

**Memorial of**

**Jesse Van Valkenburg**

**(December 31, 1868 – October 27, 1949)**

**Hennepin County Bar Association  
District Court  
Fourth Judicial District  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
March 25, 1950**

If the Court please; ladies and gentlemen of the Bar and friends:

Jesse Van Valkenburg was born in Sharon Hill, school Schoharie County, New York, on December 31, 1868. He was admitted and licensed to practice law in Minnesota on June 6, 1895, and died at Minneapolis, Minnesota, on October 27, 1949.

Sharon Hill is about twenty miles west of Troy, in the Valley of the Mohawk. At the time of his birth, the country was recovering from the effects of the Civil War. Andrew Johnson's struggle with the Senate was to affect the future powers and prerogatives of the President. Freight moved down the Erie Canal drawn by horses and mules driven on its bank. The Union Pacific Railroad was being laid to the West. The Northwest, as we know it, was then a frontier land, truly a middle border. Buffalo roamed the plains. Minnesota had been in the Union but ten years. Mr. Van Valkenburg's life spanned the era from the ox car to the aeroplane, from the stagecoach to the radio and television.

Sharon Hill must have been a romantic place for a boy. Even today, the traveler will note its scenic beauty. In the '60's, fruits, vegetables and hops were the products of the farm. The Van Valkenberg home, an inheritance from the grandfather, Joseph, was stocked with books from the Greek and Latin Masters, and works on Medical Science. Perhaps the culture and refinement of that home had its mark on the youthful Jesse, even if, when but three months old, his parents, probably following the advice of Horace Greeley, came to Farmington, Minnesota. There, for ten years, they engaged in the arduous venture of wrestling a livelihood from a comparative wilderness. Again, to the West they went —this time to Canby.

Any native son of Minnesota, who lived in the Western portion of the State before the beginning of this century, can picture in his own mind that section back in the late '70's or '80's of the past century. No roads or radios, few schools, and rarely a church. In most things they lacked many advantages of the present day. Long distances were travelled to school and everyone went on horseback. Friendships were made in those beginnings which lasted through life. One such was the friendship that existed between Mr. Van Valkenburg and Michael Dowling. We will recall that Mr. Dowling was injured in an accident during a blizzard, and as a result of that accident, lost both legs and one arm. They were but youngsters then, and anxious to make their way through school they had the courage and character which marked the enterprising and the forward youngsters of that day. While Michael Dowling was recovering, in so far as he ever did recover from the accident, he called on his friend, Jesse Van Valkenburg, to care for his pony.

Mr. Van Valkenburg taught school when he was fourteen years of age; many of the children were larger and older than himself. He studied Greek and Latin under a clergyman in Granite Falls. He took a short course at Mankato Normal and then returned to teach, this time in the Lac Qui Parle County. Again he quit the job of teaching for the labor of a student, entering the University of Minnesota. Among his instructors were the renowned Dr. Jabez Brooks, Dr. Hutchinson and Professor Clark. Like everyone else in those times, he was in straightened financial circumstances. Those were days of panic and instability. 'Black Friday' and the Jay Cooke & Company failure still cast an ominous shadow over the land. Money was scarce, but if there was work to be done, Jesse Van Valkenburg would do it if it made him a respectable living. While a student at the University, he wrote for the public press. In fact, he became known as the "church writer."

He graduated from Mankato Normal as President of his class. He was President of his class when he graduated from the University Law School. He belonged to Sigma Chi Fraternity, and in 1895, he presented himself for admission to the Bar.

Economic conditions were still unstable. Again, the panic which lasted from 1889 until 1893 left the country in shaky condition. The country was not yet grown up. But presently, the discovery of gold in Alaska and a war with Spain changed the economic complexion. The automobile was as yet a new experiment. Indeed, in those days, it was nothing more than a queer contraption. Values were still down, and the wages of labor were not to be compared with those of today, but surprising to relate, for his first day of professional service, Mr. Van Valkenburg received \$5.00, a handsome compensation for that time. He was associated with Harrison & Noyes, then an outstanding firm, with offices in the Globe Building, but he still wrote for the newspapers, just to be sure.

In 1903 he married Luella Grace Jerrems, who survives him; three daughters and two sons were born. One of them, Horace Van Valkenburg, former president of the State Bar Association, is an active practitioner in this Court. There are three grandsons, one of whom was in the military in the recent war.

To lawyers who actively practiced in Minnesota during the first 25 years of this century, meeting Mr. Van Valkenburg in Courts from one corner of the State to the other, was a common experience. How one man could range so far, be so active, and care for so many diverse interests still amazes. Today, he might be in Court in Brainerd, tomorrow Crookston or Willmar, or some other forum. From one Court to the other, always industrious, always active, and never failing in courtesy and consideration to his brother lawyers; always having the respect and

confidence of court and counsel, his practice ranged over a wide field: lumber, milling, banks, farms and insurance. If it required the services of a lawyer outside the realm of the criminal field, Mr. Van Valkenburg gave it attention.

His predominant characteristic was his untiring, never-ceasing industry, combined with the courtesy, frankness and a directness that gave you instant confidence. In the many years of our acquaintance and friendship, I think he never had an idle moment. With kindness and consideration he could be strict, direct and forceful, as I sometimes had occasion to know. Short of stature, one look into his face told you that here, indeed, was driving energy and an active mind.

The negotiations incident to business, the clash at the trial, the antagonism of clients never entered his spirit. He dealt fairly and openly. He expected opposing counsel to do likewise. He was eager and aggressive for his client, but in good faith he accorded opposing counsel the same privilege. Few lawyers had more warm friends in the profession than he — friendships which are based on integrity and high purpose, and for that reason they were lasting. He was always friendly, not effusive, but reserved.

His life was not dedicated to law exclusively. Politics, church, school and every activity that affected the public interest claimed his attention; a real citizen of the community in which he lived. He discussed a subject only when he mastered it, but once informed, he was untiring in advancing the position which he assumed. You may not have agreed with him, but you knew integrity was back of activity.

He left a high mark in his professional career. The community, as well as the particular clients, depended on him for leadership and disinterested advice. Adherent and opponent alike accepted his word without question. His ideals of the law, even in the midst of a trial, were for the improvement of the common lot. We who knew him best will always remember him as a lawyer of high purpose, industry, kindness and fidelity to a cause.

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Respectfully submitted,



Daniel F. Foley

## APPENDIX

Horace B. Hudson, *A Half-Century of Minneapolis* 96  
(MLHP, 2013-15) (published first, 1908).

VAN VALKENBURG, Jesse, was born in Sharon, New York, on December 31, 1868, and is of a family whose ancestors took part in the Revolution. His father, Joseph Van Valkenburg, was at the time of his son's birth a New York farmer, but later engaged in business, and is now retired; his mother was Harriet Seeley Van Valkenburg. The family moved West and Jesse grew up at Farmington, Minnesota, attending the local schools and afterwards taking a course at the Mankato state normal school. After graduating at Mankato, he completed his education with the academic and law courses at the University of Minnesota, graduating from the former in 1894 and the latter in 1895. During the later years of his university work he was on the staff of the Minneapolis Tribune as a reporter and continued for a short time after graduating, or until he commenced practice in his chosen profession. During his ten years' membership in the bar of the city and state he has made a large acquaintance and established a satisfactory practice. A republican in politics, he has not taken a politician's part in party affairs, but has been interested in civic betterments and good government. He is a member of the Masonic order and of the society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Mr. Van Valkenburg is married and has three children. The family attend the Congregational church.

*Who's Who in the Central States 1008 (1929)*

**VAN VALKENBURG, Jesse.** Lawyer. Born at Sharon Hill, N. Y., Dec. 31, 1868. Son of Joseph and Hattie (Secley) Van Valkenburg. *Genealogy:* Ancestors fought in Amer. Rev. War. *Ed:* Minn. State Normal Sch; U. of Minn. (A.B., 1894; LL.D., 1895). Reporter, Minneapolis Tribune, 1895-97; engaged in law practice, Minneapolis, 1897—; Dir., Atty. Marquette Natl. Bank, Marquette Tr. Co., East Hennepin State Bank, Chicago-Lake State Bank, Minneapolis. *Mem:* Minn. State Bar Assn; Hennepin Co. Bar Assn; Trustee, Minneapolis Bar Assn; Civic and Commerce Assn; Masons; Sigma Chi. *Clubs:* Athletic; Automobile. Hobby is Dairy Farming. Republican. *Church:* Congregational. Married Luella Grace Jerrems, Jan. 14, 1903. *Children:* Horace (25); Grace (23); Luella (20); Earle (11); Louise (7). *Office:* Northwestern Bank. *Home:* 1941 James Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minn.

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## Related Article

Horace Van Valkenburg (1901-1987)  
“Bar Memorials, Hennepin County Bar Association” 35 (1987)(MLHP, 2014).

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