

# OLOF L. BRUCE

( March 23, 1873 – February 4, 1958 )

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(ca. 1923)

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*It was after 1860 that the floodgates of Swedish immigration were opened and the rush of settlers proceeded into the Upper Mississippi Valley. In less than 25 years, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa were studded with Swedish and other Scandinavian agricultural colonies.*<sup>1</sup>

Among them were members of the Bruce family. The first to arrive were the four oldest children of Lars and Anna Bruce, probably in the early 1880s. They settled in Minnesota. In 1892, five years after the death of her husband, Anna Bruce and her remaining five children emigrated, uniting the family in Minneapolis. Among them was nineteen year old Olof Ludwig Bruce. He had, it seems, a hunger for education that had not been satisfied by the religious schooling he received in Sweden. While working as a carpenter and, later, on a newspaper, he took classes at Northwestern Collegiate & Business Institute and the Minneapolis Academy, from which he graduated with honors in 1901. He promptly enrolled in the Law Department of the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1904,<sup>2</sup> followed by more studies and a Master's Degree in 1905. He then began the practice of law.

The following profile of him appeared in Marion Daniel Shutter's *History of Minneapolis*, published by subscription in 1923. Under this publishing arrangement, the subscriber wrote or provided the biographical data for his own profile. Bruce's self portrait, while typically flattering, reveals his pride in his ancestry. Like all immigrants, he never forgot where he came from.

The legal profession of Minneapolis is proud to number among its representative members Olof Ludwig Bruce, who was born in Vermland, Sweden, on the 23d of March, 1873,

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America: The Saga of the Immigrant* 264 (Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., revised 1964)(published first, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> He was admitted to the bar on June 3, 1904, as a member of the University's class of 1904. 1 *Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 70 (State Law Library, 2011). The 1916 Law Alumni Directory has the following entry:

Olof L. Bruce, LL. B., 04; LL. M., 05; Lawyer.  
711 N. Y. Life Bldg. and 3045 Columbus Ave.,  
Mpls., Minn.

Alumni of the College of Law, 1889-1915, at 273 (online).

and came to Minneapolis when he was nineteen years old. His parents were Lars H. and Anna Bruce. The father was a descendant of Finlanders, who emigrated to Sweden during the reign of Charles XII, while the mother was a member of a Scotch family and the only child of Olof Bruce. Some of her ancestors held seats in the Riksdag for years and others held positions of honor and trust in Sweden. These ancestors were owners of the mines and smelters at Langbanshyttan, Vermland. On the maternal side there were also professional warriors and military men. Carl Roos, a cousin of the maternal grandfather, Olof Bruce, was a trained soldier and an officer in the Swedish army. He came to America prior to the Civil war and upon the outbreak of that conflict, at the age of fifty-nine years, he rallied to the defense of the Union and enlisted in Company D, Third Minnesota Regiment. He served from the beginning of the war until near the end, when he was given an honorable discharge, his health being completely broken by the many hardships and the exposure which he endured. He kept a very complete and neat diary of his experiences throughout the period of his service and this diary is well preserved and in the possession of a son, Carl Roos, who is still residing on the old homestead at Vasa, Minnesota. Lars H. Bruce engaged in agricultural pursuits in Sweden and was for years "Namdeman" — a representative of his district in a judicial capacity, as a sort of associate Judge. His home was located in the picturesque and beautiful Upper Vermland and he and his wife were honored and respected in the community in which they reared their children.

In the acquirement of his early education Olof Ludwig Bruce attended the schools of his native country, completing his public school course at the age of thirteen. He then read for the ministry until the customary requirements for a religious education were fulfilled. About that time great numbers of his fellow-countrymen were emigrating to America and by the time his father had died, in 1887, the four older children of the family had come to this country and won a place for themselves in their new homeland. Some five years later Mrs. Bruce brought the five younger children to America to join the other members of the family,

who had located in Minneapolis. Olof L. Bruce, who was still anxious to further his education, at once enrolled in the Northwestern Collegiate & Business Institute, later becoming a member of its board of trustees. After studying there for three years he entered the Minneapolis Academy, taking a full course and graduating with the class of 1901. While at the academy he proved a brilliant student and won several honors, among them a gold medal in oratory and debate. He entered the legal department of the University of Minnesota, where, after completing the regular law course, he took up post-graduate work, receiving the degree of Master of Laws in 1905. While finishing his course at the State University, Mr. Bruce was also acting as general manager of the Minneapolis Weekly, a religious and political paper of this city. After receiving his degree he resigned his position with the paper and began the active practice of law. He has since practiced here, always independently, and he enjoys an extensive and lucrative clientele. His practice is not confined to Minneapolis alone for he is often called to handle litigation in other cities throughout the state. Mr. Bruce has achieved gratifying success, and he occupies a prominent position among the attorneys at the Minneapolis bar.

In 1909 was celebrated the marriage of Mr. Bruce to Miss Esther M. Wallgren, a daughter of Rev. Erik Wallgren of Chicago. Their children are: Robert W., born September 26, 1910; Laura Vivian, born February 21, 1913; and Margaret Esther, born June 8, 1917. Mrs. Bruce is a woman of much culture and refinement and previous to her marriage won a reputation as a pianist of considerable talent. Since taking up her residence here she has been prominent in the club and social circles of this city.

The political endorsement of Mr. Bruce is given to the republican party, but he supports the right man in preference to party. He belongs to the Tabernacle church and for a number of years he was a member of the board of trustees. For some years he was president of the Young People's Society and superintendent of the Sunday school and he was one of the prime factors in the organization of the Young People's Covenant of the Northwest. He was one

of the officers in that organization until other duties made it impossible for him to devote any time thereto. He has likewise been president of the Scandinavian Union Mission of Minneapolis, of which he was one of the founders. He is now one of the trustees of Minnehaha Academy of this city. Mr. Bruce is essentially a public-spirited man and his aid may always be counted upon in the furtherance of any movement for the development and improvement of the general welfare. To that end he holds membership in the Civic & Commerce Association and is identified with other organizations which tend to promote good city government. In coming to the new world Mr. Bruce has found the opportunity for which he sought and he is sincerely devoted to the interests of his native land. During the World war he gave of his time and money without reservation and was prominent in all drives.<sup>3</sup>

He practiced law in Minneapolis for the next three decades, retiring in 1956. He died on February 4, 1958. Three months later, the following memorial was delivered by Seth Lundquist on behalf of the Hennepin County Bar Association:

#### MEMORIAL ON OLOF L. BRUCE

For Hennepin County Bar Meeting, Saturday, May 10, 1958  
By Seth Lundquist

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Olof L. Bruce, born in Sweden on March 23, 1873, came to Minneapolis in 1898 at age 19 and resided here until 1955 when he moved to Alhambra, California, where he died February 4, 1958, within a few weeks of rounding out his 85th year. He practiced law in Minneapolis for nearly fifty years, until his retirement in 1956. He is survived by his wife, Esther, his daughters Laura Dye and Marjorie Stuermer, his daughter-in-law Mrs. Robert W. Bruce, and nine grandchildren. Closer details touching his manifold activities and the large portfolio of his friendships were

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<sup>3</sup> Marion Daniel Shutter, *2 History of Minneapolis: Gateway to the Northwest* 708-11 (1923). The picture of Bruce on the first page of this article is taken from this book.

rendered at the funeral services at Alhambra in form of an obituary prepared by his son-in-law Dr. Harry W. Stuermer, a copy of which is hereto attached.

The undersigned first met Olof in 1898, as a member of the Bible Class at Swedish Tabernacle. He was then working with two of his brothers, Emil and Nels, as a carpenter, while pursuing his school studies. A few years later Olof graduated from Minneapolis Academy, and thereupon entered the University of Minnesota Law School, where he received in 1904 his LLB and in 1905 his LLM. Soon thereafter he started practice while simultaneously working as business manager for Minneapolis Veckoblad, a Swedish religious weekly. That connection incidentally served to extend his acquaintanceship in building up a clientele. About the time of the close of World War I he became a member of the law firm Tautges, Bruce, Bissell & Wilder. Eventually Olof resumed individual general practice, specializing more or less in personal injury litigation.

Olof was a skilled trial lawyer. One of his great assets was his Scandinavian brogue; another was his understanding of the use and the value of psychological pause. With the brogue and the pause he could achieve a telling anti-climax. He had an engaging smile, a good sense of humor, and well-schooled self-possession.

He happily extracted both joy and profit from his work. In his dealings with fellow-practitioners and the Courts he was the very embodiment of a gentleman, respectful and patient.

The sudden death of his son Robert in August 1957 was a hard blow to Olof. Robert had taken over his father's practice in 1955.

Olof Bruce will be well remembered for his faithful and successful labor in his chosen field of the law, and for his deep interest in extending a helping hand in the outlying areas of community service.

Respectfully submitted this May 10, 1958.

/s/ Seth Lundquist  
Seth Lundquist, Minneapolis

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Copy of obituary on Olof L. Bruce, prepared by his son-in law  
and read by the Minister at the funeral services at  
Alhambra, California, February 7, 1958.<sup>4</sup>

OLOF LUDWIG BRUCE born at Värmland, Sweden, March 23, 1873, came to America in 1892, at age 19 years. He engaged in his trade as a carpenter to finance his education. At Minneapolis Academy in 1901 he won a Gold Medal for oratory and debate. In 1904 he graduated from State University Law School and was admitted to the Minnesota Bar that same year. He went on to obtain his Master's Degree in 1905, and then into Law Practice. He practiced in Minneapolis for over 50 years. His son, Robert, continued his practice in Minneapolis when Mr. Bruce retired to Alhambra, in 1955.

In 1909 he married Esther M. Wallgren, daughter of Reverend Erik Wallgren of Chicago, Illinois. They recently observed their 49th wedding anniversary. Through all the years he and his wife have been true Christians. Mr. Bruce never failed to practice his Christian beliefs in his daily work and with his family. He was active in church work, and at one time was President of the Scandinavian Union Mission, Superintendent of Sunday Schools at Swedish Covenant Church, and helped organize the Young Peoples Covenant in Minneapolis. In his later years he was active in the Kingdom National Message through the Truth and Liberty Temple of Minneapolis.

He is survived by his wife, Esther M. Bruce, and his daughters Mrs. Laura V. Dye, and Mrs. Marjorie E. Steur-

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<sup>4</sup> This tribute by Dr. Stuermer is part of Bruce's bar memorial on file at the Minnesota Historical Society.

mer. His son, Robert Waldemar Bruce, died only recently in August, 1957, and left his wife, Susan, and 2 sons, Richard and David. Mr. Bruce had journeyed back to Minneapolis to attend the funeral services of his son. There are 7 other grandchildren, for a total of 9. Mr. Bruce was always thinking of his children and family and was unbounded in his generous help to them. His grandchildren have been a special interest to him. He has given all who knew him an example of high standards to live by.

Anyone who knew him also knew of his love of trees. His lake home at Wildhurst, Minnesota, was a garden of lovely trees of all varieties. The pine and evergreens were his favorites, and some of these he moved and took with him to the city and to his last home in Minneapolis.

Illness nearly took Mr. Bruce in 1954 and again 1956, but his courage and faith carried him through when all else failed. His death occurred after several days of illness, and he passed on February 4th, 1958, at 4 P. M. His wife and daughter Marjorie were at his side at the time.

His host of friends in Minneapolis were tremendous and only distance will prevent their attendance at his last gathering. Many relatives and business associates not here will remember him for his past helps and kindnesses. ■

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Posted MLHP: April 1, 2014.