

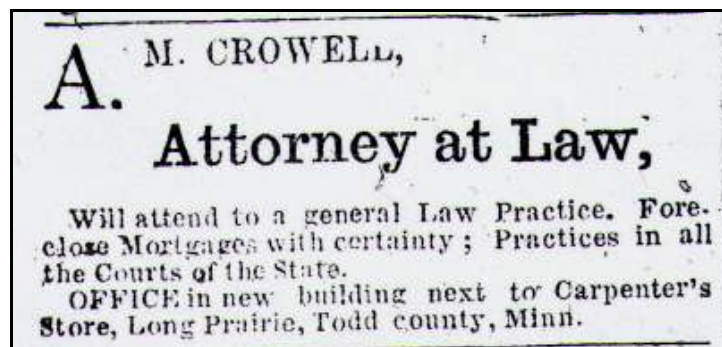
# ALVIN M. CROWELL

( August 20, 1841 — December 20, 1920 )



## 1. Beginnings: Long Prairie.

Alvin Martin Crowell was admitted to the Minnesota bar in June 1874, and two months later began the practice of law in Long Prairie, the seat of Todd County. He had a general practice according to his business card published in the local newspaper:<sup>1</sup>



He was attracted to public life and served three terms as Todd County attorney in the late 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>2</sup> In 1886, he ran for probate judge of Todd County. A self-professed Republican, he attended the party county convention in Long Prairie in mid-September, and was elected a delegate at the District Judicial Convention. But in the balloting for endorsement for probate judge, he lost narrowly to the incumbent, L. S. Hoadley.<sup>3</sup> Undeterred, he turned to the opposition, attended the Democratic county convention on October 14, 1886, and was nominated by acclamation for the judgeship.<sup>4</sup>

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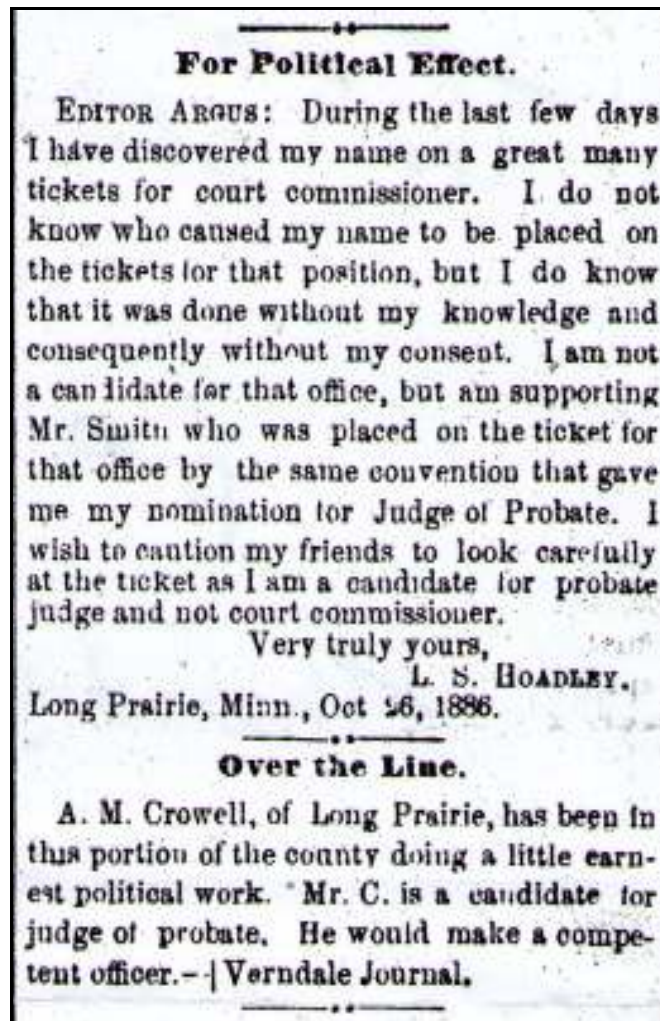
<sup>1</sup> The Todd County Argus, February 4, 1886, at 1 (enlarged).

<sup>2</sup> Clara K. Fuller, History of Morrison and Todd Counties, Minnesota 241 (1915) ("In 1879 the county attorney was A. W. Crowell, who served till 1881 . . .").

<sup>3</sup> The Todd County Argus, September 23, 1886, at 1 ("The informal ballot for Judge of Probate resulted as follows: L. S. Hoadley 22, A. M. Crowell, 29, A. H. Hendrickson 12. A formal ballot was then taken which gave Mr. Hoadley 32 and Mr. Crowell 30. Mr. Hoadley was declared nominated.").

<sup>4</sup> The Todd County Argus, October 14, 1886, at 1 ("The next business was the nomination of county officers. . . . A. M. Crowell was then nominated for judge of probate by acclamation.").

In the late nineteenth century, endorsed candidates campaigned under the party banner, and did not publish individual advertisements. Occasionally, however, they were forced to combat rumors and charges of impropriety by letters or notices in the newspaper. The following letter to the editor of *The Todd County Argus* appeared a month before the election:<sup>5</sup>



“The ticket” Judge Hoadley warned voters to examine was printed on the actual ballot cast on election day. Because those ballots were prepared by the political parties, there were frequent charges of abuse.

<sup>5</sup> The Todd County Argus, October 28, 1886, at 4 (enlarged).

In the election on November 2, 1886, he lost to Judge Hoadley:

L. S. Hoadley .....995  
Alvin M. Crowell.....822 <sup>6</sup>

In 1889, he placed this profile in a book of biographies of individuals living in the Red River Valley:

ALVIN M. CROWELL is a prominent attorney-at-law in the village of Long Prairie, Todd county, Minnesota. He is a native of New York State, born in Steuben county, and is the son of Alvin and Malinda (Covey) Crowell, natives also of the State of New York. The father and mother of our subject removed to the State of Michigan in 1849 or 1850, where he remained until 1850, when he removed to the State of Iowa, later to Minnesota, and settled in Wright county in 1880, where he is still living. The mother of our subject died in 1887. They are members of the Methodist Episcopal church. They are the parents of the following-named children — Chancey, Hiram, John, Clarissa, Alvin, Melvin, Almira, Ira, Aaron, Howard, George, and Alice and Almond (twins).

Mr. Crowell, the subject of this article, received his education in the States of Michigan, Iowa and Illinois, finishing his education at Lowell, Michigan, in 1868. He commenced in life for himself at the age of fifteen years, and at first worked out as a laborer, then engaged in teaching in the State of Michigan for several years. He then removed to Minnesota and settled in Todd county, Minnesota, in 1870, locating in Birchdale and Grey Eagle townships, where he homesteaded land and continued to reside for three years. He taught school for several terms while holding his homestead. In 1883 he was married to Sarah A. Phinney; in 1871 he removed to Sauk Center, Minnesota, where he commenced the study of law with

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<sup>6</sup> The Todd County Argus, November 11, 1886, at 4 (“Official vote of Todd County”). Judge Hoadley served from 1881 to 1891. See Fuller, note 2, at 241.

Charles Walker, with whom he remained one year. He was admitted to the bar in June, 1874, by Judge McKelvy of St. Cloud, Minnesota. Mr. Crowell then removed to the village of Long Prairie, Todd county, Minnesota, in August 1874, where he commenced the law business and has since continued in that profession. He tried “the first jury case that was district court of Todd county,” in 1874. He was admitted to practice in the United States District of Minnesota, in 1884, and is known all over the State. While on his farm he held the office of clerk of the township for three terms, and also county attorney “of said county” for three terms. Mr. Crowell is a member of the Masonic fraternity; is a republican in politics and one of the most substantial and highly esteemed citizens of Todd county. He is now forty years old.<sup>7</sup>

The next year, probably in search of a better economic environment, he moved from Long Prairie to Dawson in Lac Qui Parle County, and sometime later to Turtle Lake Township in Beltrami County. In these villages, he practiced law and may have farmed.

## **2. Relocation to Bemidji and Campaigns for Office.**

Shortly after the turn of the century, he settled in Bemidji, the seat of Beltrami County. He was about sixty years old at the time. He likely had a small, general practice, with some collections and real estate work. He may have maintained a farm near Turtle Lake. Making a living by lawyering at this time in his life must have been hard. And so he turned to politics. In the next fifteen years, he ran for public office seven times.

### **1904. Beltrami County Attorney.**

Although he had resided in Bemidji only a few years, he decided in the autumn of 1904 to run for the office of Beltrami County attorney. No longer a loyal member of the Republican party, he ran as an

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<sup>7</sup> Illustrated Album of Biography of the Famous Valley of the Red River of the North and the Park Regions 626 (1889).

independent candidate. It was not unusual at this time for a lawyer to eschew party labels and run as an “independent,” rarely, however, with success. Crowell could only appear on the ballot by petition, and the local newspaper described his efforts:

#### **Circulates Petition.**

A. M. Crowell of Turtle River well known in Bemidji is in the city today circulating his petition as an independent candidate for county attorney. Mr. Crowell will oppose the nominee of the republican party and is not without hope of success.<sup>8</sup>

In early October P. J. Russell, another Bemidji lawyer, entered the race, also as an “independent candidate,” but later dropped out.<sup>9</sup> In the election on November 8, 1904, Crowell lost to the incumbent Herbert Loud, who received 62% of the vote:

Herbert J. Loud.....	1,567
Alvin M. Crowell.....	966 <sup>10</sup>

#### **1906. Probate Judge.**

Two years later, he ran for Probate Judge of Beltrami County, but lost in the primary election on September 18, 1906:

M. A. Clark.....	1,033
Alvin M. Crowell.....	487
F. J. Dunwoody.....	546 <sup>11</sup>

#### **1908. Beltrami County Attorney.**

In his second run for county attorney in 1908, he did not survive the Republican primary, coming in last in a field of four. The results of the

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<sup>8</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, September 8, 1904, at 4.

<sup>9</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, October 6, 1904, at 4 (Russell announces he is running as an independent candidate).

<sup>10</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, November 17, 1904, at 4 (official returns).

<sup>11</sup> Beltrami Daily Pioneer, September 26, 1906, at 4 (“Official” results). Previous editions had “unofficial results.”

election on September 15, 1908, were:

D. H. Fisk.....415  
George E. Ericson.....564  
Alvin M. Crowell.....402  
Chester McKusick.....957<sup>12</sup>

He never published his business card in Bemidji newspapers. His court room victories, if any, were not written up by the local press. But in his own mind, he had a reputation for excellence, which was expressed in a flattering profile in a special edition of the *Bemidji Daily Pioneer* on March 27, 1909.<sup>13</sup> This sketch may have been directed more at future voters than clients.

In July 1910, he was appointed Beltrami County Court Commissioner, normally an elective post, which had a four year term and an annual salary of \$300.<sup>14</sup> He held this office until March 1913.

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<sup>12</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, September 21, 1908, at 1.

<sup>13</sup> In his profile he dates his arrival in Bemidji around 1900:

Attorney Crowell has been a resident of Bemidji for about nine years. He was admitted to the bar at St. Cloud in the year 1874, moved to Todd county the same year, where he practiced law for sixteen years. In 1884 he was admitted at St. Paul to practice before the United States District Court. He maintained a law office at Long Prairie for sixteen years, where he was state's attorney for a period of six years, after which time he moved to Dawson, Lac Qui Parle county. In each place of his residence Mr. Crowell has made his mark in the legal realm, and proved himself the learned barrister that he is. Since his advent in Bemidji Mr. Crowell has been one of the leading counsel in many important cases. He is well known through out the state, and his ability as a practitioner before the bar has been fittingly recognized.

Bemidji Daily Pioneer, March 27, 1909, at 62 (for the complete section see “The Bar of Bemidji” (MLHP, 2014)).

<sup>14</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, July 14, 1910, at 1 (front page article stating that Crowell posted a \$2,000 bond after being “recently appointed” and that his salary was \$300 a year. He is listed as court commissioner for Beltrami County whose term expires in January 1915 in the 1913 Blue Book, at 302.

The state law on court commissioners provided in part:

288. Election—Term of office—There shall be elected in each county a court commissioner, who shall hold his office for four years and until his successor qualifies. One person may hold at the same time the offices of court commissioner and probate judge.

289. Qualification and powers—Court commissioners shall be men learned in the law, and shall have and may exercise the judicial powers of a judge of the district

## 1910. Beltrami County Attorney.

He still had ambitions for higher office. In November of that year, he ran for county attorney. The *Bemidji Daily Pioneer* endorsed him, though he was not a Republican:

### THE COUNTY TICKET

With two exceptions, the Pioneer urges the election of the complete republican ticket in Beltrami county.

While the Pioneer is a republican paper, it does not carry its allegiance to any party to that point which jeopardizes the best interests of the people.

In the present campaign there are two instances where the Pioneer believes, the interests of the public demand that the ticket be scratched. The offices of sheriff and county attorney are the ones referred to. . . .

For county attorney Alvin M. Crowell is making the race as an independent candidate. The business men of the county and the best people of the county for the most part, believe that he should be empowered with the authority of this important office.

We support all republican nominees when we can do so in justice to the taxpayers and when we urge the election of a candidate not on the regular ticket it is a pretty good sign that there are extraordinary reasons for so doing.<sup>15</sup>

This endorsement was not enough. In the election on November 8, 1910, He lost to Henry Funkley:

Henry Funkley.....	1,314
Alvin M. Crowell.....	1,216 <sup>16</sup>

Only six months into his term, Funkley abruptly resigned, charging that he was being undermined by having warrants issued by the Court

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court at chambers. . .

Stat. ch. 5, §§ 282-289, at 63 (1913).

<sup>15</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, October 20, 1910, at 2.

<sup>16</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, November 15, 1910, at 1.

Commissioner without his knowledge at the insistence of Sam Fullerton, Deputy State Fire Marshall, and by rumors that he was “suspected of being in league with criminals.”<sup>17</sup> The County Board thereupon selected Graham M. Torrance as the new county attorney.

### 1912. Beltrami County Attorney

In 1912, Crowell ran for Beltrami County attorney—his fourth attempt. The incumbent, Graham M. Torrance, handily defeated his opponent in the Republican primary in September, leaving him to face A. A. Andrews, the Democratic candidate, and Alvin Crowell, who was now a socialist.<sup>18</sup> However, on October 14, 1912, Andrews quit the race stating that the primary results showed the voters “were satisfied” with the incumbent.<sup>19</sup> In the general election on November 5, Torrance was re-elected easily, receiving 59% of the vote

Graham M. Torrance.....	1,689
Alvin M. Crowell.....	1,178 <sup>20</sup>

It may be noted that he was not alone in changing his politics during the turbulent Populist and Progressive eras.

### 1913. Judge of Municipal Court

Only four months later—in February 1913—he ran for judge of the Bemidji Municipal Court — sometimes called the “police court.” A municipal court judge had a four year term and was paid an annual salary of \$800.<sup>21</sup> For several reasons — not the least being the salary — this minor judgeship invariably attracted multiple candidates. In 1913, six candidates, probably a third of the local bar, were identified in the local paper:

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<sup>17</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, June 21, 1911, at 1 (“Funkley, Angered, Quits Public Office....Resigns as County Attorney, Gives as Reason Snub and Intimation of Crime Combine.”).

<sup>18</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, September 19, 1912, at 1 (Torrance received 760 votes, G. W. Campbell, 399).

<sup>19</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, October 14, 1912, at 1 (“Andrews Out of Race...Says Voters Want Torrance.”).

<sup>20</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, November 12, 1912, at 1 (unofficial totals, as the votes from the Town of Eugene were not included).

<sup>21</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, August 21, 1917, at 1 (describing how newly-elected Municipal Court Judge Gibbons’ annual salary was raised from \$800 to \$1,300 because of the increased revenue he generated from levying higher fines).



Judge of Municipal Court. Hiram Simons, present judge and former agent of the Bemidji Townsite company, John L. Brown, attorney, John F. Gibbons, attorney, H. J. Loud, attorney, A. M. Crowell, present court commissioner, and L. G. Pendergast, one time justice of the peace.<sup>22</sup>

For the first time, he won an election in Bemidji —by one vote. The results of the election on February 18, 1913, were:

Hiram A. Simons.....	145
John L. Brown.....	169
John F. Gibbons.....	180
Herbert J. Loud.....	44
Alvin M. Crowell.....	181
L. G. Pendergast.....	125 <sup>23</sup>

Although most judicial candidates no longer ran on party tickets, his most recent political preference was noted in the paper:

#### A. M. Crowell Stands Alone

A. M. Crowell, police judge elect, is the only Socialist who won out at the election yesterday. Mr. Crowell's election was not conceded until the last vote, was counted, although it appeared to be the general opinion that with an opposition split in five parts, he had the most favorable opportunity.<sup>24</sup>

He served on the municipal court for the next four years. A few of his rulings, findings and sentences were reported in the local press. It was, in other words, a visible post.

#### 1917: Judge of Municipal Court.

At the end of his term, he was seventy-five years old. Nevertheless, he

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<sup>22</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 8, 1913, at 1. All were lawyers, as required by state law. Stat., ch. 5 §262, at 57 (1913) (“All municipal judges and special municipal judges shall be men learned in the law and residents of the city or village...”).

<sup>23</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 19, 1913, at 4.

<sup>24</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 19, 1913, at 2:

decided to run for re-election. Inevitably, a gaggle of lawyers entered the contest, including John Gibbons, who was perhaps still smarting from his defeat by one vote in 1913. By this time, a few candidates placed personal advertisements in the local news-papers. The following were published in the *Bemidji Daily Pioneer* on the eve of the election:<sup>25</sup>

**FOR MUNICIPAL JUDGE**  
(Amount \$3.00)  
**D. H. FISK**  
I am an independent candidate for the office of Municipal Judge, and if elected agree to fill the same to the best of my ability. Your support at the polls will be appreciated.  
—D. H. Fisk.

(Amount \$5.00)



**HIRAM A. SIMONS**  
Candidate  
JUDGE MUNICIPAL COURT  
To be Voted for  
Tuesday, Feb. 20, 1917

(Amount \$5.00)  
**A. M. CROWELL**  
**FOR MUNICIPAL JUDGE**  
To the Voters: Again I am a candidate for the office of Judge of the Municipal Court of this city. This office is an important one, and every voter should ask himself before casting his ballot these questions: Is he honest? Is he capable? Then vote for such a man as Judge. I trust I have made good and for that reason (if for no other) I should be entitled to another term. This office is not locally established or run for revenue only (as some think). The Judge should be a man who will render justice as far as possible, irrespective of persons or conditions.  
—A. M. Crowell.

(Amount \$3.00)  
**WILLES NYE**  
I hereby announce myself a candidate for the office of Municipal Judge. I feel that I am well qualified to hold this position, and if elected will exert every effort to fulfill the duties of this office. Your support will be appreciated at the polls February 20.  
—Willes Nye.

(Paid)  
**FOR MUNICIPAL JUDGE**  
To the voters of the city of Bemidji:  
I hereby announce my candidacy for municipal judge to be voted on at the city election, Tuesday, February 20, 1917. Respectfully yours,  
O. M. Skinvik.

**FOR MUNICIPAL JUDGE.**  
(Amount, \$1.50)  
**D. H. FISK.**  
I announce that I am a candidate for municipal judge and respectfully solicit votes at the municipal election to be held in and for the city of Bemidji, February 20, 1917, to the end that I may be elected to that office.  
Very truly yours,  
—D. H. FISK.

(Amount, \$1.50)  
**O. M. SKINVIK**  
To the voters of the city of Bemidji: I hereby announce my candidacy for municipal judge to be voted on at the city election, Tuesday, February 20, 1917.  
Respectfully yours,  
—O. M. Skinvik.

(Amount, \$2.00)  
**JUDGE A. M. CROWELL**  
To the voters of the city of Bemidji: I hereby announce myself as a candidate for re-election to the office of municipal judge, hoping that my administration now about to terminate, has been satisfactory to a large majority of the people of this city, and believing that it has, I have a right to expect your support. I have performed the arduous duties of the office without fear or favor of any one and if re-elected will continue to hew to the line of justice and right "and let the chips fall where they may." If I have made mistakes (and who does not make mistakes) it has been on the side of mercy. Hoping that all fair-minded persons will see things as they are and give me their support, I remain as ever, yours truly,  
—A. M. Crowell.

<sup>25</sup> Left: Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 12, 1917, at 2 (reduced).  
Right: Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 16, 1917, at 2 (enlarged).

The vote was divided among seven candidates. In the election on February 20, 1917, he came in second to John Gibbons:

Alvin M. Crowell.....	275
Willis Nye.....	81
Herbert J. Loud.....	73
O. M. Skinvik.....	180
Hiram A. Simons.....	52
John F. Gibbons.....	324
D. H. Fisk.....	50 <sup>26</sup>

This was his last election. He did not resume the practice of law. He retired after his term expired the next month.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Crowell on the Bench

From March 1913 to March 1917, Judge Crowell presided over hundreds of cases. There was a wide variety of litigation, though many were prosecutions by the city attorney for public drunkenness, traffic violations and other misdemeanors.<sup>28</sup> Every week or so, a case became

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<sup>26</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 21, 1917, at 1, 4 (unofficial results).

<sup>27</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, December 21, 1920, at 1 (according to his obituary, “he gave up his practice four years ago and since that time has spent his time with his family entirely.”).

<sup>28</sup> State law established the types of cases that could be tried in municipal court.

§262 Jurisdiction—Every municipal court shall be a court of record and its jurisdiction shall be coextensive with, and limited to, the county or counties in which the city or village lies. It may try and determine civil actions:

1. Arising on contract, for the recovery of money only, when the amount claimed does not exceed five hundred dollars.

2. For damages for injury to the person or to real property, or for taking, retaining, or injuring personal property, when the amount claimed, or, in replevin, the value of the property in controversy, does not exceed five hundred dollars.

3. For a penalty given by statute, not exceeding five hundred dollars, or upon a bond conditioned for the payment of money, whatever the penalty thereof, when the amount claimed does not exceed five hundred dollars.

4. On an official bond, or any bond taken in a municipal court, if the penalty does not exceed five hundred dollars.

5. For forcible entry and unlawful detainer, whether involving the title to real estate or not.

It may also take and enter judgments by confession to an amount not exceeding five hundred dollars, and shall have all the powers and jurisdiction, civil and

the subject of a short article in the local newspaper. The following, picked at random, are from *The Bemidji Daily Pioneer*.

1913

FIVE DAYS OR \$5.00

Is Blow Dealt Out By Municipal  
Judge Crowell This Morning.

Swan Erickson was fined five dollars and costs or five days in the county jail this morning in municipal court on a charge of being drunk and causing a disturbance. He spent the greater part of the morning scouring the city for his friends in order to raise the fine.<sup>29</sup>

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In Police Court.

Charged with disorderly conduct, Frank Meallnes and Doris LaBlanch was tried before judge Crowell this morning and were fined ten dollars and costs or thirteen dollars or fifteen days in the county jail. Sentence was suspended in the case of the latter on the condition that she leave town before tonight. Doris LaBlanch has been a source of trouble to the local police department for the past three years.<sup>30</sup>

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criminal, of courts of justices of the peace.

§263. Jurisdiction withheld—Except as provided in § 262, subd. 5, no municipal court shall have jurisdiction of civil actions involving the title to real estate, or of any action:

1. For a divorce;
2. To recover damages for false imprisonment, libel, slander, malicious prosecution, criminal conversation, seduction, or breach of promise to marry;
3. Wherein equitable relief is demanded;
4. Against an executor or administrator, as such; or
5. Against the city, village, or county.

Nor shall such court have power to issue writs of habeas corpus, quo warranto, ne exeat, mandamus, prohibition, or injunction. (Laws, ch. 5, §262, at 58 (1913))

<sup>29</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, May 15, 1913, at 1.

<sup>30</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, June 20, 1913, at 1.

1914

**FINED FOR ILLEGAL PRACTICE**

**Mrs. Rose Sterling of Kelliher  
Pays Fifty Dollars.**

Because she has been giving medical advice to residents of Kelliher without a license, Mrs. Rose Sterling of that village was fined fifty dollars in municipal court, before Judge Crowell this morning. The state was represented by P. J. Russell. Long before there were any physicians in Kelliher Mrs. Sterling assisted in caring for the sick and when the doctors took up residence there, she did not stop the practice.<sup>31</sup>

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**ESCAPED FROM ASYLUM**

**Man Arrested Yesterday at Point of  
Gun, Fined One Dollar, Sentence  
Suspended — Arrested by Sheriff.**

**WILL BE RETURNED TO FERGUS**

George Taylor, alias William Hines, the man arrested here yesterday after resisting an officer, following a forced ride from Nebish on the Red Lake railroad, is not the much wanted gun man, as was first supposed, but an escaped inmate of the Fergus Falls insane asylum.

That fact was admitted by Taylor when he was arraigned before Judge Crowell in municipal court this morning. Taylor told the judge that the clothes he wore (his jacket being of the asylum uniform) were stolen from the asylum the day he made his escape last June and that his reason for defying the officers was the fear that they wanted him in order that he might be restored to the Fergus Falls authorities.

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<sup>31</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, August 11, 1914, at 1.

His story appealed to Judge Crowell and he fined him one dollar and then suspended sentence, ordering that Taylor be given his freedom.

No sooner was this done when Chief Lane notified Sheriff Johnson of the case and with Patrolman Brown, Taylor was again arrested in the Great Northern restaurant a few moments later. Communication with Fergus Falls says that Taylor is wanted there and that they will send an officer for him. While in the asylum Taylor was kept in a separate cell.<sup>32</sup>

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1915

**TREATY "LID" ON DEBTS, TOO  
Court Holds Liquor Accounts Void  
Because of Indian Case Ruling.**

In a test case that was brought before Judge A. M. Crowell in municipal court at Bemidji the Turner Distilling company of Cincinnati, O., is denied judgment in the amount of \$80 in an account against John Goodman of Bemidji, who last October endorsed the account of Tom McCarthy, then proprietor of a saloon. The judge held that the ruling of the supreme court on the 1855 Indian treaty made all accounts for liquor in the territory covered by that treaty void. The company has more than \$5,000 in accounts for liquor throughout the Indian territory and practically every brewery and distillery in the Northwest, it is said, has accounts with former saloon men of the Indian "dry" territory. The case will be appealed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, August 21, 1914, at 8.

<sup>33</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, February 3, 1915, at 12.

1916

TO JAIL FOR 30 DAYS  
FOR KILLING DEER

Walter Ester, who has been trapping for several months northeast of Blackduck, pleaded guilty in the municipal court this morning on a charge of killing deer out of season. Judge Crowell sentenced him to pay \$50 fine or serve 30 days in the county jail. He chose the latter and commenced his sentence this afternoon.<sup>34</sup>

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PRICE OF SPEEDING  
INCREASED TO \$5

The price of speeding in the city of Bemidji was increased to five dollars in the municipal court this morning. Three speeders were arrested yesterday. When their cases were called this morning, Judge A. M. Crowell and City Attorney Russell stated that speeding in the city must be stopped. Judge Crowell stated that he would not be so lenient in the future as he has been in the past with speeders and he imposed a fine of five dollars each.<sup>35</sup>

## 4. OBITUARY

Alvin Martin Crowell died on December 20, 1920, in Bemidji, aged seventy-nine.<sup>36</sup> His obituary appeared in the *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*,<sup>37</sup> and the *Long Prairie Leader*:

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<sup>34</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, April 14, 1916, at 1.

<sup>35</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, July 15, 1916, at 1.

<sup>36</sup> According to his death certificate (1920-MN-0000712), he was born on August 20, 1841.

<sup>37</sup> Bemidji Daily Pioneer, December 21, 1920, at 1 ("Death Takes Pioneer Resident Yesterday").

## Death of A. M. Crowell

A. M. Crowell, formerly one of the well known citizens of this village, died at his home in Bemidji, Monday December 20. Forty years ago Mr. Crowell was a practicing attorney here and one of the county's leading citizens. He will be remembered by all old settlers. The following account of his death is from the *Bemidji Sentinel*:

"Alvin Martin Crowell, 79 years and three months old, died Monday morning at 2:15 o'clock. Death was caused by heart trouble. Mr. Crowell had lived in Bemidji for the past eighteen years, the greater part of which he spent practicing law. He served a four-year term as judge of municipal court, preceding Judge Gibbons. He gave up his practice four years ago and retired. . . .

The deceased leaves to mourn his death, in addition to a host of friends and acquaintances, his wife, Nellie E. Crowell, four daughters, Mrs. Thomas Newton, Mrs. Thomas Kerrick, Miss Nellie Crowell, of Bemidji, and Mrs. James Holiday of International Falls; three step-daughters, Mrs. Bert Kirtland of Backus, Mrs. Avis Gye and Mrs. Will LaMont of Bemidji; two sons, Roy and Oliver of this city, also five brothers."<sup>38</sup>

## 5. AFTERWORD

Why did he run for office so often after he settled in Bemidji? To this, the answer seems obvious: if elected he would receive a salary to support his family. Money surely was a factor in his applying to be court commissioner in 1910.

But he was not the only member of the Bemidji bar to run multiple times for city and county offices in the early 1900s. Herbert Loud was

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<sup>38</sup> Long Prairie Leader (Todd County), Thursday, December 30, 1920, at 1. A memorial by the county bar association has not been located.



elected county attorney in 1904, but defeated in runs for municipal court judge in 1913 and 1917; D. H. Fisk lost bids for county attorney in 1908 and municipal court judge in 1913 and 1917; John Gibbons ran for county attorney in 1906 and municipal court judge in 1913 and 1917. In this period, campaigns for city or county judicial offices were short and inexpensive. It was easy to get on the ballot. Candidates for these offices did not attack and call each other names. In a field of several candidates, an individual who would lose most two-man contests might win by a slim plurality because the total vote was split among three or more opponents. There was, in other words, an element of chance in these elections. Moreover, a lawyer who lost did not suffer financially or professionally.<sup>39</sup> He continued to practice law. He knew as did his “brethren at the bar” that another election for county attorney or judge of the probate or municipal courts was not far off—and he just may run again . . . and see what happens.

Alvin M. Crowell’s seven campaigns between 1904 and 1917 must be viewed within the culture of the local bar. At one time or another most lawyers in the city of Bemidji ran for public office. He just ran more often than the others.



## Related Article

“The Bar of Bemidji” (MLHP, 2014) (published first, 1909).



Posted MLHP: September 29, 2014.

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<sup>39</sup> Crowell’s campaigns were never viewed as being hopeless or futile. In this respect he may be contrasted to William H. Vanderburgh, who ran for a seat on the Supreme Court nine times between 1918 and 1936, and Luther Melin, who ran eleven times between 1942 and 1962. See “Results of the Elections to the Minnesota Supreme Court, 1857-2012” (MLHP, 2010). Nor was he ever called a “chronic campaigner” or a “perennial candidate,” an epithet directed at lawyers who run frequently for office with no chance of victory. E. g., Eleanore Bresky, a Minneapolis lawyer whose obituary in the Minneapolis Star was headlined, “Eleanore Bresky, Perennial City Candidate, Dies at 69.” Minneapolis Star, March 24, 1952, at 8.