

**IN MEMORIAM**

**WILLIAM C. DURKEE**

**(1842 - 1882)**

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**Blue Earth County Bar Association  
Mankato, Minnesota**

**October 31, 1882**

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# **William C. Durkee**

( May 27, 1842 - October 27, 1882 )

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## **Blue Earth County Bar Association— Tribute to a Deceased Brother.**

**At a meeting of the Blue Earth county Bar Association on the 30th of October [1882], to take appropriate action relative to the death of W. C. Durkee, esq., a member of the association, Judge Severance and P. A. Foster, esq., were appointed a committee to draft suitable resolutions. It was also voted that the association attend the funeral as a mark of respect to the deceased. At a meeting the following day, Judge Severance read the following resolutions:**

**“On Friday of last week our friend, William C. Durkee, esq., an old resident of the city of Mankato, and for many years the clerk of the district court for the county of Blue Earth, as well as a member of the legal profession, died in the state of Kansas, where he had gone in the vain hope of prolonging his life, and now his mortal remains lie at his home in this city, awaiting the last solemn rites we can pay to the dead.**

**Not custom alone but a sincere admiration for the character and virtues of the deceased call upon the Bar Association of Blue Earth county to express in fitting terms its regard for the memory and worth of our departed friend, whose life is over and whose labor is done.**

**Therefore, be it resolved, That the deceased wrought well and truly in life, and erected the fabric of his character on the sure foundation of a sensitive and exalted manhood, ever recognizing the fact that he was but one in the great brotherhood of man, a co-worker bound to the same duties and having only equal rights with others.**

**That the tender consideration ever manifested by our departed friend towards others struggling against the ills of life is worthy of all imitation by us, for he who scatters kindness and good will, plants the only flowers on Earth that can outlive the tempest and the storm.**

**That the deceased in his religious life was neither a Martineau or a bigot.**

To profess with him was nothing, to do was everything. And he never estimated his fellow-man by any rule of ideal perfection, but he knew the infirmities of his race, strove with a tireless hand against his own, and blistered no one with caustic criticism because his way was different from his own. But he was willing to credit every one with all the good he did, no matter how or in what name he did it.

Patient to the last, always radiant with hope, and never complaining in the public ear, he descended to the tomb and crossed the river without ever halting to tremble at the unconceivable solemnity beyond.

That, as a public office he was competent and faithful, and knowing that he was the servant of the people, without that demeanor of pride and ostentation that marks the inferior mind, he discharged his duties with the cordial and easy manner that won the sure and lasting friendship of all.

That, as a citizen, without petulance or cavil he joined his hand with the rest in the performance of every work and duty, whether of benevolence or public progress and development, that would relieve individual distress or promote the public weal, and with so little assumption and friction has he moved through his duties as a citizen, that he has not left a single scar on the community to taunt the memory of his life.

That, to the wife and children of the deceased, stricken and wounded by this last blow of death, we offer the sympathy due to blighted affections and broken hearts, and we promise never to lay a vandal hand on the memory they cherish as sacred, but in place of the boundless gentleness and love that made the perpetual summer of their home, we have nothing to tender but an unvarying esteem for the lost idol of their hopes, that moved so noiselessly among us, and then went back, a single spark, to the great invisible flame that lead it to them and to us.

That the high esteem in which the community now holds the memory of the deceased, every one going with saddened step to yield a last tribute to the dead, ought to teach us, that in his life there was something of priceless value that commended itself to all the people and won upon the social and popular hearts.

And now when the chivalry and gallantry that the living bestow upon the dead bring our the virtues of our friend beyond the blemishes of his life, let us discover what those virtues were and imitate them to the end of our sunset, like his, may be radiant with the love of the living.”

**Mr. P. A. Foster then read the following resolution:**

**“To the memory of our brother in the profession of the said William C. Durkee, deceased”**

**Our brother William C. Durkee, having in life’s journey, passed us by, and entered before us through the veiled portal of death into that world to which we go, it is fitting that we should set up by the wayside as we travel on a memorial to testify to those who come after us, to our regard for the virtues and worth of him, who has at an early age distanced us in the race for immortality.**

**And first upon the tablet to his memory let us write our brother as kind.**

**Never in his whole intercourse with us has he spoken an unkind word. His relations with none have been marred with discord or anger.**

**Secondly, let us write our brother was faithful. Upon none of us had devolved the tasks to oversee his work, that it was properly done or done at all. In health he was ever at his post, in sickness ever struggling to bear up to the end. So long as he could stand, even when he had ceased to speak, he had not ceased to work. “Work while the day lasts, for the night cometh wherein no man can work,” seemed to have been his motto.**

**Thirdly, let us write our brother was just. In all the decisions that he has made, either for or against us, we have never even thought to impugn his motives; nor in all the temptations that necessarily surrounded him in the position that he has held did he ever falter in his duty. There lives not a man who can say that our brother ever did him an intentional wrong.**

**Fourthly, let us write our brother was charitable. For the love of the giving he gave, and boasted not his gifts, but farther did his charity extend: His sympathy for man made him loved by men. Unbiased in his opinions, and candid in his thoughts, he was ever willing to concede that others might be right, not too harshly did he condemn, if others innocently were wrong.**

**Of his further virtues, of which his life was a speaking book, we need not write, for those among us or who come after us, who can claim these virtues, theirs, may feel assured that they, too, will have an inheritance in the promised land that lies beyond the dark portal that has closed our beloved brother from our sight.—While**

we mourn at his death, let his virtues, taught by his example, live in us and those to follow us.

To his sorrowing wife, children and father, dear ones one and all, we tender our heartfelt sympathy for their and our loss but heaven's gain.

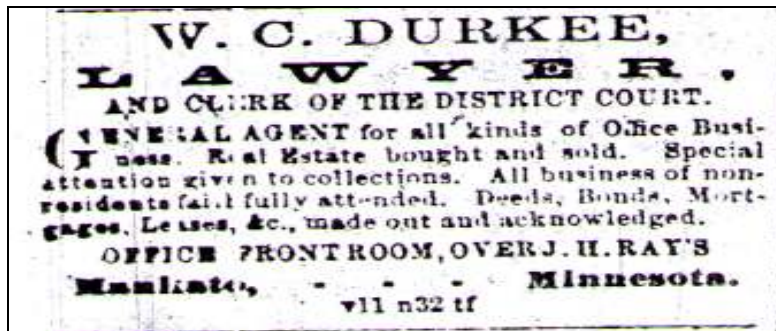
When the silent mound shall have been heaped upon his kindred clay, he will not wholly rest within that grave, but his example will still live as a power for good on earth, and his remembrance will still live in the affectionate regard of all who knew him.

Both sets of resolutions were adopted, ordered spread upon the records of the association, printed in the county papers and a copy of the same forwarded to Mrs. Durkee. <sup>1</sup> ◇

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## Afterword

Durkee's business card appeared in Mankato newspapers during the 1870s.<sup>2</sup>



Two profiles of Durkee follow: The first appeared in the *History of the Minnesota Valley* published in 1882, the second in a newsletter of the county historical society published in 2011:

William C. Durkee was born May 27, 1842, in St. Lawrence county, New York. In 1856 he accompanied his parents to Mankato. He

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<sup>1</sup> *Mankato Review*, Tuesday, November 14, 1882, at 2. See also Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County and Biographies of Its Leading Citizens* 194 (1909) ("On October 27, 1882, Wm. C. Durkee, who had served the county since 1869 as Clerk of its District Court, died, and Wm. B. Torrey was appointed to fill the vacancy.").

<sup>2</sup> *Mankato Record*, December 23, 1871, front page (enlarged).

enlisted in 1861 in Company H, Second Minnesota; February of the next year he was discharged for disability, but in August enlisted as sergeant in Company E, Ninth regiment; December, 1863, was commissioned captain of the Sixty-second colored regiment and served until August 1866. In May, 1868, he graduated from the law department of Ann Arbor college, and was admitted to practice in Michigan; returned to Mankato and was admitted to the bar in this state. Since 1871 has been clerk of the district court. Mary Davis became his wife in 1869, and has borne him five children. The living are Emma, Ella S., William C. and Gertrude M. <sup>3</sup>

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William C. Durkee led a short, but very full and active life. Born May 27, 1842 in St. Lawrence County, New York, he came with his parents to Mankato in 1856. In 1861 he enlisted as a private in Company H, but in the spring of 1862 was discharged on a surgeon's certificate of disability. However, not to be held back, William reenlisted in Company E of the 9th Minnesota in August of the same year. He was later promoted to Captain in the 62nd U. S. Colored Troops. After the close of the rebellion William studied law, graduating in 1868. He returned to Mankato and was admitted to practice the bar. He was elected to the office of Clerk of District Court, which post he held to the day of his death.<sup>4</sup> ◇

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<sup>3</sup> Edward D. Neill, *History of the Minnesota Valley, Including the Explorers and Pioneers of Minnesota* 565 (1882).

<sup>4</sup> E. Winston Grundmeier, "Blue Earth County and The Civil War: Company H 2nd Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry," 19 *The Blue Earth County Historian* 10 (Spring 2011).

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**Posted April 1, 2014.**