

IN MEMORIAM
GEORGE A. HEISEY

April 3, 1893 — February 10, 1990

Hennepin County Bar Association
Hennepin County Government Center
April 25, 1990

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April 3, 1893 — February 10, 1990

A gentleman of the old school, George Heisey, at 96 was still keen and direct, but with a rare blend of compassion and wit. Compassion for his parents started George off toward an interesting and continuously productive life of public service. Resolving not to burden his parents with education costs for him, he learned shorthand to prepare himself financially and academically to attend law school.

George began to work his way through the Minneapolis-St. Paul College of Law. While working in a St. Paul law office, George's ability and facility with shorthand came to the attention of U. S. Senator-elect Frank B. Kellogg. He requested that George go to Washington D. C. as his personal secretary. George's dream of attending Georgetown was fulfilled.

Five months of WWI service saw George rise in rank from private to "top sergeant."

After the war, George graduated from Georgetown. Senator Kellogg asked him to continue as personal secretary for Kellogg's new duties in London as Ambassador. George declined the offer to return to Minnesota to practice law. Shortly thereafter, Minnesota Senator Knute Nelson recommended George for appointment as Assistant U. S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota.

George participated in many interesting federal cases from 1922 to 1926 and from 1929 to 1939. One matter involved the Karpis-Barker Gang/Bremer and Hamm kidnapping cases in St Paul. Two other capital cases were handled by George. He successfully prosecuted the murderer of a federal agent before one jury and defended another federal agent on a state murder charge before another jury. George then served six years as chief trial counsel for the Soo Line Railway.

In 1945, Chief Judge Gunnar H. Nordbye appointed George to be referee in bankruptcy for the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of the U. S. District Court for Minnesota. George served there with great distinction for nearly a quarter of a century. His verbatim shorthand transcripts of all proceedings conducted in his court were legendary.

George recruited another bankruptcy judge, Kenneth G. Owens, who spoke highly of George's skills as camp cook on annual fishing trips on the Gunflint Trail. George was an admirer and friend of John Sanborn, who served both the federal district and circuit benches.

Compassion and care for his beloved wife, Ava, were a major focus for George in the early 80s. Following her death in 1985 and in the absence of immediate family, George was both consoled and enjoyed by many of his "federal family." George's durability, mental acuity, and good humor, despite a crushed vertebrae suffered in his last several years, endured to the very end of his remarkable life. He is an inspiration.

George's favorite story was the assessment of him by his first full-time employer, a Davenport, Iowa, railroad station agent. At that time, George was able to truthfully disavow the use of alcohol and tobacco and also, at age 18, to disavow "roistering about with women," as Mr. Murphy's employment inquiries termed it. Murphy then summed up George as having, "No vices and damned few virtues."

For nearly 80 years thereafter, George had few, if any, vices. During his lifetime, he quietly gave evidence of his many virtues.

TOM LOVETT and CONNOR SCHMID

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