

John E. Green

(December 4, 1865 – September 15, 1952)

After graduating college in 1888, John Edward Green taught school, a rite of passage of many young men who harbored ambitions to become lawyers in the nineteenth century. He was superintendent of schools of Carleton County, Minnesota, from 1889 to 1894. That experience bound him to this county, in life and in memory.

In 1894, he enrolled in the University of Minnesota College of Law. He graduated and was admitted to the bar on June 5, 1896.¹ The next month, he opened a law office in Carleton, the county seat, which was still recovering from a depression following the Panic of 1893. He was thirty years old, a husband and a father.

We can imagine his first day at the office: it was one room on the second floor of a local bank. It had a desk, two or three chairs and a small bookcase holding books he had used in law school, including several *Illustrative Casebooks* compiled by Dean Pattee and Professor James Paige. He did not own a set of *West's Northwestern Reporter*. He did not have a secretary. He did not have a telephone. He had pens, ink and paper but no typewriter. His diploma hung on the wall. His rent was a few dollars a month. Friends dropped in. Otherwise it was quiet. He was awaiting his first client.

Gradually he built a practice. His work was that of every small town lawyer at the time. On the civil side, he handled collections, probates, real estate matters (leases, sales, evictions and boundary disputes), and a few personal injury claims; divorces were rare. On the criminal side, he was assigned indigent cases by the district court at its terms in April and October. It can be assumed that his former students came to him for legal advice and, as years passed, their children also became clients, invariably reminding him that he once taught their mothers or fathers.

¹ *1 Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 39 (State Law Library, 2011). As a graduate of the University of Minnesota Law Department, he was not required to take an examination to be admitted.

His entry in the 1916 University Alumni Directory suggests he was confused with someone else:

John E. Green,
Lawyer. (Spokane, Wash.)

Alumni of the College of Law, 1889-1915, at 255 (1916) (online).

In 1900 he was elected county attorney, the first of three elections. During his six years in office, his reputation grew as he became known throughout the county. In 1907, he placed his personal profile in two subscriber-funded volumes of biographical sketches that were popular at the time. The following appeared in Albert Marquis' *Book of Minnesotans*:

GREEN, John Edward, lawyer; born at Winnebago Indian Agency (now St. Clair), Minn., Dec. 4, 1865; son of John and Mary (Hall) Green; educated in High School, Rushford, Minn., graduating, June, 1885; Northern Indiana Normal School, Valparaiso, Ind., graduating, degree of B.S., Aug. 8, 1888; University of Minnesota, College of Law, graduating, degree of LL.B., June 5, 1896. Taught school 5 years. Began practice of law at Carlton, July, 1896: county superintendent of schools, Carlton co., 4 years; county attorney of Carlton Co., 1900-06. Republican. Presbyterian. Member Masonic order, I. O. O. F., M. W. A. Married at Superior, Wis. Sept. 4, 1890, to Miss Sara A. Watkins. Recreations: Fishing and hunting. Address: Carlton, Minn.²

He never ran for public office again but remained active in community affairs, thereby fulfilling an important part of the job description of every small town lawyer. He served on the city school board and belonged to several social and fraternal organizations. He was loyal to the Republican Party and a regular congregant of the local Presbyterian Church.

He and Sara raised their three children in Fairmont, lived through prosperity, recessions, a depression and multiple foreign wars. He outlived his sons and wife of sixty years. On September 15, 1952, he died, aged eighty-six. Three days later, the weekly *Carleton County Vidette*, carried the story on its front page:

² Albert N. Marquis, ed., *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men of the State of Minnesota* 195 (1907). Here is the second profile:

Green John Edward, Carlton. Lawyer. Born Dec 4, 1865 in St Clair Blue Earth county Minn., son of John and Mary (Hall) Green. Married Sept 4, 1890 to Sara A Watkins. Graduated from Rushford High School 1886; Northern Indiana Normal College BS 1888; law dept U of M, LL B 1896. Principal of school Hokah Minn. 1888-89; principal of school Carlton 1889-91; county supt of schools 1890-94; practiced law in Carlton 1896 to date; county atty 1900-1907. Sec Rep County Committee 6 years; member Board of Education 3 years. Member Commercial Club, Masonic fraternity and I. O. O. F.

Little Sketches of Big Folks in Minnesota 157-58 (1907).

J. E. Green Dies, Service On Friday

John E. Green, pioneer Carleton attorney, died Monday evening in Duluth of old age complications, at the age of 86.

Green was born in southern Minnesota and came to N.P. Junction in 1889 after teaching in southern Minnesota for several years. Mr. Green was once quoted as saying, "Yes, I was considering two places to teach that coming fall, one was in Colorado, the other in Northern Minnesota, but I'm awfully glad I came to this section instead of Colorado.

Mr. Green had practiced law in Carleton for more than 50 years. He came to N. P. Junction to teach school before the turnoff the century. In September, 1890 he and Miss Sarah Watkins were joined in marriage and on Sept. 4, 1940, they marked their golden wedding anniversary. Mrs. Green died November 25, 1951.

Mr. Green at one time was going to locate in Cloquet, but partly due to Henry Oldenburg's encouragement, he opened his little law office, in the upstairs of what was the old Asa Paine bank and built up a law practice which earned him the respect and confidence of Carleton, and the rural areas. He numbered the district judges among his best friends.

Mr. Green was an ardent sportsman. One he learned at an early age was trout fishing which he enjoyed even until his eightieth birthday. He was a thirty-second degree Scottish Rite Mason, Valley of Duluth, active in civic affairs, was former village attorney and had served on the school board and the village council. He was a charter member of the Olivet Presbyterian church, predecessor to Paine Memorial Presbyterian church. For many years he was superintendent of the church Sunday school.

Mr. Green is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Fred Johnson, Nordham Heights, Mass., and four grandchildren. Two sons, Floyd and Jack, preceded him.

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Carleton has lost a loyal friend and a wise counselor. God grant that younger hands and hearts may carry on faithfully

the many tasks that John E. Green so often battled for in the growth and improvement of his loved ones and community.³ ■

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Posted MLHP: April 1, 2014.

³ *Carlton County Vidette*, September 18, 1952, at 1 (photograph and funeral arrangements omitted).