

**MEMORIAL**

**TO**

**THOMAS I. McDERMOTT**  
**(1876 – 1927)**

**RAMSEY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION**

**APRIL 7, 1928**

**THOMAS IGNATIUS McDERMOTT.**  
( 1876-1927 )

In 1906, a book on the history of St. Paul was published under the title, *Past and Present of St. Paul, Minnesota*. One of the book's subscribers was thirty year old Thomas McDermott, a "present" member of the city. His self-portrait provided:

Thomas McDermott, attorney at law, who for several years has been special attorney for the water board of St. Paul and has also served as assistant corporation counsel, was born in Stillwater, Minnesota, March 4, 1876. His father, Philip McDermott, was a native of Nova Scotia and in 1854 came to Minnesota, engaging in the lumber business at Stillwater. He married Elizabeth McGrath, a native of Stillwater. Their son, Thomas McDermott, was educated in the public schools, passed through successive grades until he had completed the high-school course in his native city with the class of 1892. He then entered the University of Minnesota, where he pursued a literary course and was graduated in 1896. His professional training was received in the law department of the State University, from which he was graduated in the class of 1900.<sup>1</sup> He immediately began practice in St. Paul and has since remained an active member of the bar of the capital city. He was assistant corporation counsel for two years and for several years has been special attorney for the water board. He has given his attention largely to civil law, but is well versed in all departments of jurisprudence and handles his cases in a manner that shows a mind trained in the severest school of reasoning.

Mr. McDermott, since age conferred upon him the right of franchise, has been a stalwart advocate of the republican party and he is a valued representative of various fraternal and social organizations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the

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<sup>1</sup> He was admitted June 8, 1900. See 1 *Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 53 (State Law Library, 2011).

**Knights of Columbus, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the Theta Delta Chi, a college fraternity; the Minnesota Club and the Town and Country Club. His entire life having been spent in this state, he early became imbued with the spirit of enterprise and progress which has always been the dominant factor in the upbuilding of the state, and in his chosen profession, which demands the same close application and persistent labor that constitute a feature of success in industrial and commercial life, he has won a creditable position for a man of his years.<sup>2</sup>**

**McDermott practiced law in St. Paul for the next two decades. He died on June 20, 1927, at age fifty-one. In April of the following year, the Ramsey County Bar Association presented the following memorial to him:**

#### **MEMORIAL TO THOMAS McDERMOTT**

**TO THE HONORABLE JUDGES OF THE DISTRICT COURT AND TO THE BAR OF RAMSEY COUNTY:**

**We, your committee appointed to prepare a memorial to the late Thomas McDermott, respectfully submit the following:**

**On June 20, 1927, while convalescing from a short illness of bronchial pneumonia, Thomas McDermott, long an eminent member of the Bar of this county, suffered a failure of the heart and died immediately. Although his family and associates had been alarmed by his condition upon his return to St. Paul from the Convention of the National Electric Light Association, at Atlantic City, where he had contracted a severe cold, the bronchial attack from which he had suffered had subsided and he had consulted with clients within a few hours before his death.**

**Mr. McDermott was born at Stillwater, Minnesota, on March 4, 1876, the son of Philip McDermott, one of**

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<sup>2</sup> **W. B. Hennessy, *Past and Present of St. Paul, Minnesota* 365-66 (1906).**

**the pioneer lumbermen of our state, who had immigrated to this country in his youth from Londonderry County, Ireland. After his early education in the parochial and public schools of Stillwater, he attended the University of Minnesota, from which he was graduated in 1896 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree. While there enrolled in the academic college he became a member of the Theta Delti Chi fraternity wherein he formed an intimate friendship with C. Louis Weeks, who after many years became one of his partners in the practice of law. In 1897 Mr. McDermott began to read law at the office of Messrs. Howe and Butler, then one of the leading law firms of this city, and while so occupied attended the night law school then being conducted at the University and was graduated as a member of the class of 1900 with a Bachelor of Laws degree.**

**The conferring of the degree then earned with it admission to the Bar of Minnesota and in the following year he was appointed a clerk in the office of the Corporation Counsel of St. Paul. In 1902, during the term of Mr. J. E. Markham, Mr. McDermott was promoted to the position of first Assistant Corporation Counsel. He left that office, however, in the following year to begin the private practice of his profession which was to continue until 1912 when he and the late Senator James D. Denegre became associated under the firm name of Denegre and McDermott. With the subsequent additions of Harry S. Stearns and C. Louis Weeks, this partnership continued until the death of Senator Denegre in 1926, whereupon Mr. McDermott became the senior member of his firm.**

**In 1921 he married Numea Baquie of New Orleans, Louisiana, whom he left surviving.**

**From the most humble of beginnings his practice at the time of his death had become one of the finest in the Northwest and although his ability was not confined to any single branch of the law, he achieved his greatest success as a corporation counsel. In this**

**capacity his practice extended over several of our adjacent states and his reputation as a public utility counsel had brought him national recognition.**

**He was eminently qualified by nature to pursue the profession of the law, being possessed of a keen, penetrating and analytical mind. He was agile in the employment of his mental faculties to the end that the immaterial was quickly discarded and a large volume of work was accomplish in a comparatively short time. This clear reasoning was followed by concise expression. To him it seemed that time was the food life lives upon and to dissipate the time of a court, a lawyer, or a jury was a mark of mediocrity.**

**These characteristics of the mind and of expression were complemented by a resourceful sense of humor, a good grace of manner, and at times a fearlessness of attack, which are among the essential qualifications of a fine advocate in our profession.**

**To an unusual degree it may be said that hand in hand with the pursuit of his profession he spent his years in the study of human nature. The devious motives and reactions of men were to him a constant source of interest and examination. It was this exceptional understanding of human beings which, supplemented by his legal training, fitted him so well to the task of counseling the heads of corporations of a quasi public nature. He faced difficult situations with an unusual ability to analyze the human and the personal element, with a personality which many found to be irresistible, and with an executive ability which has today become an essential attribute of the modern lawyer. His genial smile and hearty laugh often penetrated defenses which had been immune to argumentative persuasion. His demeanor at no time was marked by anything approaching affectation, for his was a true and hearty geniality. His wit was spontaneous and years of human contact had furnished his unerring memory with an abundant store of experience, interesting enough in themselves, but enriched by his manner of telling.**

**Behind all of this eagerness of his for contact and for action, there were in abundance those fundamental attributes which are characteristic of all fine men. He had great faith in men; he had courage in the maintenance of the right; he believed that a trust carries with it an unremitting obligation to duty, that ability brings responsibility, and that the greatest happiness is to be found in the assistance of others. In the practice of his profession the duty to advise, protect, or serve a client, having been once assumed, was an obligation without excuse for violation. In his later years, after financial success had come to him, he was a benefactor to many persons and charitable organizations of our city, but so modestly that even his intimates were unaware of the extent of his benefactions.**

**Such, in brief, was the nature of the many whose memory we at this time honor. The Bar of the county was deeply enriched by the presence of Thomas McDermott. To have had the pleasure to know him well, to have been encouraged day by day by his happy personality, and to have listened to his almost faultless advice, was indeed a privilege. The memory of this man will not soon be forgotten.**

**April 7, 1928**

**Respectfully submitted**

**/s/ Harry Stearns**  
**/s/ Gerhard J. Bundlie**  
**/s/ James C. Otis**  
**/s/ Anthony E. Nelson**  
**/s/ Thomas D. O'Brien**  
**/s/ M. J. Doherty**  
**/s/ Pierce Butler Jr.**  
**/s/ Frederick Dickson**  
**/s/ Charles Briggs**  
**/s/ Raymond G. O'Malley**

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