

**“ Melville & Mason:
The First Law Firm in Fergus Falls ” ***

in

HISTORY

OF

**Otter Tail County
MINNESOTA**

ITS PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

JOHN W. MASON

Editor

With Biographical Sketches of Representative Citizens and
Genealogical Records of Many of the Old Families

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* MLHP editor: The first item that follows appeared on pages 693-4, the second on page 584, of the first of Mason's two volume history of Otter Tail County. Though reformatted, it is complete. The author's spelling and punctuation are not changed.

THE FIRST LAW FIRM IN FERGUS FALLS.

Lawyers may come and lawyers may go, but some go sooner than others. It was forty-five years ago this summer that the first law firm in Fergus Falls came into existence and one member of this first firm is still practicing in the city. In an old ledger, yellow with age and mellow with time, the historian found the following interesting document, a contract which carries with it its own explanation:

Fergus Falls. July 5, 1871.

Be it remembered, on this 5th day of July, A. D. 1871, that we, the undersigned, attorneys-at-law, have entered into a general co-partnership under the firm name and style of Melville & Mason, on the following conditions: 1st, said firm to commence business on the day above written; 2nd. to remain the same under said name and style for one year from said date; 3rd. each member to receive an equal share of all fees; 4th, to defray equally all necessary expenses for the maintenance and convenience of said firm; 5th, to engage strictly in the practice of law; 6th, each pledges himself upon his honor to attend strictly to business in an honorable manner.

Bert Melville
J. W. Mason

This firm was not destined to remain intact for the reason that he whose name headed it failed to live up to the sixth condition of the contract. Wine and women, if not song, were responsible for the dissolution of the firm and, while Mason proved his right to be classed as one of the best lawyers in the city, his partner severed his allegiance with Blackstone and became a follower of Bacchus. Long years ago he left the city where he might have become a useful citizen and a leading lawyer, but the other member of the firm has lived to become one of the best lawyers and at the same time one of the most highly respected citizens of Fergus Falls. Today Hon. John W Mason is the oldest member of the local bar and a man whose career has been such that future chroniclers may say of him—"The life of such a man does not go out; it goes on."

In an earlier chapter entitled “Reminiscences by John W. Mason,” the author recalled the demise of his firm:

Soon after coming to Fergus Falls, I formed a partnership with Bert Melville under the firm name and style of “Melville & Mason, Attorneys at Law.” These two legal lights burned in unison till a few weeks later, when one went out. He extinguished and distinguished himself one night by eloping with another man’s wife, and the burden of a precarious practice fell upon the junior member of the firm.



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