

“ BENCH AND BAR OF GRANT COUNTY ” *
IN
HISTORY
OF
Douglas and Grant Counties
Minnesota

THEIR PEOPLE INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

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Editor-in-Chief

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

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*** MLHP editor: This chapter appeared on pages 458 to 460 of the first volume of this joint history of Douglas and Grant counties. It has been reformatted. The author's spelling and punctuation have not been changed.**

CHAPTER XII.

THE BENCH AND BAR.

From the time of its permanent organization, in 1873, until 1883, Grant county was a part of Douglas county for judicial purposes, and district court cases from this county were tried at Alexandria. In 1883 the state Legislature gave Grant county a court of its own and made it a part of the seventh judicial district, which was comprised of Benton, Douglas, Grant, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Otter Tail, Pope, Sherburne, Stearns and Todd counties. The judges who presided over this court while Grant county was a part of the seventh judicial district were L. W. Collins and L. L. Baxter. Judge Collins later became a member of the state supreme court.

In 1887 Grant county became a part of the sixteenth judicial district, then composed of Big Stone, Grant, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin counties, to which Pope county was added later, and these counties constitute the present sixteenth judicial district. The judges have been: Calvin L. Brown, who served from 1887 to 1898, when he was elected to the state supreme court of which he is now chief justice; F. J. Steidl, who served from 1898 to 1901, and S. A. Flaherty, who was elected in 1900 and is still presiding as judge of this district.

ATTORNEYS.

E. S. Rolfe was the first attorney to take up residence in Grant county. He opened a law office at Herman in the early seventies and at once took an active part in county affairs. Mr. Rolfe was county superintendent of schools from 1879 to 1880 and was county attorney from 1878 to 1881. He moved away from Herman in 1882.

Joseph W. Reynolds located in Herman in 1879 and was one of the leading early lawyers. Mr. Reynolds was county attorney from 1881 to 1883. He is now practicing law in Duluth.

Charles M. Stevens, who also located at Herman, was county attorney from 1883 to 1885. He moved from Grant county to Minneapolis, and later went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where he is still in the practice.

W. H. Townsend, a native of Michigan and a graduate of the law [459] school at Ann Arbor, located at Herman in 1887. He was county superintendent of schools from 1893 to 1895. Mr. Townsend died at Flint, Michigan, in 1900.

A Mr. Rothrick engaged in the practice of law at Herman, in 1882, in partnership with J. W. Reynolds. About 1888 he moved to Little Falls, this state.

George Ketcham opened a law office at Herman in 1882. He was county attorney from 1885 to 1891. Mr. Ketcham died at Herman in 1899.

Arthur B. Childress moved from Northfield to Herman in 1897, engaged in the practice there for two years, then came to Elbow Lake, and after conducting an office here for one year moved back to Northfield, where he is now judge of the fifth judicial district.

Guy B. Caldwell located in Herman about 1895. After practicing there three years he removed to St. Paul.

F. C. Anderson opened a law office in Herman in 1905, and is still located there.

Nels J. Bothne located in Herman in 1906, and after residing there one year moved to Elbow Lake. Mr. Bothne was county attorney from 1909 to 1913. Soon after leaving this office he moved to New Rockford, North Dakota.

A. S. King came to Ashby in 1882 and after residing there until 1900 moved to Lake Park, Becker county, where he is still engaged in the practice.

Michael Casey and Thomas Casey, brothers, natives of Wisconsin, opened an office for the practice of law at Elbow Lake in 1887. Michael Casey

served as county attorney from 1895 to 1899. In 1899 he moved to Bloomington, Wisconsin, where he is engaged in the practice. Thomas Casey was court commissioner for Grant county from 1897 to 1895. He is still engaged in practice at Elbow Lake.

Oscar M. Torrison located at Elbow Lake in 1887, and lived here until 1890, then moved to Chicago, where he is now one of the judges of the circuit court.

E. J. Scofield came to Elbow Lake from Houston county in 1889, and was in partnership with Mr. Torrison for one year. Mr. Scofield served as county attorney from 1891 to 1895 and from 1899 to 1900. He is still engaged in practice here.

Andrew O. Ofsthun located at Elbow Lake in 1891. In 1896 he was elected judge of probate and was serving in that office when he was accidentally killed at Pomme de Terre lake in 1901. [460]

R. J. Stromme began the practice of law at Elbow Lake in 1903. Mr. Stromme was county superintendent of schools from 1907 to 1913, and since 1913 has been county attorney.

Knut T. Dahlen came to Elbow Lake in 1900, and opened an office for the practice of law. Mr. Dahlen was county superintendent of schools from 1895 to 1901. In 1912 he moved to Minneapolis, where he now is assistant county attorney.

James S. Scribner located in Elbow Lake in 1900, and one year later moved to Walker, where he is engaged in the practice.

STORY OF THE FIRST COURT SESSION.

At the dedication of the new court house, in 1906, a letter was read from Judge L. W. Collins, who presided at the first session of the district court held in Grant county, in 1883. This letter is of interest, as it gives an insight into the conditions which confronted the early lawyers in Grant county. Judge Collins wrote as follows:

“I held the first term of court in your county at Elbow Lake in 1883 in the old court house, a small building erected for public purposes. There was but one hotel, kept by Mr. Laastuen, and, if I remember right, no store at all in your place. I am told that the hotel I speak of was on the ground now occupied by the new court house—a beautiful site for a public building.

“Things were very crude in those days. I remember that an appeal was made to me to transfer the court to either Herman or Ashby, because there were no proper facilities in Elbow Lake. I thought that those who had business might be discommoded, and stated, upon opening the court, that if any complaints were to be made, I would listen to them at that time, and, if there was no well founded reason for transferring the court to some other town, it would be held here. I heard no complaints and we went on with the business.

“The lawyers were all taken care of by the then county auditor, Mr. Sanford, who lived about a mile away, across a small lake. Farmers took jurors, litigants and witnesses to their houses in the neighborhood. The hotel proprietor and his good wife did exceedingly well with the crowds that were thrust upon them, and, upon the whole, it was not an unpleasant condition of things.

“I held, as district judge, one or two terms later, when the town had commenced to grow and could boast of a store and three or four dwelling houses. I look back upon those days and the friends I met there with a good deal of satisfaction.”



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