

IN MEMORIAM

NEIL BYRON FERGUSON

(1853 – 1927)

RAMSEY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

April 27, 1928

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Neil Byron Ferguson was born in the Province of Ontario, on a farm near the small village of Kirkfield about 70 miles northeast of Toronto, in the year 1853.

In this locality Mr. Ferguson acquired his elementary education in the common schools, which in those days, were of a more or less crude character. He was born of parents who had come to this locality from Scotland; his father's name was Alexander Ferguson, and his mother's maiden name was Anna C. McFayden. They were a sturdy people and the family was large including seven children.

Family loyalty was a very marked virtue in the Ferguson household. So strong was this trait of character that the five brothers pooled their earnings to educate one another; thus his brother Alexander was given a course of study in medicine which was completed upon his enrollment as a student in the University of Edinburgh. He later became an eminent surgeon in Chicago. This family solidarity, a little later accrued to the benefit of Neil Byron. The earnings of the other brothers enable him to take a law course at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and from this institution he graduated and received the degree of Bachelor of Laws in about the year 1884.

Shortly thereafter he came to St. Paul and entered upon the practice of law in which profession he was engaged until a few years before he died, which was on the 9th day of April, 1927.

During the years 1908 and 1909, Mr. Ferguson became intensely interested in the study of Shakespearean literature. In the course of such study he arrived at the opinion that certain dramatic literature, which by most people is attributed to the efforts of William Shakespeare, had been composed and written by Lord Bacon of England. He became so absorbed in this study that he lost interest in his profession, and notwithstanding the advice of his brothers, and members of the bar at St. Paul, he gave up the

practice of law and went to England to complete his studies in the literature, the authorship of which was thus in controversy. When he returned a few years afterwards he claimed to have discovered to the satisfaction of his mind that Bacon had written the Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, and practically all of the Shakespearean plays. He was a persistent worker and continued to study and labor in this field with the expectation that he might find some one who would assist him to get the documents that he had so prepared in this so-called Shakespearean-Bacon controversy printed and published. In this he failed. By this time the people had become acquainted with the writings of Ignatius Donnelly, particularly the book known as "The Cryptogram", and had for the most part made up their minds that William Shakespeare was the true author of these plays; to many others it did not appear to make much difference whether they were written by Shakespeare, Bacon or somebody else.

Mr. Ferguson no doubt received a great deal of enjoyment from his study and so informed his sceptical friends, who advised him to resume his practice of law. This he never did. He died in the happy belief that he had made a wonderful discovery.

Mr. Ferguson was a man of sterling qualities, absolutely upright and honest in his dealings with people, and by the time he took up his studies in literature, had become a capable and efficient lawyer. He never married.

The enthusiasm he manifested in his study was of a kind which usually accrues to the benefit of the public, but in this case it was otherwise. We who knew him will mourn the loss of a staunch friend.

Harold Harris,
Chairman.

Dillon J. O'Brien,
A. B. Horn,
Committee.

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