

MEMORIAL

FOR

RUFUS AUGUSTINE SKINNER

(1885 – 1953)

**HENNEPIN COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
1953**

Rufus Augustine Skinner was born in French Guiana, South America, in 1885. He pursued his early formal education in that country. At first intending to study medicine, he came to Eastern Canada for that purpose, but later decided to study law and entered the Northwestern College of Law in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and graduated therefrom in 1915. Shortly thereafter he was admitted to practice in the courts of our state. In September 1918 he married Margaret Rose Fairly, and of this union were born two daughters, Rita and Andrea.

Mr. Skinner and his family moved to Chicago, where he became admitted to the bar and a member of the Cook County Bar Association. He and his family returned to Minneapolis in 1937, and he later became a member of the Hennepin County and Minnesota State Bar Associations. His wife died in 1938.

He was a member of St. Mary's Court, Catholic Order of Foresters, and one of the original members of the Society of Blessed Martin de Porres. He became one of the incorporators of the Church of St. Leonard of Port Maurice and of the Church of St. Martin and remained a lay trustee thereof thereof until his death. He was active in the Holy Name Society, Third Order of St. Francis, and the St. Vincent de Paul society. He was a former President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Minneapolis Urban League for many years. He was also a teacher of religious instruction at the Margaret Barry House in this city.

He died in Minneapolis January 29, 1953. His daughters Rite and Andrea survive him.

Mr. Skinner had a personality at once courtly, friendly, and quietly courageous. He was innately a gentleman, with a sense of humor and a sparkling wit that was free from malice. Throughout adversity and the vicissitudes of life he was not given to complaint but bore heavy burdens with manliness and complete lack of ostentation. He was accomplished in the language of Racine and Corneille and spoke it with the scholarly ease of an advocate of the Court of Appeal. His early desire to study medicine yielded to his devotion for the law. He became a citizen of our nation by choice and by devotion.

He had a deep respect for the courts and for our system of law. He did his full part in achieving harmony in our community and without yielding principle, was so tactful and considerate, diplomatic and genuinely friendly, that he won the admiration and respect of those of other races, and in his quiet and orderly way, with his profound respect for law and with a deeply imbued sense of Christian charity, he quickened the consciences of many who might not have been impressed by other methods.

It was not his fortune to have conducted any large number of causes célèbres. Perhaps he might have felt that were the opportunities afforded he could have argued great principles before the tribunals of last resort, but what he did in the legal matters that came to his attention he did with modesty to the best of his ability and gave counsel to many, and helped solve the problems and troubles of the clients who were fortunate enough to know him. After all, no greater accolade can come to a lawyer.

He was a deeply religious man and the theme of profound

but cheerful devotion to the following of Christ is his great epitaph. He saw in the comforts and consolations of religion a way of life that surmounted the trials and trivialities of life, the pettiness of thoughtless men, and showed him not only the promises of a glorious and peacefully life to come but a great satisfaction in serving God in this world and using his kindly influence and example to show to others the spiritual richness of such a life. With such representative examples as Martin of Porres and Leonard of Port Maurice before him, he knew the eternal truth that greatness of soul is not confined to any one race or nation. His was the greatness of a simple, kindly man, but a cheerful one. He was humble with the great dignity of those who are humble and whose promise of reward is implicit in the words contained in the magnificent Cantic of Mary:

“He has put down mighty from their thrones and the humble he has exalted.”



Afterword

Skinner was admitted to the bar on February 16, 1916. At that time, his address was listed as 2817 Chicago Avenue, Minneapolis. *Roll of Attorneys, Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 150 (Minnesota Digital Library).

The date of this memorial is not given. Presumably it was delivered in 1953 at the annual memorial services of the county bar association. The author of the memorial is not named.

