

Marion S. Stevens

(August 31, 1854 • May 13, 1936)



◁ 1897 ▷

In 1878, twenty-four year old Marion Seldon Stevens moved to Graceville, a small village in Big Stone County, Minnesota. There he studied law and was admitted to the bar the next year.¹ He never moved away, content to practice law by himself, marry and raise his family there. Like many rural lawyers of this period he became a community leader, and served as mayor and on the charter commission. His interests ranged far beyond this village whose population never exceeded one thousand. Politics was one passion though he did not seek election to high office. He was a member of many regional and state committees of the Republican Party, and was considered a loyal party stalwart until 1912 when he followed former President Roosevelt into the Bull Moose Party. Addicted to reading he was known as “the best read man in Minnesota.”



The Village of Graceville in the early 1900s

The population of Graceville could support only a few lawyers. In 1912, it had two: Stevens and John A. Green. Their business cards were published in the *Graceville Phoenix* on May 9, 1912:

¹ His obituary in the *St. Paul Dispatch* and *Graceville Enterprise and Dumont Tribune* states that he was educated at the “St. Paul Law School,” an apparent reference to the St. Paul College of Law; however that school did not start operations until 1900. It is certain that Stevens read law in or near Graceville before being admitted to practice in 1879.

Attorneys		
M. S. STEVENS		
Attorney and Counsellor At Law, General Practice, Mercantile Law and Col- lections a Specialty.		
GRACEVILLE,	↓ ↓	MINNESOTA.
JOHN A. GREEN		
Lawyer		
Collections given careful attention.		
Insurance written on town and farm proper Land and Homestead relinquishments in North Dakota, for sale,		

Both lawyers emphasized "collections" as a specialty. Green also offered insurance, loans and homesteads for sale in North Dakota while Stevens it seems made his living exclusively from lawyering. His practice must have been profitable because he was able to buy several sizeable farms which he claimed he operated himself.

In 1897 after almost twenty years of practice, he must have felt such pride in his accomplishments that he subscribed to and placed his portrait in *Progressive Men of Minnesota*, subtitled "Biographical sketches and portraits of the leaders in business, politics and the professions; together with an historical and descriptive sketch of the state." No other lawyer profiled in this book came from a village as small as Graceville.

Marion S. Stevens is a lawyer living in Graceville, Minnesota. He traces his ancestry back to England, but his parents and grandparents were natives of Summerset County, Maine. His father, Elija Grant Stevens, was married to Miss Mary Rice, of Summerset County, in 1849; and during the

same year moved to what is now Pepin County, Wisconsin. He was twice elected sheriff of Dunn County, Wisconsin, and held other positions of trust and responsibility up to the time of his death, which occurred in 1872. He moved to Minnesota in 1864, but after six years returned to Pepin County, where he passed the remainder of his days. His son Marion was born in 1854, in Pepin County. He was one of a family of seven children, who are all living.

When his father came to Minnesota in 1864 young Marion was, of course, with the family, but instead of returning to Wisconsin he established himself in this state and has lived here ever since. He received a common school education, supplemented by an academic course. Since finishing his school life he has followed the early acquired habit of reading and study until he is one of the best read men in the state.

Mr. Stevens went to Graceville in 1878 when the place was first settled. He studied law there and was admitted to practice before the Hon. C. L. Brown, District Judge, in 1889 (sic). Upon his admission to the bar he at once engaged in the practice of law at Graceville, and by his energy and ability he soon worked up a lucrative practice. While living in Graceville Mr. Stevens has done valuable and effective work for the Republican party in that section of the state. Though having extensive acquaintance he has persistently refused to accept office. At present he is chairman of the Republican committee. In Masonic, Pythian and Woodmen orders he is prominent and influential.

In 1889 Mr. Stevens married Sue J. Crossmun, of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Miss Crossmun was at that time principal of the high school at Burlingame, Kansas. They have a daughter, Marion Fay, and a son, Lloyd C.²

Ten years later he placed this sketch in *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men of the State of Minnesota*:

² Marion D. Shutter & J. S. McLain eds., *Progressive Men of Minnesota* 211 (1897). Stevens' photograph on the first page of this article is from this book.

STEVENS, Marion S., lawyer; born at Arkansaw, Wis., Aug. 31, 1854; son of Elijah Grant and Mary (Rice) Stevens; educated in common schools and at Galesville College. Has been engaged in the practice of law since 1879. Republican; has served as member of town, county, legislative, congressional and state Republican committees. Owner of several farms (one of 1,300 acres, highly improved) which he operates himself. Methodist. President of the Charter Commission of Graceville, and mayor of that city, where he has resided for 18 years. Member Masonic order, Modern Woodmen of America, Maccabees and Knights of Pythias. Married at Burlingame, Kan., May 14, 1899, to Sue J. Crossmun. Club: Commercial, of Graceville. Address: Graceville, Minn.³

Stevens retired to California and also resided for long stretches with his daughter in Dallas, Texas. There he died on May 13, 1936, at age eighty-one. The *St. Paul Dispatch* reported his death that very day:

MARION S. STEVENS
DIES IN TEXAS AT 81

Former Minnesota Settler,
G.O.P. Leader in This State
During World War.

Dallas Texas, May 13.— (AP)— Marion Seldon Stevens, 81 years old, for many years active in civic and governmental affairs of Minnesota died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. R. H. Morrison, here, today.

He had been ill for several months. . . .

Stevens was born in 1854 at Pepin, Wis., and settled as a young man in a western Minnesota community, later named Graceville. He received a law degree at the St. Paul Law

³ Albert N. Marquis, ed., *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men of the State of Minnesota* 489 (1907).

School and practiced steadily at his home until retirement a few years ago.

He was Minnesota Republican chairman during the World War, and food administrator for his district.

Friends here said he was known as "the best read man in Minnesota."

He was a Mason, Woodman and a member of the Knights of Pythias.⁴

The *Graceville Enterprise and Dumont Tribune* simply reproduced the obituary from a Dallas newspaper:

Marion S. Stevens,
Former resident,
Dies in Dallas, Tex.

Was Prominent Attorney and Civic
Leader Among Pioneers of
Community Here

Word was received last Thursday of the death of Marion Seldon Stevens, former attorney and pioneer resident of this community, who passed away at the home of his daughter, Mrs. R. H. Morrison, Dallas, Texas, on Wednesday morning.

To Mrs. Morrison we are indebted for the following clipping concerning the deceased, taken from the Dallas Times Herald:

Marion Seldon Stevens, 81, for many years an active figure in civic and governmental affairs of Minnesota, died here

⁴ *St. Paul Dispatch*, Wednesday, May 13, 1936 at 2 (Funeral arrangements and survivors omitted).

Wednesday morning at the home of his daughter, Mrs. R. H. Morrison, 4408 St. John's Drive in Highland Park.

Mr. Stevens' death followed an illness of several months duration. He had been residing at his daughter's home for the past year. In prior years he has been a frequent visitor to the city and had a wide acquaintance here. . . .

Mr. Stevens was born in 1854 in Pepin County, Wis. As a young pioneer, he settled in Western Minnesota in a community which later became known as Graceville. He received a law degree at the St. Paul Law School and practiced law in his hometown until his retirement several years ago.

Mr. Stevens was active for many years in Republican party affairs of his home state. He represented his state as Republican chairman and during the war served as food administrator for his district. When Roosevelt bolted the party, Mr. Stevens followed him into the Bull Moose Camp.

During his decline in health, Mr. Stevens never lost his sparkling wit and his keen interest in national affairs. His home state knew him as the "best read man in Minnesota," and his Texas friends delighted in his deep understanding of governmental and social philosophy.

Mr. Stevens was a Mason, Woodman and member of the Knights of Pythias. He leaves a widow in Los Angeles, three daughters and a son; Mr. Paul Reidy, Miss Lucille Stevens and Lloyd Stevens of California and Mrs. Morrison of Dallas.⁵



⁵ *Graceville Enterprise and Dumont Tribune*, May 19, 1936, at 1 (funeral arrangements omitted). Photograph of Graceville on page 2 from LakesnWoods.com.