

## JED L. WASHBURN<sup>1</sup>

Jed L. Washburn was born on December 26, 1856, in Montgomery County, Indiana. He was the son of Christopher C. and Julia A. (Showen) Washburn. In June, 1857, the family removed to Blue Earth County, Minnesota, and from that time until his death on August 27, 1931, Mr. Washburn resided in the state of Minnesota. In May, 1882, he was married to Alma J. Pattee of Stockton, Portage County, Wisconsin. They raised an interesting family of six children: Claude C., Genevieve, Abbott McC., Mildred (now Mrs. C. R. McLean), Hope, and John Lawrence. Claude C. died on August 10, 1926, just as he was making for himself an enviable reputation as a linguist and an author. Mr. Washburn is survived by his estimable wife and five children.

Mr. Washburn was a forceful character, blessed with many talents, having many interests, and engaged in many activities, and within the scope of this brief memorial only some glimpses of his personality can be presented. First and foremost he was a lawyer, thoroughly grounded in the fundamental principles of the law. After receiving his academic education, he studied in the office of the late Judge M. J. Severance of Mankato. He was admitted to the bar at that place in 1880, and practiced his profession there until 1890, when he removed to Duluth, where he resided for the remainder of his life. There he found a ripe field for his extraordinary legal ability, and he soon built up a large and profitable law business. He was a safe legal adviser of business men, and was recognized by the bar as one of the leading practitioners in the state. He tried many important cases, all of which he prepared with care and pre-

<sup>1</sup> Read at the eighty-third annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Paul on January 11, 1932. *Ed.*

sented with zeal and ability and in accordance with the highest ethics of the profession. He possessed that rare faculty of being equally at home in the court room whether he was engaged in presenting a legal question to the court or in arguing a question of fact before a jury. For many years he was the head of the well-known law firm of Washburn, Bailey, and Mitchell, which he organized. Some years before his death he retired from active general practice to care for the business of some specially important clients and to attend to his own increasing business affairs and public activities.

Mr. Washburn took a great interest in the State Bar Association, was one of its promoters, and was its president for the year 1907-08. He became one of the best-known members of his profession, and enjoyed a large personal acquaintance among attorneys and judges. Whenever the annual meeting of the association was held in Duluth, it was his delight to entertain many attorneys and judges at his home, which he always did in a most pleasant but informal manner.

Mr. Washburn was a keen business man, and he was connected with many business corporations and enterprises. For some years he was president of the Duluth Savings Bank, and when that institution was converted into the present Northern National Bank of Duluth in 1909, he became its president, and he served as such until 1929. At the urgent insistence of the board of directors and other officers he then became chairman of the board, and he held that office until his death.

Mr. Washburn was a sound, conservative banker. He was, however, impressed with the fact that in Duluth there was a large class of people, principally wage-earners, who often needed financial assistance that the ordinary commercial bank could not well furnish, and he was desirous of organizing a corporation beneficial to that class of borrowers. The result of his thorough study of the question

was the calling into his office, one day in 1917, of some twenty of the leading business and financial men of the city. He persuaded them to join him in the organization of the Duluth Morris Plan Company, the pioneer industrial banking institution in the Northwest. He personally prepared the articles of incorporation; he was elected the first president of the company; and under his fostering care it prospered and fully justified the faith of himself and his cofounders. It has served the community well, along the lines that he proposed, by furnishing credit and financial assistance to a class of people who normally would not be able to obtain credit at a commercial bank. He remained president for some years, until the company was on a safe foundation, and then he insisted on being relieved of the office by reason of the pressure of other business and professional matters, and partly because of failing health. Though he severed his official connection with the company, he continued to take a deep interest in its affairs and he was freely consulted by its board of directors and officers.

With all his active professional and business duties, he devoted much time to education, in which he was keenly interested. He was a member of the board of education of Mankato before he took up his residence in Duluth; and he served on the board of education of the Independent School District of Duluth from 1900 to 1907; and he was a member of the state normal school board, now the state teachers college board, and resident director of the Duluth State Normal School from 1903 to 1920.

He took an active interest in everything pertaining to the welfare of the city of Duluth. He was generous to a fault. No worthy cause or worthy individual appealed to him in vain; and his gifts were made without ostentation. No one knew the extent of his benefactions. He, truly, did not let his left hand know what his right hand did. He did much in behalf of education. The normal school of Duluth was greatly enriched by his generosity. He pur-

chased and donated to the state additions to the campus grounds of the normal school. These were needed in order to group to better effect and with greater convenience the buildings on the campus. He expended his own money in improving and beautifying the campus and adjacent streets. He also took great interest in the students at the normal school. He established a loan fund of five thousand dollars for the benefit of worthy students who were unable to finance themselves through school. He furnished outdoor equipment, such as sweaters, mackinaws, skates, and skis, for women students in the dormitories; and for many years he provided them with season tickets for skating rinks. He was instrumental in establishing a public school in the Hunters Park section of the city and he donated the greater part of the school grounds. The school was fittingly named in his honor. He always took a special interest in this school and aided it in many ways, such as developing its playgrounds and supplying it with an adequate library.

In 1915, he was largely instrumental in having the legislature establish the Jay Cooke State Park, comprising some thousands of acres on either side of the picturesque St. Louis River in Carlton County and near Duluth. In addition to giving large financial aid to the project, he acted as chairman of a commission appointed by the governor to secure for the state the property forming the park. His love of nature and of beauty enabled him to render real service at the beginning of the development of the park. The commission of which he was chairman was continued for some years.

Though widely read in the law and in legal literature, his reading was by no means confined to these fields. He had collected one of the best-selected and largest private libraries in the state, and few were more at home in a general library than he. He was a great admirer of Lincoln, and his library contained a vast amount of literature touching on that great man. He also sought to have in his li-

brary everything available pertaining to the early history of Minnesota and the Lake Superior country. To that end he was an active member of the Minnesota Historical Society for thirty years and served on its executive council for seven years. He was also active in the St. Louis County Historical Society and greatly aided this organization as well as the state society in its labors.

He delivered many addresses on educational and patriotic subjects. All these were prepared with care and accuracy and couched in most choice language. They were for the most part delivered before educational gatherings. As an example of his studious preparation, lucidity of style, and fervor of spirit, might be mentioned the address on the "Flag of the United States," which at the time of its delivery was given wide publicity. It was delivered on June 8, 1917, before the alumni association of the college of law of the University of Minnesota, and afterwards, by request, before numerous other bodies.

His interest in public affairs was so genuine and unselfish that he was repeatedly called upon either to preside or to deliver addresses at public meetings. One notable event was the visit to Duluth of James Bryce when he was ambassador of Great Britain to the United States. A banquet was given in honor of Mr. Bryce at the Commercial Club. It was a great gathering, representative of the whole city, and as was natural and usual, Mr. Washburn was chosen to deliver the address in behalf of the people of Duluth.

He was a devoted husband and father, genial companion, true friend, and ideal citizen. Although modest and diffident by nature, by the force of his personality he easily dominated any gathering in which he took part. The secret of his influence lay in the fact that he was a real leader of men. In seeking to accomplish something for the public good, he would in effect say, "Come, let us do this," and the result was coöperation in which he always took more than his full share of the burden, but his spirit inspired

the others to action also. Such a full and useful life as his cannot fail to have left an impress upon his city and state that will long endure.

It is appropriate in closing to apply to Mr. Washburn the beautiful language which he himself applied to his friend, the late Judge Philip E. Brown, a justice of the supreme court of Minnesota, at a memorial held in the supreme court on April 6, 1915. In a brief address on that occasion Mr. Washburn used these words:

I recount that a discriminating sense of justice; a keen judgment of the law; modesty of assertion; unlimited courage; a genial and generous disposition and chivalrous spirit; a high sense of personal honor and an elevated standard of duty as a citizen, all crowned with habits of industry and sobriety, were the dominant characteristics and virtues of this distinguished citizen. The tug at the sleeve that such a life makes tends to stimulate his companions who still abide to emulate his virtues, and when the summons comes to them, to courageously cross the threshold into the unknown, but let us hope not unknowable, sequence of human life and human effort.

JOHN G. WILLIAMS

DULUTH, MINNESOTA



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