

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Bar

G. A. FORREST

Gustavus A. Forrest was born in the state of New Hampshire on August 23rd, 1845. The family came to Wisconsin in 1850 going first to Kenosha and in the following year settled on a farm near old Fort Winnebago—now Portage. As a boy Mr. Forrest labored on the family farm. He received his primary instruction in the public schools of Kenosha and Fort Winnebago. In the year 1864 he entered Lawrence University as a member of the class of 1868 and remained until near the completion of his course but did not graduate, going instead to the State University.

He had decided on the study of law and entered the office of Spooner and Lamb, of Madison, Wis. At the same time he pursued the course in the college of law and graduated in the class of 1869, the first law class to be graduated from the State University.

He came to the city of Manitowoc in the autumn of 1869. At the following spring election he was chosen one of the Justices of the Peace, and opened an office, but a little later made his headquarters in the office of Ellery B. Treat reading up in Statutory law and practice until 1872 when he entered upon practice in partnership with C. W. White the firm being White and Forrest. This firm, a very busy one, lasted until 1880, when the firm of Forrest & Sedgwick was formed which dissolved in 1882, each of the partners practicing alone. After about a year Mr. Forrest formed the partnership of Forrest and Blesch; Charles Blesch being the junior of the firm. This connection was dissolved in 1887, on account of the failure of health of Mr. Blesch who died not long thereafter.

Since that time Mr. Forrest has practiced alone. He has been a member of the Manitowoc County Bar for over fifty years. While I was connected with the bar as student and office clerk nearly two years before he came to Manitowoc, his formal record of admission antedates mine by nearly a year. Our entrance upon the work of the profession was about the same period. He was a very busy man in the early

period of his lawyer life, and has to his credit twelve to fifteen appearances in the Supreme Court reports.

He served six yearly terms at different periods as City Attorney of Manitowoc. When, a few years ago, the legislature created the office of "divorce counsel"; he was appointed to that position, which he still holds. He has always been noted among his brethren of the bar for a vein of dry wit, wholly out of keeping with his habitual gravity of demeanour, which flashes out suddenly and unexpectedly. Many are the anecdotes which his old associates tell of this phase of his career.

JUSTICE JOHN BARNES

It would be a grave omission in the history of the Manitowoc County bar if no mention were made of the connection of John Barnes with it. Brief as it was the illustrious prominence of his later years rested securely on the foundation laid here in the period when he was acquiring his education in letters and law.

His parents John Barnes and Mary Butler Barnes were natives of Kilkenny County, Ireland. Soon after their marriage they emigrated to Montreal, Canada. After a short stay they removed to Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, and settled on a farm in the Meeme settlement, where their son John Barnes was born on July 26th, 1859. As he grew up he did a boy's share of the necessary work on the farm and between times attended "the little red school house" which has been credited with sending out so many noted and useful men.

When John Barnes had absorbed what the country school had to give him, he came to the city of Manitowoc and graduated in one of its high schools. Then followed a period of school teaching, alternating with terms of study at the Oshkosh Normal School. He was a successful teacher, but his ambition was not content to accept that as a life-work. Sometime in 1880 he entered the law school of the State University and graduated with the class of 1883, which marked his admission to the law profession.

To the best of my recollection he taught school for a year, or thereabout, after that and then came to Manitowoc, where he first spent a few weeks in the office of H. G. & W. J. Turner and later entered the office of G. G. Sedgwick, whom he assisted in the work of the office though he was not at any time either a stated clerk or a partner. He was simply fitting himself in the knowledge of practice. He remained about a year in that office. The time of his removal to Rhinelander where he settled and began practice is given as in 1886. He

served a term as Municipal Judge of Oneida county. After that he built up a practice which extended all over Northern Wisconsin. He was naturally a good business man and in the knowledge of business law, contracts, partnership, corporation, insurance and railway law had few equals. It was a new country, lately opened for development, with abundant opportunities for business of all kinds. He was a strong and tireless worker and naturally he prospered. He was a good citizen and identified himself with the public interests of his new home in every way, working with his fellow citizens to forward the growth and prosperity of that new and undeveloped country; giving freely of his energy and his time which had early become very valuable. He was especially active in the upbuilding of the public schools, and as well took a deep interest in all other phases of education.

In 1906 he was appointed a member of the newly created Railroad Commission by the Republican Governor of the state although he adhered to the Democratic party, selected solely on account of his pre-eminent fitness. He had given to the questions arising out of railway transportation a great deal of thought and study and his knowledge along those lines was well understood.

After two and a half years of service he resigned his office and returned to the practice of his profession. But for a short time only. The death of Chief Justice Cassoday caused a vacancy upon the Supreme bench and his name came prominently before the people as a worthy successor. His election to fill the unexpired term of the Chief Justice and his re-election for a full term in the spring of 1909, followed rapidly. His work as a member of the Supreme Court fully met the expectations of his many friends.

In 1916 he resigned his place upon the Supreme bench to accept the position of chief counsel for the Northwestern Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee; one of the largest financial institutions in the United States. This position he occupied until his death, which unexpectedly occurred on January 1st, 1919, when he was at the very height of his intellectual powers and usefulness.

When attending the high school at Manitowoc he had become attached to Julia Koelzer, a young girl schoolmate, afterwards a fellow teacher. Her family had been long residents of the city and was well known in business and social circles. The attachment was mutual and in 1887 they were married. She, with three daughters and one son survives him.

Though but a small part of the lifework of John Barnes was performed in Manitowoc county and he was but for a little time a member of its bar, we claim the right to share in

honoring his memory. We claim also the right to share in that honor which a just fame well earned reflects upon his early associations. Here he was born. Here he received the fundamental education which enabled him to mount still higher. Here he grew to manhood and woo'd and won the wife who so greatly helped him in his upward struggle. From the social atmosphere and environment of Manitowoc he absorbed his just and laudable ambition to do, and be worthy of, great things.

HENRY F. BELITZ

In what was heretofore written of the bar during the period 1870-1880, no mention was made of Col. Henry F. Belitz. His name was not on the roll of attorneys, and it was by the merest accident the record of his admission was discovered in the journal of the court.

Henry F. Belitz was one of those North Germans who came from the Province of Schleswig-Holstein to Manitowoc county about the year 1854. He was highly educated in many directions and was looked upon as an authority in music and the drama. He was a leader in the organization of a theatrical association and also in musical societies in the village of Kiel of which he was one of the founders having purchased the greater portion of the village plat, in 1855. In November of that year he headed a petition to the County Board, for the organization of the Town of Schleswig, and was its first representative in the County Board the following spring session. He also built the first industrial establishment in the town, a sawmill.

During the Civil war he was active in rallying the German element of the state in support of the government. He raised a company for the 9th Wisconsin (German) regiment in his neighborhood and, as a captain, went to the front with it in November, 1861 and served until December 24th, 1862, when he resigned. Upon the organization of the 45th Wisconsin another German regiment, he was commissioned as its Colonel on September 17th, 1864, and served with it until the end of the war, being mustered out, July 17, 1865.

He was familiar with the English language before he came to this country and did a good deal of notarial and conveyancing work for his countrymen who were not so fortunate. After his return from the army he also acted as Justice of the Peace and thus became interested in the law. He procured some law books did a little reading and at the June term of the Circuit court for 1866 was admitted to practice

after due examination. He came up to court on the opening day of the term, for a year or two after. I do not remember that he ever made an appearance in court as attorney, nor do such records as I have examined show that he did so. I suspect that he simply desired the title of "Attorney at Law" for the prestige it gave him among his neighbors.

He died about 1877-8.

Col. Belitz is an interesting character, considered as a capable and active pioneer citizen. As a lawyer he scarcely created a ripple on the current of legal history.