

2017

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Recommended Citation

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PRE 305

Paper #2

4/26/2016

Clinton Street Lawyers Take Control of Plattsburgh in the Early 20th Century

In 1917, a whopping 20 lawyers were practicing on Clinton street in downtown Plattsburgh, even though the street was only one tenth of a mile long, just under a minute and a half walk from end to end.¹ Of these twenty lawyers, five were some of the most prominent figures in the North Country based upon their involvement, reputations and earnestness, among other things . Robert E. Healey, John H. Booth, Egbert C. Everest, Ernest C. Gordon and Jeremiah W. Davern, all practicing lawyers in Plattsburgh, had their hands in many of the goings-on in Plattsburgh, and sometimes their paths even crossed into the lives of one another, one way being that all five of the men were registered notaries.

Robert E. Healey, born in Plattsburgh on June 10, 1870,² was well known as a great lawyer and an even better man. A quote from his obituary said “No client was ever turned from his door because he lacked a fee for the conduct of his legal affairs.”³

In 1900, Healey was appointed the title of recorder of the village of Plattsburgh. It was during Healey’s three-year term as recorder that Plattsburgh officially became an

¹ Timed walk down the street.

² *The Plattsburgh Sentinel* (Sept. 21, 1920), Plattsburgh, N.Y.

³ *The Plattsburgh Sentinel* (Sept. 21, 1920), Plattsburgh, N.Y.

incorporated city, and when this happened Healey's position shifted from recorder to town judge, and Healey was the first person in Plattsburgh to hold this title.⁴

Healey was equally respected in areas outside his work as well. He was elected to serve on the board of education for the Plattsburgh School District,⁵ was a member of the Plattsburgh and Macdonough Social and Commercial Clubs, the Plattsburgh Chamber of Commerce⁶, the Knights of the Maccabees , Plattsburgh Elks Lodge No. 621 and Plattsburgh Council No. 255 of the Knights of Columbus, where Healey served five and a half years as grand knight.⁷

Right across the way from Healey, at 27 Clinton Street, where an attorney's office still sits today 99 years later,⁸ Judge John H. Booth was also making quite a name for himself as another important figure on Clinton Street.⁹ Booth, born in Plattsburgh on May 3rd 1863,¹⁰ served two terms, 12 years in total, as Clinton County Surrogate Judge from 1893-1905.¹¹ This term still stands as of today as the longest anyone has ever served in the position.¹² Booth also served on the Plattsburgh Academy Board of Trustees from 1918¹³-1919,¹⁴ was a chairperson for the local red cross branch¹⁵ and sometimes publicly spoke and lectured on trips he had taken to other countries and the

⁴ *The Plattsburgh Sentinel* Sept. 21, 1920. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

⁵ 1908 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 13.

⁶ Cutter, William R. *Genealogical and Family History of Northern New York*. Page 639. New York: Lewis Historical, 1910. *Google Books*.

⁷ *The Plattsburgh Sentinel* (Sept. 21, 1920), Plattsburgh, N.Y.

⁸ <http://www.yellowpages.com/plattsburgh-ny/mip/joseph-attorney-lavorando-at-law-2660380>

⁹ 1917 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 13.

¹⁰ *Adirondack Record* (May 6, 1943), Au Sable Forks, N.Y.

¹¹ *Adirondack Record* (May 6, 1943), Au Sable Forks, N.Y.

¹² <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/history/legal-history-new-york/documents/clinton-county-history.pdf>

¹³ 1918 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 224.

¹⁴ 1919 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 222.

¹⁵ 1917 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 231

knowledge he gained on them.¹⁶ Booth and Healey's paths actually crossed when they worked side-by-side, not mentally, but physically, for two years. From 1903-1905 both Healey and Booth worked in the County Clerk's office in downtown Plattsburgh. At the time, Healey was town judge during the time Booth was surrogate, their offices only a short walk away from one another.¹⁷

Booth's strong law roots continued through his bloodline onto one of his children as well. Booth's son Robert was a general practice lawyer in Plattsburgh who may have even risen high enough to have surmounted his father's impressive legacy. Robert served as a captain of the Infantry in the 76th and 26th divisions in France during World War I, a result of the first military camps ever to take place in Plattsburgh.¹⁸ After representing our country, Robert eventually became the assistant attorney general of New York State.¹⁹

Within eyeshot of the front door of Booth's practice is 21 Clinton Street,²⁰ which in 1917 held the office of Egbert C. Everest.²¹ Everest, after graduating from Albany Law School and being admitted to the New York State Bar in 1887, started his law career by joining his father's practice in his birthplace in Champlain, New York.²² In 1895 Everest moved to Plattsburgh as the District Attorney of Clinton County.²³ Everest served his term as District Attorney from 1895 to 1898.²⁴

¹⁶ *The Plattsburgh Sentinel*

¹⁷ Visit to County Clerk's office.

¹⁸ *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Sept. 10, 1981. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

¹⁹ *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Sept. 10, 1981. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

²⁰ Google Street-View

²¹ (US Census 1920)

²² *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Nov. 20, 1943. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

²³ *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Nov. 20, 1943. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

²⁴ <http://www.clintoncountygov.com/departments/da/DAHISTORY.html>

Everest was a role model to the local young lawyers in the community and fellow members of the Plattsburgh Bar Association as well. Members of the Bar said “Mr. Everest knew his law” and spoke of how his opinions were often sought by junior members of the profession in the Plattsburgh area.²⁵ Outside of law, the prominent lawyer had some interesting hobbies which he was not shy about sharing with his peers and the community. Everest’s obituary spoke of how Everest has many hobbies, with the foremost being his study of Indian lore, which was deemed an authority on. Everest was also sometimes called upon to speak before schools, clubs and other gatherings on this subject. The obituary speaks of his knowledge of the North County as being extremely thorough as well.²⁶

Ernest C. Gordon, born in April of 1886 in England,²⁷ was a couple decades younger than some of his law practicing colleagues in Plattsburgh during this time, but he was certainly no less accomplished. Gordon took up shop twenty plots down from Everest, at 47 Clinton Street.

Though he was only 31 years old, Gordon had already made his mark on both the public and law communities. In 1917, in addition to his private practice in Plattsburgh, Gordon was an assistant attorney general of the state of New York.²⁸ In 1919 Gordon served as city judge as well as on the board of education for Plattsburgh

²⁵ *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Nov. 20, 1943. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

²⁶ *The Plattsburgh Press Republican* Nov. 20, 1943. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

²⁷ (US Census 1920)

²⁸ Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States. 1917. Department of Justice, Washington DC.

school along with Healey.²⁹ Outside of his legal work, Gordon was also the President of the Saranac Land and Timber Company.³⁰

It would be difficult to fully talk about Gordon without also mentioning the other lawyer he shared 47 Clinton Street with, Jeremiah W. Davern. Davern and Gordon II.³¹ However, Davern and Gordon didn't just share an office space, they worked as assistant attorney generals together and also helped start an entire company together. Gordon and Davern started the Plattsburgh Republican Publishing Company, and were the company's first head directors.³² By the time their company took over the Plattsburgh Daily Republican in July of 1917, Gordon was president and Davern was secretary and treasurer.³³

Davern, who was born in Plattsburgh in 1886, specialized in law, but also, along with Healey were the only two people in Plattsburgh professionally dealing with loans at this time.³⁴ Though Davern was less publically involved than a few of his fellow lawyers, he made up for it through memorable court cases. One specific case that was taken all the way to the New York Supreme Court was *The People of New York State against Samuel Baxter*. Baxter was accused of assault in the second degree against an eight year old girl. This case was memorable due to the fact that the young girl was called to the stand, and found to not have been telling the whole truth, which was big news at the

²⁹ 1908 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 13.

³⁰ Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Land Office. 1922. New York Public Library.

³¹ Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States. 1917. Department of Justice, Washington DC.

³² *The Editor and Publisher and the Journalist*. Jan. 1, 1916. Page 14.

³³ *The Plattsburgh Daily Republican* July. 28, 1916. Plattsburgh, N.Y.

³⁴ 1919 Plattsburgh City Directory, L.P. Waite & Co Publishers, Newburgh, N.Y. Page 211.

time and the move by Davern to put the girl on the stand was regarded as different for the time.³⁵

Some of the connections made between these men were intentional, such as Davern and Gordon's partnership in law and with the Plattsburgh Republican Publishing Company. Others were pure coincidence, like how Healey and Booth happened to work in the same building when they were doing their government jobs, but there is no denying the fact that their paths crossed, and each and every one made an impact on the community during the early 1900s.

Though they were different ages, born in different countries and led completely separate lives, all five of these men chose Plattsburgh as their home and Clinton Street the place they wanted to practice law, and what the city gave to them in terms of resources and customers, they gave back in effort and service. They became heads of organizations, sat on boards, likely walked past one another in the hallway of the county clerk's office or on their way to court, and even more than likely walked past one another on the .1 mile street that they all chose to take up shop on, a street that housed some of the kindest, hardest-working, most involved and well respected men the North Country ever saw, or will ever see.

³⁵ New York Supreme Court. Appellate Division. Case on Appeal. 1921.