

HON. WILLIAM HAMILTON MARTIN

Indiana has always been distinguished for the high rank of her bench and bar. Perhaps none of the newer states can justly boast of abler jurists or attorneys. Many of them have been men of national fame, and among those whose lives have been passed on a quieter plane there is scarcely a town or city in the state but that can boast of one or more lawyers capable of crossing swords in forensic combat with many of the distinguished legal lights of the country. While the growth and development of the state in the last half century has been most marvelous, viewed from any standpoint, yet of no one class of her citizenship has she greater reason for just pride than her judges and attorneys, in Judge Martin are found united many of the rare qualities which go to make the successful lawyer and jurist. He possesses perhaps few of those brilliant, dazzling, meteoric qualities which have sometimes flashed along the legal horizon, riveting the gaze and blinding the vision for the moment, then disappearing, leaving little or no trace behind; but rather has those solid and more substantial qualities which shine with a constant luster, shedding light in the dark places with steadiness and continuity.

William H. Martin, ex-judge of the tenth judicial circuit and one of the most prominent attorneys of the Lawrence county bar, was born on May 7, 1848, at Salem, Washington county, Indiana, and is the son of Roger and Martha E. (Cornell) Martin, the former a native of Ireland, born near Lake Killarney on June 22, 1805 while his wife was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, on June 15, 1818. Roger Martin ran away from home in his boyhood and worked his way across the Atlantic as a sailor boy, being but sixteen years of age when he arrived in this country. He first located in Baltimore, Maryland. He was variously employed and, being ambitious to succeed, he carefully husbanded his earnings and in 1834 decided to come West, making the long and tiresome trip overland to Salem, Indiana, where he engaged in the mercantile business. He was thus engaged until the building of the old New Albany & Salem Railroad, when he entered the employ of that company, principally as road master. He was a faithful and competent employee and remained with that road until the outbreak of the war of the Rebellion, when he gave practical evidence of his loyalty to his adopted country by enlisting in the Fifty-third Regiment Indiana Volunteer Infantry, in which he received a commission as major. With this regiment he took part in a number of the hardest-fought battles of the war and eventually was detailed to recruit the Sixty-sixth Indiana Regiment. He was commissioned lieutenant-colonel of the latter regiment and later was promoted to the colonelcy of the regiment, with which he served until the close of the war. He was a faithful and courageous soldier and his record was a creditable one in every respect.

On his return home, Mr. Martin again entered the employ of the railroad, with whom he remained until his death, which occurred in January, 1873. He was survived a number of years by his widow, who died in March, 1896. They were the parents of twelve children, of which number five survive, namely: Anna and Jennie L., who are unmarried and reside at Long Beach, California; William H., of this sketch; Louis P. and Robert S., both of whom are now in Old Mexico. Roger Martin was a man of vigorous intellect and, through much reading and study and habits of close observation, he became a man of wide and accurate information. He was forceful and eloquent speaker, having wonderful control over his audiences, and he was twice a candidate for Congress in the old second Indiana district.

William H. Martin received a good practical education in the common schools of Salem, and in 1864 he went to New Albany, Indiana, where for two years he was employed as a clerk. He then entered the employ of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company as bookkeeper for the master mechanic of the Pittsburgh division. In the summer of 1868. at the age of twenty years, Mr. Martin entered the law office of the late Judge Frank Wilson and Colonel A. C. Voris, at Bedford, as a student of law. In June, 1869, one month after he had attained his majority, he was admitted to the bar, and in the following November he went to Paoli, Orange county, Indiana, and entered upon the practice of his profession. In 1880 Mr. Martin returned to Bedford and has since remained here, having for many years been numbered among the leading legal practitioners of Lawrence county. In recognition of his high character and eminent ability, he was elected to the bench of the tenth judicial circuit and assumed the duties of his office in November, 1896, for the term of six years. At the conclusion of his term Judge Martin re-entered the practice and has since been actively engaged therein. On leaving the bench, the Judge formed a partnership with his son, William R. Martin, and Edward K. Dye, a brilliant young lawyer who died in October, his place in the firm being taken by Henry T. Pearson. Aside from his profession, Judge Martin is interested in a number of local enterprises, being president of the Citizens Trust Company of Bedford. He has been a director, since its organization, of the Citizens National Bank, and now is its counsel.

Judge Martin was well qualified for the bench, possessing integrity of character, natural ability and the acumen of the judicial temperament. As a judge he was able to divest himself of prejudice or favoritism and consider only the legal aspects of a question involved. No labor was too great, how ever onerous; no application too exacting, however severe, if necessary to the complete understanding and correct determination of a point submitted. His record as a judge was also notable in that he was vigorous in his dispatch of the business of his court. He was merciful when mercy seemed to be justified, but he was equally relentless when there was undoubted evidence of crime, and he sent two hundred and sixty-four men to prison or reformatory, a record exceeded in only two counties in this state. As a practitioner, Judge Martin employs none of the arts and tricks of oratory, but his speeches are eloquent in the clearness of statement, the broad common sense of reasoning, the force of logic, earnestness and power. His career on the bench and at the bar offers an inspiration to the young practitioner just entering upon his life work, while he has never been known to fail in that strict courtesy and regard for professional ethics which should ever characterize the members of the bar.

On May 7, 1874, William H. Martin was married to Martha F. Dougherty, of Liberty, Missouri, and to them were born four children, only one of whom survives, William R., who, as stated above, is now a partner with his father in the law practice.

Fraternally, Judge Martin belongs to the Masonic order, in which he has taken all the degrees of the York rite and those of the Scottish rite up to the thirty-second. and is also a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Religiously, he is a member of the Presbyterian church, in which he is an elder. In the civic life of the community, the Judge has always taken an active interest giving his support to all movements having for their object the advancement of the general welfare. Personally, he is a genial and agreeable man to meet and enjoys a merited popularity among his acquaintances.

(History of Lawrence and Monroe Counties Indiana , 1914 B. F. Bowen & Co. Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana pgs 484-486)