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William P. Willey

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WILLIAM P. WILLEY.

Professor William P. Willey died at his home at Morgantown, December 19, 1922. He was born in Morgantown on May 24, 1840, the son of Senator Waitman T. Willey. He was educated in the local schools and by private tutors and was graduated from Dickinson College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, with the degree of Master of Arts in 1862. After his graduation he read law with his father and was admitted to practice in 1866. He was the first prosecuting attorney of Monongalia County, West Virginia, having been elected in 1866. Incident to his duties as prosecuting attorney the first important case he tried happened to be the first in Monongalia County in which negroes were admitted as witnesses.

In the spring of 1873 Mr. Willey moved to St. Louis, Missouri, but not finding the climate there favorable to his health he removed to Baltimore in February, 1874. There he practiced law alone for a short time, later forming a copartnership with Isaac McCurley under the firm name of McCurley and Willey. He practiced law in this firm with more than the average measure of success, until the fall of 1878 when he returned to his native state and became the editor of the Wheeling Register. In this capacity he continued until August, 1883, when he was elected to the chair of history in West Virginia University. In 1892 with the growth of the law school he gave up his duties teaching history and thereafter devoted his entire time to instruction in law until his retirement from active teaching service in 1912, when he was made Professor of Law Emeritus. During the twenty-nine years of Professor Willey’s
active service as Professor of Law in West Virginia University, he was a moral force for untold good on the minds and characters of the hundreds of young men who studied under his guidance. Many of them are now leaders in the profession. To the members of his classes, represented in nearly every town and city of the state, he gave inspiration and high ideals in scholarship, professional efficiency, and conduct.

But perhaps Professor Willey's greatest service was not as a University teacher and administrative official. He extended his influence beyond his classroom. He was one of the handful of members of the legal profession who founded the West Virginia Bar Association at Grafton, July 8, 1886, at which meeting he was elected Secretary of the association. He may well be called the founder, and the preserver for many years, of the West Virginia Bar Association, as he performed the arduous duties of Secretary of that association during its formative period from 1886 to 1891, and the latter year he served as its President. Upon retiring as President, he was made a member of the Executive Council and re-elected each year until 1917. During the greater part of this time he was its chairman and in this capacity was a most efficient official and servant of the Association. In 1894 Professor Willey founded "THE BAR" and continued as its editor until 1917, when it was consolidated with the "WEST VIRGINIA LAW QUARTERLY." It was perhaps through this medium that he made his influence most valuable. His twenty-five years of service as editor represent labor untold and devotion unmeasured for the good of the legal profession of West Virginia. The service thus rendered to the Bar and to the State, especially in the early years of the Association's existence was invaluable. In his triple capacity as editor of "THE BAR," as leader in the work of the Bar Association, and as Professor of Law in the University, he worthily followed his illustrious father as a maker for good in the history of the State. These positions brought into full play his brilliant mind and the effect of his teaching and writing reaching into a very wide field is difficult to estimate.

Professor Willey was a brilliant legal scholar. He was simple in taste; kind and cordial in manner; sincere and upright in character; steadfast in duty; and untiring in his labors—a worthy model as a man, a lawyer, and an educator. The State, the University, and the Profession have lost an eminent leader, an untiring worker, a kind friend, one who brought only honor to all his undertakings.