

Judge Benjamin William Lacy

Benjamin William Lacy was born on March 12, 1849 ([9-28-1912, p. 1](#)) in New York. His parents moved to Iowa when he was six years old. He attended public schools and Upper Iowa University prior to studying law in Washington, D.C. and graduating from Columbia Law. Benjamin Lacy came to Dubuque in 1872 and became a partner in the law firm ([September 28, 1912; p. 1](#)) of Robinson, Powers, and Lacy. It was said that he came to the Bar as “a young man fresh from his books, blessed with vigorous health, unusual ability, great industry, and unswerving honesty of purpose.” ([October 11, 1912 p.3](#)) The law firm handled business law, ([12-12-1909 p.11](#)) bankruptcies, ([7-11-1911 p. 2](#)) civil matters, ([5-22-1912, p. 5](#)) real estate, ([6-22-1910, p. 11](#)) and estate work ([7-22-1910, p.9](#)) to mention some.

On March 20, 1873 he married Helen Werden. Helen fell ill after just two months of marriage and died ([7-31-1873, p. 6](#)) two months later on July 30. Benjamin was married again on October 6, 1879, ([10-01-1879; p. 4](#)) to May Goddard Robinson, who was the daughter of his law partner Frank M. Robinson. They had three children, Frank R, Burritt S. and Clive W.

At age 29 he was appointed Judge to the Circuit Court of the 9th Judicial District in the fall of 1878 to fill a vacancy caused by death of his predecessor. ([May 28, 1879 p 3](#)) His first year promised a heavy case load, ([January 4, 1879, p. 4](#)) but within six months “favorable reports” ([May 28, 1879, p. 2](#)) were coming in “from all sides.” The newspaper noted that he was elevated to the bench as a young man without a lot of experience as a practice lawyer, ([November 1, 1882 p. 1](#)) but had certainly proven himself. He astonished people with his hard work. Judge Lacy began court at 8:30 a.m. and after an hour’s lunch resumed court until the supper break, after which he would continue to work until he grew tired, which the paper reported “generally occurs in Delhi about bedtime.” It was further noted that “any poor cuss of a lawyer expecting to have a ‘go as you please’ in his court, will, we think, be fooled.” He was reelected and held this position for a total of five years before resigning in 1884 ([December 14, 1884 p. 1](#)) and resuming his private law practice. His colleagues stated, ([10-11-1912 p.3](#)) “When he voluntarily laid down the burdens of that important office, and returned to his place at the bar, the voice of the people of five counties of his district were unanimous in expression of its appreciation and regret.”

Judge Lacy often participated in meetings where “many of the prominent and monied men ([December 19, 1895 p. 8](#)) of the City [were] present.” His remarks and opinions ([October 1, 1912 p. 12](#)) were of the greatest importance in the community as he was known for, and held a reputation for, being “always wise in counsel, judicial and fair in decision, and kind and genial in giving his views.” Judge Lenehan described Lacy ([September 29, 1912, p. 4](#)) as “careful, conservative, and extremely conscientious, and was the most particular man I ever knew in the matter of giving advice on a question that might be in dispute.”

He offered eulogies for Judge Couch, ([2-27-1896 p.8](#)) and served as a pallbearer for many well-known Dubuquers including former Mayor Burch, ([5-5-1901 p 3](#)) Mrs. Harriet Taft Kimball, ([Feb. 9, 1909 p. 2](#)) Mrs. Olive Lare, ([March 31, 1899. P. 8](#)) Frederick H. Becker, ([5-02-1910, page 8](#)) and for George L. Torbert, whose funeral was reported as the largest ([04-05-1895 p. 5](#)) the city had seen. Resolutions following death were a very important practice. Judge Lacy, along with Judge Husted were appointed as a committee to adopt resolutions outlining the virtues of local attorney J.J. McCarthy, ([09-06-1904 p. 3](#)) upon his death.

Dubuquers looked up to Benjamin Lacy as a leader in the community, which numbered around 37,000. They took interest in his comings and goings and the newspaper kept up with his many travels that included several trips to Washington, D.C. ([1-15-1896 p. 8](#)) and several to Sioux City, ([May 3, 1898 p. 8](#)) California, ([Feb. 2, 1898 p. 8](#)) St. Paul, ([September 4, 1896 p. 8](#)) Mackinac Island, ([July 10, 1889 p. 4](#)) to the lakes, ([August 12, 1896 p. 8](#)) Ithaca, New York, ([7-30-1882 p. 2](#)) Champaign, Illinois, ([March 17, 1909, p. 10](#)) to the seaside, ([June 30, 1895, p. 8](#)) and a memorable trip to Florida in March of 1902 when the family returned to a blizzard with temperatures below zero! ([March 17, 1902, p. 3](#)) Once Benjamin was able to get away with the guys for an excursion to Spirit Lake, Iowa ([7-01-1879 p. 4](#)) returning just over a week later ([5-31-1903. P.5](#)) from “hunting, fishing, and recreating in the most enjoyable manner.”

Social activities were also noted, such as an invitation to attend a special luncheon to honor a guest in town ([March 6, 1910, p. 2](#)) and when he entertained at dinner on a Saturday night, ([May 25, 1902, page 3](#)) or when Judge Lacy and his wife played hearts at a card party attended by Dubuque’s elite in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Malver Iles. “Profuse and tasteful decorations of carnations, smilax, and ferns transformed the brilliantly illuminated parlors of the mansion into a scene of beauty...” ([5-31-1903. P.5](#)) These were just some of the activities of the Lacy family that were deemed newsworthy.

Judge Lacy was a member of the Municipal League. ([March 6, 1906 p. 5](#)) He was not bashful about stating his political opinions and even weighed in on international politics ([May 16, 1886 p. 8](#)) by supporting home rule for Ireland in 1886. He was a staunch Republican and was associated with what came to be known as the “Allison-Henderson crowd,” ([April 3, 1887, p.4](#)) which was believed to have controlled the Republican party in Dubuque County “for so many years.” Lacy was a longtime supporter of Senator William Boyd Allison and led [the](#) ([January 7, 1908, p. 3](#)) Dubuque County Allison Club. He was a good friend of Allison’s and served as executor ([1-22-1910, p. 7](#)) for Allison’s estate.

Lacy was encouraged to run for mayor, but the delegates of the local party did not endorse ([04-03-1887 p. 4](#)) this plan. Judge Lacy attended the local republican convention in March, 1895, which was quite lively and followed a non-partisan convention held a few days earlier that he also attended, ([March 21, 1895 p. 8](#)) although that one was accused of being anything but non-partisan. Lacy’s name popped up in the news frequently whenever local politics were reported. He had a role in the County Republican convention ([October 17, 1888, p.4](#)) in 1888. He also went to the Republican Convention in Des Moines ([March 10, 1896 p.5](#)) in 1896 with Jacob Rich, George Perry, W.H. Torbert, and Charles Hancock, which was convening to select delegates to present Allison’s name for President at the St. Louis convention. This was a memorable enough event that it was mentioned again ([March 9, 1916 p.6.](#)) – twenty years later in the local newspaper.

President McKinley was scheduled to visit Dubuque on Monday, October 16, 1899. A crowd gathered to discuss this and plan for the upcoming event. “Those present were the substantial men of the city, the men who Dubuquers are pleased to honor and whom every Dubuquer should aid in arranging the reception to the president.” Judge Lacy was appointed to the committee ([October 5, 1899 p. 5](#)) to make the arrangements.

Benjamin Lacy was very active in the community. He advocated for and supported the establishment of a hospital ([March 14, 1890 p. 4](#)) in Dubuque. The new hospital was named the Finley Hospital after its generous benefactor, Mrs. Helen Finley in memory of her husband, Dr.

John Finley. Lacy was elected President of the hospital at the annual meeting of the board of Managers at Finley on March 12, 1902 and also addressed the graduating [\(March 12, 1902 P 5\)](#) class of nurses. Lacy was still on the executive committee [\(March 9, 1910 p. 5\)](#) in 1910.

He served as director of the First National Bank [\(1-15-1896, p. 8\)](#) and the Dubuque Fire & Marine Insurance Company. Lacy was also a major stockholder of [\(1-15-1896, p. 8\)](#) Key City Gas Company, and served [\(2-01-1903 p. 8\)](#) as its Vice President.

Benjamin Lacy was also principal stockholder in the Home Electric Company when it introduced [\(August 16, 1931 p. 17\)](#) electric street cars. Prior to street cars, Lacy, along with other businessmen established the [\(June 28, 1901 p. 8\)](#) Dubuque, Vinton, & Southwestern Railway Company.

Lacy was on a committee of three to evaluate the Dubuque Water Company system and negotiated with the company to agree upon a price to sell the utility to [\(1-28-1900 page 9\)](#) the City of Dubuque. The value was set at \$545,000, or around \$15,689,460 in 2016 dollars. This was approved by the City. The Mayor wanted Lacy to serve as a trustee of the Dubuque Water Works. Judge Lacy was out of town at the time, but sent a telegram [\(03-08-1900 p. 1\)](#) from Baltimore respectfully declining. He often preferred to remain in the background and turned down other offers to serve.

In 1887 Miss May Rogers [\(November 24, 1887, p.3.\)](#) sought election to the school board. The newspaper opined that while in many parts of Iowa women have been elected “electors in the city of Dubuque do not lean that way” and an endorsement was given to Judge Lacy “who has the confidence of the people, regardless of party. He is a man every way fitted, and from his unstained record as judge, gives assurance of an impartial and able manner.” No news article was found that Lacy served on the School Board.

Benjamin Lacy served on the Board of Directors for the [\(January 12, 1898, p. 4\)](#) First National Bank and during his second career as a banker, was the President of the [\(5-22-1906, p. 3\)](#) Iowa Trust & Savings Bank.

Judge Benjamin William Lacy suffered a stroke [\(September 28, 1912 p. 1\)](#) in 1912. His progress was reported as slowly improving in the July 21 [\(July 21, 1912, p. 9\)](#) newspaper and while his condition was “precarious” the outlook was optimistic for his recovery; however, he did not recover and died on Saturday, September 28, at age 63, in his summer home.

News articles and resolutions [\(October 6, 1912 p. 11\)](#) provided insight into Benjamin Lacy’s character and personality. An editorial [\(September 30, 1912, p.4\)](#) began with: “Judge Lacy had an exceptional mind.” “His opinions were shared only when he had taken into consideration all sides of an issue. His was even-tempered, modest, and chose to focus on the best in people.” The Library Board of Trustees held a special meeting two days after Lacy’s death to express their feelings on his passing. The Library Board [\(October 1, 1912, p. 12\)](#) said that his death was a “heavy and serious blow” to the community and reported their grief was profound. He was a member of the first Carnegie-Stout Public Library Board of Trustees serving actively and giving generously. The Board described him as “always wise in counsel, judicial and fair in decision, and kind and genial in giving his views” and further acknowledged his “purity of purpose and honesty of intent.” The Bar Association [\(October 11, 1912, p 3\)](#) also met and adopted resolutions regarding Judge Lacy, the man who always “thought of the best interest of

Dubuque and Dubuque people.” The Association of Bankers ([10-4-1912 p.10](#)) paid tribute and spoke of Lacy’s “unimpeachable character, unflinching courtesy, and his superior judgement.”

The Dubuque Telegraph-Herald interviewed those who knew Judge Lacy ([9-29-1912 p. 4](#)) and reported their remembrances and universal sorrow. “He was always willing to aid younger members of the profession by giving them good advice.” “He was a man of very even temperament, always the same, and I never saw him lose his temper. While others about him were in high pitch of excitement he always maintained his composure.” “My observation was that Mr. Lacy was loved in the community and deserved to be loved.” “He would have nothing to do with business matters which were not open and above board and he showed even justice and fairness in everything he did.” “He was a gentle friend; a courageous opponent.”

When Benjamin Lacy died, his wife, May, decided to have a memorial fountain erected to memorialize him. She met with the Park Board and together they worked on the specifications of the fountain and its location in Jackson Park. ([March 9, 1913, p. 5](#)) The pool was to measure 27’ long by 9’ 6” wide. The cost of the fountain was \$5,000, which is equivalent to \$121,204.00 in 2016, but within a year, ([September 26, 1954, Res Carta p. 9](#)) much of the landscaping was removed and the pool filled in.

The fountain was the target of vandals ([September 26, 1954; res Carta p. 9](#)) and fell into disrepair. In 1966 ([January 16, 1966, page 10 or Res Carta p. 4](#)) a proposal was offered by the Boy’s Club to use some land in Jackson Park for a building. The proposal included relocating the fountain “for children to play in and dogs to use.” Discussions followed, ([February 8, 1966; p 5 – Res Carta p. 3](#)) but the Dubuque Park Board declined the request. The fountain was again a target of vandalism ([7-13-1975 p. 1](#)) in the 1970s.

In 1999 ([October 10, 1999 p. A3](#)) the fountain was rededicated in celebration of its refurbishment and the repaired water system that allowed water to flow once again. This was made possible by Lacy’s grandson, Benjamin Lacy, of Cohasset, Massachusetts, who had grown up in the home at 1640 Main Street that had been in the family for four generations. ([February 28, 1937, p. 14](#)) The house is now the Hoffmann-Schneider Funeral Home.

The water no longer runs in the fountain, but it has been maintained and new generations have continued to discover it and hear its story. ([9-13-2008 p. 3](#))

Carnegie-Stout Free Public Library

The Young Men’s Literary Association was formed in 1856 by a number of young professionals and businessman. The Association was incorporated in 1859 and was recognized as highly successful on a statewide level ([January 1, 1987, p. 5.](#)) with a large collection, circulation, and at least \$2,500 in revenue each year (equivalent to about \$72,000 in 2016). Within six years the word “literary” was replaced by Library. Benjamin Lacy was an active member of the Young Men’s Library Association (YMLA) since he moved to Dubuque in 1872.

In 1892 Judge Lacy was appointed President Association ([April 6, 1892, p.4](#)) of the Young Men’s Library Association. During this annual meeting Lacy questioned whether the library could be made free arguing the greater interest would more than compensate for lost revenue, and this led to discussion or the library becoming free by means of it being a tax-supported institution. This discussion became much more serious when Jacob Rich of the YMLA and Senator Allison arranged a meeting with Andrew Carnegie to seek funding. The conditions of

the “unknown philanthropist” ([August 1, 1900, p. 4](#)) were discussed in the August 1, 1900 edition of The Dubuque Herald.

The newspaper wrote an editorial ([9-16-1900, p. 4](#)) endorsing and supporting the building of a public library in September of 1900.

Judge Lacy served as Treasurer of YMLA ([04-03-1901 p. 1](#)) during its transition to the new public library. He was appointed to the first Carnegie-Stout Free Public Library Board of Trustees by the mayor in January of 1901 for a six-year term and remained on the Board until his death in 1912.

Linda Lacy Avery and Virginia Lacy, descendants of Judge Benjamin William Lacy visited ([June 10, 2014, p. 3A](#)) Dubuque in June of 2014. They represented the Clive W. and Mona M. Lacy Trusts and discussed ideas with Library Director, Susan Henricks, to honor the Lacy family through a gift from the Trust. Through the generosity of the Clive W. and Mona M. Lacy Trusts the Carnegie-Stout Public Library was able to partner with the Telegraph Herald to bring digital archives of the paper to life and accessible to the Dubuque Community.

“In memory then, of this useful life lived not in vain, and that we may bear personal testimony to his character as a man. . .” *D. J. Lenehan, J.W. Kintzinger, and Glenn Brown. October 11, 1912* (speaking of Judge Benjamin William Lacy)