



A LASTING TRIBUTE

by Howard Tarkow

Carrying on the Timeless Tradition of the Hennepin County Bar Memorial

“Sharing tales of those we’ve lost is how we keep from really losing them.”

Mitch Albom, “For One More Day.”

This spring, the Fourth District Court will convene in special session for the bar memorial to remember the lawyers and judges of Hennepin County who passed away in 2024. This annual program is the culmination of months of planning by lawyers and judges who volunteer to serve on the bar memorial committee.

There have been memorials in Hennepin County to honor attorneys born as early as the 1830s. The practice of offering unwritten memorials began around the time that Minnesota became a state. The earliest written memorial may have been in 1879, recalling the life of Colonel George Bradley, whose resume included responding to President Lincoln’s call to volunteer for the Union army.

From its inception, the bar memorial has been a testament to the importance of remembering and appreciating those who are gone for their commitments to our community, the justice system, and the rule of law. Many lawyers attend the event to remember their deceased friends and colleagues, and gaze fondly at the photos of the memorialized attorneys on display. Every year, older attorneys lament that they knew many of the lawyers listed in the program.

For the hour-long session, families attending the memorial in person, or watching online, remember their family member. The dignity of the program, with dozens of district court judges clad in judicial robes, makes them feel special. The chief judge welcomes the guests and sincerely acknowledges their losses on behalf of the entire District Court. Some family members tear up when the bar association president reads their family member’s name or when they see their photograph projected on the auditorium’s screen. Near the end of the program, they realize that the bar memorial is such an important event that a law school dean, a famed judge such as Harry Blackmun, or a prominent lawyer such as Walter Mondale accepted the invitation to deliver

the memorial address. For some attendees, the memorial address is the first time they learn of the scope and importance of their family member’s work.

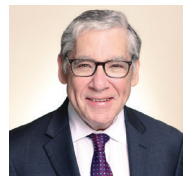
In the bar memorial’s early years, the authors—loved ones or colleagues of the decedent—would rise to read their tributes aloud. Starting in 1964, the bar association has compiled the memorials into bound booklets each year. The memorials include biographical facts, personal and professional accomplishments, remembrances, and expressions of love. The authors of the memorials decide how to best honor and record the achievements and life stories of their departed loved ones and friends.

At the conclusion of the program, the chief judge enters the booklet into the permanent record of the district court to preserve the legacies and life to preserve the legacies and life work of the decedents. Many guests request multiple copies to share with their colleagues, friends, and families. The bar memorial booklets are posted online following the session for everyone to learn of the lives and good deeds of the lawyers we have lost.

The Bar Memorial Committee Needs You

As far as we know, the bar memorial—where we gather, remember, mourn, and honor colleagues in this type of session—is unique to the legal profession. Serving on the bar memorial planning committee is wonderful, satisfying community service. Members work with the families and colleagues of the deceased to compile guest lists and help them write their memorials. Knowing that those who have lost a loved one are able to experience the lovely and dignified tribute is very rewarding.

Please contact Sabrina Sands at ssands@mnbars.org if you are interested in joining the planning committee and helping to continue the tradition of the bar memorial.



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