

William Collier RCBA PRESIDENT 1914

In October 1914 it was reported that the Riverside Bar Association had been languishing of late but a well attended meeting of local attorneys gathered in the local courtroom to adopt a new constitution and bylaws to reinvigorate the Association. The then current officers of the Association included William Collier as President, George French, Vice President, and L. C. Kelley, the Secretary.

William Collier was born to David and Lydia Collier in a little farming community of Birmingham, Iowa, February 11, 1845. David Collier was a local merchant providing William with a community environment and a “county” education. Near the end of the Civil War, Collier, being a teenager, was called up for what is referred to as the 100 day enlistments in the 45th Iowa Infantry to support Sherman's March to the Sea. (William Collier was reportedly a charter member of the first G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) fraternity organized in Riverside County.)

Shortly after the war Collier attended college in Illinois completing a two year program. Returning home, Collier commenced to study law under the tutelage of John H. Craig. Eventually Collier became a law partner with Craig, the partnership lasting until 1884 when Collier moved to Southern California. The Craigs followed Collier to Riverside where a partnership with John Craig’s son thrived.

Shortly after moving to California, William and his brother-in-law Donald Graham (married William’s sister Margaret - she eventually becoming one of the “who’s who” of Pasadena), purchased a significant interest in Rancho La Laguna (La Laguna now known as Lake Elsinore). William and Donald desired to have a subdivided portion of the Rancho named “Laguna” but the United States Postal Service denied the request because Southern California already had a community named Laguna. Williams’ sister Margaret suggested an alternative, Elsinore. She was a literary fan and thought the name Elsinore, in Denmark, referred by Shakespeare in his story Hamlet, unique. Elsinore it became and still is.

William and Donald sold their interest in Elsinore in 1885. Desiring a competing venture in the area, the two gentleman created and processed a subdivision map in San Diego for the east end of Lake Laguna; note, Riverside County was not created until 1893. The map recorded was for the new community of Wildomar. The name Wildomar was Margaret’s second community naming effort. This time she chose the name from the beginning of the names of her brother, husband and herself - Wil, Do, Mar.

Real Estate development was not Williams only business effort. William did continue his law practice in Riverside. Included among the legal areas handled were a San Bernardino versus Riverside County case over railroad taxes, contract disputes, trademark disputes for the orange industry, divorce, water rights (equitable relief), judicial foreclosures, libel (representing the newspaper, San Jacinto Register), and probate.

By 1910, it appears William was more a farmer in Wildomar than an attorney in Riverside.

Although the firm of Collier, Carahan & Craig appeared to be quite active, news around the area regularly referenced William and his wife traveling from Wildomar to his sister's house in Pasadena or the Colliers traveling from Wildomar to their Riverside home for a bit of weekend respite. When William was mentioned in the local press, he was found mostly providing farm news on rain and crop yields.

By 1914, even in his semi-retired state, William Collier became the President of the Riverside Bar Association. Not much is known of his presidency beyond a few RCBA resolutions for eulogies. However, by October of 1914 an effort was made to reorganize the bar resulting in the creation of a new constitution and by-laws.

William's last act as president was on February 4, 1915, as host of the annual RCBA meeting and banquet at the Glenwood Inn (Mission Inn). At that meeting, after the evenings speeches and celebration, the new directorate for 1915 was elected with District Attorney Lyman Evans becoming President.

By the summer of 1915, it was well known William Collier was retired from his law practice. His civic involvement continued, promoting additional development in the Wildomar area among other items.

In early 1916, a new judge was needed for Riverside County. It was fairly much assured Collier would be selected by Governor Hiram Johnson, Collier being an active supporter of the Republican Governor. But at 71 years of age, Collier declined the formal offer and in fact requested his law partner, Hugh H. Craig, be given the appointment instead. Governor Johnson granted the request and Riverside County had a new judge in Hugh Craig.

Over the next year, Collier actively supported the campaign of Governor Johnson to become United States Senator Johnson. It was a common sight to see Collier at Johnson's side during campaign events in the area. Johnson was eventually elected US Senator and served from March 4, 1917 to August 6, 1945. William Collier remained an iconic presence in Wildomar for the remainder of this life except for his summer months in Oceanside.

On March 16, 1925, a sudden illness struck William. He died the next day. Former RCBA President and District Attorney, Lyman Evans, a lifetime California friend of William Collier, delivered the eulogy at William's funeral. William was buried, not in Wildomar, but in Olivewood Cemetery, Riverside.

The William Collier house still stands in Riverside at 3092 Lime Street; a beautiful example of Riverside architecture of 1895.

Written by Christopher G. Jensen