

[Manley, Williston]

Half Century of Newspaper Work In Career of Williston Manley

Announcement of the death of Williston Manley, 82, publisher of the St. Lawrence Plaindealer at Canton, was made in an Associated Press dispatch yesterday.

The following biographical sketch is published because of the wide acquaintance Mr. Manley had in this area and because of the fact that his father, Gilbert Manley, was principal of Franklin Academy for a time.

Williston Manley was born April 15, 1865, at Northampton, Mass., the son of Glibert B. and Martha Hyde Maney. He liked to recall that he was born the same day and hour as Abraham Lincoln died in Washington, D. C.

Gilbert Manley's father, the Rev. George Manley, in about 1829 was pastor of what is now the Brick Chapel Church. Gilbert Manley, a school principal at Homer in Cortland County, moved his family to Canton in 1873.

A nephew who was a printer, George T. Manley, in that year persuaded him to purchase the St. Lawrence Plaindealer from Col. S. [Seth] P. Remington, father of the artist Frederic Remington. George Manley became foreman of the office.

Mrs. Martha Hyde Manley came of a pioneer Massena family.

Williston Manley was graduated from the old Canton Academy in 1881 and won his bachelor degree at St. Lawrence University in 1888.

He then became an associate of his father on the Plaindealer, and upon G. B. Manley's death in 1900 became editor and publisher. He was joined on the paper by his son G. Atwood Manley, in 1918.

He was married to Miss Mary L. Atwood, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Isaac M. Atwood of Canton, in the First Universalist Church [on] June 15, 1889. His wife died in 1923. They lived in what is now the [?] cottage on University avenue and in 1908 purchased the East Main St. residence that recently was owned by Van C. Whittemore.

Mr. Manley's activities in connection with St. Lawrence University were many. He served 29 years as secretary of the Alumni Association and one year as its president, and from 1924 to 1938 was an alumni trustee.

From 1928 to 1945 he was a member first of the university's executive committee and then of its successor, the board of administration. His resignation from the latter was accepted by the board of trustees in June, 1945, in a resolution that said in part:

"Wisdom stemming from long experience as a country newspaper editor and intimate knowledge of the communnity as well as the college and of its history made his contribution to the board of trustees, the board of administration, and to the board of athletic control, on which he also served for many years, of inestimable value."

[Manley, Williston]

He was a member of the board of athletic control for 22 years and also of the building committee in charge of construction of the men's residence, which was completed in 1932.

At the request of Herbert G. Gunnison, Charles S. Brewer, Charles W. Appleton and Owen D. Young, he organized the St. Lawrence Golf and Country Club and was its president for nine years.

He was a charter member of the Canton Club, a social organization founded in 1886. He served as its president for many years and at his death was its oldest active member.

He was a member of the Stillwater Fishing and Hunting Club for 25 years, joining shortly after graduating from St. Lawrence, and was its president for 19 years.

One of the best informed woodsmen in the country, he made his first trip to Cranberry Lake with his father in 1879. He went there again in 1882 with his brother, the late Dr. Mark Manley, and Judge Lawrence Russell. Thereafter he went into the woods every year until shortly before the recent war.

He was one of the organizers of the old Canton Advertising Club, which he served as president, and on two occasions helped organize a Canton Chamber of Commerce. He also served several years as director of the First National Bank of Canton.

Mr. Manley, a member of the First Universalist Church parish, was largely responsible for the restoration of the Silas Wright Cemetery 40 years ago, raising the money and rallying community interest.

He was one of those championing a new village water system in about 1916. He seldom left Canton after moving here in 1873, except for occasional trips to Cleveland and Chicago and a good many visits to New York.

He was a member of the Beta Zeta chapter of Beta Theta Pi, and served as chief of District III of that national fraternity in 1903. He and Atwood Manley were the first father and son to hold the position of district chief in the same district.

[On] June 10, 1946, he received the Grand Lodge 50-year service medal at the final meeting of the six month celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Lawrence Lodge No. 111, Free and Accepted Masons. He was a member of that lodge, of St. Lawrence Chapter No. 132, R.A.M., and of St. Lawrence Commandery No. 28, Knights Templar.

He began to write "The Rounder" commentary column in the Plaindealer, about 1895. At first he wrote about current topics and local people, but in later years the column was chiefly reminiscent.

[Manley, Williston]

The biggest news story the Plaindealer ever covered was the murder of Asa W. Briggs, of Hannawa Falls in November, 1897. The murderer remained unknown for some time, and Mr. Manley published a four-line item in the Plaindealer saying that Ledyard P. Hale, county district attorney, and the sheriff "would have to look nearer to Uncle Asa's farm to find the murderer."

Afterwards Mr. Manley learned that Howard P. Burt of Hannawa Falls was on his way from Ogdensburg to Canton to serve notice of a libel suit against Gilbert Manley as editor of the offending newspaper.

Williston Manley sped to Potsdam and returned with the district attorney and a warrant for Burt's arrest before the libel papers could be served and public opinion aroused against the paper.

During Burt's trial, the murderer ask him, "Are you Manley who has been writing about this trial in the papers?" Mr. Manley said yes, and Burt patted his hip where he might have carried a revolver and said, "I'll take care of you when this is over."

But Mr. Manley was spared, as Burt was convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment at Dannemora.

Malone Evening Telegram, Malone NY, Tue. 11 Nov 1947

Transcribed on 12 Sep 2023 by Karen E. Dau of East Rochester, NY