

Michigan Lawyers in History

Henry Munroe Campbell

By Carrie Sharlow



The state of Michigan was built by the lumber and auto industries, agriculture, and the lawyers who lived, studied, and practiced here. The articles in this occasional series highlight some of those lawyers and judges and their continuing influence on this great state.

Henry Munroe Campbell was destined to become a lawyer; it was the family profession. He was named after his grandfather, who moved the family from New York to Michigan Territory after the War of 1812. Campbell's grandfather had served as a judge in New York, and went on to do the same in Michigan while being involved in other businesses on the side.¹

Henry's father, James Valentine Campbell, also served as a judge, though with a bit more notoriety. He's readily recognized in a group portrait at Lansing's Hall of Justice as one of the "Big Four."

John Coppin's famous portrait of the Big Four depicts a quartet of white-haired men, but James V. Campbell, Benjamin F. Graves, Thomas M. Cooley, and Isaac P. Christiancy were fairly young when they first became Michigan Supreme Court justices. Graves² was only 40 in 1857 and Campbell³ was 35 in 1858 when each arrived at the Court. Cooley⁴ was 40 when he joined in 1864 and Christiancy⁵ was the eldest, being 46 when he was elected in 1858. In 1868, when all four were on the Supreme Court together for the first time, the oldest was still shy of 60. So while they sat on the Supreme Court and built Michigan law, they were also building families. Graves's and Campbell's children

were elementary-school age in 1868 and at least one of Cooley's children was born while he was a Supreme Court justice.

The Campbell family could chart the birth of their children with Justice Campbell's career. Cornelia was five, Henry was four, and James Junior⁶ not yet two when their father first took his seat on the Supreme Court bench in 1858. Baby Charles⁷ was born that summer—considerate enough to wait until the day after the last cases of the July term were decided. With four children under the age of five at home, Justice Campbell wrote 15 opinions and four dissents that year, traveling between Lansing and Detroit. At this point, it should be noted that behind every great man is an excellent wife; Campbell's was Cornelia Hotchkiss.

A fourth son, Douglass,⁸ was born the year Campbell was appointed dean and professor at the new University of Michigan Law School. The last boy, Edward,⁹ was born shortly before Cooley joined Campbell on the Supreme Court. It's easy to imagine that the Campbell kids played with the Cooley children since their fathers were not only law school colleagues, but Cooley also served as Supreme Court reporter in the early years of Campbell's tenure.

By 1868, Justices Cooley, Graves, Campbell, and Christiancy were together on the

Supreme Court, sitting as they were depicted in Coppin's portrait, and the children of the Big Four were beginning to search for their own professions. With great examples of legal expertise close to home, several of the boys, including Henry Campbell, chose law. Can you imagine attending law school as the son of a state Supreme Court justice? The expectations must have been extraordinarily high; no failing grades and certainly no cutting class.

Henry obtained a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1876 and an LL.B in 1878. That same year—as his father was serving as chief justice—he established a partnership with a local attorney named Henry Russel. The two young attorneys met either at the University of Michigan or while studying law in the office of Alfred Russell, who evidently served as co-counsel with both men in early cases.

Russel and Campbell were well-versed in the law and had a variety of business interests. Russel was "appointed assistant attorney of the Michigan Central Railroad Company"¹⁰ and would eventually serve as director and president of several "banking, railroad, manufacturing and land companies."¹¹ Campbell would serve as a director of banks and railroad companies, counsel of Parke Davis & Company and the Union



Henry Campbell's father, James, is the only one in John Coppin's portrait without a beard.

Trust Company, president of Russel-Woods and River Rouge Improvement companies, and president of the Woodlawn and Elmwood cemeteries.¹²

In the early years of the Russel & Campbell firm, there was apparently some sort of unwritten agreement that new associates be named Henry. Accordingly, Harry Conant Bulkley joined in 1895 and Henry Ledyard in 1896. Both men would eventually add their surnames to the firm title. Russel & Campbell lasted for more than 25 years before becoming Russel Campbell & Bulkley, and was renamed Russel Campbell Bulkley & Ledyard shortly thereafter.

By World War I, Henry Campbell was "widely recognized as a lawyer of marked ability, forceful and resourceful in the presentation of his cases, and at all times strong and logical in his reasoning and in his deductions."¹³ He was an excellent corporate lawyer and "his services [were] sought by the largest commercial, industrial and financial

institutions"¹⁴ in the state. His firm was one of the top in Detroit, with the partners enjoying "an extensive practice of an important character"¹⁵ housed in the new Union Trust Building downtown.

While practicing law and building his firm, Henry Campbell also started a family. He married Caroline Burtenshaw on November 22, 1881. Henry Jr. was born in 1885, followed by Douglas in 1888.

Although he didn't serve as a judge and interpret laws like his father, Henry Campbell wrote laws as a delegate to Michigan's 1908 constitutional convention. And while he didn't teach law like his father, he helped educate a new generation of attorneys who read his father's opinions in law school and came to Campbell Bulkley & Ledyard to apply them in practice.

New University of Michigan Law School graduates joined the firm; by 1920, there were several new partners. Breaking with tradition, none were named Henry: among

them were Wilson W. Mills, Charles H. L'Hommedieu, and Selden S. Dickinson. It was a new era.

Henry Campbell died in 1926, a full century after his grandfather moved his family from New York to Detroit and, in doing so, significantly altered Michigan's legal community. The Big Four are legendary. Henry's own legacy, the law firm of Russel & Campbell, still exists as well, though the Campbell name was dropped from the firm in 1931, the same year two associates Henry had hired saw their names added to the firm letterhead. The names of Selden Dickinson and Edward Wright remained long after the partners had passed, but that's a story for another time. ■

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ENDNOTES

1. Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan: A Chronological Cyclopaedia of the Past and Present* (New York: Silas Farmer & Co, 1890), p 1,113.
2. Born October 18, 1817. Died March 3, 1906.
3. Born February 25, 1823. Died March 26, 1890.
4. Born January 6, 1824. Died September 12, 1898.
5. Born March 12, 1812. Died September 8, 1890.
6. James Valentine Campbell Jr. was born July 8, 1856. He died in 1894.
7. Charles Hotchkiss Campbell was born July 18, 1858. He died in 1927.
8. Douglass Houghton Campbell was born December 16, 1859. He died in 1953.
9. Edward DeMille Campbell was born September 7, 1863. He died in 1925.
10. Leake, *History of Detroit: Chronicle of its Progress, its Industries, its Institutions, and the People of the Fair City of the Straits* (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), vol 2, p 466.
11. *Id.*
12. Burton, *The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922* (Detroit: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), vol 3, p 632.
13. *Id.*
14. *Successful Men of Michigan: A Compilation of Useful Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men* (S. U. Collins, Publisher, 1914), p 21.
15. *The City of Detroit*, p 269.
16. *Id.* at 632.
17. *Id.* at 269.