

GEORGE M. SABIN:

Nevada's Third Federal District Court Judge

BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

Born in Ohio in 1833, George M. Sabin studied at Western Reserve Case College and received his legal training by reading the law. In 1858, he opened his law office in Wisconsin. After a few years practicing there, he moved to Nevada in 1868.

Like many, Sabin relocated from mining camp to mining camp as the gold ran out or was discovered elsewhere. He opened his first law practice in Treasure Hill in White Pine County. Then, in 1872, he moved to Pioche, where he helped to organize Lincoln County into the Ninth Judicial District Court. From 1877, Sabin lived in Eureka until President Chester Arthur nominated him to be Nevada's third U.S. District Court judge on July 20, 1882. Sabin was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and sworn into office on the same day: July 26, 1882.

In 1888, he wrote to Dr. George Starr, a Western Reserve College classmate, about his life.¹ "I always liked to live in Nevada. It is very different in climate & productions & people from Ohio or any Eastern State. But there is a charm about it which I can hardly explain, especially in the mining districts. There is a life – go ahead freedom of thought & action never found elsewhere. I always had a nice & profitable law practice & earned a good deal of money – the most of which went the way of all the earth. So I didn't have to look after it – or sit up nights & keep guard lest thieves break through & steal – so I was happy. When I was first offered the U.S. Judgeship I was not much disposed to take it, as the salary was – & I regret to say still is – only \$3,500.00 per ann. & I was making nearly double that amount in my practice & some years four times that amount. However, I did accept it & now that I have the harness on and *all* other harnesses off, I do not know but that I shall jog along hearing and settling other peoples' woes and sorrows until I become a full fledged angel and bid adieu to mundane affairs.

"I like the position quite well & find it as much to my taste as any perhaps which I could select. The practice in our Courts (U.S.) is quite different from that of the State Courts. The sphere is larger & we have nothing to do with a thousand petty matters which engage the time & labors of the State Judges. In civil matters we have no jurisdiction in cases involving less than \$2000, unless it be something arising under U. S. statute – & usually the cases in our courts involve far greater sums. I hardly think I have ever tried a half dozen civil cases involving no more than \$2000 unless it be Govt. cases & patent, copyright, or admiralty cases. This brings before us usually the best lawyers at the Bar and it is always a pleasure to have before you men of ability & learning & enough at stake so that one can easily afford to give his business his whole time, energy & thought.

When I am not busy here in Nevada, I am usually engaged at San Francisco holding court there. This makes a pleasant change – though involving a good deal of hard work. I went to S.F. about Dec. 1st last, returned here February 10th. Will remain here until about April 10th then return to S.F. for a couple of months – then home again, & so the years run quickly away. I think I have been fairly successful since I was appointed & have given very general satisfaction as a Judge."

Sabin served on the bench nearly eight years until he became ill. He died of rheumatic gout that attacked his brain. Taken to San Francisco for treatment, he died at age 55 on May 12, 1890. His body was brought back to Carson City, where he lay in state in a rosewood coffin in the capitol rotunda until his funeral on May 15 at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. He was buried in the Grand Army of the Republic section in the Lone Mountain Cemetery in Carson City.

ENDNOTE:

1. Letter, dated February 28, 1888, was reprinted in the Nevada Historical Society's Quarterly, Spring 1983, Vol 26, No. 1.

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