

From Arts & Architecture: Henry Johnson Hersey Memorial Plaque

Perhaps Saint John's most remarkable memorial plaque, both because of its artistry and its placement, is the plaque honoring Henry Johnson Hersey. The story behind the Hersey memorial plaque, on the east wall of the nave between the Memorial Hall entry doors and the Shannon Room, would not be complete without the acknowledgement of both Henry's and his wife's colonial ancestry, of which both were quite proud. There might also be a tip of the "ironic hat" to the fact that descendants of established Puritan and Baptist families met, married, and then became Episcopalians at Saint John's Cathedral in Denver, Colorado. The story goes like this:

In the autumn of 1635, William Hersey, his wife Elizabeth, and their children settled in the town of Hingham, across the harbor from Boston, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Part of the Great Puritan Migration (1620-1640), William and his family left the town of Reading, Berkshire, England, that had been his family's home for generations, to pursue the promise of freedom of worship on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. A year later, in 1636, a Cambridge divine and staunch advocate for the separation of church and state and "liberty of conscience," was exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of those "dangerous beliefs." That minister, Roger Williams, also held anabaptist convictions. He established Providence Plantations on the west side of the Seekonk River in 1636, and founded the First Baptist Church in America in 1638, in what is now Providence, Rhode Island.

Two hundred and twenty-eight years later, in 1863, Henry Johnson Hersey was born, in Sandwich, Massachusetts, a direct descendant of the Puritan William Hersey of Hingham, Massachusetts, and Reading, England. Henry's wife, Annie Louise Budlong Hersey was born in 1864 in Warren, Rhode Island, a descendant of Roger Williams and member of an established Baptist family of Rhode Island.

By the time Henry Johnson Hersey was born on February 18th 1863, it seems his parents, Joseph Odell Bogart Hersey and Mary Knowles Dyer Hersey, had become part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1843 they were married in Provincetown, Massachusetts by the Presiding Elder of the Methodist Episcopal District of Sandwich. Because of the Methodist connection, Henry Hersey chose to matriculate at Methodist-affiliated Boston University for both his undergraduate and law school education. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1884, and his LL.B. degree *cum laude* in 1886.

The year 1886 was in several ways an eventful one for Henry. Not only did he receive his law degree, but he also married Annie Louise Budlong on June 15th in Providence, Rhode Island. The wedding was officiated by the eminent Baptist minister, the Rev. Dr. Richard Montague, graduate of Harvard



University and Newton Theological School, and pastor of Providence's Central Baptist Church. Curiously enough, Henry's elder brother George and Annie Louise's sister Alice were also married by Dr. Montague two years earlier. After their wedding, Annie Louise and Henry relocated to Denver, where Henry "entered practice in Denver in the year of his graduation," according to Wilbur Fiske Stone's 1918 *History of Colorado*.

From 1886 until his death in 1928, Henry Johnson Hersey was deeply involved in the legal, judicial, and corporate matters both of Denver and the young state of Colorado. Wilbur Fiske Stone writes, "Advancing steadily in the ranks of the legal profession, Henry Johnson Hersey is now [1918] classed as one of the eminent lawyers of Denver, his name appearing in connection with much important litigation that has been heard in district, state, and federal courts." He became a member of both the American Bar Association, the Denver and the Colorado Bar, and also the American Society for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes.



Henry Johnson Hersey's legal career encompassed 42 years of service as a lawyer, Deputy Attorney General of Colorado, Judge Advocate for the Colorado National Guard, where he achieved the rank of major, and an elected district court judge from 1918. As a district court judge, Hersey presided over divorce cases, among others. Because he held traditional ideas about the responsibilities of marriage for both partners, he did not grant divorces easily, as was reported in a Sunday May 11th *Denver Post* article covering the judge's thoughts on marriage and divorce. Judge Hersey gave the interview to the *Post* because his statement that "men are responsible for ninety divorce complaints out of a hundred had been questioned." That statement, among others, attests to the influence of Judge Hersey's wife, Annie Louise, who was active in numerous educational, child welfare, and progressive women's organizations in Denver.

Aside from his legal work, Judge Hersey was involved as a member of two Masonic organizations, Beta Theta Phi and Phi Delta Phi fraternities, the Colorado chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, for which he served a term as president, and the Lakewood Country Club, since he was an avid golfer!

A Vestry Resolution of 1928, the year of Judge Hersey's death, provides ample evidence of his involvement in and service to Saint John's Cathedral:

"Inasmuch as God in his wisdom has taken unto himself the soul of our beloved friend and associate, Henry Johnson Hersey:

Be it therefore resolved that we communicate to his bereaved wife, son and daughter, our sympathy. Judge Hersey was a churchman of unusual devotion and usefulness. Since his arrival in Denver in 1886 he has been a worshipper and worker in Saint John's. He has served as chorister, teacher, Superintendent of the Sunday school, Vestryman and Warden. He was wise in counsel, patient in

perplexity, sympathetic in tribulations. His work and influence extended beyond the Parish bounds into the Missions of the Diocese where he served as Lay Reader. His integrity of character was appreciated in the City and State in which he lived and he received high honors from his fellow citizens. We value our years of association with him and treasure his memory.”

Henry Johnson Hersey died on Sunday January 22nd 1928, surrounded by his wife, daughter Helen, and son Henry Jr., according to his obituary in *The Denver Post* for Monday January 23rd. His funeral was held at Saint John's on Tuesday January 24th at noon, with Dean Benjamin Dagwell officiating. Like his wife Annie Louise, who died many years later at the home of their son in Seattle, Judge Hersey's remains were cremated. Their cremains rest in the Wyoming Cemetery in Melrose, Massachusetts, outside of Boston. The headstone of his brother, George Milbank Hersey, and his wife (and Annie Louise's sister) Alice Stafford Budlong Hersey also commemorates Henry Johnson Hersey and Annie Louise Budlong Hersey, their daughter Mary, who died in infancy, and their daughter Helen Hersey Tuthill, well-known in her own right as a vocalist and performer.

