

Introducing Ignatius Donnelly . . .

Lawyer, poet, fiery orator leaves mark on Minnesota

Ignatius Donnelly's name doesn't leap from the pages of Minnesota history like those of Alexander Ramsey or Hubert Humphrey.

There is no Donnelly Highway anywhere in the state, nor a building that bears his name. His statue doesn't stand on the grounds of the state Capitol. His name isn't commonly invoked in the halls of government.

Nevertheless, Ignatius Donnelly — Minnesota's second lieutenant governor, a lawyer, a poet and a fire-breathing orator, a believer in the legend of Atlantis and known by admirers as "the Sage of Nininger" — left his mark.

Donnelly, the son of Irish immigrants, was born in Philadelphia on Nov. 3, 1831. Following his graduation from public schools, he talked his way into a clerkship in the law offices of Benjamin Brewster, who later would serve as U.S. attorney general.

Donnelly got an unusually early start on his twin careers as poet and politician: He published his first book of poetry, *The Mourner's Vision*, at 19 and was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar at 21.

Although he would later use his law degree to distinguish himself in politics, Donnelly was far from a successful attorney. Clients found it remarkably easy to get credit from Donnelly, who found it correspondingly difficult to be a hard-nosed bill collector: "If you have the slightest wish ever to pay me, call and see me," he wrote timidly to one client.

In 1855, he married Catherine McCaffrey, much to the apparent displeasure of her mother, who spent the next 15 years avoiding all contact with her daughter.

Shortly after his marriage, Donnelly invested in a series of cooperative building association schemes. At some point during his involvement, but before any of the projects were completed, Donnelly decided to leave Philadelphia and take his family west; however, before he left, he came under attack by detractors who accused him of fraud and misappropriating funds. Although he volunteered to open his books to satisfy his accusers, the false rumors left permanent scars on the idealistic Donnelly.

Donnelly headed west to seek his destiny. As an avid abolitionist who made hundreds of speeches during the Civil War in support

of the Union, he ruled out making his home in Kansas because of slavery; he also decided against living in Iowa because of an unpleasant experience with stagecoach travel. But after a scenic steamboat trip to scope out the area, Donnelly and his family visited the booming Minnesota territory in 1857 and decided to settle there.

Donnelly soon formed a partnership with Minnesota entrepreneur John Nininger, acquired extensive land holdings and made plans to develop his dream town, Nininger

town, it never prospered due partly to the nation's economic woes and partly to the proximity of established towns like Hastings. Donnelly, however, built his family a home in Nininger in 1857 and lived there for the rest of his life.

Late that same year, Donnelly's aversion to slavery prompted him to switch political allegiances from the Democratic to the Republican Party. He unsuccessfully sought seats in the Minnesota Territorial Senate in 1857 and 1858, despite his burgeoning oratorical skills, which he utilized by resuming his practice of law in Dakota County.

In 1859, following Minnesota's admission to the union, Donnelly took another stab at politics, announcing his candidacy for lieutenant governor. The move worried his budget-conscious wife, who heard the news while visiting Philadelphia and wrote back wistfully, "Does the office pay? I wish it would, as that is my great anxiety."

Donnelly was just 28 when he was elected Minnesota's second lieutenant governor. Although many Republicans had opposed his nomination, his fiery speeches won over most of them, and in 1860, the state central committee bent its rules and offered to pay for Donnelly to accompany Gov. Alexander Ramsey on a trip around the state, promoting Republican candidates in the upcoming election.

In one debate that year with Willis A. Gorman, a former territorial governor, Donnelly illustrated what he believed would happen if Democrats won the election by telling a story of a man asking a boy for directions. "Well," the boy said, "if you take this road, you will wish you were in hell. If you take *that* road, you will wish that you took the first."

Donnelly won a second term as lieutenant governor in 1861, serving briefly as acting governor while Ramsey was back east.

In 1862, Donnelly made the jump from state to national politics, winning election to Minnesota's Second District seat in the U.S. House and becoming the youngest congressman in the nation at the age of 32. He was re-elected in 1864 and 1866.

But the Republicans, fearing that the in-



Ignatius Donnelly was a poet, novelist, and pugnatius politician in the early days of Minnesota's statehood.

Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

City, 17 miles south of St. Paul on the Mississippi River. It was a plan applauded by Nininger's wife, who remarked on the German-Irish affiliation: "Two heads are better than one, even if one should be a 'sour Kraut' and the other a 'Paddy.'"

Donnelly made trips back to Philadelphia to talk up Minnesota's advantages and encourage easterners to settle in Nininger. Although he worked tirelessly to promote the

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creasingly popular Donnelly had his sights set on Ramsey's U.S. Senate seat, backed off in their support, and Donnelly lost his House seat in 1868. Although he failed to win renomination by the Republicans that year, he was nominated by an agrarian-oriented splinter group from the party; as a result of the split, both Republican candidates lost to the Democrat that year.

Donnelly then tried and failed to win Ramsey's vacant seat in the Senate, despite the help of his agrarian allies in the Legislature.

By that time, the Civil War was over and slavery had been abolished. Donnelly, who had been an ardent abolitionist, surprised many people by advocating lenient treatment of the former Confederacy and supporting liberal appropriations by Congress to feed the starving South.

"Government must rest upon the love of the people," Donnelly said in 1867. "I am sorry to hear these appeals made to the natural prejudices and natural bitterness which exists in our hearts. So I say now, in the presence of this suffering and death, I have not the heart to remember anything save only that these people are human, and being human, pitiable."

In 1873, Donnelly joined the Grange, an agrarian-rights group formed in Minnesota in 1868. He helped form the Anti-Monopolist Party, which combined the principles of the Democratic Party and the Grange, and ran successfully for the state Senate in 1873 as a member of the new party.

He held that office until 1878 as an anti-monopolist and a "greenbacker," one who advocated the use of inconvertible paper money. His last political victory came in 1886, when he won a seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Donnelly combined his political career with one as a writer. In 1882 he published *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World*, a book that had 21 printings in the U.S. and 23 in England and was translated into French. The book was Donnelly's attempt to prove that the island of Atlantis once existed; he claimed that the destruction of Atlantis lay behind all the flood legends of mankind.

Donnelly published several more successful tomes. In 1883, his second book, *Rangnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel*, went through 11 American printings. Five years later, *The Great Cryptogram; or Francis Bacon's Cipher in the Shakespeare Plays* earned him more acclaim. In the book, Donnelly sought to prove that Bacon was the real author of

some of Shakespeare's works.

Donnelly also wrote *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century*, which sold more than 60,000 copies in the U.S. within a month of its publication, and *The Huguet*.

In 1894, Donnelly's wife, Catherine, died. Historians believe it was his loneliness that led him to marry a 20-year-old Scandinavian woman, Marian Olive Hanson, four years later when he was 67.

Donnelly died on New Year's Day 1901.

—Betsy Gerboth

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install the cameras. Cowman solved that dilemma by putting up brackets to hold the equipment; both cameras and brackets are removed each year at the end of a legislative session, preserving the chamber's historical integrity.

Another of the department's projects was to establish an interactive television site in Room 5 of the State Office Building. Connected to more than 40 sites throughout Minnesota, the technology allows members of the public to testify before the Legislature while in locations such as Duluth or Marshall, saving time and money by avoiding a trip to St. Paul.

Each day, Cowman meets with his Senate counterpart, Steve Senyk, director of Senate Media Services, to decide which committee hearings should be broadcast. Often, if two meetings conflict with each other, one will be broadcast live and the other taped to be aired later.

Cowman hopes to be able to install robotic cameras in at least one more hearing room this summer, and eventually he'd like to see more committee rooms and possibly a press conference room equipped with cameras.

Ultimately, he says, the main focus should be on the quality of what viewers see on Channel 17. "That's what we're mainly concerned about," he says. "Everyone who works here is really concerned about our on-air product."

—Betsy Gerboth

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something, the U of M is "requested" to do so. Such language reflects the unique status of the U of M.

Mankato State Professor Edgar Twedt issued a warning to lawmakers.

"I remember driving into Rochester and seeing the sign, 'Impeach Earl Warren,'" said

Twedt, expressing gratitude that the former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court couldn't be removed because of lifelong tenure. "It ought to be difficult to get rid of an academic faculty member in order to preserve academic freedom . . . this is a slippery slope here."

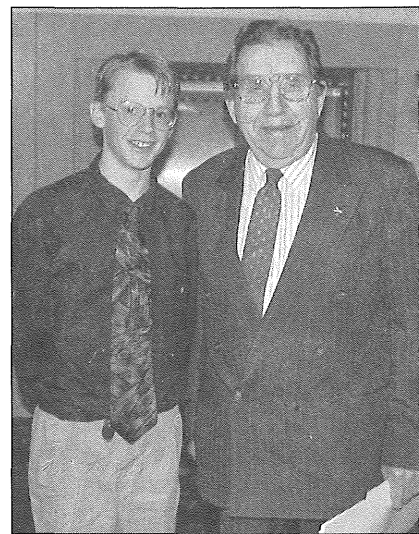
Rep. Alice Johnson (DFL-Spring Lake Park) said tying funds in any way to the tenure system could discourage the U of M from awarding tenure.

"Why would the University grant tenure anymore because their funding could be tied to getting rid of it?" she said.

Because tenure systems vary widely from state to state, a state could put itself at a competitive disadvantage if it curbed its tenure program, said Diamond of Syracuse University.

Diamond, who has not reviewed HF3238 said it sounds like something legislators will be addressing more and more in the future, given dwindling public dollars and rising tuition costs.

—Kendall Anderson



Jeff Fish from the Minnesota New Country School in the LeSueur-Henderson School District and Rep. Willard Munger pose at a Feb. 19 hearing of the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee. Though they represent different generations of "frog pickers," both are concerned about proposals involving research on deformed frogs. Munger said he used to "pick" thousands of frogs to sell for food when he was Jeff's age. Frogs aren't as bountiful now and some are deformed, he said. Fish, who calls himself "Mr. Hothands," caught the first deformed frog while on a nature hike near Henderson, Minn., last summer. In testimony, he has said, "We're looking for frogs and answers." (See story, page 11)