

Lengthy obituary sums up life of a former public servant

"Senator Fulk's condition has become alarming in the past 10 hours, and the family and physicians expect the end at any time."

— *Bloomington Evening World*, Oct. 27, 1903.

The headline on Richard A. Fulk's obituary summed up his life as well as any other words could — "DEATH CLOSES A USEFUL LIFE." The native Monroe County had passed away in the 71st year of his life.

Certainly there were shorter obituaries printed in those days, but those would have described persons whose lives had received far less public scrutiny.

Fulk, who was born in Indian Creek Township of parents who had come here from North Carolina, shared his growing-up years in Monroe and Greene counties. For a time, he lived in Jasper County, Mo., but Indiana, the place of his boyhood years, kept pulling him back.

By 1850, Fulk was back in Indiana, farming in Indian Creek and later apprenticing himself to a Harrodsburg carpenter. Some-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

thing or someone nudged him into politics, and in 1870, he was elected sheriff.

As sheriff Fulk was obliged to learn some rudimentary law, and the taste intrigued him enough to get himself enrolled in IU law classes. Three years later, the Monroe County bar added him to their number.

For six years Fulk spent his time with clients and fellow lawyers, but another political candidacy lured him away from the courtroom. His next county office was a four-year stint as auditor, followed by a return to law practice.

His highest elective office was that of state senator during the years 1892-1896. Titles had a tendency to remain with people for a lifetime. Hence his designation as "Senator Fulk" in the obituary.

In his later years, the former senator was leading what the *Evening World* called "a Christian life." Though he was a member of the Kirkwood Avenue Christian Church, he was not always in a pew there on Sunday morning. The newspaper explained. "Senator Fulk was especially popular among his friends in the country and hardly a Sabbath passed that he did not hold religious services at a country church."

Furthermore, Fulk preached at a lot of funerals and even performed wedding ceremonies. As an elder in the Christian Church, he was available for some common sense counseling when it was needed by those in trouble.

Members of the Monroe County Bar Association decided to recognize Fulk for his contributions to the community. John R. East, the Honorable A.M. Hadley, Major J.T. Loudon and the city attorney, whose name was Hottle, formed a committee to compose a resolution. Court was adjourned during the funeral services at the Christian Church.

Fulk's body lay in state at his home on the

corner of Walnut and Third streets prior to the funeral. The Rev. T.J. Clark was in charge of the services.

Pall bearers were chosen from the three organizations closest to Fulk's heart — his church, the Bar Association and his lodge, the I.O.O.F. The men were: from the Bar, Robert W. Miers, and John R. East; from the lodge, T.H. Sudbury and Robert Seward; and from the church, I.O. Sutphin and William Stephenson.

Fulk was a widower, but he left behind a daughter, two sisters and five grandchildren. The Bar Association resolution, which was printed on Oct. 31, 1903, was flowery, but no doubt sincere. Here are some excerpts: "He was a gifted orator, a fluent speaker, and candor characterized his every effort. ... During his career he held many positions of public trust which he always surrendered to his successors without spot or blemish."

He was a member of that generation who were public servants first and politicians second.

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