

Louis FitzHenry (1870-1935)

Louis FitzHenry was born in Bloomington, Illinois, on June 13, 1870. He was the oldest son of Hiram and Elizabeth (Johnson) FitzHenry. Hiram was a farmer and miller who came to Bloomington from Ohio. The family lived on East Locust Street in Bloomington.

From a young age, Louis was full of energy and ambition. He went to Bloomington public schools and graduated from Bloomington High School in 1888. While he was in school, he had a couple of jobs. One was lighting gas streetlamps for the city at sunset and turning them off at midnight. He also sold newspapers on street corners for the *Daily Bulletin*.

His job as a newspaper carrier sparked his interest in the newspaper business. While still in high school, Louis became a reporter for the *Daily Bulletin*. After graduation, he worked full-time in the newspaper industry, first for the *Daily Bulletin*, then later as circulation manager for the *Sunday Eye*, and eventually as the editor and advertising manager for a local Republican paper called *The Leader*.

In 1895, Louis decided to study law and enrolled at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington. While in law school, he joined Phi Alpha Delta legal fraternity, and continued working in newspapers to support himself. He even bought a local labor newspaper, the *Trades Review*, which he edited and managed. Louis graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1897.

After graduating, he passed the Illinois Bar Association exam and became a lawyer. He worked for the *Daily Pantagraph* and, by 1900, opened his own law practice in Bloomington. He partnered with another lawyer, Lester H. Martin, and their office was on the second floor of the Unity Building in downtown Bloomington.

In 1900, disaster struck when the Great Fire in downtown Bloomington destroyed their office. The fire, which started in the Model Laundry in the 100 block of East Monroe Street, wiped out several blocks of buildings, including the McLean County Courthouse. Louis and his partner quickly reopened their office after the building was rebuilt. In 1918, Louis gave a speech marking the anniversary of the fire. He said that although the fire destroyed a lot, it also helped build a better Bloomington.

Louis was a lifelong supporter of the Democratic Party. In 1907, he ran for City Attorney and won. He supported the idea that public utilities, like electric companies, should be able to use public streets without paying for them. He served as City Attorney until 1911.

In 1909, Louis surprised everyone by getting married. He married Lottie B. Rankin, and they settled in Bloomington. They had three children, though one son, Louis, died as a baby. Their daughters were Charlotte Louise and Mildred.

Louis also ran for other political offices. In 1910, he ran for Congress but lost. However, in 1912, he ran again and won, becoming a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. While in Congress, he worked on important laws during President Woodrow Wilson's time, including the Clayton Anti-Trust Act and the Federal Reserve Act. After losing re-election in 1914, he went back to practicing law in Bloomington.

As a lawyer, Louis supported workers and unions. In 1913, he worked on a law to help railroad workers who were striking for better wages. He also worked on improving the arbitration process to prevent strikes. He was a member of many legal organizations, including the American Bar Association.

Louis tried to re-enter politics in 1915, running for the Illinois Supreme Court, but lost again. Despite this, his career in public service continued. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson

appointed Louis to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Illinois. He would serve as a judge for the next 15 years.

As a judge, Louis became known for his strong support of Prohibition (a constitutional amendment that banned alcohol). He was strict in his enforcement of Prohibition laws, sending many criminals to prison for selling alcohol illegally. He also worked hard to educate juries on the importance of following the law, even when they disagreed with it.

One of Louis's most famous cases was the conviction of the Colbeck Gang, also known as Egan's Rats. In 1924, he sentenced nine members of the gang to 25 years in prison for robbing the U.S. Mail and kidnapping a postmaster.

Louis earned a reputation as a fair and honest judge. He was especially kind to new lawyers in his courtroom, always remembering what it was like to be a young attorney himself. In 1926, Illinois Wesleyan University awarded him an honorary law degree for his service. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Louis to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the 17th District. He continued to serve as a judge in this capacity until his death.

Louis FitzHenry died on November 18, 1935, at his home in Normal, Illinois. His funeral was simple, and both the Chicago and Peoria Bar Associations held memorial services for him. His old law partner, Lester Martin, said that Louis's death was a loss to the community, calling him a great public servant and jurist. Louis was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.