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Memoirs: 1892-1969, A New Mexico Item

By

WILLIAM A. KELEHER


In 1913 at the age of 27, a young New Mexican began law school at Washington and Lee University in Virginia. William Keleher had not been to school for 13 years, having dropped out of the academic world after the eighth grade to help support his family; but Dean Martin Burks granted special permission to the determined westerner. Keleher had grown up in Albuquerque and had worked for the telegraph company, served on a survey crew and been employed as a clerk for the Board of Education before becoming a reporter for the Albuquerque Journal and Albuquerque Herald. In 1913 however, he quit his $30 a week job as reporter and city editor for the Albuquerque Herald to become a lawyer. In a day in which few attorneys had gone through a formal law school program, Keleher studied law with Judge Benjamin Adams and District Attorney Frank Clancy before going to Washington and Lee.

The new lawyer returned to Albuquerque to practice law, and although the lack of clients caused him to take a $30 a month job as city editor of the El Paso Times for a brief period, he eventually became a successful and respected attorney.

William Keleher has had a long and varied career. An acquaintance of leading New Mexicans from all walks of life, he was also friends with nationally prominent figures such as William McAdoo, a presidential aspirant in 1924. Keleher himself was involved in city politics and was of some influence on the state level. Author of the inaugural address and other speeches for Governor Clyde Tingley, Keleher served on the State Board of Finance under six governors and helped write the sales tax law of 1935, a temporary measure to save the schools which is still on the books. He is, in addition, an author of some note whose writings on New Mexico history are widely respected.

Keleher's Memoirs is a breezy and anecdotal reminiscence which is in part autobiography and in part observation. Material on his own life and career are presented with a considerable degree of modesty while comments on New Mexico politicians are invariably generous. One might have hoped for more critical evaluations from such a
careful observer. To a degree this is also an episodic and informal history of Albuquerque and New Mexico, for Keleher was intimately connected with the development of the city, serving as city attorney and as conservator of the First National Bank during the depression while also contributing his services to the state as an investigator during the labor troubles in Gallup in 1933. A pleasant and informative book to be enjoyed by all New Mexicans, Kelcher's *Memoirs* tends to mirror the state's history and to demonstrate once again his love affair with New Mexico.

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