

Bethinking of
1-24-85
Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



Vol. VII
No. 4
THOMAS A. KIRBY 1869-1922

But well the way I knew;
A feeling of familiar things
With every footstep grew.

A presence, strange at once and known,
Walked with me as my guide
The skirts of some forgotten life
Trailed noiseless at my side.

Was it a dim-remembered dream?
Or glimpse through aeons old?
The secret which the mountains kept
The river never told."

John Greenleaf Whittier

Thomas A. Kirby grew up in Albion and was educated in the common schools. At the age of sixteen he began his study of law in Albion with John Cunneen who was later elected Attorney General of New York State. During the early 1890's Mr. Kirby formed a partnership with Thomas L. Hughes until the latter moved to New York City. Mr. Kirby then practiced law on his own and maintained offices on East Bank Street.

Throughout his career he held interest in many civic causes. He was a prominent member of the Republican Party and a member of the New York State Bar Association. He was elected Orleans County District Attorney and served one term from 1899 through 1901. His name was once widely mentioned to fill a vacancy existing on the Supreme Court bench. He was at one time a delegate from this district to a State Constitutional Convention. Mr. Kirby was instrumental in forming the Albion Chapter American Red Cross in 1917 and was its first Vice-chairman. At the time of his death he was serving as Village of Albion Attorney and President of the Board of Education. He was active in the Knights of Columbus and a trustee of St. Joseph's Church. "Tom" Kirby and his wife Emma had two sons, Albert G. and Thomas A. Kirby, Jr.

Mr. Kirby had a wide reputation for being known as one of the best trial lawyers in Western New York. He was also recognized as a most distinguished orator. Certainly the quality of the accompanying portrait would suggest this. Carl Carmer in his book "Dark Trees to the Wind" (1949) remembers as a boy a Fourth of July celebration in Albion many years ago. It is Thomas A. Kirby that Mr. Carmer alludes to in the following excerpt.

"A quartet sang "Tenting Tonight" and a frightened little girl recited the Gettysburg Address, and then the Town's lawyer-orator, Corpulent and elegant in his best blue suit and white waistcoat, stood on the platform and with calculated deliberation began his patriotic oration. Twenty minutes later his rich deep voice was pouring out his devotion to his country and his flag with all the poetry and rhetoric born in his Irish soul. His audience was spellbound. When he had ended his concluding paragraph we all stood and sang the first and last stanzas of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee....."

Although Tom Kirby has been dead over sixty years, his name is found embellished many times in print on what we now call the pages of history. His obituary declared: "Thomas A. Kirby always stood for the right as he saw it and was fearless in his denunciation of wrong.....Faithful in every trust reposed in him...."