

John Milton Scott (1824-1898)

John Milton Scott was born on August 1, 1823, in Belleville, Illinois. His parents, Samuel and Nancy (Briggs) Scott, were from Virginia and Illinois respectively. John went to public school and received extra tutoring in English, Latin, and math. He briefly taught school in 1837, then studied law at a local law firm. In 1848, after finishing his studies, he became a lawyer and moved to Bloomington to start his career. While practicing law, he met famous lawyers like Abraham Lincoln, David Davis, and Asahel Gridley.

John married Charlotte Ann Perry on April 27, 1853. They had two children who sadly died when they were very young. They lived at 312 S. Main Street in Bloomington for their entire married life.

John's first political position was as the school commissioner of McLean County in 1849. He also served as the city clerk at the same time, making him the first person in Bloomington to hold two public offices at once. He served as the city attorney in 1850 and later started a law firm with William Holmes. In 1852, he was elected judge for the McLean County court.

In 1856, John ran for the Illinois State Senate as an anti-slavery candidate, but he lost. He had been a strong supporter of the Whig Party, which later split over slavery, and then he joined the newly formed Republican Party. He became president of the Fremont Republican Club, which would be like the head of the county Republican Party today.

In 1862, John was appointed to fill a vacancy as a judge on the 8th Judicial Circuit Court. He was re-elected in 1867 due to his fair reputation. In 1870, he was elected to the Illinois State Supreme Court, where he served until 1888. As a judge, he saw the law as a way to protect society and believed it should be based on Christian principles, like protecting human rights. He thought that people should be paid fairly for their work, based on how much they produced.

One of his most famous cases was the Haymarket Case in 1886. Workers had been protesting for better working conditions, and during a rally in Chicago, a bomb exploded, killing eight police officers. Eight men were arrested and put on trial. Although John disliked violence, he overturned their sentences, saying there wasn't enough evidence to prove they were involved in the bombing. Four of the men were eventually executed, but the others were pardoned in 1893.

John also ruled on important cases like *Dimick vs. the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad* in 1875, which said that railroads could be held responsible for accidents if the workers weren't at fault. In 1884, in *Ker vs. the People*, he decided that criminals fleeing to other countries should not be given asylum.

After retiring in 1888, John studied history and traveled. He wrote two books and helped start the McLean County Historical Society in 1892, serving as its president until his death in 1898. He enjoyed teaching law and history, and spoke regularly at Illinois Wesleyan University.

In December 1897, John became ill due to a tumor on the back of his head. He died on January 21, 1898, and was buried in a grand mausoleum in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. His wife, Charlotte, joined him there after her death in 1917.

John Scott left behind a will that used his estate to create the John M. Scott Health Care Trust. His goal was to build a hospital that would treat everyone fairly, no matter their background. However, by the time his heirs passed away in 1976, there was no longer a need for this hospital. Instead, a health center and other projects benefited from his \$6.9 million estate.