

Attorney jailing 1st in 10 years

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Tuesday's jailing of a local attorney for contempt of court was the first in Isabella County in at least 10 years.

Daniel O'Neil, administrator of the Legal Defense Association, was cited for contempt of court and jailed Tuesday evening after he continued to object to a ruling made by Judge Paul F. O'Connell during the armed robbery trial of Thomas Boynton.

A transcript of the debate leading up to the jailing indicated that Mr. O'Neil had been told by the judge to stop his objection or be cited for contempt of court. When Mr. O'Neil attempted to continue his objection, he was removed from the courtroom.

Mr. O'Neil said Wednesday that he believed he was protecting the interest of his client.

Mr. O'Neil was released from the Isabella County Jail at 6:15 a.m. Wednesday and continued to represent Mr. Boynton as the trial continued.

A source in the county building said it was the only time Judge Paul F. O'Connell has jailed an attorney for contempt of court.

Emory Freeman, an assistant executive director of the State Bar Association and a former Mt. Pleasant attorney, said citing an attorney for contempt of court is a rarity, and jailing is even more rare. Mr. Freeman, who practiced in Mt. Pleasant during the 1950s, said he could not recall any attorney being jailed while he was here.

Several local attorneys said the atmosphere in court recently has been so heated, they were surprised no one had been cited before this.

Recent court proceedings have often been plagued by attacks on personality, interruptions, and objections continued after the judge has made a ruling.

Thomas Plachta, chief assistant prosecuting attorney for Isabella County, dismissed as "nonsense" any notion that Mr. O'Neil was a victim of some underlying situation.

"This is not something that just happened or built up because tempers were running high," he said, "Dan didn't get it because of some bad luck."

Mr. O'Neil's partner, attorney Dan Pyscher, said he was surprised, both because he considers Mr. O'Neil "a pretty easy-going person" and because Mr. O'Neil was held in jail without bond for the night.

Mr. O'Neil said he did not expect to spend the night in jail, and was sure he would be released, until he was notified — by another of his legal partners — that he was being held without bond.