



The President's Page

JOSEPH H. MURPHY

A PAGE OF HISTORY

Over one hundred years ago, in 1875, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York saw the need for a statewide association of lawyers. It undertook the ground work which brought delegates from each judicial district to a meeting in Albany in 1876. There, on November 21, the New York State Bar Association was born. It was confirmed by Legislative charter the next year.

We had 356 members in 1877. In 1878 we bragged that our membership had increased by thirty-one. In 1892, when there were 11,000 lawyers in the state, 800 were members. Today we are still not representative, but our situation has improved. We have nearly 26,000 lawyers and there are almost 60,000 in the state.

For many years, the annual meetings of the Association were held in November in Albany. In 1884 the date was changed to January to coincide with the Legislative Session. At the Thirtieth Meeting in 1907 it was decided to change the meeting place to New York.

In the debate which preceded this decision, the question of cost was raised. One member said, "I don't know how it could be more costly. I paid four dollars for my room last night." Another said, "The question of hotel accommodations is serious in Albany. We have had to double up and sleep together and walk around looking for places to sleep. It is almost impossible to find a room. You either have to go over to Troy or sleep in a bathhouse." The clincher may have been, "If you go to New York, you can sit down to dinner at any time you please and not have to wait until nine o'clock to have other people fed first."

At the first meeting in New York City in 1908, Association President Joseph H. Choate remarked:

There has been a great discovery in the last forty-eight hours. Do you know what it is? Why, the New York State Bar Association has discovered itself. It has been hidden away there in a quiet corner in Albany for the last thirty-one years and this move of coming to New York for the first time, why it is a new birth . . . Whether it will ever be able to get into its original shell again and retire and return to Albany, I don't know. . .

Governor Charles Evans Hughes, speaker at the Annual Dinner that year, commented:

The New York State Bar Association used to live a simple life. It was content with the mildest of revels in Albany, and there, under the aegis of governmental authority, a few members, mainly from the up-country, met and it seemed to me their chief business was getting next to the Court of Appeals. Now, with a metropolitan president and a world outlook, they have yielded to metropolitan seductions and they will go home wiser, albeit poorer men.

Whether in Albany or New York, or, for that matter, riding the circuit to Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse or Utica for its annual meetings, as it did for a bit, the Association was in the forefront of modern developments in the law. For example, in 1877 it took the position that "females otherwise properly qualified cannot be rejected from being admitted to practice as attorneys solely on account of their sex." True to its upstate-downstate tradition, Miss Georgia Hare of Groton and Mrs. Clarice Margoles Baright of New York City became the first women members of the Association in 1917.

In 1898, the Association spearheaded a drive which resulted in the enactment of Chapter 165 of the laws for that year. The law called for lawyer registration in order to "drive from cover the many individuals who, under the name and title and prestige and privileges of our profession, are preying upon the people to the discredit of the Bar and to its harm and damage."

And if it be felt that we tend to exaggerate in extolling our Association, it is reassuring to read the following words from the secretary of the Michigan State Bar Association at our Annual Meeting in Albany in 1896:

Your Association stands easily at the head of such organizations in the character of its membership, in its services to the law, and in utility to the profession. You are known everywhere throughout the United States as the leading state bar association in the country in every respect, and the lawyers of other states look up to you as a pattern worthy of imitation.

We trust and hope that the description is still apt.



Foundation Memorials

A fitting and lasting tribute to a deceased lawyer can be made through a memorial contribution to The New York Bar Foundation. This highly appropriate and meaningful gesture on the part of friends and associates will be felt and appreciated by the family of the deceased.

Contributions may be made to The New York Bar Foundation, One Elk Street, Albany, New York 12207, stating in whose memory it is made. An officer of the Foundation will notify the family that a contribution has been made and by whom, although the amount of the contribution will not be specified.

All lawyers in whose name contributions are made will be listed in a Foundation Memorial Book maintained at the New York State Bar Center in Albany. In addition, the names of deceased members in whose memory bequests or contributions in the sum of \$1,000 or more are made will be permanently inscribed on a bronze plaque mounted in the Memorial Hall facing the handsome courtyard at the Bar Center.

Contributions to the Foundation are tax deductible.

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