

A HISTORY  
OF THE  
GRAND RAPIDS BAR ASSOCIATION  
February, 1902 to February, 1977

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A HISTORY  
OF THE  
GRAND RAPIDS BAR ASSOCIATION

A long and illustrious history of service to the profession of law, and to the community it serves, has established the Grand Rapids Bar Association as one of the foremost professional associations in Kent County. On February 25, 1977, its members assembled at the Pantlind Hotel for the association's 75th Annual Meeting, to review the past and to challenge the future, reaffirming their belief in the honor of their profession, and their accompanying responsibility to the proper administration of justice.

Their past began on January 11, 1902, when a group of local attorneys met in the Grand Rapids Law Library to consider formation of a local bar association. The meeting organized by electing Willard F. Keeney, Chairman, and Hugh E. Wilson, Secretary. A committee of five, Philip H. Travis, Wesley W. Hyde, C. M. Wilson, William P. Belden, and Chairman Keeney, was appointed to arrange the details of organization, draft articles of incorporation, and "extend an invitation to such members of the Bar of Grand Rapids as the committee shall agree are desirable to attend the meeting." The formal Articles of Incorporation were filed on February 8, 1902, with an initial membership of 106. The stated purpose of the

organization was to maintain the honor and dignity of the profession of law, to increase its usefulness in promoting the due administration of justice, and to cultivate social intercourse among its members.

The original By-Laws provided that any member of the Kent County Bar in good standing could apply to the Board of Trustees for membership. Applicants were voted upon by mail ballot and "five adverse votes cast by members of the Association were sufficient to exclude." The By-Laws also provided for expulsion of members by a vote of two-thirds of the members present, and all elections were by secret ballot. Membership dues were \$1.00 per year. In 1911, the By-Laws were amended to require a ten per cent negative vote before membership could be refused. A concerted effort was made in 1923 to enroll all Kent County attorneys in the association, and the By-Laws were amended again, making any member of the Kent County Bar in good standing eligible for membership. The only requirements provided in the current By-Laws are duly qualified membership in the State Bar of Michigan and Kent County residency.

Early meetings of the Association were primarily social. The Board of Trustees met two or three times a year to canvas ballots, act on resignations and membership applications, and to appoint committees to carry out specific programs. One of the major committee responsibilities was drafting suitable memorial resolutions honoring a deceased fellow attorney or judge and making arrangements for their presentation at a court ceremony to which family, friends and members of the Bar were invited. The Minutes of April 5, 1902, recorded a motion that "the members of the Bar

meet at the Livingston Hotel and proceed in a body to attend the funeral services of Arthur R. Rood at the Presbyterian church." In addition to attending the services, specific attorneys were delegated to accompany the funeral cortege to the cemetery.

The original offices of the Association were housed in the Grand Rapids Law Library at 1035 Michigan Trust Building. Thomas J. O'Brien served as the first President, and his officers and trustees included Loyal E. Knappen, Hugh E. Wilson, Henry T. Heald, Wesley W. Hyde, Arthur C. Edison and John E. Moore. Mr. O'Brien later served as Ambassador to Japan and Denmark under Theodore Roosevelt, and Ambassador to Italy, under William Howard Taft.

The first Annual Meeting, held on January 31, 1903, at the Pantlind Hotel, was one of the earliest social functions of the young Association. George Clapperton chaired the committee which handled the details. Other early committee assignments included the Legislative Committee, which investigated and reported on proposed legislation, and the Morals and Ethics Committee which investigated reports of misconduct by any attorney, whether or not a member of the Association. Trustees' meetings were held on Saturday afternoon at 3:00 o'clock. In a call to a meeting, President Albert Crane admonished the Board members "to be on hand at the instant, and it will take but little time." In a later letter to Trustee Kirk E. Wicks, he complained, "One difficulty in accomplishing my work has been the delay and neglect of members to meet when requested."

The years between 1903 and 1922 were involved with establishment of state and local courts. In January, 1907, a report by the Legislative Committee to the members recommended

against appointment of a third circuit judge. The membership supported the committee recommendation. By 1911, however, the ever-increasing caseload in the courts caused President Charles M. Wilson to appoint a committee to recommend candidates for a third circuit court seat. Among other action taken by the Association during this period involving the courts was a recommendation to the 60th Congress of the United States approving a proposed increase in salaries for Circuit and District Court judges.

This concern for the quality and effectiveness of the judicial system in all phases of government remained an integral part of Association activities. Very early in its history, a Committee on Local Practice and Procedure was created as a liaison between the attorneys and the courts in matters relating to court procedures. As these procedures became more complicated, and the numbers of courts increased, the involvement of the Association through its committees also increased.

In 1951, the Kent County Board of Supervisors, concerned with crowded conditions at the jail, asked the Bar Association to make a study of the local court system. Under the chairmanship of Lawrence D. Smith, the Local Practice and Procedure Committee made an extended survey of the Superior, Municipal and Police Courts. Their report resulted in the transfer of divorce cases to Circuit Court jurisdiction, and provisions for assistance in Superior Court by Circuit Court judges were made so that hearings and trials might be speeded and disposition of prisoners hastened.

In 1963, a sub-committee, which later became the Judiciary Committee, was asked to investigate a unified court system for Grand Rapids. They recommended the abolishment of the Superior Court of Grand Rapids, and the establishment of a Fourth Circuit Court Judge.

Approved by the general membership, the plan was well publicized and supported by the local news media. Although both the Kent County Board of Supervisors and the Grand Rapids City Commission voted formal approval, it became a political issue in the state legislature and died in committee. A district court act was adopted later by the state legislators, which did abolish the Superior Court and establish additional circuit court judges.

The Judiciary Committee, in 1961-1962, made a year-long study of salaries for all city and county judges. In addition to specific recommendations regarding the salary schedule, they strongly urged a sufficient salary so that judges would not have to resort to private practice to supplement a less-than-adequate income. This was one of many studies which have been made by the Association to assist county and city officials in establishing salaries for all court personnel.

The Bar Association and the Grand Rapids City Commission met headlong in 1967 over the decision of the Commissioners to abolish the position of Associate Judge of the Police Court by repeal of a section of the City Code. This apparently was a move to oust Judge Robert M. Verdier from his seat on the bench, as plans appeared to be under way to re-instate the seat after a sufficient time lapse, appointing someone else more to the liking of the Commissioners. The Bar Association, dedicated to an independent judiciary as essential to our system of government, was concerned that the action of the Commission would lead to a violation of the basic constitutional tenet of separation of powers. Although the Association does not have any express or direct powers, as far as judicial procedures are concerned, a law suit was filed,

in Judge Verdier's behalf, by three of the major law firms in Grand Rapids -- Warner, Norcross & Judd, Cholette, Perkins & Buchanan, and Varnum, Riddering, Christenson & Wierengo. The City Commission rescinded their original action, and Judge Verdier was restored to the bench where he presided as one of the local District Court judges until his death in 1972.

Other committees were added to the Association as the scope of interest and activity grew. In 1912 the members approved the formation of a standing Program Committee, authorizing it to plan an Annual Meeting and a number of other meetings for the year where "live legal questions of national, state and local interest" could be discussed. On May 6, 1912, forty five members attended the first meeting planned by this committee to hear Dean Henry M. Bates of the University of Michigan, and Judge Howard Wiest discuss the recall of judges and judicial decisions. A Committee on Unauthorized Practice was added in 1933 to investigate matters involving practice of law by non-attorneys. In their effort to help customers and clients, insurance agencies, realtors and funeral homes often infringed in areas of legal practice which occasionally resulted in the dissemination of incorrect information causing, in some instances, financial loss and additional litigation. Through the efforts of the Association, and the work of this committee, unauthorized practice of law has been reduced to a minimum in this community.

The question of misconduct and unethical practice always has been a matter of grave concern to the Association in its struggle to improve the image of the Bar to a sometimes unreceptive public. Prior to 1929, an attorney accused of misconduct was requested to appear before the Trustees to answer the charges. If, in the opinion



of the Trustees, his reply was unsatisfactory, and the nature of the matter sufficiently grave, a report was made to the Attorney General of Michigan who would institute suit for disbarment. Occasionally, the problem was one of excessive tippling, or desrespectful courtroom demeanor. An attorney in this situation was subjected to a personal talk by the President of the Association who usually advised him "to henceforth conduct himself in a more seemly and proper manner." After 1929, a Grievance Committee investigated charges of misconduct or arbitrated fee disputes. Matters not resolved locally were referred to the State Bar Grievance Board. Recent action of the Supreme Court placed all grievance matters under the jurisdiction of the Court where they are handled by the State Bar Grievance Board.

The 1920's launched the Association upon a period of activity and growth. In October, 1923, a motion was approved to organize "the younger members of the Bar for noon day luncheon meetings." A highlight of this period was the hosting of the State Bar Convention in September, 1923. Justice Sanford of the United States Supreme Court was the guest speaker for the evening dinner, and many Michigan dignitaries were present. Unfortunately, it was necessary "to canvas the membership for funds" in order to cover expenses. Soon after this, annual membership dues were raised to \$3.00. The 1920's also brought formal recognition to the Bar Association as a community organization when it was invited to membership in the Civic Round Table. A series of dinners and golf outings were instituted, and the distaff side of the Bar was formally invited to the dinners. The first joint meeting was held with the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board, and a suggestion made for

a Doctor-Lawyer meeting. The present Doctor-Lawyer and Real Estate Board liaison committees stem from this period.

In 1925, a Minimum Fee Schedule was adopted. In recommending this action to the membership, the Committee emphasized the moral obligation of the legal profession to aid in making justice available to everyone, but placed equal emphasis on the right of the attorney "to maintain an office, render competent service to his clients, and maintain his family." The Schedule was updated in 1952, and again, in 1967. After several consumer suits were filed, and accusations of "price fixing" were made, the State Bar of Michigan rescinded any suggested minimum fee schedules. The Grand Rapids Bar Association followed suit and passed the following resolution: <sup>date (?)</sup>

"Be it resolved that the Grand Rapids Bar Association hereby withdraw its acceptance of or its recommendation of any minimum fee schedule."

In response to a request from the Social Welfare Association, the Bar became involved in selecting some form of a Legal Aid program for the community. An earlier volunteer committee had worked with the Welfare Association, providing legal assistance without compensation when needed. A proposed plan to establish a Legal Aid Bureau "under the continuous friendly supervision of a committee of the Grand Rapids Bar Association, to aid and assist the employed attorney of the agency" was presented in the early part of 1921. The Association in 1924, assisted veterans of "the world war" in securing their bonuses. In later years they provided judges with a listing of attorneys willing to serve as court-appointed counsel. Appointing attorneys to defend the indigent in criminal matters is still a practice of the courts. But, by the mid-1950's, concern was being expressed by attorneys and judges alike, as it became

apparent that this method would have to be supplemented. The Association began to seek other means of handling indigent clients, among them a suggested plan for a Private Defender System. Historically, appointment of counsel in federal district courts had been on an ad hoc basis, without compensation, until the implementation of a new Criminal Justice Act in 1965. In the county courts, counsel was appointed only when requested, and only for felonies, with the average fee to the attorney, \$75.00. In some instances, the court-appointed attorney had little or no experience in criminal law. Often, he was involved in extensive litigation with his private practice, and he was forced to neglect either his own clients or the defendant he was appointed to represent. The Civil Riots of 1967 gave an added impetus to the establishment of an additional program as the procedures in some courts were virtually brought to a standstill by the overwhelming numbers of indigent defendants who needed appointed counsel. Although Grand Rapids escaped the massive arrests, it was apparent that "it could happen here." On November 1, 1967, WOOD-TV prematurely announced that Kent County would have a Private Defender System by the end of that year. Upon receiving congratulations from a somewhat-puzzled Bar President, the Chairman of the Private Defender Committee, George R. Cook, announced that he was more surprised than happy at the news. It was 1971 before the proposal became reality, with the establishment of the Office of Private Defender, the first year of its operation subsidized through contributions from the members of the Bar Association and funds from the Office of Economic Management. This program, as it becomes self-supporting, is expected not only to save the taxpayers money, but "will not diminish the readiness and willingness of the Bar

generally to render the duty which it has to the public to aid in the proper administration of justice."

In the many annual elections, only one resulted in a tie vote for president. In 1929, Roger I. Wykes and John Dunham each received fifty eight votes. When faced with the ballot count, the Trustees declared no contest as to office of president and waived further action until the new Board took office. When a second ballot was issued and counted, Mr. Wykes was elected. However, John Dunham was elected the following year and served two terms, one of only three men to serve a second term as president. Mark Norris was elected in 1919, and in 1920, and Willard F. Keeney, not only served in 1917 and 1918, but was elected again in 1933 to serve an unprecedented third term.

The Association ordered its own stationery in 1929, and in 1930, the 184 members voted to establish weekly luncheon meetings, to be held at the Elks Temple Cafeteria. Except for a few brief intervals, these luncheon meetings have been held on a weekly basis since their inception, making the Grand Rapids Bar one of the few associations in the country to meet each week.

As we entered the period of the "Great Depression," a letter from Mayor George W. Welsh, dated October 24, 1930, asked the Bar Association to assist in "bringing prosperity back to Michigan." With the closing of the banks in 1932, \$299.00 of the Association funds were impounded in the Grand Rapids National Bank. When it reopened, the Treasurer accepted fifty per cent of the impounded balance. To effect a savings of public money, the Association recommended elimination of printed court records, substituting the stenographer's typed manuscript. Two resolutions involved the jury system -- one suggested the use of six member juries whenever

possible; the second, "in view of the emergencies existing and the absolute necessity for conservation of county and city resources, recommended the elimination of jury trials whenever the attorney felt the interests of his client would not suffer."

In the midst of the depression, the Grand Rapids Bar Association persuaded the American Bar Association to hold its national convention in Grand Rapids. Extolling the virtues of his home town, John Dunham, local attorney, referred to Grand Rapids as the "Boston of the Midwest." Concern was expressed by some delegates that Grand Rapids, "Being an inland city will be very hot in August." However, the convention staging was most successful, and a picnic held at Lakewood Farms for the delegates and their families proved a great success. A charge of twenty five cents per person, paid by the host Association, entitled the participants to miniature golf, tours of the botanical gardens and zoo, access to the beach, and use of the house for a ladies' bridge party.

The meeting topics over the years reflected the matters of concern to the Association and the community. In 1922, Dean Henry M. Bates of The University of Michigan discussed the "Tendency of the Federal Government to Usurp Functions of Local Government." Senatorial investigation of munitions makers interested the members in 1935, but, by 1938, they received, with great concern, a report on the occupation of Shanghai by the Japanese. Early in 1941, President Fred N. Searl formed a Committee of Military Service, and dues of members in the Armed Forces and government service were waived. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the Association savings were invested in defense bonds, and a War and Patriotic Committee was appointed. In 1942, gasoline rationing forced the

members to share rides to meetings, as Fred Searl and Fred Wetmore were selected to act as a clearing house for transportation arrangements. In 1943 and 1944, Christmas greetings were mailed to the fifty members who were serving in the Armed Forces or with the Government agencies. With their wish for "a speedy victory of our country and your safe return," was included a subscription to Readers Digest. Wartime food rationing forced the close of the Elks Temple Cafeteria in 1943, and luncheon meetings moved to the Y.M.C.A. The returning veterans were welcomed home, at the end of the war, with a party that provided "plenty of free cocktails, a roast beef dinner, and speechless entertainment."

The end of the war was followed by another period of dynamic growth and activity. In a letter to members of the Association, President Donald Slawson, in November, 1948, reminded them of the need for expanded office facilities and expanded use of the law library by all members. He also reminded them of the search for some means "to assure legal service to those not entitled to Legal Aid, but who forgo necessary representation through fear of exorbitant charges." The Grand Rapids Law Library, established in 1887 as a non-profit, stockholding corporation, controlled the use of its facilities. Chief stockholder, at this time, was the Michigan Trust Company. Stockholders were accorded all library privileges, including keys and borrowing of books. Attorneys who did not hold stock paid annual dues for membership, but were not accorded full privileges and had no voting power. With its income limited, by virtue of its corporate structure, there were no funds to maintain the present volumes, nor add additional services and texts. "Whereas the Library was desirous of increasing its membership among members

of the Bar, and the Bar was desirous of sharing the quarters and personnel of the library," an agreement was effected in 1948 between the two corporations. By its terms, the Agreement provided full use of the library by all members in good standing of the Grand Rapids Bar Association. The Library Corporation also furnished office space sufficient to accommodate "one person who shall be Executive Secretary and Librarian." The Trustees allotted \$80.00 to purchase furniture and agreed to maintain the present law books and operation of the library at a yearly cost not to exceed \$3,700.00. By unwritten agreement for many years, 5/13 of the salary of the Executive Secretary and Librarian was paid by the Library Corporation, and 8/13, by the Bar Association. The formal agreement was renewed annually, at a joint meeting of the two Boards, until the dissolution of the Library Corporation in 1967.

The consolidation of the executive offices and library permitted the Association to realize the fruition of another dream -- the establishment of a referral service. "Established as an acceptance of social responsibility by the Bar," Lawyers Reference Service has proved to be an outstanding success. The original concept, as drawn up in 1949, has been little changed. The client who comes to the office is referred directly to an attorney experienced in a particular area of law. The fee for a half-hour consultation with the attorney is now \$10.00, instead of the original \$5.00, and is collected at the Association office rather than by the attorney. The original log of clients was written in long hand, with detailed accounts of each client and his problem. Today, a typed log merely records the date, name of the client, type of case, and the attorney to whom the referral is made. This program was the

first of its kind established in Michigan and has served as a model program throughout the United States. In an interview granted to the Michigan Times, on December 9, 1949, President Carl H. Smith of the State Bar of Michigan, indicated that the Lawyers Reference Service plan, tried experimentally in Grand Rapids, had encouraged state-wide development of the idea.

Various steps were taken to introduce this new service to the public. Notices were posted in the courts and other agency offices. Aware that more efficient means must be devised to reach those people in need of the service, other methods were considered. In 1951, the Public Relations Committee, in cooperation with WOOD-TV, as a public service feature, instituted a series of one-half hour shows, called, "Before the Bar." Participating members of the Bar debated current controversial issues, and spot announcements publicized the Lawyers Reference Service. As a result, the number of clients in 1951 were double the number in 1950. Also, in connection with this program, an informative pamphlet, "Facts You Should Know About Legal Problems," was distributed to program viewers who requested it.

Concern for the quality and character of the local judiciary led, in 1951, to the study of a Bar Primary for evaluating candidates for judicial office. As early as 1936, a move to establish a primary for prosecuting attorneys and judges had been tabled by the Trustees. Revived occasionally, the idea often seemed to be a dead issue, but never remained completely buried. It was 1951 before a preliminary study was authorized by the Trustees, and later that year, a committee, chaired by Gordon B. Wheeler, made a long and detailed study of a Bar Primary plan. Appraising the work of this committee, the Minutes read that "perhaps no other project in the





history of the Bar Association has been so diligently or expertly handled." The resulting Bar Primary Plan was approved by the membership on May 20, 1952. Patterned after similar programs in Cleveland and Chicago, adapted to the needs of this community, the Bar Primary was established to "promote the importance of electing honest and able judges, to help voters select such persons, and to encourage qualified candidates for judicial office." By secret ballot, the attorneys vote on the qualifications of judicial candidates, the results are tabulated by an accounting firm, and the ratings released to the public through various news media. The Bar Primary also includes a Code of Fair Campaign Practice which limits campaigning by judicial candidates. Although concerned that there is not one hundred per cent participation by the attorneys, the newspapers have indicated that the plan is of real value to the voting public. The original plan was amended in 1966 to provide a more efficient evaluation of the candidates, rating them as Qualified, Very Qualified, Highly Qualified, and Outstanding. However, the concept generated strong feeling among the membership, as well as the public, a great deal of opposition, and the Bar Primary has not been used in any election since 1968.

The Grand Rapids Urban Renewal program was well underway by 1963, and Old Kent Bank and Trust Company was constructing its new quarters at One Vandenberg Center. Rumors had reached Association officers that the Trust Company, who was now major stockholder in the Library Corporation, planned to move the library from the Michigan Trust Building to the new structure then under construction. The lease with Michigan Trust Building was due to expire, and having the library in their new office building would be very advantageous to

Old Kent Bank and Trust in leasing space. The Bar Association, desiring that control of the library should be returned to the hands of the attorneys, approached the Bank officials regarding an agreement which would return the stock holdings to the Bar Association in return for a long-term lease in Vandenberg Center. By this time, the Bar Association had assumed all financial obligations of the library, and the library trustees left all negotiations in the hands of the Bar Trustees. The final agreement, consummated June, 1966, transferred the 211 shares of stock to the Bar Association, and a fifteen year lease was executed for space on the tenth floor to house the library. Old Kent Bank and Trust retained the option to repurchase the stock should the Association terminate the lease within the fifteen year period.

The moving of the library and executive offices of the Association was a major undertaking, involving long-range plans for growth and expansion. New shelving, additional furniture for the library and offices, and plans for a large conference room necessitated an increase in dues. An assessment of \$60.00 per member, to be paid over a four year period, financed the move, the furnishings and all new equipment. The Young Lawyers Section volunteered to unpack and shelve the 18,000 volumes in their new location, and by the end of 1965, the Lawyers Reference Service, Law Library and Executive Offices were established at 1010 Old Kent Building. The membership was 395.

During 1965 and 1966, the Association attempted to acquire the balance of library stock held by members and their families. By the time they had acquired seventy five per cent of the stock, steps were being taken to dissolve the original Law Library Corporation,

merging it into the Association. The dissolution was effected in 1967, and the Law Library is now owned by the Grand Rapids Bar Association. A Library Committee selects new acquisitions, establishes rules governing the use of the library, and submits an annual budget to the Board of Trustees. The Law Library is supported wholly by dues from Association members, and its use is limited to members and their research assistants, clerks and secretaries. The Executive Secretary of the Association serves as Law Librarian.

The younger members of the Bar have played a vital role in Association activities, often serving as an impetus to the older members in their search for newer and more constructive programming. Originally called the "Young Turks," then the Junior Bar, they were formally organized in September, 1966, as the Young Lawyers Section of the Grand Rapids Bar Association. Their present organizational form includes an Executive Committee which meets monthly. The chairman of this Committee is a member ex officio of the Trustees as liaison between the two groups. While still referred to as the Junior Bar, they were awarded honorable mention for the Award of Merit by the State Bar in 1949 and 1950. Among their activities is a yearly reception for new attorneys in the community, an annual "Smoker," and the planning responsibility for two luncheon programs. These two programs rank among the most popular meetings, as neither judiciary nor counsel escape the barbed wit of these expert perpetrators of legalized satire. On the serious side, they maintain a Speakers' Bureau, furnishing to the community a list of attorneys who will speak on a variety of subjects. Of major importance are the programs which the Young Lawyers plan and promote

each year as part of the national Law Day celebration. Attorneys will be assigned to high school civics and government classes to discuss law in a number of areas relating to the present day student. A feature of the Law Day luncheon meeting is the presentation of the Liberty Bell Award to a member of the community for outstanding service resulting in the strengthening of the American system of freedom under law. The recipients of this award have included Mrs. Vera Armitage, Arnold Pigorsh, Dr. Edward A. Jones, George LeBour, Joan L. Wykes, John A. Collins, William A. Johnson, William J. Rob, Dr. Walter Bergman, Chester A. Laskowski, Frederick G. Meyer, Hon. Lyman S. Parks, Dr. C. Mash Vasu, Brigadier Rollin G. Clark, Dorothy Judd, Father Patrick Cawley, and posthumously to Lt. Commander Roger Chaffee, and Sgt. Stanley Van Tuinen. The Young Lawyers Section sponsors, also, an Explorer Scouting program, providing leadership for troops composed of students interested in the study of law. Another function is the production and filming of a mock trial which then is available to junior and high school classes.

It is not the purpose within this paper to list and appraise all of the attorneys who have peopled the historical past of the Grand Rapids Bar Association. But there have appeared in its annals some who have garnered public recognition and office in other areas, some who have played important roles in the State Bar and judiciary, and some interesting local dynasties of lawyers.

Julius A. Amberg served as Assistant to the Secretary of War in both World War I and World War II, receiving the Medal of Merit from President Harry Truman for his contribution to the war effort. Laurent K. Varnum, John W. Cummiskey, Stuart Knappen,

and Stephen C. Bransdorfer are among those who have served as State Bar President. The current President of the State Bar is William G. Reamon. William Alden Smith served as Senator from Michigan from 1907 through 1919, and Alfred K. Ewing ran for the House of Representatives on the Bull Moose ticket. Monseignour Thomas O. Martin was the first Catholic priest admitted to practice in Michigan, and Raymond Starr, who became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Michigan, was the brother of an attorney, and the father of John Starr, who also served as State Bar President. This is but one of several dynasties found on the membership rolls of the Bar Association. The first Norris to practice here was Lyman D. Norris, who had represented the Emerson family in the Dred Scott case. His son, Mark, served as President of the local Association. The Verdiers have practiced law in Grand Rapids since the admission of Leonard D. in 1901. Martin Verdier was admitted in 1935, and Leonard D., Sr., served as Circuit Judge and is now engaged in private practice. Robert was District Court Judge.

The Dilleys have occupied a prominent position in the pages of law in Grand Rapids. According to Abner Dilley, patriarch of the family and father of three attorneys, he frequently discussed his cases at the dinner table with his three growing sons, whose advice, he adds, he occasionally heeded. When Donald Dilley was admitted to practice in 1951, a newspaper reported that the "Dilleys Never Dallied at Dinner." Abner Dilley died in 1971, and Robert, Albert, and Donald have continued the firm. In 1976, Frederick Dilley, son of Albert, became associated with the family practice. Currently, there are several attorneys serving their government on the national or state scene.

Notable among the membership of the Grand Rapids Bar

Association is, of course, former President Gerald R. Ford who has retained his membership status through the years. Mr. John B. Martin has been a member of the President's Committee on Aging for many years. During Mr. Ford's term of office, Philip Buchen and L. William Seidman occupied important government positions. Richard F. Vander-Veen recently served a term as Representative, unseated in the last election by another local attorney, Harold Sawyer. Congressman Sawyer has two sons practicing law in Grand Rapids, Stephen with a local law firm, and Donald, recently elected Prosecuting Attorney for Kent County.

*Grand  
Kearney  
Sawyer*

For many years, there were only <sup>FOUR</sup> ~~five~~ women attorneys in the Association -- Jean McKee, Rosemary Scott, Mary Jane Morris, and Margaret Cook. Margaret Cook was sponsored by her husband, George, now a circuit court judge, at her admission, the only time in the history of the local ceremonies that a husband sponsored his wife for admittance to practice law. Jean McKee has been active in local politics, as has been Mary Jane Morris. Presently there are 12 women in the Grand Rapids Bar Association.

In 1969, one admission ceremony brought to the practice of law in Grand Rapids the sons of four Judges -- Dirk C. Hoffius, Michael Smolenski, Claude VanderPloeg, and Thomas W. Waalkes.

The Grand Rapids Bar Association is a more sophisticated and complex organization than its counterpart of 1902. 721 members constitute its four classes of membership. There are 22 Honorary members, 20 Inactive, 6 Associate, and 674 Active members. There are 17 committees, and over 2,600 clients were referred to attorneys in 1976 through Lawyer Referral Service. The library houses 25,000 volumes, and concern for space has led to the formation of a committee to investigate and recommend solutions to this problem, as well as

the financing thereof. But the committee assignments and programs of the Bar Association still reflect their concern for the dignity of their profession and the due administration of justice. Although the size of the Association make "social intercourse" more difficult, and there is occasional disagreement on policy, the personal relationship among members of the Bar Association is best demonstrated by a bequest to the Association from Fred C. Wetmore, a former attorney, whose will read:

"I give and bequeath to the Grand Rapids Bar the sum of \$1,000.00, just to show that I appreciate and have not forgotten the honors bestowed and the friendship enjoyed with the lawyers of Grand Rapids."

The year Calkins came here he built an office at the northeast corner of the intersection of Crescent Street and Bond Avenue. The preservation of that little office, described as "the perfection of Greek design", was a matter of concern 130 years later.

Some discipline came with the establishment in 1878 of the Kent County Bar Association to maintain the honor and dignity of the profession, to promote due administration of justice, and to establish a library. Its first president was D. Darwin Hughes. John W. Champlin, Lyman D. Norris, and Edwin F. Uhl followed. The establishment of the Grand Rapids Law Library was effected in 1886, and by 1890 there were 42 members and the library contained more than 4,000 volumes -- a library the "most complete" of any in the state, except the Michigan Supreme Court and Detroit libraries.

Better stature and effectiveness came with the organization of the Grand Rapids Bar Association in 1902 with 106 incorporators. Thomas J. O'Brien was named president and Loyal E. Knappen vice president.



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(Deceased)

Vander Ploeg, Claude (1965- ) b. Grand Rapids, 1915;  
Calvin College and U. of M. Law School, 1946; overseas duty as  
captain in the Army World War II; assistant Kent prosecutor,  
assistant city attorney and city attorney; elected Superior  
Court judge, 1959, serving until 1965 when he took the fourth  
circuit bench to which he was elected; as Superior Judge; Vander-  
Ploeg heard the cases rising out of urban renewal of the 1960's.