



# LSBA at 75: Perspectives on the Practice

By Arthur R. (Art) Carmody, Jr.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), of which you and I are proud members. Originally founded as a voluntary organization, the LSBA was converted to a mandatory (or integrated) bar under the rulemaking power of the Louisiana Supreme Court in March 1941. Although the formation of the LSBA predates my legal career, at least by a few years, I am proud to share some of my recollections of the legal practice in the earlier years of the organization.

The first regular job I ever held was in the summer of 1948 when I started as an “office boy” (a politically incorrect term today) at the Wilkinson firm (Wilkinson, Lewis & Wilkinson, at the time), which was then housed in the Slattery Building across Marshall Street from the Caddo Parish Courthouse. My salary was \$20 a week, thanks to the senior partner, and my desk, such as it was, was in the library by a window, always open in the summer, overlooking a nearby building whose owner kept a large colony of roosters and hens on the roof! The cackling or crowing of the brood was one of my few sources of diversion.

My duties were to be there from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week, and until noon on Saturday. At that time, all the lawyers in Shreveport wore matching conservative suits, white shirts and ties to work. There were no sports shirts or blue blazers. And there were no exceptions. Even in the hottest weather, I wore a shirt and tie to work, as it seemed appropriate; nobody ever had to tell me. There were no other “runners” in town at the time; my duties included filing documents in state and federal courts, proofreading property descriptions, and going to the Western Union office, which is no longer a factor in

the practice of law. Also, I had to maintain the firm’s large library, which acquainted me with West Publishing, CCH, Corbin and Wigmore. These duties reinforced my decision to attend law school and helped me make the journey a pleasant one.

I began my legal career on Sept. 1, 1952, at the Wilkinson firm. One of the partners, John Madison, Sr., was my best mentor, always full of wisdom expressed in the short, simple language he had learned at the U.S. Naval Academy. One of his standard sayings was that any Louisiana law school graduate should be able to (1) examine a title, (2) do a succession, and (3) try a simple case. He also encouraged the new lawyers, especially those who had an office practice, to visit city court at least once a year to see what the real world was like! John died in 1961, but his guidance and wisdom have never left me. I sincerely hope that the LSBA’s “Transition Into Practice” mentoring program will confer the same benefits on new law school graduates as I received from John Madison, Sr.

I miss the camaraderie and rapport among the Shreveport Bar of the past mid-century. We were all clustered within a tight area of downtown, and you soon got to know most of the lawyers by name and reputation. You soon learned that the great majority were quality individuals and true to their word. By the same token, you learned there were one or two you should not turn your back on, and always “get it in writing.”

There were several ways that respect, good will and collegiality were expressed within the Bar. One would be the Wednesday morning motion hour, another the 10:30 a.m. daily informal “soiree” at the coffee shop of the Washington-Youree Hotel, and the good times related to the Lawyers Softball Team, which played in a local fast-pitch league. Sadly, they no

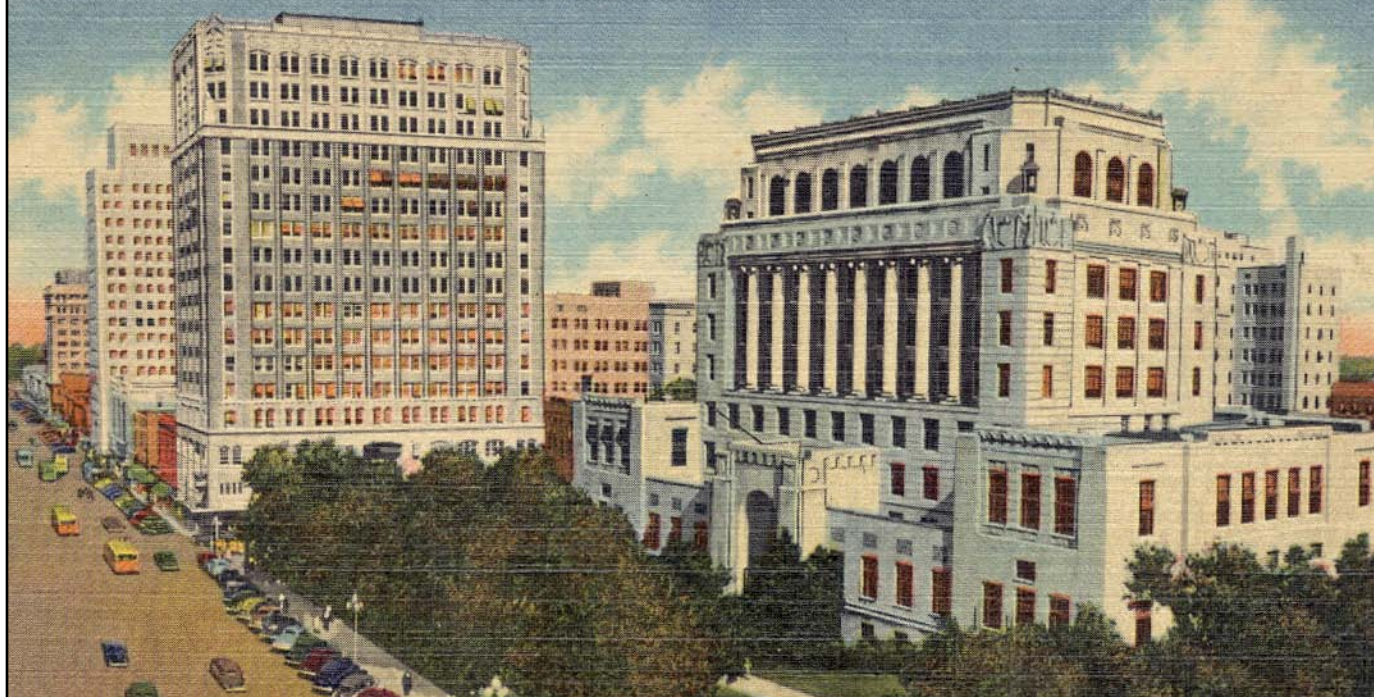
longer exist.

As to “motion hour,” it is hard to understand today how a routine, rather formal court proceeding could generate a good feeling about life and law, but somehow it did and was looked forward to. The tradition was long established. It started promptly at 10 a.m. each and every Wednesday in the “big courtroom” on the third floor of the Caddo Parish Courthouse. The room filled quickly with lawyers sitting on the courtroom benches, along the walls and inside the jury box. The scene was presided over by the popular chief deputy clerk, Eddie Goetz, a lawyer who did not practice, but, all in all, was highly knowledgeable and cooperative with all.

At 10 a.m., Mr. Goetz called the court to order, all rose, and the district judges, with black robes flowing, somberly marched in and seated themselves behind the high bench. The presiding judge politely but formally welcomed the audience and ordered the clerk to sound the docket. The first order of business was the reading of opinions. Occasionally, this was a long and dry exercise, especially when the opinions were lengthy and dull, but in the main they were short and of interest. Then Mr. Goetz called the cases tendered for trial in the following week, covering all the judges. Generally, there were no exceptions to a setting, but, when there was, the objector had to rise, approach the bench, state the reasons for the objection and hope for the best. Sometimes the reasons were petty or personal and caused embarrassment to the objectors and brought on a twitter in the audience. The judges normally ruled on the objections on the spot, occasionally ordering the parties back at 2 p.m. for a decision.

Next came the reading of preliminary defaults. Lawyers with busy trial dockets needed to be present to ensure there were

View of Caddo Parish Court House Square on Texas Street, Looking East  
Shreveport, La.



This 1940s-era postcard of the view looking east down Texas Street depicts the Caddo Parish Courthouse and the Slattery Building. Just south of the Slattery Building was a 10-story office on which the owner, Mr. Ricou, kept his rooftop rookery.

no unexpected surprises! Then came the confirmation of defaults. Usually these were debt collection cases, divorces and separations (the latter also no longer a feature of the legal practice), foreclosures and the like. Witness testimony was normally required to prove it up. In this way, many young lawyers got their first experience in questioning witnesses in a crowded courtroom before a knowing audience. Sometimes the answers were not as expected, and occasionally young lawyers fumbled or drew a blank and had to sit down embarrassed, garnering sympathy and suggestions from the audience. Most of the audience keenly remembered when it had happened to them.

There being no further business, Mr. Goetz adjourned court *sine die*. One usually left with a colleague for a coffee break and a conversation over what had occurred.

The Washington-Youree coffee shop was a rougher and less formal experience but always entertaining. The hotel, built in 1922, was a busy, vibrant, popular place located on Edwards Street at the present location of Louisiana Tower (Capital One Bank). It contained four restaurants (one

being the coffee shop), a 24-hour grill, gift shops, two bars, a deluxe supper club called the Zephyr Room, and the original offices and studio of KSLA-TV Channel 12. The coffee shop was seldom empty.

By the 1950s, a tradition had been established by a group of lawyers who were friends, or would soon become friends, to meet in the coffee shop around 10:30 a.m. for coffee and conversation or, more often, conversation and coffee. I have vivid and treasured recollections of the participants, especially Marlin Risinger of the Blanchard Firm, who was the champion of the liberal view on all subjects, and Horace Holder of the Tucker Firm, who was ready and able to come out swinging in support of all conservative causes. Many other lawyers joined in, either to support one side or the other, or just because it was so interesting. Strangely, these verbal free-for-alls did not diminish friendships but seemed to make them grow and flourish.

And then, the Lawyers Softball Team. Softball was incredibly popular in Shreveport in mid-century. Some of the enthusiasm can be garnered from the opinion of *Roos v. Metropolitan Cas. Ins. Co.*, 195

So. 655 (La. App. 2 Cir. 1938), in which an outfielder made a Willie Mays-quality catch but, unfortunately, collided with an automobile parked on the edge of the field! One judge had to recuse himself, as he was a member of the team, but justice was served.

The lawyers' fast-pitch softball team was also a morale and friendship builder. In the 1950s, our team played in the Industrial League along with teams from United Gas, Texas Eastern, SWEPCO, the young doctors from Confederate Memorial Hospital and other A-class teams. It soon became obvious there were not enough lawyers to play competitively in this league! A solution was proposed to allow us to include law enforcement personnel on the team. This was readily agreed to, and the improvement was immediate — almost like acquiring Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in their prime. One police captain was a former member of the Philadelphia A's (before the team's 1954 move to Kansas City), and several officers and deputies had done stints in the Texas League. At the end of each season, one of the lawyers, Leroy Smallenberger (later a bankruptcy judge for the Western





The Washington-Youree Hotel housed a coffee shop which was the unofficial meeting place for Shreveport lawyers in the 1940s and 1950s.

District of Louisiana), hosted a barbecue for the team at his home on Cross Lake. This was always an enjoyable occasion.

I said I missed the camaraderie and rapport that used to exist between lawyers. However, as I look back at the life and times of lawyers today, my perception is that these feelings are now improving to a high degree. We can take pride in the way we practice our profession. I think of the high accomplishments of the Inns of Court movement, and, in particular, Shreveport's Harry V. Booth/Henry W. Politz Inn of Court, which has fostered and fortified ethics, knowledge, mentoring and friendship, much in the way the Wednesday motion hour, the 10:30 coffee "soiree" at the Washington-Youree and the softball team used to.

I also have to mention, with pride, our local bar's participation in Carnival, with the Shreveport Bar Association's own Krewe of Justinian. This has proved to be a great opportunity for our lawyers to cooperate and interact outside the litigation setting and has raised our profile with much of the public. In 2015, the krewe made a contribution of \$25,000 to the Shreveport Bar Foundation, with proceeds used to provide free civil legal services through the Pro Bono Project, mobile clinics at local homeless shelters, Ask-A-Lawyer clinics and other worthwhile projects. Being a part of Carnival has added a touch of color, glitz and glitter, but it is so much

more than just that.

Of course, other beneficial changes have come to the practice of law. It would not be accurate to say that women were always precluded from the practice; most law schools, including LSU and Tulane, were open to women from the inception, around the turn of the 20th century. But it would certainly be true to say that their attendance was not encouraged, as evidenced by the fact that zero, or an occasional one or two, was the norm for the entering and graduating classes before World War II. But the G.I. Bill, the freedom of movement which resulted during or after the war, the employment of women in jobs which had not been open to them in the past, all with good results, opened the doors for women born after, say, 1950. This change, slow at first, has been open and encouraging.

The growth from the inexorable zero to the normal two or three has been eclipsed by the dramatic, exponential growth in the number and quality of women in our practice. At present, slightly over one-third of the members of the Shreveport Bar Association are women, numbers that are probably mirrored elsewhere in the state. Even more significant is the fact that almost without exception over one-half of the women have been admitted since 1980 and the number of women in graduating classes of all four state law schools exceeds the number of male graduates.

The participation of African-Americans

in the legal profession was slow at first, although we have documented that the first in Shreveport was an able gentleman named Charles Roberson, who opened his office in 1914 and continued on until his death in 1932. By the 1960s, others began to break down the walls of prejudice. I definitely feel that the profession, and society at large, have benefited from the infusion of African-American lawyers. The profession is a much more dynamic and rewarding place than ever before.

Finally, I would mention the enormous everyday mechanical changes to the practice of law. It may be shocking to younger practitioners to think that, in the 1950s, a Xerox machine seemed somewhat extravagant, and, not long after that, fax machines were almost miraculous! Computers and printers have enormously changed the way we practice, not to mention Westlaw and its competitors, and the dizzying array of phones, tablets, pads and other devices. It has been a long way from my daily trips to the Western Union office back in 1948, but the journey has been worth the ride.

Congratulations, LSBA, on its first 75 years. It has been my honor to be part of this organization for so much of its life. Embrace the change and the tradition, and we will have a bright future ahead.

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