



# Society Update

The Official Publication of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society

Fall 2023

## Life After the Court: Bridget Mary McCormack

by *Carrie Sharlow*

A little over a year ago, on September 12, 2022, Zach Gorchow, Publisher and Editor of the *Gongwer News*, tweeted that “If I woke up tomorrow with my head sewn into the carpet, I wouldn’t be more surprised than I am right now.”<sup>1</sup> That was the day Chief Justice Bridget McCormack announced her retirement from the Michigan Supreme Court.

In 2022, McCormack was entering her tenth year as a member of the Court, and her fourth as chief justice. She’d been an attorney for over thirty years and a professor at the University of Michigan Law School for nearly a quarter of a century. While there, she served as the Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs, and “taught in the Michigan Clinical Law Program, a domestic violence clinic, and a pediatric advocacy clinic,”<sup>2</sup> and in between classes, she co-founded the Michigan Innocence Clinic – which has since “won the release of 36 men and women who had been wrongfully convicted of crimes” and imprisoned<sup>3</sup> – and wrote innumerable articles published in legal journals across the country. All this (and more) was in addition to raising four children with her husband, Steven Croley.

And she was still only fifty-six.

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1 Zach Gorchow Twitter, September 12, 2022 <<https://twitter.com/ZachGorchow/status/1569366713577119744?ext=HHwWgICx0cGtwccrAAAA>> (accessed May 23, 2023).

2 University of Michigan: Faculty and Scholarship: Bridget Mary McCormack <<https://michigan.law.umich.edu/faculty-and-scholarship/our-faculty/bridget-mary-mccormack>> (accessed May 23, 2023).

3 University of Michigan: Experiential Learning: Clinics: Michigan Innocence Clinic <<https://michigan.law.umich.edu/academics/experiential-learning/clinics/michigan-innocence-clinic-0>> (accessed May 23, 2023).



Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack at the 2019 Historical Society Annual Luncheon.

Having done as much in thirty years as many people take a lifetime to do, it would make sense that McCormack retired for some much-earned relaxation.

She did not. It was simply time to do something else and pass the baton.

The Society had the opportunity to speak with the former chief justice on May 9, and one thing is clear: it is incredibly difficult to summarize her time on the Court. She was elected on November 6, 2012, along with Brian K. Zahra and Stephen J. Markman; now, only Justice Zahra remains on the Court. She sat under three chief justices: Robert P. Young, Jr., Stephen J. Markman, and Elizabeth T. Clement. During that time, the Court issued an estimated 263 authored opinions. Around sixty of those were while McCormack was chief justice and about half of those were unanimous.

And of all the cases and opinions and briefs, this is what she has the greatest pride in: those unanimous opinions. The times where seven justices – from different backgrounds and with different experiences – spoke with one voice to provide clarity for the state. It seems both idealistic and obvious, but when the Court can speak with one voice and work together without conflict, it’s doing a great service to the people it serves.

While she was on the Court, McCormack not only worked to increase the public’s confidence in a unified Court, but she also worked to make a difference “on how people experience their justice system within their local communities,” across eighty-three separate counties, many times without advocates.<sup>4</sup> And she’s proud of that as well: what the court system as a whole accomplished “on the administrative agenda, working together with the talented team of SCAO.”<sup>5</sup> Through that administrative work, the Court was able to make the biggest difference to the most people.

Of course, through each stage of her career, McCormack made it an important part of her personal mission “to elevate and support newer lawyers and judges who would bring diversity to the profession.”<sup>6</sup> This is rooted in her belief that “the more our courts reflect the public we serve, the greater the public’s confidence will be in the decisions we make.”<sup>7</sup> It seems appropriate that McCormack’s vacant seat was filled by Justice Kyra Harris Bolden, Michigan’s first African-American woman justice.

Surprise and shock aside – and without a doubt, the legal community was in September 2022 – McCormack recognized it was the right time to depart – it is important to make sure you don’t overstay in any position – and “step aside at a time when you give new leaders an opportunity to lead.”<sup>8</sup>

But she didn’t retire.

She’s CEO of the American Arbitration Association, which really just seems like a continuation of her work on the Court: “fair, effective, efficient and economical

methods of dispute resolution through education, technology, and solutions-oriented service.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps in another decade or two – having no doubt made a huge contribution at the American Arbitration Association, where people will surely look back on her leadership and be grateful for it – McCormack may take her well-earned retirement, do some hiking, read some non-law-related books, relax...but I doubt it: it isn’t the McCormack way.

After all, when her father, William J. McCormack, retired from *his* seven-day-a-week job, he spent the next two decades working as a volunteer in hospice care. And one of the many lessons Bill McCormack taught his three children before he passed away in August 2022 at age eighty-three was that “nothing is more important than leaving your world better than you found it.”<sup>10</sup> And so off the Court, as she had on the Court, McCormack will continue to do just that.

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9 American Arbitration Association: Mission, Vision, and Values <<https://www.adr.org/mission-vision-and-values>> (accessed May 23, 2023).

10 Bridget Mary McCormack Twitter, August 17, 2022 <[https://twitter.com/BridgetMaryMc/status/1560013345910030336?context=HHwWgICw\\_e33o6YrAAAA](https://twitter.com/BridgetMaryMc/status/1560013345910030336?context=HHwWgICw_e33o6YrAAAA)> (accessed May 23, 2023).



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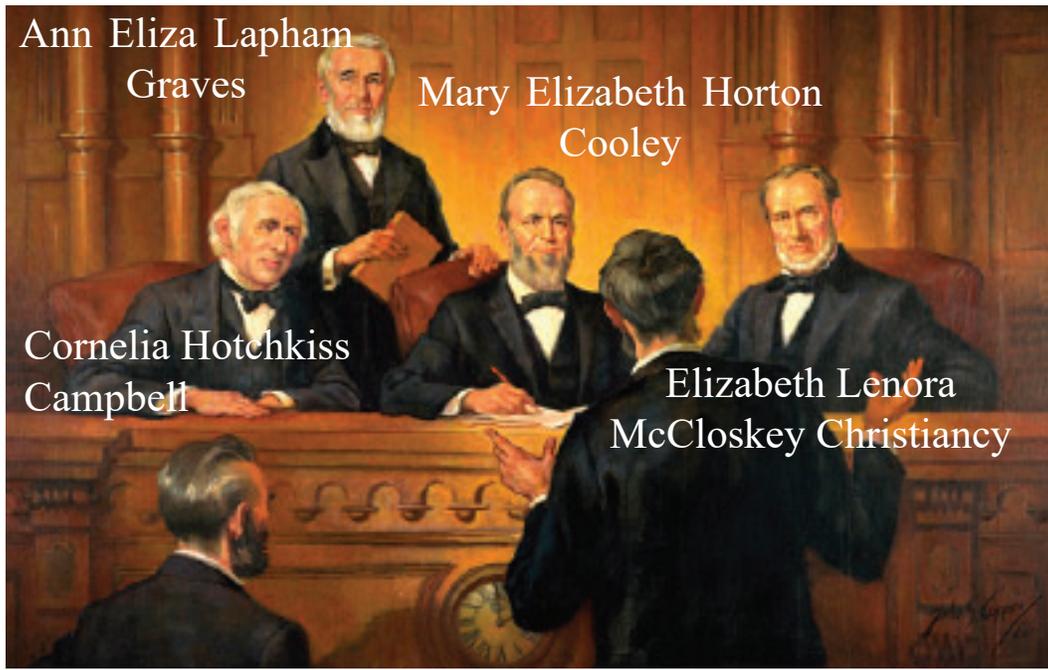
4 May 9, 2023 Conversation with Bridget Mary McCormack.

5 *Id.*

6 *Id.*

7 *Id.*

8 *Id.*



## The Wives of the Big Four

by Carrie Sharlow

If you are a student of Michigan Supreme Court history, chances are good that you recognize the four gentlemen in the portrait above. If not, it's left to right: James Valentine Campbell, Benjamin Franklin Graves, Thomas McIntyre Cooley, and Isaac Peckham Christiancy. Between 1868 and 1875, they were known as “the Big Four”:<sup>1</sup> great jurists in Michigan and national law. We still read their opinions, and they are legends, but this isn't an article about them.

Justices Campbell, Graves, Cooley, and Christiancy were on the Court together for seven years. But that was only a fraction of their lives, and those lives were shared with four extraordinary women, supportive wives at home, holding down the homestead, raising the children, providing extra time for their husbands to change Michigan law, and in some cases making significant contributions to their communities in their own right. Do you know their names?

### Elizabeth Lenora McCloskey Christiancy

Elizabeth Lenora McCloskey was the oldest of the wives, born on October 22, 1821. She was also the only wife born in Michigan. Her father, James McCloskey, was a Maryland native who settled in the Michigan

Territory around the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> He married Susanna Godfrey, the daughter of Jacques Gabriel Godfrey, a French Canadian who saw the flag over Detroit change three times for each “conquering” nation. They managed to flourish despite the shifts in government.<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth's mother gave birth to six children between 1816 and 1825. Her father worked in various industries to support his growing family.<sup>3</sup> Already a member of the Maryland militia, James served in Michigan's as well. Col. McCloskey would rub shoulders with a number of important persons in the Territory's early years:

In 1817, he was made superintendent of buildings (there was only one) of the University of Michigan; in August, 1818, he was appointed quartermaster general of the territory; in 1819 and 1820, he was elected to the board of trustees of Detroit (created by act of Oct. 24, 1815), serving as chairman of the board in the first year. In 1821, he was defeated by Solomon Sibley in election for delegate to Congress; and in 1823,

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Collections: Collections & Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Vol. XXXVI* (Lansing: Wyncoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1908), p 386.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Burton, *Governor and Judges Journal: Proceedings of the Land Board of Detroit* (1915), p 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Quaipe, *The John Askin Papers Volume II: 1796-1820* (Detroit Library Commission, 1931), p 562.

he was one of half a dozen candidates in the election which was won by Father Gabriel Richard.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to all this, McCloskey worked as a surveyor, laying out both the roads from Detroit to Miami and Detroit to Chicago.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding these accomplishments, he also worked as a banker to less esteem. He was implicated in an early scandal at the Bank of Michigan, accused of embezzling \$10,300.<sup>6</sup> That would have assuredly affected his reputation if it hadn't already been tarnished with the claim that he was "a dishonest debtor who was totally indifferent to meeting his obligations."<sup>7</sup> As it was, McCloskey fortunately had powerful family and friends.

At some point in Elizabeth's early years, her family moved from Detroit to Monroe, where despite his prior difficulties with the Bank of Michigan, her father once again found work in a local bank.<sup>8</sup> It was a gutsy move, relocating the family closer to the Ohio border during the era of the Toledo strip conflict, but James was in the military and his in-laws had land there. Hindsight being 20-20, Monroe's closeness to the water and the road to New York would dramatically influence Elizabeth's future.

Elizabeth was one of two Big Four spouses who lacked a substantial formal education; there may have been a number of reasons for this. Her father died when she was young and her mother, who never remarried, was left a widow with all those children.<sup>9</sup> Given that Susanna McCloskey resided with Elizabeth in later years, perhaps the two were close.<sup>10</sup> The Territory was also in its early years, and village schoolhouses may not have been high on the list of necessary buildings in a pioneer community.<sup>11</sup> And, of course, Elizabeth married at a

young age, which removed any opportunity to travel back East for education.

When Elizabeth was 15 and the Territory was finalizing its entry into the Union, a New Yorker arrived in Monroe; he would change Elizabeth's life. Isaac Christiancy was like many, moving west for better opportunities. It's interesting that he settled in Monroe, rather than traveling a bit further to Detroit, which certainly had a more robust legal community. But Isaac had the chance to read law in the Monroe office of future governor Robert McClelland and work in the local land office. And, of course, Monroe was where he met Elizabeth. The couple married on November 16, 1839; she was just past 18, and he was 27.<sup>12</sup> The Christiancys settled into Monroe, a community already accustomed to the McCloskeys, Godfreys, and Askins, and destined to become proud of its association with this member of the Big Four.

The Christiancys had a huge family, the largest of the Big Four. Over two decades, Elizabeth gave birth to ten children. She must have been an excellent mother and nurse; only two of her children died in infancy, when frontier medicine and infant-mortality rates were not the best. (In an unfortunate connection between the wives, three of the four lost young children; only the Cooleys escaped that tragedy.)

Given the names of the Christiancy children, it's obvious their parents were both well-read and aware of current events. Henry Clay Christiancy (born in 1841)<sup>13</sup> was followed by Benjamin Franklin Christiancy (born in 1852) and Victor Hugo Christiancy (born in 1854) and John Wesley Christiancy (born in 1856) and Thomas Jefferson Christiancy (born in 1859). The baby of the family, born during the Civil War, was George Armstrong Custer Christiancy (born in 1863).

With a number of children, Elizabeth's mother living in the household, and her in-laws in close proximity, the Christiancy household in Monroe was probably very

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4 *Id.*

5 *Governor and Judges Journal.*

6 *Governor and Judges Journal.*

7 *The John Askin Papers Volume II: 1796-1820.*

8 Isaac Christiancy, *Detroit Tribune* (January 22, 1875), p 2.

9 *The John Askin Papers Volume II: 1796-1820.*

10 1850 U.S. Census, Monroe, Michigan, population schedule, 1st Ward, City of Monroe, p 354b, Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M432; Roll: 358; Page: 354b (accessed via Ancestry.com on 8/16/2023).

11 "Report of the Memorial Committee: Washtenaw County: Mary E. Cooley," *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Vol. XVIII* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1892), p 301.

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12 Dodd, Jordan R, et. al.. *iEarly American Marriages: Michigan to 1850/i.* Bountiful, UT, USA: Precision Indexing Publishers, 19xx. Michigan, U.S., *Compiled Marriages, 1817-1850* (accessed via Ancestry.com on 8/16/2023).

13 You can read more about Henry Clay Christiancy's Civil War service via his 1862 – 1864 diary at the Bentley Historical Library <<https://findingaids.lib.umich.edu/catalog/umich-bhl-86667>> (accessed August 16 , 2023).

busy and lively.<sup>14</sup> The influx of relatives offered extra help for births and childrearing, especially when Isaac traveled for business.

And Isaac's professional career flourished. By the Christiancys' ten-year anniversary, Isaac had served as Monroe County prosecutor for five years; he was elected to the state senate in 1850.<sup>15</sup> The next years were eventful as Isaac helped found a new political party and Elizabeth had Caroline, Benjamin Franklin, Victor Hugo, and John Wesley.

In 1858, when Elizabeth was 37, Isaac joined the Michigan Supreme Court, and for the rest of their marriage, he would be on the Court.<sup>16</sup>

This was also the same year that Cornelia Campbell's husband joined the Court.

### **Cornelia Hotchkiss Campbell**

Cornelia Hotchkiss Campbell was only two years younger than Elizabeth, but she came from a different world. Cornelia was born on August 17, 1823, in Oneida County, New York, to Chauncey and Sophia (Thomas) Hotchkiss.<sup>17</sup> Her father was a laborer and worked on the building of the Erie Canal. Everything I've located about Cornelia's first family defines Chauncey by that one job: "Cornelia Campbell was the daughter of Chauncey Hotchkiss, one of the builders of the Erie Canal."<sup>18</sup> It was an interesting connection to Michigan, especially as the canal expanded travel routes to the new Territory. Unfortunately, like Elizabeth Christiancy's father, Chauncey Hotchkiss died young, around the same time as James McCloskey.<sup>19</sup>

Somehow Cornelia ended up in Detroit: she just appeared. Her father was a member of the Connecticut

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14 1860 U.S. Census, Monroe County, Michigan, population schedule, City of Dundee, p 345, Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M653; Roll: M653\_554; Page: 345; Family History Library Film: 803554 (accessed via Ancestry.com on 8/16/2023).

15 Chardavoyne, Moreno, *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society Reference Guide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), p 55.

16 *Id.*

17 Leake, *History of Detroit: Chronicle of its Progress, its Industries, its Institutions, and the People of the Fair City of the Straits, Volume III* (Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), p 1048.

18 *Id.*

19 Ed. Virkus, *The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy: First Families of America, Volume I* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Company, 1925), p 535.

Hotchkiss family, and perhaps there were relatives in Detroit around the same time, who stepped up to provide for Sophia and her children. Whatever the reason for the change of location, it was fortunate because that's where Cornelia met James Valentine Campbell.

Like the rest of the Big Four and their wives, James was born in New York, but he was unique in that he moved to Michigan as a toddler, not as a young man.<sup>20</sup> In Conelia, he met his match. Both were educated in higher institutions – James at St. Paul's College and Cornelia at an unnamed woman's seminary school.<sup>21</sup> Both lost their fathers at young ages before the couple met and married. Both were mature adults at marriage, with Cornelia in spitting distance of "old maid age." And the two were the closest in age of any of the Big Four spouses – only six months apart. The couple married on November 9, 1849, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where Cornelia's older married sister lived, and settled back into Detroit.<sup>22</sup>

James was working with Douglas & Walker<sup>23</sup> – where he had read law, and which became a family firm when his younger sister married his partner<sup>24</sup> – when he married Cornelia. The couple set up house with Cornelia's mother-in-law and unmarried sisters-in-law.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, the Campbells' married life began with tragedy when their first child, Lois Eleanor, died at age six months.<sup>26</sup> It was a dreadful connection with the Christiancys, who lost their own infant daughter in 1850. Perhaps Elizabeth and Cornelia bonded in their grief when they met seven years later.

It's easy to picture Justices Campbell and Christiancy in their Supreme Court portraits as old gentlemen with

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20 *Reference Guide*, p 56.

21 *Mrs. James V. Campbell Dead: The Wife of the Chief Justice Passes Quietly Away*, *The Evening Detroit News* (May 2, 1888), p 1.

22 *Married*, *Daily Sanduskian* (November 20, 1849), p 2.

23 Carlisle, *Chronology of Notable Events in the History of the Northwest Territory and Wayne County* (Detroit: O.S. Gully, Bornman & Co., 1890), p 215.

24 Ed. Miller, *States At War: A Reference Guide for Michigan in the Civil War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), p 13.

25 1850 U.S. Census, Wayne County, Michigan, population schedule, City of Detroit, p 187b, Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M432; Residence Date: 1850; Roll: 365; Page: 187b (accessed via Ancestry.com on 8/16/2023).

26 Ed. Virkus, p 535.

gray hair, but it would be better to remember that they were relatively young when they ascended to the Court. Isaac was only 46, and James was only 35. Their families were young and grew up together. Lois Campbell was followed by Cornelia, Jr. (1852 - 1935), Henry Munroe (1854 - 1926), James Valentine, Jr. (1856 - 1894), Charles Hotchkiss (1858 - 1927), Douglas Houghton (1859 - 1953), and Edward Demille (1863 - 1925). Cornelia was pregnant when James was sworn in, and in 1859 and 1863, both couples had new babies. Perhaps both justices occasionally had to hear a case or draft an opinion after a sleepless night with a colicky baby.<sup>27</sup>

Only a few days into their new positions, Justices Christiancy and Campbell, along with their colleagues Chief Justice George Martin and Randolph Manning, appointed Mary Horton Cooley's husband to the position of court reporter.<sup>28</sup>

### Mary Elizabeth Horton Cooley

Mary was the youngest of the wives, as her husband was the youngest of the justices. She was born in Genesee County, New York, to David and Betsy (Cary) Horton on June 15, 1830.<sup>29</sup> She was their eldest child and ended up marrying so young that only two of her siblings were born before her marriage; and at least one sibling was younger than his nephews. She met her future husband, Thomas McIntyre Cooley, when he arrived in Adrian, Michigan, where the Hortons moved several years before.<sup>30</sup>

Thomas was born near Attica, New York, on January 6, 1824, one of 15 children spread out over his father's two marriages. After graduating from a local "academy" and reading law briefly in Palmyra, Thomas headed west for adventure.<sup>31</sup> We may actually owe the presence of one of Michigan's most famous justices to a mismanagement of travel funds. He may have been a brilliant student, but he was less so in his financial planning. Originally headed to Chicago, he ran out of

money and had to settle for the Great Lakes State.<sup>32</sup> He certainly didn't get too far across the state before settling in Adrian, which is where he met the Hortons.

Mary and Thomas Cooley married in 1846; she'd just turned 16 and he was just admitted to the bar. A later historian observed that Mary was "very young at the time, but all young people matured earlier in the pioneer state, and she especially did so, that there was no seeming impropriety in so early a marriage."<sup>33</sup> There's a delightful little story about the couple eloping because Mary's father did not approve of Thomas – apparently, Mr. Horton didn't think Thomas would amount to anything.<sup>34</sup> It gives an aura of romance that you wouldn't expect of Thomas Cooley.

It was a happy marriage. Their successful relationship was so well-known that people would come "to Cooley for counsel in their love affairs."<sup>35</sup> And it was said that of all the things she did, the most important was that Mary had a well-run, happy household.<sup>36</sup> In later years, Thomas observed that "without the aid of Mrs. Cooley's noble life and example, her every day assistance and support in a thousand ways, he would never have been able to accomplish the great work that crowned his life."<sup>37</sup> When he was absent from home, they corresponded<sup>38</sup> – Thomas addresses Mary as "my dearest" – and you can read a treasure trove of letters at the Bentley Historical Library. Later, Thomas encouraged his sons to write their mother when they flew the nest, even providing the necessary paper and stamps.<sup>39</sup>

Initially, the couple resided in Adrian with the Hortons. Thomas traveled for work – Coldwater, Tecumseh, and Toledo – and edited a local newspaper. Eventually –

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32 *Id.*

33 "Report of the Memorial Committee: Washtenaw County: Mary E. Cooley,"

34 Ed. Reed, *Bench & Bar of Michigan* (Chicago: The Century Publishing & Engraving Company, 1897), p 228.

35 Velde, p 867.

36 "Report of the Memorial Committee: Washtenaw County: Mary E. Cooley,"

37 Cheever, "Recollections of Great Men: A Symposium: The Author of Constitutional Limitations," *The Inlander*, Vol. XI, No. 10, June 1901, p 421.

38 Velde, p 867.

39 T.M. Cooley to Sons, 11 July 1863, Typescripts of Correspondence, 1841-1869, Box 6, Thomas M. Cooley Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

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27 Of course, given the arrival of Justice Harris Bolden and her daughter Emerson Portia Bolden, that concept may not be in the past.

28 Geo. Martin to Thomas M. Cooley, 11 January 1958, Type-  
scripts of Correspondence, 1841-1869, Box 6, Thomas M. Cooley  
Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

29 *Michigan Matters: Death of Judge Cooley's Wife*, *The Evening News* (September 1, 1890), p 1.

30 *Reference Guide*, p 57.

31 Velde, "Thomas McIntyre Cooley," *I.C.C. Practitioners' Journal*, Volume 15, Issue 10, September 1948, p 860.

after a stint with the legislature compiling the state statutes – Thomas was hired by the Court as a reporter.<sup>40</sup>

When Mary was 34, with three children at home (Eugene was fifteen, Edgar was twelve, and Fannie was seven) and expecting another, Thomas was elected to the Court. The Cooleys were the youngest couple and would have the latest babies on the Court; Charles Horton was born in 1864, Thomas Benton in 1871, and Mary Beatrice in 1873.

The quartet was almost complete but for Ann Lapham Graves's husband.

### **Ann Eliza Lapham Graves**

Finally, eleven years after he was first on the Court for the briefest of times, Benjamin Franklin Graves was back. Benjamin had the most judicial experience when he began his longer term on the Court, having served as a judge in the 5th Circuit for eight years. In his education and experience, he was well-tied to Ann Lapham.

Ann Eliza Lapham was actually Benjamin's second wife. After he moved to Battle Creek from Rochester, New York, in 1843, Benjamin met and married Lydia Merritt.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Lydia died in 1850 after less than three years of marriage. Fortunately for Benjamin, that was also around the time Ann decided to visit relations in Battle Creek.

Ann is a legend in her own right. She was a year younger than Elizabeth Christiancy. She was born in 1822 in Erie County, New York, to Gideon and Dorcas Lapham. Education was prized in the Lapham family; Ann's brother became a well-known doctor,<sup>42</sup> and Ann herself went to a "select school" in Buffalo.

There are debates on when and why she arrived in Battle Creek and how she met Benjamin Graves.<sup>43</sup> One

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40 *Michigan Matters: Death of Judge Cooley's Wife*, The Evening News (September 1, 1890), p 1.

41 Post, *Benjamin Franklin Graves*, Michigan Law Review, Vol. V, No. 6 (April 1907), p 418.

42 Mason, *A Legacy to My Children: Including Family History, Autobiography, and Original Essays* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin, 1868), p 69.

43 See Goodrich, A.M., *Ann Graves – A Forgotten Suffragist* (copy in possession of author) or Talbot, F.S., *Mrs. Benjamin F. Graves* (copy in possession of author).

historian has her teaching at a recently founded "select school" in Battle Creek around the time that Graves was still married to Lydia. Another notes that she found work in Dayton, Ohio, serving as a "preceptress" at a women's seminary.<sup>44</sup> Ann's mother's maiden name was Merritt, so perhaps Lydia Merritt Graves was an extended cousin. What everyone agrees with is that prominent Battle Creek citizen Eratus Hussey was a distant relation, and Ann visited on at least one occasion. Eventually, she connected or re-connected with Benjamin Graves, and the couple married on July 24, 1851.<sup>45</sup> Ann "matched him and was a tower of strength to him."<sup>46</sup>

While Benjamin's law practice grew, Ann continued teaching, running her own "select school" from the family home, and educating the three Graves children.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, Ann would spread her educational pursuits to the community as a whole, as she was elected to the school board the year before her husband joined the Court. And she later founded a library association, encouraging reading accessibility for all.<sup>48</sup>

Ann was a strong character. An author of her obituary, who knew her in his youth, recalled that she was faithful to "her own individuality," regarding it as a sacred charge: "she believed that people should be themselves, not somebody else, that they should work according to their own bent, maintain the right of private judgment, act simply and naturally."<sup>49</sup> A very modern viewpoint for the 19th century.

There were even rumors that she assisted with the underground railroad station in Battle Creek. Apparently, that distant relation, Eratus Hussey, assisted a thousand enslaved persons in their escapes to freedom, and the Husseys and Graves families were neighbors.<sup>50</sup> While I can find only one reference to Ann's involvement, it's easy to suppose this possibility given the relational closeness of the families, the intellectual closeness of their beliefs, and the physical closeness of their properties.

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44 *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Vol. XXVI* (Robert Smith & Co: Lansing, 1896), p 369-371.

45 *Id.*

46 *Id.*

47 *Id.*

48 *Id.*

49 *Id.*

50 Goodrich, p 8.

By the Civil War, Ann had delivered three children and buried one: Arthur Kingsley was born in 1852 and died ten years later, Lydia Merritt was born in 1854, and Henry Bowen was born in 1861.<sup>51</sup> It was a close family. In the late 1860s, when Ann was evidently away from home, the couple sent letters, Ann addressing Benjamin as “F” (presumably due to his middle name of “Franklin”), and he called her “AE” or “my dearest wife.” Benjamin related in one letter his seven-year-old’s elation and the general jubilation in general of the children on a letter arriving from the absent Ann.<sup>52</sup>

In 1868, Benjamin Graves once again joined the Court as a justice, and the era of the Big Four began. You can read about those seven years in a number of different articles and books, but not here. Suffice to say that those seven years were remarkable years of legendary jurisprudence, important not only to the state and country, but to the four men (and their families) at the center. Years later, Christiancy wrote Cooley that

The best part of my life has been spent on the bench of the Supreme Court of Michigan, and my dearest memories are connected with it, and especially with you and Judge Campbell, and more lately also with Judge Graves. I know that the state of Michigan feels, & has a right to feel justly proud of the reputation & high standing of its Supreme Court, and that you have, to say the least, largely contributed to give it that high standing & reputation, which I do not want to see lowered.<sup>53</sup>

That is perhaps the best epitaph for those years.

## The End

Elizabeth Christiancy was the first wife to leave the Court. She died on December 13, 1874, and just missed becoming the wife of a United States senator.<sup>54</sup> There is no doubt that she would have been as supportive of

Isaac as she was at every level of his career. Isaac resigned from the Court less than three months after Elizabeth’s death, and perhaps that change of profession was for the best after his loss. His service on the Court might have constantly reminded him of Elizabeth, who had been by his side through it all.

Sadder still, Isaac remarried shortly after his Senate career began in what became a tragic union with Lillie Lugenbiel, a beautiful but mercurial woman a third his age. She appears to have brought about the marriage through the skillful use of her considerable charm on one hand and the threat of a breach-of-promise suit on the other. The disastrous result was a scandal for the ages, with a celebrated divorce case that titillated the nation and was utterly ruinous for both parties.<sup>55</sup>

The remaining three justices continued through 1883, when Justice Graves left and returned to Battle Creek, where Ann was making waves with various organizations, including the Ladies’ Library Association (later expanded to the Battle Creek Women’s Club), and was “the center of the literary culture of the town.”<sup>56</sup> Always a firm proponent of improved education, Ann joined the school board, and, in 1891, she was elected “president of the Battle Creek Board of Education,” an office no woman would hold again for nearly a century.<sup>57</sup>

Justice Cooley promptly resigned from the Court in 1885 after a shocking election loss and returned to Mary in Ann Arbor. Their oldest child was 36 with children of his own, and the baby of the family was a teenager. There’s a delightful photograph of the family in generations with the Angell in-laws;<sup>58</sup> the Hortons are there as well, the only Big Four in-laws pictured.

Mary continued her involvement with her own local Ladies’ Library Association and the various religious organizations in Ann Arbor. Later, the Governor requested her “qualities of head and heart” for service on the Board of Adrian’s State Industrial School for Girls: her colleagues “recognized her business capacity and sense

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51 *Historical Collections*.

52 See Letter to Ann from Benjamin, Battle Creek, November 5, 1868 (copy courtesy of the Historical Society of Battle Creek).

53 Christiancy to T.M. Cooley, August 12, 1884., Typescripts of Correspondence, July 1884-January 1885, Box 6, Thomas M. Cooley Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

54 *State News*, The Evening Detroit News (December 15, 1874), p 1.

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55 Of course, the story will be a subject of a future article in the Newsletter soon.

56 Unidentified Battle Creek newspaper, *Tells Members How Their Club Had Its Start*, (March 20, 1914).

57 Walbeck, *Local Suffragist’s Legacy Legacy Almost Lost in Obscurity*, Battle Creek Enquirer (March 22, 1999), p 3.

58 The Cooleys’ eldest daughter, Fannie, married Alexis Angell, son of the University of Michigan’s president.

of duty,” and she was appointed Board president.<sup>59</sup>

Justice Campbell departed in 1890, the member of the Big Four with the longest term of service. But Cornelia had passed away two years before.<sup>60</sup>

All of the Big Four survived their wives: Elizabeth Christiancy died in 1874, Cornelia Campbell in 1888, Mary Cooley in 1890, and Ann Graves in 1894. As noted, Isaac Christiancy’s personal life was a disaster after Elizabeth left his side. Thomas Cooley was said to have been heartbroken at Mary’s death and his health swiftly declined; he never really recovered from his loss. Benjamin Graves was “so distraught after his wife’s death that he did not want to live in the house, or the city, which held so many painful memories,” and he moved across the state to Detroit.<sup>61</sup> And James Campbell died two years after Cornelia’s death, once again the closest in age.

We generally remember the Big Four for that seven-year period from 1868 to 1875. But seven years is a comparably short time when held up to the length of their lives, which were shared with these extraordinary women. And their wives’ contributions should not be underestimated. Thomas Cooley was famous for never taking a vacation and working constantly, but his wife was equally busy, keeping the homestead running smoothly while he worked. (And if you were to read the letters he wrote to her when they were separated, you would consider Thomas M. Cooley a romantic.) And who organized the family home with multiple relations and generations while Isaac Christiancy worked? And who taught school, raised children, and was involved in a myriad of other civic programs in Battle Creek?

There is more than a little truth to that old saying that behind every great man is an extraordinary woman, and the wives of the Big Four are no exception. So the next time you see that famous portrait of the Big Four, try to imagine the justices’ wives standing beside them – remember, it’s left to right: Cornelia Campbell, Ann Graves, Mary Cooley, and Elizabeth Christiancy.

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59 *Michigan Matters: Death of Judge Cooley’s Wife.*

60 *Mrs. James V. Campbell Dead.*

61 Goodrich, A.M., *Ann Graves – A Forgotten Suffragist*, p 8.

## Order Publications

You can order any of the Society publications by contacting Lynn Seaks at [lynnseaks@micourthistory.com](mailto:lynnseaks@micourthistory.com) or Carrie Sharlow at [carriesharlow@micourthistory.com](mailto:carriesharlow@micourthistory.com). We have copies of the former Chief Justice Thomas E. Brennan’s novel *The Bench* (\$10.00) as well as *The Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide, Second Edition* (\$30.00).

## For Questions and Contact

If you’ve any questions about the Society in general, membership or events, please contact

***Executive Director***

***Lynn Seaks at  
[lynnseaks@micourthistory.com](mailto:lynnseaks@micourthistory.com).***

For questions regarding the newsletter or article publication, please contact

***Assistant Executive  
Director***

***Carrie Sharlow at  
[carriesharlow@micourthistory.com](mailto:carriesharlow@micourthistory.com).***



## **A Quick Note About Dues**

The MSCHS operates on a calendar year and dues notices are typically sent out prior to the April membership luncheon. This year's renewals were delayed somewhat due to the staff transition, but our goal is to send all future renewals in February of each year. We are also beginning to transition to electronic renewals to help defray the cost of mailings.

The annual dues for members are \$150 and do not include donations for portrait events or payment for attendance at the yearly luncheons or dinners

New "Life" memberships were abolished in 2017, but we encourage those existing "Life" members to continue to make yearly donations to help defray the costs of operating the Society.

Advocates must join the Society at \$150 per year and then pay an additional \$50 to become a member of the Advocates Guild.

The Society hopes that you see the value in becoming a member and maintaining that status.

## **Save the Date -**

**Wednesday,**

**October 4, 2023**

**Opening Session for the 2023-2024 Court Year**

**Wednesday,**

**October 25, 2023**

**Advocates Guild Dinner\*\***

**Wednesday,**

**November 29, 2023**

**Former Justice Kurtis T. Wilder  
Portrait Unveiling\*\***

**Thursday,**

**April 11, 2024**

**Annual Membership Luncheon**

**\*\*invitation only attendance**

## **On and Off the Court**

For those trivia-lovers, did you know that the Society has a section on its website with details about each justice's elevation to and departure from the bench, along with length of service, and previous positions held? <https://www.micourthistory.org/on-and-off-the-court/>

So we know that Ephaphroditus Ransom – who has one of the most remarkable first names of any Michigan Supreme Court justice – served for eleven years, five months, and fifteen days, and after his departure from the Court, he served as Governor of Michigan. And Isaac Christiancy – the oldest of the "Big Four" – resigned from the Court after his election to the United States Senate. While Allen Morse – who defeated Thomas Cooley in a remarkable upset election – left the Court to serve as United States counsel in Scotland.

Check it out – the first person to send me an email ([carriesharlow@micourthistory.com](mailto:carriesharlow@micourthistory.com)) with the names of the justices who served the shortest length of time and the longest length of time wins a copy of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide.

# Portrait Unveiling for Former Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan



Also present were daughter Megan Grano and her husband, Michael Canale, along with many of Justice Corrigan’s siblings and other relatives.

Former Justice Kurtis T. Wilder, now Justice Corrigan’s colleague at the Butzel law firm, served as master of ceremonies. “It’s been my privilege to work alongside Justice Corrigan ... and to become closer to her as a friend,” Justice Wilder said. “When you think of Maura Corrigan, as a person and a professional, you think of tenacity, leadership, a brilliant legal mind, dedication to her faith, tenacity, leadership, loving kindness, generosity, concern for others, tenacity, leadership.... You’ve got the picture. Whether it concerns her family, Blessed Solanus Casey, the judiciary, the practice of law, caring for children and those less fortunate, Justice Corrigan is ‘All In,’ 100 percent focused, and highly accomplished.”

Speakers included Timothy Baughman, former chief of research, training, and appeals for the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office, who with Justice Corrigan was an assistant prosecuting attorney in Wayne County early

in their careers. Former Chief Justice Robert P. Young described her as “just as good, and gallant, and true in private as she is in the public square,” adding “There are human beings who shine so brightly on us in an often gloomy world, and by whose light and warmth the rest of us catch fire. Maura always brings the fire.”

John Bursch, former Michigan solicitor general and an appellate attorney who first worked with Justice Corrigan when she was director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, praised her as “a gift to Michigan children and their families,” noting that her deep faith was evident “in every mission she undertook ... advancing God’s creation here on earth.” Robert Doar, president of the American Enterprise Institute, spoke of her work in poverty studies for AEI, especially “her tre-

*By Marcia M. McBrien*

Hon. Maura D. Corrigan’s exceptional career was celebrated at the June 14 presentation of her portrait at the Michigan Hall of Justice – and all five of her grandchildren were there to assist.

The Supreme Court courtroom was filled to capacity with the former chief justice’s family and friends, paying homage to her work as an attorney, jurist, and children’s advocate. Two of Justice Corrigan’s grandsons, Cub Scouts Joseph and Charles Grano, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The invocation was given by Rev. Marianne Grano, who is married to Justice Corrigan’s son Daniel Grano.

mendous commitment to helping poor children,” particularly those in the foster care system.

Rounding out the featured speakers were Justice Corrigan’s two eldest grandchildren, Diana Mae Grano and Anthony Canale, who spoke about their “Nana” as a trailblazer and role model for her family, stressing the importance of hard work and persistence. Anthony got probably the biggest laugh of the ceremony: “Believe it or not, this is our 17th portrait unveiling this week!”

In her remarks, Justice Corrigan said she was “profoundly grateful.” Justice Corrigan chose the day of the portrait unveiling – her 75th birthday – to thank God for the gift of life, she said, and “for God’s abundant blessings to me each and every day of the past 75 years.”

“Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio back in the 1950s, I never could have imagined that one day I would be the 101st Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court,” she told the audience. “I’m both honored and humbled.”

With grandson Vinny Canale, Justice Corrigan recalled how “Grandpa Joe” – her late husband, Wayne State University Distinguished Professor of Law Joseph D. Grano – said that “The dining room is the happiest place in the house” because of family conversations over dinner.

“Each of our families taught us the values of faith, family, and country, and they did this in conversations every night over the dinner table,” she said. “My parting wish is that not just my grandchildren, but that every child could learn these values and be happy at the dinner table.”

The portrait, the work of the late Patricia Hill Burnett, was unveiled by all five grandchildren.

Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement, in accepting the portrait on behalf of the Supreme Court, extolled Justice Corrigan as “a mentor, an inspiration, and a role model ... Maura Corrigan has vision, particularly a vision of a world where every child is loved and cherished, where every family is a nurturing and happy place.”

The closing prayer was delivered by Rev. Msgr. Patrick Halfpenny, retired pastor of St. Paul on the Lake Catholic Church and volunteer chaplain to the Wayne County Jail Outreach Ministry. “Gracious and loving



God ... we thank you for the heart you placed in Chief Justice Maura Corrigan, for the manner in which she brought that heart to her service to our community and our state,” he said.

A reception followed in the Hall of Justice Conference Center, where Justice Young led attendees in singing “Happy Birthday” to Justice Corrigan.

#### **Portrait Artist Patricia Hill Burnett**

The late Patricia Hill Burnett, who painted Justice Corrigan’s portrait, began painting and selling portraits while still a child, and continued working until only a few months before her death in 2014 at age 94.

Burnett painted the portraits of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Margaret Thatcher, Betty Ford, Barbara Walters, Rosa Parks, Indira Gandhi, and Michigan Governors William Milliken and John Engler, among other persons of note. She exhibited her work in over 400 juried shows and 40 solo shows; her art appears in museums throughout the world. Among other honors, she was named one of the Top Twelve Portraitists in the United States by the Council of Leading American Portrait Painters in 1994. She was one of the first women members of Detroit’s Scarab Club, a traditionally all-male artists’ collective, which she joined in 1962.

# Retired Justice Robert Young's Remarks at the Portrait Unveiling

Good afternoon. I'm Bob Young and, surprisingly, Maura asked me to offer remarks on the occasion of her portrait unveiling.

I am a little surprised to have been given such a high honor. Most of my friends shy away from having me speak for them – particularly when I am still miffed with them for abandoning me as Maura did when she left the Court to take up her passion to help the children of our state. But Maura has always been fearless.

She asked that my remarks be funny. But the problem is that Maura is not funny – at least not intentionally so. I do have lots of fall-on-the-ground funny stories about Maura, but they cannot be told in polite company. (I am willing to share a few in a corner during the refreshments after the show.)

I am taking credit of this event because it was I who urged Maura to get her portrait done 15 years ago like I did so that the portrait artist didn't have to have skill in embalmer's arts to make us a presentable subject. Even so, as you will see, the late wonderful portrait artist, Patricia Burnett, was required to take artistic liberties with her subject matter. Reverse Dorian Gray comes to mind.

From January 1999 when we both joined the Court, until she abandoned me in 2011, Maura and I were fast friends and remain so.

There is so much to say about Maura, a great deal of which you already know. A few minutes of research reveals the *public* Maura: her exemplary legal career, beginning with the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. What you may not know is that her nickname while there was "Porn Queen." (I have no idea why. Perhaps Maura will devote some of her remarks this afternoon to explaining this unusual, if enigmatic, appellation.)

Obviously, being the "Porn Queen" was no impediment to her career since she eventually became a member of the Michigan Court of Appeals and Supreme Court and then later the director of the Department of Human Resources. In that latter capacity, I referred to her as "Director Whirling Dervish" because she was a force



Retired Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. at the  
June 14, 2023 Event

of nature sweeping aside all impediments to change in order to serve children and families of Michigan.

The public record of Maura's accomplishment is well known:

- her legal acumen, so well and vigorously expressed in her many Supreme Court and Court of Appeals opinions;
- her tireless work on behalf of Michigan children and families, especially children in foster care;
- the many changes she made to Michigan law and court practice so that children in foster care would not languish in the system but would instead move as swiftly as possible toward permanency, whether with their birth families, other relatives or guardians, or adoptive parents.

She has a list of well-deserved awards and honors as long as your arm. That is the public, and well-known, Maura Corrigan. And there is the Maura Corrigan that her family and friends know – who, in contrast with many public figures, is just as good, gallant, and true in private as she is in the public square. This is the Maura

who averaged four hours' sleep a night as she cared for her husband, the late Professor Joe Grano, in the last stages of his battle with Parkinson's disease – this, mind you, while serving her first year as chief justice.

This is the staunch friend who has counseled so many people in need, including the foster youths she has mentored. This is the devoted sister and sister-in-law, the aunt of many nieces and nephews, the mother of her beloved Daniel and Megan, and, the grandmother who proclaims that the sun rises and sets on her grandchildren's heads.

Her energy and persistence are legendary and cannot be *fully* explained by her constant diet of coffee and Diet Pepsi. Here, in my opinion, is the secret of Maura Corrigan's energy: *She believes in her mission.*

Many of us have a mission in life, or are called to have one, but not all of us accept the call. Maura *embraces* hers. She believes in the good, the true, and the beautiful, and she also believes that they demand her best. She gives nothing less than her best; I don't believe she ever has.

She has the heart of a Girl Scout, the mind of a chess grand master, and the soul of Don Quixote – and she put them all in the service of the law and her beloved Michigan families and children.

She's also very mean to me. She referred to me as her "work husband" but being the eldest of about 30 siblings, Maura instantly installed herself as my "older sister" – a much, *much* older sister – hectoring me at every turn. She was the older sister I never had – or wanted. I still get the shivers as I recall her fixing on me her disapproving side eye look with the Churchillian set of her lower lip when I got too frisky at conference. (Have I mentioned that she abandoned me?)

Maura told me that years ago, as a child, she would accompany her father, a doctor, on his house calls. In her way, Maura is also a practitioner of the healing arts. She understands that our challenge is not limited to material poverty and its attendant problems – lack of nourishing food, safe shelter, education – but the poverty of the spirit that wastes lives and cripples societies.

That is why I think she stresses responsibility, independence, and self-respect, because, in the long run, feed-

ing the body without also strengthening the soul accomplishes nothing.

Winston Churchill once said: "We are all worms, but I do believe I am a glow-worm." That's our Maura. There are human beings who shine brightly on us in an often-gloomy world, and by whose light and warmth the rest of us catch fire. *Maura Corrigan always brings the fire.* I love her and am inspired by her. I hope to be a tenth as good as she – when I'm as old as she is.

Maura, thank you for your wonderful career of public service and your friendship.

### **An inspiring career**

*By Marcia M. McBrien*

Maura Denise Corrigan has held the highest positions in the Michigan justice system, including Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals.

A magna cum laude graduate of Marygrove College, she earned her law degree from the University of Detroit in 1973, graduating cum laude. She served as a law clerk to Judge John Gillis of the Michigan Court of Appeals for two years, followed by four years as a Wayne County assistant prosecuting attorney. In 1979, she joined the staff of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan, serving as chief of appeals (1979-1986) and chief assistant U.S. attorney (1986-1989). In 1989, she became a partner in the law firm of Plunkett Cooney, specializing in litigation and appeals.

In March 1992, Governor John Engler appointed her to the Court of Appeals, and she won elections in November 1992 and 1994. She was appointed chief judge of the appeals court in 1997, a position she held before her election to the Supreme Court in 1998. Her fellow justices elected her to two terms as Chief Justice. On January 14, 2011, Justice Corrigan resigned from the Supreme Court to accept appointment by Governor Rick Snyder as director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, a position she held for four years. From January 2015 to December 2017, she was a visiting fellow in poverty studies at the American Enterprise Institute. She then joined the Butzel Long law firm as counsel, concentrating her practice in litigation and appeals, retiring from the firm in July.

Justice Corrigan has served on many nonprofit boards, and is chair of the board of directors of the Wayne County Jail Outreach Ministry. Justice Corrigan is the widow of Wayne State University Distinguished Professor of Law Joseph D. Grano. She is the mother of two children and the proud grandmother of five.

# A New Project, A New Coleman Intern

On April 20, the Board approved a new research project.

Twenty years ago, the Society published a new section on its website titled “Women and the Law.” Nineteen women were highlighted with brief biographical sketches and photographs and included “women who stand out as champions of Michigan women, were trendsetters in the law, were ‘firsts’ in their field, and are role models for aspiring young women.”

The Society is replicating this project and focusing on the contributions of African American lawyers and judges in Michigan: “African Americans who stand out as champions of law, were trendsetters in the law, were ‘firsts’ in their field, and are role models.”

The result will be a new section of the Society website highlighting between nineteen and twenty-five African Americans key to Michigan’s legal history.

Assisting the Society in this endeavor will be a newly hired intern, Michael Donelan.

Michael is a Joyce Scholar at the University of Notre Dame and a Granville, Ohio native with family ties to the Detroit area. A rising junior, he is majoring in History and Political Science, with minors in Constitutional Studies and Philosophy, Politics, and Economics.

On campus, he serves as President of Dean’s Fellows, President of the Alexander Hamilton Society, Editor-in-Chief for the Journal of Undergraduate Research, Chairman of the American Enterprise Institute’s Executive Council, and the Director of Research for the Irish for Inclusion Initiative. He is also a Tocqueville Fellow, a Sorin Fellow, a former Director of Access-ABLE, and a member of the Department of Academic Affairs, Judicial Council, Diversity Council, and Next Step Learning.

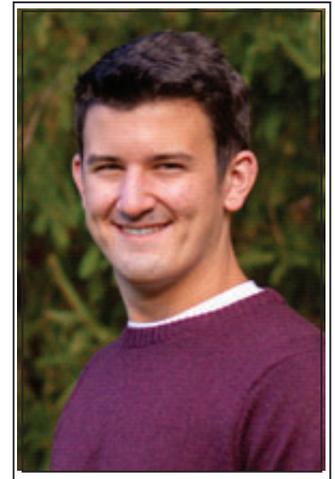
He is thrilled to explore such a significant facet of Michigan’s legal history, and looks forward to contributing to the public memory of these remarkable professionals.

Throughout the Summer, Michael has been reading and writing. Below is the list we’ve begun to research on to date. We know it is far from complete and welcome further input; please email [MSCHistoricalSocietyProject@gmail.com](mailto:MSCHistoricalSocietyProject@gmail.com).

Dennis W. Archer  
Harold Bledsoe  
Kyra Harris Bolden  
Cora Mae Brown  
Stephanie D. Davis  
Willis M. Graves and  
Francis M. Dent  
Jelani Jefferson Exum  
William W. Ferguson  
Geraldine Bledsoe Ford  
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Myron Wahls  
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**Save the Date!**  
Annual Membership Luncheon  
Thursday, April 11, 2024

Invitations & additional information to follow.

### ***Mission Statement***

The Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, collects, preserves, and displays documents, records, and memorabilia relating to the Michigan Supreme Court and the other Courts of Michigan, promotes the study of the history of Michigan's courts, and seeks to increase public awareness of Michigan's legal heritage. The Society sponsors and conducts historical research, provides speakers and educational materials for students, and sponsors and provides publications, portraits and memorials, special events, and projects consistent with its mission.

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