



# Society Update

The Official Publication of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society

Summer 2025

## A Historical Court Several Times Over

We at the Society would be hard-pressed to recall a more history-making six months with regards to the membership of the Michigan Supreme Court than in the past months.

For the first time in Michigan's history, an African American woman was elected to the highest court in the state (readers may recall that Justice Kyra Harris Bolden was appointed the Court on January 1, 2023). (See Summer 2023 Newsletter for an article about Justice Bolden: "Because of Emerson, and Because of Jesse.")

Not only that, but the Court gained an additional woman justice – Kimberly A. Thomas – causing the Court to have a super-majority of women justices for the first time in its history. Starting in January 2025, the Court was comprised of five women and two men. (See Pages 8 - 9 for an article Justice Thomas and Pages 4 - 6 for photos of her investiture.)

To continue with this female history-making trend, on January 15, 2025, Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement was re-elected chief justice by her colleagues, the first time a woman has been elected chief justice of the Court three times in a row.

At an event last year, Justice

Elizabeth Welch noted that it is no longer "a big deal" for Michigan's Supreme Court to have a female majority: it is such a regular occurrence in this state.

And if this article ended here, it would still be a historical beginning to the Court's newest term. But more was to come.

On February 19, Chief Justice Clement announced that she was stepping down, not only from her position as chief justice, but from the Court entirely. The reaction was akin to that when Chief Justice Bridget McCormack announced her own departure from the Court in 2022.



The Michigan Supreme Court from January 1 to April 14, 2025:  
A historical Court with five women justices serving at the same time and a woman chief justice elected three times.

The Michigan Supreme Court from April 15 to May 26, 2025:

A historical Court with a child of a former chief justice serving as chief justice for the first time in the Court's history.



Less than a month later, on March 13, the Court announced the next chief justice: Megan K. Cavanagh. Not only is Chief Justice Cavanagh the eighth woman to serve as chief justice of the Court, she is the first chief justice who is also the child of a former chief justice. (See Pages 10 - 14 for an article on Chief Justice Cavanagh.)

Finally, on April 23, the newest justice was appointed: former Court of Appeals Judge now Justice Noah P. Hood. This marks the first time that two African Americans have served on the Court at the same time. We hope to interview Justice Hood for the next newsletter issue.



The Michigan Supreme Court starting May 27, 2025:

A historical Court, with two African American justices serving on the Court at the same time for the first time in the Court's history and a child of a former chief justice serving as chief justice.

## **Table of Contents**

**A Historical Court Several Times  
Over**  
pp 1 - 3

**Justice Kimberly Ann Thomas's  
Investiture**

pp 4 - 9

**Remarks by Gentleman Justice  
Jonathan Sacks**

pp 6 - 7

**Justice Thomas's Dream Job**  
*by Carrie Sharlow - pp 8 - 9*

**Remarks by Chief Justice  
Elizabeth T. Clement**

p 9

**Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh's  
Historic Appointment**

pp 10 - 14

**Chief Justice Cavanagh**

*by Carrie Sharlow - pp 10 - 12*

**Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh:  
A Most Useful Family**

*by Carrie Sharlow - pp 13 - 14*

**Summer 2025 Intern - p 15**

**Society Annual Luncheon**

pp 16 - 21

**Remarks by SBM President Joseph  
P. McGill**

pp 18 - 19

**Remarks by Chief Justice Megan  
K. Cavanagh**

pp 20 - 21

**The Portraits of the Justices From the  
View of the Artist**

*by Sam Knecht - p 25*

**Michigan Supreme Court Law Clerks,  
June 2025**

p 25

**2025-2026 Historical Society Board of  
Directors**

p 26

**Society Welcomes New Board  
Members**

pp 27 - 29

*Anne L. Argiroff*

*Geraldine A. Brown*

*Alena M. Clark*

*Mark J. Magyar*

**From the Desk of the Executive  
Director**

*by Lynn Seaks - p 29*

**From the Office of the President**

*by Joseph Gavin - p 30 - 31*

### **NOTE:**

*Articles and letters by individually named  
authors that appear in the Society  
Update do not necessarily reflect the  
official position of the Michigan Supreme  
Court Historical Society and their  
publication does not constitute an  
endorsement of views which may be  
expressed.*

## Justice Kimberly Ann Thomas's Investiture



Justice Thomas is the same: an extraordinarily effective lawyer who can do all kinds of things. At Justice Thomas' investiture on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, the Michigan community learned exactly how much this was true.

In the words of Justice Thomas' husband, Jonathan Sacks, Justice Thomas is "really smart, and you can read about that in her biography" on the Michigan Supreme Court website. Indeed, a reciting of Thomas' educational accolades and her "brilliant legal mind" could have taken up the entire hour investiture.

Instead, Justice Thomas' friends and colleagues spoke of her character, showing that she is not only a remarkable justice but an exceptional human being.

**I think that the fact that I was a lawyer, the woman lawyer, this sort of thing led people to think that I could do all kinds of things.**

**Justice Mary Stallings Coleman,  
Interview with Roger F. Lane,  
January 21-23, 1991**



The more one learns about Michigan's newest elected justice, Justice Kimberly Ann Thomas, the more one is reminded of a side-comment from Justice Mary Stallings Coleman's oral history on January 21-23, 1991: "I think that the fact that I was a lawyer, the woman lawyer, this sort of thing led people to think that I could do all kinds of things."

To provide some context to that comment, Interviewer Roger Lane was asking the retired justice of her early career, as she assisted in her "husband's law practice when he was away," while raising their "two small children," and staying active in the "school orbit" and her community (she ended up starting a local civil theater). Justice Coleman remarked that she was recognized as an extraordinarily capable lawyer, and it was assumed and expected—correctly, of course—that she "could do all kinds of things."

University of Michigan Law Professor Dana A. Thompson, a close friend and now former colleague for Justice Thomas, served as Master of Ceremonies. Her lengthy relationship with Justice Thomas was evident with her frequent self-corrections after calling the new justice "Kim"; she'd been "Kim" for so long.



Justice Thomas' dedication to restorative justice was evidenced by the participation of retired 6th Circuit Court Judge Fred Mester and formerly incarcerated Leon Douglas as they led the courtroom in the pledge of allegiance. Thomas had served as Douglas' attorney as he sought freedom under the overturning of "mandatory life without parole sentences for juveniles convicted of homicide." Judge Mester was an unquantifiable force in Douglas' quest for freedom, achieved after nearly fifty years of incarceration.

**I am incredibly grateful to the voters of Michigan for sending Kim Thomas to us.**  
- Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement -



United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit Judge R. Guy Cole, Jr. reminisced on Justice Thomas' service as his law clerk a quarter of a century ago. Judge Cole remarked that in his hunt for the perfect clerk he looks for "brilliant and intellectually curious candidates" as well as individuals with whom he wants

to work with "day in and day out for an entire year." Without a doubt, that was Justice Thomas: not only did she have a prodigious work ethic, but also a friendly spirit. Her fellow clerks remembered her as "kind, funny, and compassionate, unfailingly pleasant and positive," always "caring passionately and deeply about our system of law."



University of Michigan Law School Professor Vivek S. Sankaran spoke next, recalling Justice Thomas' encouraging words after his interview at UofM, words that "meant everything" to him. For Professor Sankaran, Justice Thomas is someone who "instinctively knows how to make others feel seen, valued, and supported always." Through it all, she supported colleagues via a mentoring program for clinical faculty members. In addition to her professorship, Justice Thomas "advocated in courtrooms across the state representing adults sentenced as juveniles and individuals whose voices have long been ignored," and persuaded others to take those cases pro bono. Professor Sankaran referenced Justice Thomas' "humility, tenacity, and an unwavering commitment to justice." And kindness: days after the conclusion of an exhausting campaign, Justice Thomas continued a long-standing tradition with a friend "of buying and wrapping holiday gifts for a local family who would never know who they came from."

**In the worst of it, she's always there, right by your side, helping you stand tall.**  
- Professor Vivek Sankaran -

Self-designated Gentleman Justice Jonathan Sacks spoke of Justice Thomas’ “kindness, consideration, empathy, persistence, and resilience” through four poignant stories. Those remarks are printed in full on page 7. Nothing beats the “flower” story, unless it’s the “bike” story.



Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement administered the oath of office and Justice Thomas’ two sons assisted her with her robe.

Justice Thomas thanked her friends, family, and colleagues and offered a short lecture worthy of a University of Michigan Law School professor reflecting on the Seal of the Michigan Supreme Court.

With that, that investiture concluded, having highlighted the humanity of a brilliant lawyer, who, like Justice Coleman, can do all kinds of things through each season of life.



## Remarks of Jonathan Sacks Gentleman Justice

Good afternoon Chief Justice and may it please the court. One thing I’m noticing is this is different than other times speaking here – Usually orange and red lights telling me when to stop speaking, but I’m pleased to see none of that this afternoon.

First, thanks to Chief Justice Clement for her years of service to the Supreme Court and the State of Michigan, including her legacy as a champion in her support of indigent defense and justice for kids. Second, on behalf of Kim, thank you to everyone who travelled so far and took time from a busy Wednesday afternoon to get here.

One other preliminary matter, I’ve reviewed the program and materials, and I do have one objection that I thought important to make so it can be fixed for the investiture renewal ceremony: I think my title should be Gentleman Justice.

With that all said, I’m so excited and humbled to introduce my spouse, Justice Kimberly Thomas. I first met Kim in 2000 where we were part of the new public defender class in Philadelphia, and I saw her across the room at the first introduction of new lawyers, and I remember thinking, she is the one I need to get to know – she will be a Michigan Supreme Court Justice one day. And it is really amazing to be standing here, almost 25 years later, and that worked out – the Justice part, but also the getting to know her part.

I thought I would tell a few stories to tell about Justice Kimberly Thomas to describe what will be her values and skills as a Justice on the Michigan Supreme Court and for her new colleagues and for the people of Michigan:

First, the kindness, compassion, and empathy for the people that touch her life day to day – About 100 examples a week, but I’ll never forget a time that we were riding the SEPTA trolley car in Philadelphia to our apartment and there was a man on the trolley creating a real commotion – yelling and screaming at people and himself

and wandering around, and somehow Kim produced a flower (people aren't generally carrying fresh flowers on a SEPTA trolley), walked up to him, gave him the flower, and said, "it looks like you're having a bad day, why don't you take this," and he sat down and said thank-you, and all the tension immediately resolved, and to me there was no better moment to show what will be Kim's kindness, compassion, and empathy for the people in front of the Court on the most important issues of their lives.

Second, perseverance resilience, and adaptability, sometimes beyond the point of logic; again, so many examples - I've lost count, but I think she has run 22 marathons – one for each year since 2000, minus one for each of the years our children were born; when we first met, she drove a two door convertible Geo Metro that weighed about thirty-pounds, including in a snowstorm; and most recently statewide election last year showing virtually no stress the entire year, including when she was attacked for representing clients who were unconstitutionally imprisoned. And I mean no stress, sometimes through five events a day on different sides of the state.

Third, although her breadth of talent and skills are overwhelming and inspiring, she is humble enough to know she has limitations. Talking about last year is a good demonstration here – an incomplete list is Kim taught law school at University Michigan, and as a guest lecturer at a law school in Tokyo, represented multiple people in trials and appeals; ran as a candidate for a statewide election; coached Science Olympiad; and although missed some games, she played for her intramural softball team. I think it is fair to reveal to this group that it was not a great softball season, and Kim was extremely open about her base running error in one game. She will open up about her occasional mistake, but still, she's going to be mostly right.

Finally, I want to highlight one other story that I think displays all these values – I've been thinking about Kim and her family, and how incredibly sad it is that her dad Ed Thomas, is not here to share this moment, which would have been

the highlight of his life. And that reminded me of the main quality time I spent with him and Kim together was this bike ride we used to do every year, Kim, her dad, and me, the Assenmacher 100 near Flint, it was a 100-mile bike ride. And you have to understand, for Kim and her dad, it was like a walk in the woods – Kim had already run several marathons when we started doing this bike ride, and her dad rode hundreds of miles each week, including once across the country. For me, it was just something I understood would be my worst day of the year.

And of course it was awful, but something that would always happen after about mile 23 or so out of 100, when I'd start getting tired is I'd look up from the ride to find Kim and her dad standing at the corner. And they would always say the same thing, something like, "my knees bothering me a little, so just taking a break," or "we needed a rest," or "my bike needed some repairs," and I'd say "great, I'm tired too, I'll wait here with you." And that pattern would repeat itself every fifteen miles or so.

And finally, around year eight or nine, it dawned on me, and maybe this says more about me than it does about Kim, that it wasn't their knees, exhaustion, or bike repairs at all, that really, they were just waiting for me. With dignity and care, she persuaded me that we were all recovering together, when she could be miles ahead.

So, this is all to say that Kim lives the values of kindness, consideration, empathy, persistence, and resilience in her life and work, which I know she will apply every day on the bench for the people of the State of Michigan.

It is these qualities, (also, she's really smart, I haven't even talked about that, but you can see it on her bio) that demonstrate why she will be such a remarkable Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, and one that we need now more than ever as we face incredibly difficult and uncertain times in our national landscape. I knew all this when we first met at the Philadelphia public defender office, and I'm so honored to introduce her as Michigan's newest Supreme Court Justice.

# Justice Thomas's Dream Job

by Carrie Sharlow



***On April 11, 2025, the Society had the privilege to speak with our newest elected justice, Kimberly Thomas. The article below is the result.***

In 1994, recent University of Maryland graduate Kimberly Ann Thomas got her dream job: reporting at the *Detroit News*. With her bachelor's degree in journalism, it was a perfect fit. Even more so, it suited her personality: she liked researching, writing, and interacting with people, and she was a keen observer of the world around her. Surely it was expected that Ms. Thomas' initial position would lead to bigger and better things in Detroit; perhaps one day she would serve as senior editor of one of the city's oldest continual newspapers.

But a year later, everything went sideways. The Detroit Newspaper Strike began in July 1995 and would last for nearly two years. Just like that, Ms. Thomas was out of a job at the starting gate.

It could have been a disaster. Instead, Ms. Thomas took stock of her situation and changed direction. For someone whose original plan had not included law school, Thomas jumped into it with great success. Always mindful of the world around her and the need to

improve it, Thomas the Law Student became a fierce advocate for the system of law. And she was good at it: admitted to Harvard Law School, she served as editor-in-chief of the impressive *Civil Rights – Civil Liberties Law Review*.

After graduating from Harvard with honors, she obtained a prestigious clerkship with Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge R. Guy Cole, Jr. There, the judge and her colleagues learned what her classmates and previous *Detroit News* colleagues probably already had: not only was Clerk Thomas incredibly intelligent, but she was also genuinely kind and a pleasure to work with.

From Judge Cole's office, she moved to the Philadelphia Defender Association. This, too, suited Thomas' personality: seeking to improve the world around her could involve anything from providing legal services to indigent defendants to educating the next generation.

The latter led to a career with the University of Michigan Law School, where Professor Thomas taught her students about the practice of law and its applications.

While all this was going on, there was increased attention on the need for indigent defense services for adults and many discussions statewide about amending the laws to improve the system. What was absent from the discussion at the time was the consideration of indigent defense for children and the juvenile justice system as a whole. And Professor Thomas' passion for the law and legal reform was matched by her interest in working with young people, seeking to understand their world and concerns.

So, it made complete sense when Thomas co-founded the Juvenile Justice Clinic to offer training to law students interested in representing juveniles and to supply student-lawyers for juveniles in real cases. It was the first such clinic at a Michigan law school and provided excellent representation for juvenile defendants.

In between jobs, classes, clinic start-ups, and the constant writing of journal articles, Professor Thomas also became Spouse Thomas (to Jonathan Sacks) and Mom Thomas (to Theo and Henry).

One imagines that by this point, Professor Thomas needed a challenge. She had accomplished what she wanted at the law school and then some. And the land-

## Some of Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement's Remarks

She [Justice Thomas] cares about the administration of the courts and sees the work done here at the Hall of Justice as central to supporting the rule of law. This point is so important. The rule of law is not just some abstract principle but a very real goal that we must strive for each and every day. What I am saying is that if the courts are not accessible, the rule of law is diminished. If the courts are not transparent, the rule of law is diminished. If the courts are not engaging with the communities we serve, the rule of law is diminished. And if the courts are not efficient, the rule of law is diminished. That means that the administrative work done here at the Hall of Justice to support trial courts statewide help those courts deliver on the promise of the rule of law.

.....

I think that their [MSU Spartans Basketball Team] key to success on the basketball court is that they play like the ultimate team. If I had told you at the beginning of the season that the Spartans' leading score by the time March arrived would be averaging less than 13 points per game, you would probably have thought the season was a disaster. Or what if I told you that the Spartans were one of the worse three-point shooting teams in the country? But individual scoring or three-point shooting aren't the decisive factors when playing as a team is paramount. The Spartans boast a 10-man rotation with players averaging between 13 minutes and 27 minutes per game. That's how the Spartans simply overpower their opponents and often hold them scoreless during the last few minutes of the game. They play as a team and win as a team. That's the kind of player who is joining the Michigan Supreme Court: Kim Thomas is a team player, and I am sure she loves that I am comparing her to the MSU basketball players. But being a team player means that there is no job that will be too large or too small for her. She is not in this game to score points but rather to win the game when it comes to justice for all. We are lucky to have her on our team.

mark cases of *Miller v. Alabama* and the later *Montgomery v. Louisiana* added to the work of the Juvenile Justice Clinic as well as Thomas' training of Michigan attorneys to handle those cases.

Having never ventured into politics, Thomas decided to run for the highest court in the state. Like everything up to this point, Thomas was a success: she won. Like her colleagues, family, and friends, Michigan found her extremely intelligent, dedicated to the improvement of the legal system, and a genuinely likable person.

And so, in 2025, thirty years after she unexpectedly lost her position at the *Detroit News*, Kimberly Ann Thomas obtained her dream job: justice on the Michigan Supreme Court. It suits her personality perfectly: she likes researching, writing, and interacting with people along with analyzing the law and its proper applications. Justice Thomas relishes this unique opportunity, and, if her career has proved anything, she will dedicate herself to the work with unwavering commitment.



# Chief Justice Cavanagh

by Carrie Sharlow



***Please note: To avoid any confusion between our newest Chief Justice Cavanagh and her father, Former Chief Justice Cavanagh, both individuals are referred to below by their names. This is not done lightly and intends no disrespect to either individual.***

In 1971, perhaps no one imagined that the newest member of the East Lansing-based Cavanagh family would reach the Michigan Supreme Court, let alone serve as chief justice. But maybe they did: after all, there were a number of auspicious signs of a future (extraordinary) career in the law for Megan Kathleen Cavanagh.

In fact, that same year, earlier that month, Probate & Juvenile Court Judge Mary S. Coleman received her own auspicious sign of future advancement when she was “elected the first woman president of the Michigan Probate and Juvenile Court Judges Association.”<sup>1</sup> By Justice Coleman’s recollections, this was presumably also the meeting where the Association membership decided Coleman “should run for the Supreme Court” in the next election.<sup>2</sup>

That in itself was well-timed: coincidentally, 1971 was also the 100th anniversary of Sarah Killgore’s graduation from the University of Michigan Law School. Of course, this would not be notable except that Sarah

was the first woman to graduate from the renowned law school.

It is impossible to convey how extraordinary this was. In 1871, the law, courtroom, and judiciary were a man’s domain: women were not expected to enter the legal profession and were probably actively discouraged from considering it seriously if they expressed an interest. In 1836, as Michigan Supreme Court Justices Fletcher, Morrell, and Ransom took their seats behind the bench, Sarah Killgore wasn’t even born yet. Neither was Arabella Mansfield – “the first female lawyer in the United States”<sup>3</sup> – or was Ada Kepley – “the first woman to graduate from law school in the United States.”<sup>4</sup>

All that began to change, however slowly, and by 1971, when Probate Judge Coleman was considering running for the Court, it was not out of the realm of possibility that a woman would serve on the state Supreme Court, so perhaps attorney Michael Cavanagh did consider it when looking over his youngest child.

Michael Cavanagh’s rise to the judiciary coincided with



Sarah Killgore Wertman

*(A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life, 1893)*



In 2016, the future Chief Justice Megan Cavanagh participated in the unveiling and presentation of the former Chief Justice Michael Cavanagh's official portrait.

**And certainly, in Michigan, the name Cavanagh is synonymous with public service—especially in a black robe.**

Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr.,  
Presentation of the Portrait of the Honorable Michael F. Cavanagh

those auspicious signs from 1971.

At the time of Megan Cavanagh's graduation from Wayne State University Law School, Justice Michael F. Cavanagh was nearly halfway through his lengthy service on the Michigan Supreme Court. He would always have to recuse himself (though he did so with great pride) whenever Megan argued before the Court, which she did often as "one of Michigan's top appellate attorneys" at Garan Lucow Miller, P.C.<sup>7</sup>

Two years after Justice Michael F. Cavanagh's retirement, his official portrait was unveiled in a special session of the Court. There, his youngest child – the same one born the same summer Mary S. Coleman was "elected the first woman president of the Michigan Probate and Juvenile Court Judges Association"<sup>8</sup> – remarked that she "had the privilege of being intimately involved in the creation of this portrait: involved in the fundraising; finding the artist...; arranging the logistics for bringing the portrait into existence...to put down on canvas who [Justice Cavanagh] is and who he has been to this honorable institution and to this great state."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more importantly, though, it was a portrait of her dad.

Coleman's own rise to the Court. When Judge Coleman took her seat on the Court in 1973, Michael Cavanagh was elected to his first judicial office. That was also the same year that the Supreme Court had to designate "the one toilet facility in the Court robing area, in back of the bench, to be unisex."<sup>5</sup> For over a century, it had never been an issue.

More personally to the Cavanaghs, from 1973 until his retirement in 2014, Michael Cavanagh would always carry the title "Honorable."

By that time, Megan Cavanagh had followed in her father's footsteps. Initially graduating from the University of Michigan with a B.S. in Engineering in 1993, she ended up repeating Sarah Killgore's path to the law in search of a second profession. Sarah had started off as a teacher and may have been encouraged to the law by her father, "a prominent attorney" in Indiana.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it was the same for Megan, whose father may have recalled



It is, therefore, appropriate that the portrait currently hangs in the office of Chief Justice Megan Cavanagh, as she begins her historical term as chief. For the first time in the history of the Michigan Supreme Court, there is a chief justice who is the child of a former chief justice. And while it is a remarkable historical event, it is especially significant that that child of a chief justice now serving in the same position is a daughter of that former chief justice.

Surely Chief Justice Mary Coleman, the mother of two daughters herself, could not have imagined this when she was elected to the Court in 1972. Nor could Martha Strickland when she argued a case before the Michigan Supreme Court in 1890, the first woman attorney to do so. Nor could Sarah Killgore when she graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1871.

But I'd be willing to bet that Michael Cavanagh did.



**More than 200 men and women have served on the Michigan Supreme Court. God willing, a far greater number will serve in the future. I received this Court in good shape from those who came before me, and I tried to do everything I could to make sure that whoever came after me would receive a Court that is healthy in every way.**

-Retired Justice Michael F. Cavanagh, at his portrait unveiling in 2016, three years before Chief Justice Megan Cavanagh “came after him”

#### ENDNOTES

1. *Elected*, Battle Creek Enquirer & News (July 29, 1971), p A-6.
2. *Appoint Woman Juvenile Referee*, Lansing State Journal (January 6, 1958), p 4.
3. “Arabella Mansfield First Female Lawyer,” <<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2024/01/arabella-mansfield-first-female-lawyer/>> (accessed March 30, 2025).
4. “ABA Bar Journal: Historical Women Gallery,” <[https://www.abajournal.com/gallery/historical\\_women/767](https://www.abajournal.com/gallery/historical_women/767)> (accessed March 30, 2025).
5. “Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society: Presentation of the Portrait of the Honorable Mary S. Coleman,” <<https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-honorable-mary-s-coleman/>> (accessed March 30, 2025).
6. *Id.*
7. “Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society: Megan Cavanagh,” <<https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/megan-cavanagh/>> (accessed March 30, 2025).
8. *Elected*.
9. “Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society: Presentation of the Portrait of the Honorable Michael F. Cavanagh,” <<https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-honorable-michael-f-cavanagh/>> (accessed March 30, 2025).

# Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh

## “A Most Useful Family”

by Carrie Sharlow



On June 25, 2025, the Society had the privilege to speak with our newest Chief Justice. The article below is the result.

On Thursday, May 29, 2025, at the memorial service for the late Chief Justice Michael F. Cavanagh, his youngest daughter, Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh, recalled the remarks of her father when discussing the Cavanagh Family Career. It was a story that had been told many times before:

He would joke because we have so many lawyers. He said, “We’re the most useless families. We don’t build anything. We can’t fix anything. We need people who do it.”<sup>1</sup>

The message was clear at the time: “Don’t be a lawyer, Megan, do your own thing. Don’t be a lawyer and a judge because I loved being a lawyer and a judge; find your own path.” She did find her own path, and it ended up leading to the office of the Chief Justice at the Michigan Supreme Court.

It did not start out that way. Instead of the law, she decided to enter the field of environmental engineering, graduating from the University of Michigan in 1993. Granted, she didn’t love engineering in school, but she

liked the work. Still, she “kept butting up against the law and legal situations with environmental contamination,” and that was fascinating stuff.

So, of course, she decided to go to law school. And there was only one law school to consider: her father’s alma mater, University of Detroit (Mercy) School of Law, where the Cavanagh name was well-known.

She went somewhere else. For the record, she did visit the University of Detroit but decided against it. If she was going to join this “useless family profession,” she would do on her own terms and at her own school without any overshadowing family history. At Wayne State University Law School, she made a deliberate decision not to tell anyone that her father was state supreme court justice Michael F. Cavanagh, and “succeeded for a full year before her father was invited to a school event,” and the secret was out. “Oh, you’re one of *those* Cavanaghs.”

By that time, she recognized that her future was in the legal profession. Law school was completely the opposite of engineering school: “these professors and teachers taught the way she learned and thought the way she thought;” it was as if she was born for this. She was exactly where she was supposed to be: *this* was her path. She wasn’t going to be a lawyer because her father “loved being a lawyer”: she was going to be a lawyer because *she* loved the law.

She could still build things with that engineering degree and initially used both degrees through work as a patent attorney to help others build things. But that was like engineering school all over again: her heart just wasn’t in it. Not this type of law, not yet.

**Megan Cavanagh (2000)** was elected Michigan Supreme Court justice in the 2018 Midterm Election.

Wayne State University Law School Classnotes  
<https://law.wayne.edu/alumni/class-notes?page=31>

1. Portia Project Podcast: Megan K. Cavanagh, <<https://www.portiaprojectpodcast.com/episodes/episode107-megan-k-cavanagh-BWIHp>> (accessed June 25, 2025).



Garan Lucow Miller, PC attorney Megan K. Cavanagh.

She was drawn to the appellate side of the law. Perhaps there was a connection with her father's lengthy service on the state appellate courts or perhaps Cavanaghs were just well-suited to appellate work (Cousin Mark Cavanagh was a long-time Court of Appeals judge). She enjoyed legal research, writing, and analyzing the law.

Unfortunately, few firms at that time had a structured appellate department, but Rosalind Rochkind had formed one at Garan Lucow Miller, PC and they were hiring. It was the exact same feeling of going from engineering to law school: *this* was where she was supposed to be, *this* is what she was supposed to do. And, so, in little more than a decade she'd gone from environmental engineer to appellate lawyer. Before long, she was known as a "top appellate lawyer," arguing before the state supreme court.

The next steps on the path were obvious, if a bit familiar. Granted, some might feel that there was an appropriate path to the state supreme court: first you serve as a trial judge, then a court of appeals judge, then you run for a seat on the highest court. But she was interested in appellate law, and it was an excellent time to run for the Court.

"Don't be a lawyer and a judge because I loved being a lawyer and a judge. Find your own path. Do your own thing." And she did. On January 1, 2019, her father administered her oath as she became the newest justice of the Court (you can see photos on Page 12). And, of course, he was incredibly proud of her appointment as Chief Justice six years later, but he wasn't surprised: "he had confidence that would be the case one day." Like any respectful lawyer, he called her "Chief Justice" every time he answered her phone calls.

Now, the youngest cousin of her generation of Cavanaghs – that "useless family" with too many lawyers, those who didn't build or fix anything – goes to "work in a building her father designed, built, and loved, where she still gets to work with some of the same people who worked with him." And her office (which was his office) includes a Michael Cavanagh Memorial Wall, with his official Court portrait (something she had a hand in designing), old campaign fliers from his own path to the Court, and a framed image of the Hall of Justice. She even has his original email address as her own and his office number.

In so many ways she is her father's daughter, and she's extraordinarily proud of that, as he was of her.

But Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh is following her own path as she always has. Her father – who'd previously sat in her chair and worked in her office – recognized that: he would offer perspective and institutional knowledge but always acknowledged, "you're doing this your own way."

And she is: the Megan K. Cavanagh way. She'll continue building a better court system with the Michigan Judicial Council, working on a continued strategic plan for the judiciary. She'll work with her colleagues at every level of the court to improve the administration of the courts with transparency, access, and resources. She'll listen to the judges, court administrators, attorneys, and the public as they provide feedback on implementation. She'll stay focused on "the people we serve and the people those people serve." And through it all she'll surround herself with quality people, treating them with consideration and respect, all while making history serving as one member of the historical body that is our Supreme Court.

"The most useless family." Not likely.

# Save the Date

**Opening Day of  
2025-2026 Term**  
Wednesday,  
October 8, 2025  
Lansing

**Historical Society  
Progressive Dinner**  
Wednesday,  
October 22, 2025  
Hall of Justice,  
Lansing

**Historical Society  
Annual Luncheon**  
Wednesday,  
April 15, 2026  
St. John's Resort,  
Plymouth

## 2025 Coleman Intern



Keagen Leeman is a rising junior and Bud Kellstedt Scholar at Wheaton College, IL, double majoring in Political Science and English Literature. She is a Michigan native who graduated from Haslett High School with honors and received department awards in all core subjects.

At Wheaton College, she is a member of the following organizations: The Pub, an independent undergraduate literary journal, Wheaton Pre-Law Society, and Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society Chapter. Keagen will also be a Teacher's Assistant in the Political Science Department this fall.

As a Coleman Intern at the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, Keagen performed historical research on several Michigan Supreme Court Justices using census records, news reports, and records from the Bentley Historical Library. This work contributed to the development of "Justice Biographies" and will be used for future articles as well. She also identified new resources to increase funding for the Society. Inspired by her research, Keagen wrote an article on the Levin family, which highlighted their lasting impact on the current American political landscape.

## Society Annual Luncheon - April 16, 2025



Society President Joseph J. Gavin welcomes attendees to the Inn at St. John's in Plymouth.

He also recognized Elena Schultz, winner of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society Law Student Prize. The prize recognizes a law student with an exemplary performance in legal history, judiciary, or constitutional law. A third-year law student at the University of Michigan, Elena is a fellow in the Race, Law & History Program. After graduation, she will clerk in federal district court in Texas.



The Society was honored to have 90th President Joseph P. McGill in attendance. His remarks are reprinted in full on pages 18-19.



Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh honored the Society with her first public remarks after beginning her service as Chief Justice. Her remarks are printed in full on pages 20-21.



State Bar of Michigan Executive Director and Society Board Member Peter Cunningham speaks with Justice Brian K. Zahra and Justice Elizabeth M. Welch.



**Table Sponsors at the  
2025 Society Luncheon**

Plunkett Cooney  
Miller Johnson  
SBM Appellate Practice Section  
Butzel Long  
Keinbaum Hardy Viviano Pelton & Forrest  
Dickinson Wright  
Robert F. Riley



The John W. Reed Memorial Lecture was given by Professor Matthew L.M. Fletcher, University of Michigan Law School Harry Burns Hutchins Collegiate Professor of Law. He spoke on “The Common Ground of Michigan’s Tribal and State Courts: A Historical Perspective.”

He also brought copies of his Judicial Forum Comic Book, which can be found online at : <https://turtletalk.blog/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/judicial-forum-history-comic.pdf>.



Justice Kyra Harris Bolden and University of Michigan Law Student (and future lawyer) Elena Schultz



### **Remarks by State Bar of Michigan President Joseph P. McGill**

Good afternoon, esteemed justices, honored guests, colleagues, and friends.

As was mentioned my name is Joseph McGill and I am very proud to serve as the 90th President of the State Bar of Michigan. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to welcome you to the annual luncheon of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society. On behalf of the State Bar of Michigan, thank you for the opportunity to share in this meaningful tradition—one that brings us together not only to celebrate our legal community, but to reflect on the legacy and continuing story of justice in Michigan. That reflection is made possible in no small part because of the organization that brings us together today.

So, when I asked State Bar staff what I should speak about this afternoon, they said “Joe... you should speak about 5 minutes!” I’ll do my best to comply with that time restriction!

As you may know, the State Bar of Michigan is charged with licensing all attorneys in Michigan. We work tirelessly to provide services to ensure that all Michigan attorneys have the tools they need to serve their clients and advocate for a more just, judicial system. The State Bar of

Michigan is proud to be your partner and proud to be at your service.

The Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society plays an essential role in preserving, protecting, and promoting the rich history of our state’s highest court. Since its founding in 1988 by Chief Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley, the Society has worked to ensure that the legacy of Michigan’s judiciary is not only remembered, but actively studied, understood, and passed on. The Society’s contributions are both wide-ranging and deeply impactful.

The Society serves as a steward of preservation and archiving, maintaining a growing collection of legal documents, judicial portraits, biographical materials, and artifacts that chronicle the lives and work of Michigan’s justices. These are more than historical records—they are tangible links to the values and decisions that have shaped Michigan law over time.

Building on that foundation, the Society also captures the human side of history through its oral history projects. By recording the voices and reflections of former justices, the Society helps us better understand the personal convictions, challenges, and pivotal moments that don’t always make it into caselaw—but which often define an era.

Education is another vital pillar of the Society’s work. Through educational outreach and public engagement, it partners with schools and civic organizations to bring Michigan’s legal history into the classroom and communities. By teaching students about the judiciary and its role in a constitutional democracy, the Society fosters civic understanding and respect for the Rule of Law in new generations.

In addition to these efforts, the Society promotes continued scholarship through publications and research support. Its historical articles, judicial biographies, and legal essays offer rich resources for scholars, practitioners, and anyone curious about the evolution of justice in Michigan. These materials help ensure that our legal history remains accessible and relevant—not just preserved, but alive.

Through gatherings like today’s luncheon the Society nurtures, community and conversation, bringing together members of the bench and bar, scholars, students, and citizens to reflect on where we have been—and where we are going. These moments help ground us in tradition while inspiring us to move forward with purpose.

In short, the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society

ensures that our legal system has a memory—and that our collective story continues to be told with care, accuracy, and insight.

And that brings me to this year’s theme: “The Common Ground of Michigan’s Tribal and State Courts: A Historical Perspective.” This is a topic that is both timely and timeless.

It invites us to examine the evolving relationship between two sovereign systems of justice—tribal and state—and to consider how, over time, those systems have moved from parallel paths to shared purpose. Michigan is home to twelve federally recognized tribes, each with its own constitutionally recognized government, laws, and courts.

The tribal courts have served their communities for generations—rooted in ancient tradition, strengthened by resilience, and shaped by the needs and values of their people. For much of our history, tribal and state courts operated in isolation—sometimes in conflict, and often in misunderstanding.

But today, we see a different story unfolding. One of dialogue, respect, and increasing collaboration. Michigan has become a leader in interjurisdictional cooperation. From tribal-state court forums to innovative joint-jurisdiction courts that handle matters like child welfare, domestic violence, and family law. These matters are treated with the nuance and cultural sensitivity they require. These part-

nerships are not just efficient—they are human-centered. They recognize that justice must reflect the communities it serves.

And behind every cooperative effort, there is a deeper historical shift—a recognition that both tribal sovereignty and state authority can coexist, not as competing forces, but as partners in justice. That is the common ground that we speak about today.

By choosing this theme, the Historical Society reminds us that legal history isn’t confined to books or court opinions. It’s a living dialogue, shaped by people, progress, and sometimes difficult outcomes. Including tribal courts in the broader story of Michigan’s judicial development isn’t optional—it’s essential. It reflects a more honest, inclusive, and complete view of our legal past and our shared future.

As we enjoy today’s program and fellowship, let us reflect on how far we’ve come—and how much more is possible. Let us commit to a deeper understanding and cooperation between courts, cultures, and communities. And let us continue to walk forward, together, on the common ground of justice.

Thank you again for allowing the State Bar of Michigan to share in this momentous event—and please enjoy this afternoon’s program.





## Remarks by Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh

Good afternoon, friends and colleagues, and thank you, Joe Gavin, for that kind introduction and for your leadership of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society.

First off, I want to recognize my colleagues who are in attendance today and to thank them for their support in my new role: Justice Brian Zahra, Justice Richard Bernstein, Justice Elizabeth Welch, Justice Kyra Harris Bolden, and the newest member of our court, Justice Kim Thomas.

We have three former Chief Justices here today: Maura Corrigan, Conrad Mallett, and Marilyn Kelly. They have all been role models.

Also in attendance, First District Judge Michael Brown, retired Circuit Judge William Giovan, and retired Oakland Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris, who is also a board member of the society.

A few other recognitions are in order. First, former Chief Justice Beth Clement has led this court for the past two and a half years with grace, dignity, and an unmatched commitment to justice for all. What I mean by that is a justice system that is more accessible, transparent, efficient, and trusted by the people we serve. Thank you, Beth.

Second, I know he won't like the attention, but I must recognize the forty years of service of Supreme Court

Clerk and Chief of Staff Larry Royster, who is retiring later this year. I know that I speak for all of my colleagues in highlighting how much we appreciate his soft spoken dedication to making sure our Court runs smoothly. Thank you, Larry.

The third recognition I am going to save for the end of my remarks, because I do have a something to say about the topic our speaker is addressing – the relationship between state and tribal courts.

A little more than a decade ago, my father, former Chief Justice Michael Cavanagh, was instrumental in launching the Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum to provide a venue for all three jurisdictions to meet and improve working relations and communications.

My father wrote about the Forum in a guest editorial published in October of 2014, not long after its first meeting. In the article, my dad talked about the importance of the Charter that was just signed to formalize the relationship between the three parties, to make sure the mission would continue, seeking to “find common ground to accomplish wonderful things for all our children.”

Finally, he said: “The measure of our success will be reflected in strong relationships, linking our peoples, learning from the lessons of the past, and leading our children to a better future.”

That's why I am so interested to hear Professor Fletcher's keynote today.

But before we get to that speech, I want to recognize a dedicated professional whose thoughtful, steadfast, and deeply meaningful work has contributed tremendously to the preservation of Michigan's legal legacy to help us learn from the lessons of the past.

Carrie Sharlow, would you please come up here.

Carrie is the recipient of the 2024 Avern Cohn Award—which honors excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Michigan's legal history.

Carrie's scholarship and service have not only preserved our judicial heritage—they have elevated the groundbreaking work of our predecessors. Her efforts ensure that Michigan's legal stories, decisions, and

people are remembered and made accessible for generations to come.

Carrie recognized the importance of Judge Cohn to her work when she noted what would have been his 100th birthday last summer in the Historical Society newsletter. Carrie wrote:

Many of the judges and lawyers I wrote about were people he knew; if he hadn't known them personally, he had insight into their character and suggestions of research avenues. Even as I research now, I wish I could ask him a question.

I think if we could ask Judge Cohn who is most deserving of this award, it certainly would be Carrie Sharlow. With that, it is my great pleasure to present this resolution.

Carrie, on behalf of the entire Court, thank you for your service, your scholarship, and your tireless efforts to connect Michiganders—young and old—to the story of our state's legal system. We are deeply grateful for all you do. Congratulations.



The honor of a lifetime.



Three legendary retired chief justices in one picture: Marilyn J. Kelly, who served on the Court from 1997 to 2012, and as chief justice from 2009 to 2010; Conrad L. Mallett, Jr., who served on the Court from 1990 to 1999, and as chief justice from 1997 to 1998; and Maura D. Corrigan, who served on the Court from 1999 to 2011, and as chief justice from 2001 to 2004.

# The Portraits of the Justices From the View of the Artist

*By Sam Knecht, Professor of Art and Chair of the Art Department at Hillsdale College*

Selected to paint the official portrait of a Michigan Supreme Court Justice is thrilling and daunting. The mind of the artist races through prospects and challenges. It's a chance to do something memorable or fail in the endeavor!

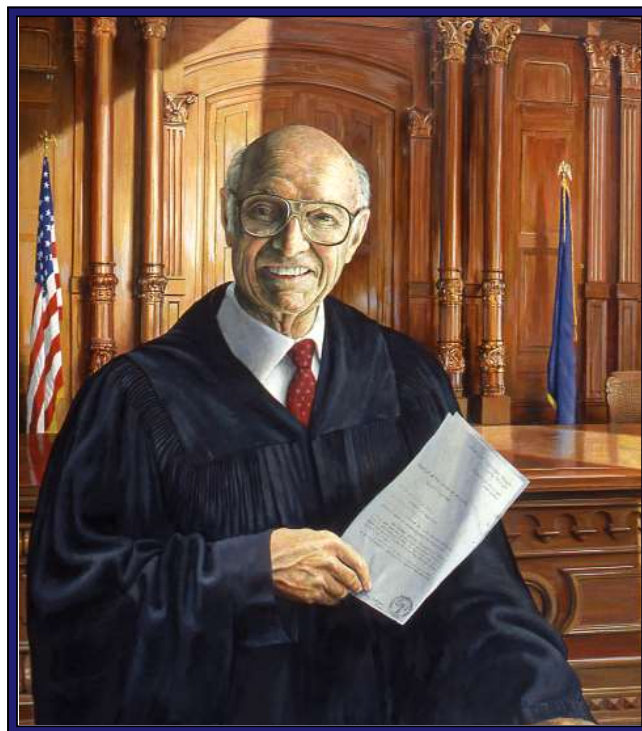
In 1994, I was tapped to paint the portrait of Justice Thomas G. Kavanagh for the Court. Kavanagh was known in the Michigan legal community as "Thomas the Good" to distinguish him from another justice who served at the same time and was also named Thomas Kavanagh, but with the middle initial of "M." The nickname for the latter Kavanagh was "Thomas the Mighty".

When I received the commission, "Thomas the Good" was retired, enjoying life with his wife in their Detroit area home. I scheduled a photo shoot with my him there. I'll never forget how welcoming he was when I arrived. Since the weather in July was warm and sunny, we chose to do the photos in his backyard. He had kept his robe, so we went to work on the shoot.

A big cheerful grin lit up his face. Normally, we portrait artists are cautioned to avoid an open mouth smile.<sup>1</sup> Any error in depicting teeth spells disaster...looking like the subject goes to a quack dentist. But with Justice Kavanagh, I faced the challenge. The smile was him!

For the reference photos, Kavanagh held a copy of a court case of which he was most proud. In the painting, you can read the main print on the document he holds. A fond memory of that encounter came when we had more than enough shots in the camera and the Justice declared, "Let's go inside and have lunch. My wife is away on errands, so let's fix hotdogs! If she was here, she would veto that plan." So we shared that mini conspiracy.

The Justice and I chose to depict him within the old courtroom the State Capitol building. Kavanagh was one of the last justices to serve within those spectacu-



Justice Thomas "The Good" Kavanagh in the Old Supreme Courtroom.

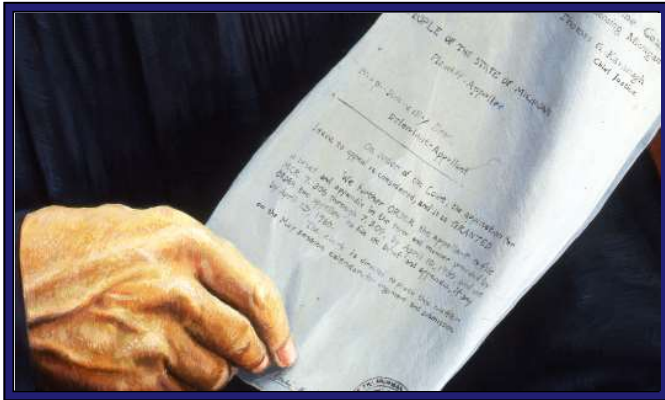
lar chambers. In the meantime, the Court had moved to new headquarters in the Hall of Justice. The painting became an opportunity to honor both this public servant and the stately 19th century chamber. I took my own reference photos in the old Court. Back in my art studio I figured out how best to place the Justice in the room. It was vital to orchestrate shapes of sunlight and shadow background so Kavanagh would remain foremost.

With a myriad of details to manage, the portrait took months to produce. When finished, the Court arranged a special unveiling session. By custom, unveilings are a

**Tom Kavanagh made this not only a task, but a great deal of fun. I became aware that the Supreme Court is not only an institution of principles, but of people, and I felt that it was my responsibility to create an image of the judge which honors both the office and the man.**

Sam Knecht at Justice Thomas G. Kavanagh's portrait unveiling in 1994

1. Readers can see more examples of Knecht portraits on his website at <https://www.knechtstudio.com/>.



Details from Thomas G. Kavanagh's portrait.

blend of formal decorum and testimonials. Friends and colleagues had their say. Imagine how nervous I was when invited to approach the podium and address the justices for a couple of minutes.

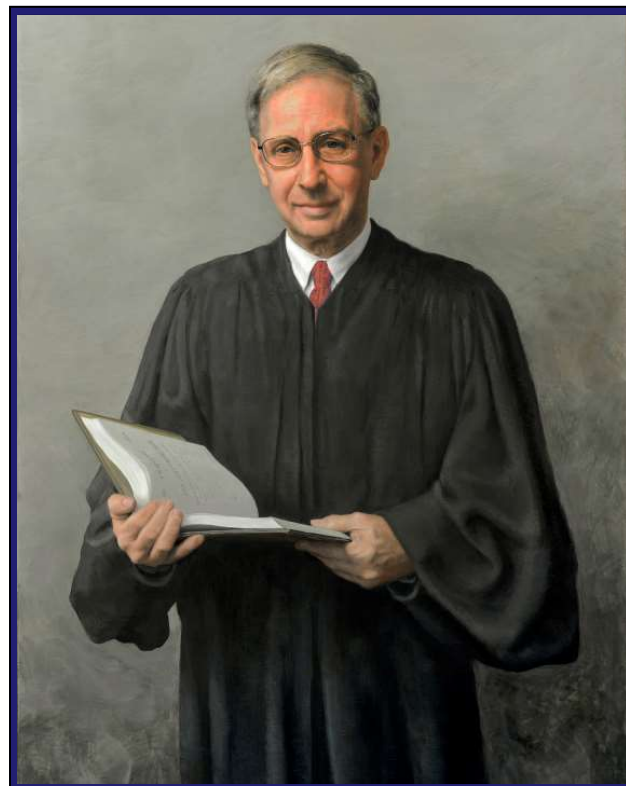
Fast forward to 2012 when I was introduced to Justice Stephen J. Markman. He was considering me for his official portrait; he liked what I had done portraying Kavanagh. We met in Markman's Hall of Justice office suite to review my portfolio; he appeared pleased with what he saw. As we continued to get acquainted, he pointed out his display of postcards of nearly every county courthouse in Michigan. It spoke to his love of the whole ecosystem of state courts. His allegiance was underscored when I learned that every fall, he drove one evening per week to Hillsdale College to teach a course on the judicial system. Now that's "above and beyond the call."

When Markman decided to have me paint his portrait, we scheduled photography sessions. He mentioned that we would have plenty of time to complete the job. By tradition, Michigan Supreme Court unveilings wait until after the person has retired. The Justice was approaching a re-election bid which he eventually won; he was returning to the Bench for another eight years. He joked about not wanting to start the portrait later if his physical condition might deteriorate. It was the only time he ever allowed a scintilla of vanity. More to the point, all my dealings with Markman convinced me of his special attention to truth and shunning of self-promotion. As several photo shoots ensued, I grew in appreciation of his steadfast, unselfish dedication to the Constitution of the United States and that of the State of Michigan.

After one photo shoot, Markman invited me to tour the Hall of Justice and review other justice portraits. He was genuinely interested in my opinion on them. How did style, pose, expression, composition, and use of paint serve the likeness? Were some "better" than others? I took comfort in his keen regard for the portraits both in their artfulness as well as their documentation of jurisprudence.

A portrait artist should comprehend character in his subject. As part of my strategy, I was permitted to sketch Markman during an actual Court session. I drew him in action as he spoke unselfconsciously with fellow justices and attorneys. It helped me soak up the ambience of the Court and those working within it.

By this point, I was mulling over possibilities of background in the portrait. Like the Kavanagh case, I enjoy showing the subject in their work setting. It helps tell their story. Using Photoshop, I provided mock-ups of several compositions for Markman to review. He examined them carefully and politely made it clear he did not want anything elaborate: no frills. So plain background it would become.



Justice Stephen J. Markman's portrait.

It became [clear] early on in our discussions, some years ago, that he was someone who wanted to avoid frills, embellishments in art, and I felt like, okay, I think if you want just a factual approach, I think I'm your man. He seemed to agree. He likes the Kavangh portrait, which is frankly now hanging in the vestibule of the Court. So, I felt like, okay, I can be the Sergeant Joe Friday of portrait painting; you know, just the facts.

Sam Knecht at Justice Stephen J. Markman's portrait unveiling in 2022

As we continued to interact, I observed Markman's meticulous attention to detail. I felt I should follow suit with my art technique. Some painters attempt to dazzle viewers with flashy brush work. That approach risks bland generalization. Instead, I stuck to visual truth. The hardest part was to record subtle aspects of light and shadow throughout. One must reveal the truth of structure in head, face, and hands. Even a judicial robe involves anatomy that must be depicted truthfully. Realism must be consistent throughout or else the painting just doesn't "work." Details are fine, but they must not confuse clarity of form.



Justice Stephen J. Markman and Sam Knecht at the former's portrait unveiling.

Progress on the portrait stretched out over several years. I would work on the portrait and then give it a break pursuing other projects. Whenever I resumed the portrait, I saw it with fresh eyes, realizing what needed to be fixed. If a judge is required to pore over every word, every sentence in a court case, then why shouldn't the artist sweat the details? It took time, but the job got done.

Justice Markman retired in 2019, and planning for the portrait unveiling following. However, COVID struck, and the Court promptly went virtual. Finally, late in 2022, special session was arranged. Current and former justices and colleagues offered friendly, perceptive observations of Markman's career. From the podium I offered a few words of appreciation and respect. Then Justice Markman, his grandchildren and I pulled the unveiling drape off the painting: a moment to savor.

Stephen Markman may have retired from the Court, but he continues to serve the Law. He has made trips to Eastern Europe providing counsel to the Ukrainian government as it endeavors to improve its judicial system. What an example of service.

Experiences of painting portraits of justices have put me in touch with individuals whose tough decisions impact real people. Such encounters are humbling, making me want to be a better citizen...and a better painter! Capturing character signals how we value Law and civil community.

Presently, I have been commissioned to do the official portrait of Justice Brian Zahra. I look forward to a new adventure of portraying both the Individual and the Office. And making a new friend.

**Sam Knecht** is Emeritus Professor of Art, Hillsdale College. He taught studio art and art history continuously there for 47 years. He holds degrees in studio art from the University of Michigan (MFA 1976); and Michigan State University (BFA 1971). Sam is Signature Member in both the Portrait Society of America and the Michigan Water Color Society. He balances his painting output between portrait and landscape painting. His works have won major awards in state and national art competitions. Sam is married to Hillsdale College Music Professor, Dr. Melissa Knecht. [www.knechtstudio.com](http://www.knechtstudio.com)

# Michigan Supreme Court Law Clerks, June 2025

## **Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh's Office**

Kirsten Perry, Sr. Clerk – MSU College of Law  
Emily O'Brien – University of Wisconsin Law School  
Jake Putala – MSU College of Law  
Alicia McCaffrey – University of Michigan Law School

## **Justice Brian K. Zahra's Office**

Brian Balow, Sr. Clerk – University of Detroit Mercy School of Law  
Samantha Cook – MSU College of Law  
Brian Weber – University of Michigan Law School  
Sarah Peterson Lorenzo – MSU College of Law

## **Justice Richard Bernstein's Office**

Vivian Chang, Sr. Clerk – University of Michigan Law School  
Michelle Goyke - Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law  
Vonica Sallan – Wayne State University Law School  
Rebecca Marcus-Nicholls – University of Toledo College of Law

## **Justice Elizabeth M. Welch's Office**

Nick Kilstein, Sr. Clerk – Yale Law School  
Jonah Hudson-Erdman – University of Michigan Law School  
Morgan Preston – Ohio State University Mortiz College of Law  
Alexandra Corcoran – University of Michigan Law School

## **Justice Kyra H. Bolden's Office**

Philip Stadler, Sr. Clerk – University of Michigan Law School  
Alexis Ringman – Wayne State University Law School  
Mallak Anani – University of Michigan Law School  
Michael Semel – University of Michigan Law School

## **Justice Kimberly A. Thomas' Office**

David Loudon, Sr. Clerk – MSU College of Law  
Hallie Konarske – MSU College of Law  
John Spangler – University of Michigan Law School  
Robin Peterson – University of Michigan Law School

## **Justice Noah P. Hood's Office**

Sean Murphy, Sr. Clerk – University of Detroit Mercy School of Law  
Sarah Brittan – Wayne State University Law School  
Sarah Hall – University of Michigan Law School  
Abrial Neely – University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

## 2025-2026 Historical Society Board of Directors\*\*



Left to Right – Mark J. Magyar, Treasurer John G. Fedynsky, Former Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan, Peter Cunningham, Society Executive Director Lynn Seaks, President Joseph J. Gavin, Alena M. Clark, Mark Cooney, Geraldine A. Brown, Carl W. Herstein, Anne L. Argiroff, Denise Langford Morris, Robert F. Riley, Frederick M. Baker, Jr., Society Assistant Executive Director Carrie Sharlow

\*\*Not Pictured: Mark R. Bendure, Gregory J. DeMars, Deborah L. Gordon, Vice President Matthew C. Herstein, Judge Mary Beth Kelly, Mary Massaron, John D. Pirich, Secretary Janet K. Welch

### **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).

## Society Welcomes New Board Members!

At the April 16 Board of Directors Meeting, the Board elected four new members:

**Anne L. Argiroff**



Anne L. Argiroff has an active and successful Michigan appellate practice concentrating in family law, with recent published cases in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Her office is located in Farmington Hills, Michigan, and she serves clients throughout the State of Michigan. With over 25 years of experience, Ms. Argiroff brings expertise and understanding to each case.

In addition, Ms. Argiroff has authored amicus briefs in the Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals and in the United States Supreme Court. A Top Lawyer in 2011 and 2012 and Super Lawyer in 2014 and 2015, she speaks on and has published numerous articles on a variety of domestic relations topics. Ms. Argiroff is a member of the State Bar of Michigan and State Bar Family Law Section. She served on the Family Law Section Council for multiple terms.

**Geraldine A. Brown**



Geraldine Brown, known to her friends as Gera, is recently retired as an assistant attorney general where she spent fourteen years concentrating on federal Medicaid law and its application in Michigan. She is now retraining in mediation and plans to return to the community mediation work she enjoyed before she began work at the Attorney General Department.

Gera came to the law later in life and attended law school only after her youngest child left for college. She graduated in 2004 from Michigan State Law School, Magna Cum Laude and as a Merit Scholar and a Kings Scholar. After graduation, she practiced with the Kitch Law Firm in Detroit for three years in the commercial law division, concentrating on business contracts and construction law. She then joined Robert E. Bourne in Midland, Michigan to specialize in asset preservation and tax savings for clients. This mainly involved estate planning, trusts, wills and probate matters.

Her educational background includes graduate work in education, an MBA and additional training in Federal Tax Issues, Life, Health and Annuities Insurance licenses and financial consulting as well as specialized medical training for allergy testing and treatment.

Before law school, Gera was an elementary school teacher for eight years, managed a physician's office, ran an allergy clinic, and was a FINRA registered stock broker/financial consultant with Merrill Lynch. She also participated in medical missions in Mexico and Guatemala.

She has three children and four grandchildren. Her hobbies include travel, painting and pottery. And it she ever finds the time she might even finally complete the last requirements to obtain her pilot's license.

## Alena M. Clark



Alena Clark (she/her) serves as an Assistant Attorney General in the Public Service Division, where she represents the Michigan Public Service Division and its staff. She handles cases in administrative courts on the state and federal level, as well as in state and federal courts.

Previously, Alena served as a county prosecutor in Saginaw and Genesee counties. She has conducted jury trials for a multitude of crimes and presented cases before

the Michigan Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. Alena also served as a judicial staff attorney to the Honorable Charlene M. Elder of the Wayne County Circuit Court, and for the Honorable Daniel A. O'Brien of the Oakland County Probate Court.

Alena spends much of her time volunteering with the Humane Society of Genesee County, where she serves as a director on their executive board. She is the proud human of a very handsome husky named Odin, and twin rescue cats, Hocus & Pocus. She is active with the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, and served as president at the state level, as well as president of two regions: Wayne and the Great Lakes Bay. She is active in the State Bar of Michigan and participates in several sections as well as serves on the American Indian Law Committee, the LGBTQ+ Law Council, and as Clerk of the Representative Assembly which also has a dual role on the Board of Commissioners.

Alena is a current instructor for the Michigan Coalition on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES). She teaches courses around the state to police officers regarding domestic violence, non-fatal strangulation, stalking/aggravated stalking, and personal protection orders. She feels strongly about each person doing their best to make this world a better and safer place before we leave it.

## Mark J. Magyar



Mark Magyar is a member of Dykema Gossett PLLC, residing in Dykema's Lansing office. Magyar's practice primarily focuses on business and commercial litiga-

tion and appeals. Magyar serves on the Executive Board for the American Bar Association's Council of Appellate Lawyers (CAL) and on the council for the State Bar of Michigan's Appellate Practice Section. He is licensed in Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana, and admitted to practice in several federal courts.

## **From the Desk of the Executive Director**

*By Lynn Seaks*

Law clerks play a pivotal role in the legal decisions made by the Supreme Court. A law clerk typically takes the first look at pleadings, sifts through facts, writes memoranda for the justice's review, and sometimes drafts opinions. The justice will have in-depth discussions with the clerks about various aspects of the case and the clerks become a sounding board for the justice being properly prepared for oral argument.

The Historical Society recently undertook a project to locate all law clerks. We sent out approximately 350 e-mails with a questionnaire to complete and return. These responses are being turned into a directory that will provide an update on where clerks are now and how their time as clerk assisted in their career path.

One of the questions posed was each clerk's favorite memory of being at the Court and many clerks recalled friendships with fellow clerks: the hours spent together, the lively discussions, shared luncheons, and the goal of assisting in important legal decisions.

Having myself been with the Court (in various capacities) for over 16 years now, this project also turned out to be a trip down memory lane. There are clerks I remember from when I first started and many conversations turned into long e-mail exchanges to catch up, talk about life, kids, careers, retirement, etc. I have always been grateful and proud of my time at the Court and it's nice to know so many others feel the same. With over 100 responses so far, I should note that the Court has some very impressive and successful clerks (including several who are now judges).

While maybe not unlike any other organization, the passing of Justice Cavanagh really solidified the importance of what the History Society does—bringing people together who share a common purpose and devotion. As a result of the information we had obtained from former law clerks for the upcoming directory, we captured Justice Cavanagh's former clerks into one e-mail group, updating them on the funeral information. His clerks then began a beautiful (and often funny) exchange amongst themselves sharing their memories and stories of being one of Justice Cavanagh's clerks. It was truly heartwarming to watch them share their grief, witness the 'reconnecting' of old friendships, and the obvious love they all feel for Justice Cavanagh. I felt honored to be a part of this in some small way. The directory should be done soon and the Historical Society will continue to update it as we receive updated or additional information.

If you are a former (or current) law clerk and did not receive a questionnaire, please reach out at [lynnseaks@micourthistory.com](mailto:lynnseaks@micourthistory.com).

**2025 Corporate  
Sponsors**

***Frederick M. Baker, Jr.,  
PLLC***

***Butzel Long***

***Fahey Schultz Burzych  
Rhodes, PLC***

***Foster Swift Collins & Smith,  
PC***

***Honigman, LLP***

***Jacobs & Diemer***

***Kerr Russell & Weber, PLC***

***Michigan Association of  
Justice***

***Miller Johnson***

***Miller Canfield Paddock &  
Stone***

***Sinas Dramis Law Firm***

***Varnum LLP***

**From the Office of the President:  
Remembering Trailblazers  
*By Joseph Gavin***



This newsletter's lead article highlights how, today more than ever, legal talent makes its way our State's Supreme Court regardless of race, sex, gender, color, or creed. We as Michiganders should all be proud of this fact.

Our Historical Society would be remiss, however, if we did not take a moment to recall, certainly in brief, two trailblazers in this important history: Justice Otis M. Smith and Justice Mary S. Coleman.

Justice Otis M. Smith served our State as the first African American justice on our highest Court. Starting his career practicing in Flint, Michigan, Justice Smith later served as a prosecuting attorney in Genesee County, before his eventual appointment to the Michigan Public Service Commission. In 1961, Governor Swainson appointed Justice Smith to the Michigan Supreme Court, to fill a vacancy created on the Court. He won the election in 1962, and served until 1966, thereafter serving as General Counsel of General Motors. Recalling his years of service on the Court in his book, *Looking Beyond Race*, Justice Smith noted one of his

accomplishments during his tenure was to have “had the highest ‘convincing rate’ of the justices.” His pragmatic approach was persuasive to his colleagues. Justice Smith recalled of himself, “I did not write a lot of colorful philosophy into cases....I strove to decide cases simply and clearly so that lawyers and judges could apply my rulings with a minimum of effort....I always tried to keep in mind the mandate of the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who is supposed to have said ‘When we get cute, somebody gets hurt.’”<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Justice Smith reflected some of the best of what the legal profession can offer our society, in its administration of our laws.

Justice Mary S. Coleman was a pioneer in Michigan’s legal profession. Elected as the first female justice to the Michigan Supreme Court, and only the third woman in the United States to sit on a State Supreme Court, Justice Coleman also served as the Michigan Supreme Court’s Chief Justice from 1979 through 1982. Born in Texas and raised in Washington D.C., Justice Coleman and her family eventually came to live in Marshall, Michigan. From there, following a period in private practice, Justice Coleman served as a Probate and Juvenile Court judge in Calhoun County from 1961 through 1973. Commenting on her judicial record, a colleague of hers, Justice James Ryan, noted that Justice Coleman was at once “a voice for deference to legislative policymaking” and the wisdom of our elected representatives, while also “not hesita[nt] to move to advance the common law of social justice with boldness and compassion and a sensible sensitivity to the nearly endless ripple effect of judicial lawmaking.” Among her many accomplishments as Chief Justice was, as Justice Ryan also noted, “her activity in the design and the refining and the enacting” of changes to the administration of our state court system, which, again according to Justice Ryan, caused “the most fragmented, expensive, unwieldy, and entrenched local judicial fiefdoms in Michigan [to be] brought together, and in very large measure unified, really, under the single umbrella of state funding.” Reflecting on

her time at the Court, Justice Coleman noted: “It remains true that this Court has never been a comfortable place for men and women with faint hearts, feeble courage, week commitment, selfish motives, or intolerance.”<sup>2</sup> Certainly hers was not a faint heart, and our State’s jurisprudence and court system is all the better because of it.

In reflecting on the Court’s history, and in these two Justices in particular, I will close with another reflection from Justice Coleman: “[T]here always will remain much to be done.” With the recent changes to our Supreme Court’s members and leadership, we can look forward to how that history will be written, hopefully one day in these very pages.

1. Smith and Stolberg, *Looking Beyond Race: The Life of Otis Milton Smith* (Wayne University Press, 2000).
2. Presentation of The Portrait of the Honorable Mary S. Coleman, December 6, 1984, <<https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-honorable-mary-s-coleman/>> (accessed July 1, 2025).

### ***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.

***Founder:***

Dorothy Comstock Riley

***Officers:***

Joseph J. Gavin, *President*

Matthew C. Herstein, *Vice President*

Janet K. Welch, *Secretary*

John G. Fedynsky, *Treasurer*

Lynn Seaks, *Executive Director*

Carrie Sharlow, *Assistant Executive Director*

***Directors:***

Anne Argiroff

Frederick M. Baker, Jr.

Mark R. Bendure

Geraldine Brown

Alena M. Clark

Mark Cooney

Justice Maura Corrigan (ret.)

Peter Cunningham

Gregory J. DeMars

Deborah L. Gordon

Carl W. Herstein

Judge Mary Beth Kelly

Mark Magyar

Mary Massaron

Denise Langford Morris

John D. Pirich

Robert F. Riley



3rd Floor, Hall of Justice  
925 W. Ottawa Street  
Lansing, MI 48915

## 2025 Contribution Form

Please use this form to join the Society or renew your dues for 2025, or to make an additional contribution

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail checks to: Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, 3rd Fl Hall of Justice, 925 W. Ottawa St., Lansing, MI 48915

Pay online at [www.micourthistory.org](http://www.micourthistory.org)

### CONTRIBUTION LEVEL

Individual dues \$150.00

Advocates Guild member \$50.00 + Dues

Law Firm Sponsor \$1,000.00

Other amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Pay Via Credit Card

We accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Exp Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Security Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_