



Society Update

The Official Publication of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society

June 2023



Justice Bolden and Emerson at the Michigan House of Representatives (photo courtesy of Justice Bolden)

Because of Emerson, and Because of Jesse

by Carrie Sharlow

On Wednesday, March 8, 2023, the Historical Society had the opportunity to speak with the newest justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Justice Kyra Harris Bolden. Justice Bolden joined the Court on January 1, 2023, and makes history as the first African American woman to serve on Michigan's highest court.

Justice Bolden is also the youngest woman to sit on the Court and has a young family. Her daughter, Emerson Portia Bolden, made her debut at Governor Whitmer's November 22, 2022, press conference announcing Justice Bolden's appointment and was comforted by the

departing Justice Bridget Mary McCormack.

Any parent will recall the exhausted days and sleep-deprived nights with a new baby in the house, but Justice Bolden has an excellent support system. She doesn't view it as a "work-life balance" so much as a "help and support community," and Emerson is able to spend time with her extended family as her mother navigates her new job.

Family is important to the Justice. She decided to run for the Michigan Supreme Court because of Emerson. And almost didn't, again, because of Emerson. In the early years of the pandemic, several key individuals suggested to the then-Representative Bolden that she run for the office of Michigan Supreme Court justice. This was not in her plans. She was already a successful legislator, representing Southfield in the Michigan House of Representatives, and eligible for a third term. And she was also hoping to start a family with her husband, Dr. Greg Bolden. The couple had suffered a miscarriage in 2019 and a new pregnancy was not conducive with a statewide campaign. But people kept asking Rep. Bolden to consider the move. And the pregnancy changed no one's mind. In fact, when Rep. Bolden announced her pregnancy, the response was the same: congratulations on the baby; we still want you to run for this office!

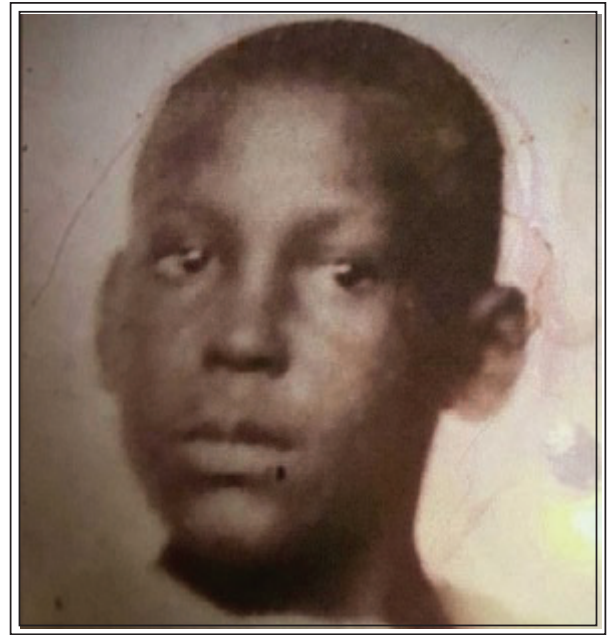
At some point, in all the requests, Representative Bolden realized that she would be giving Emerson a message either way: Emerson would learn either that (1) you can do and be anything, or (2) you can't and must limit yourself.

So she ran. And throughout 2022 and her pregnancy, Rep. Bolden campaigned: long days, lots of travel, and lots of standing. Less than a week after Emerson was born, Rep. Bolden accepted the nomination for justice of the Michigan Supreme Court at the state Democratic Convention. This was all in addition to working for her district in the Michigan House.

Rep. Bolden came in third in the Court election. On November 22, 2022, Governor Whitmer announced her intention to appoint her to the seat that Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack was vacating before the end of the calendar year. It was at that press conference that the soon-to-be Justice Bolden reminded her daughter of their own family history (which is in many ways the history of this country): “In a few generations, we’ve gone from lynching to law school and from no justice to justice with a capital ‘J.’”

Family – present, past, and future – is important to the Justice. One of the things frequently mentioned in numerous interviews and articles is the lynching of the justice’s great-grandfather Jesse Lee Bond.¹ While Justice Bolden ran for office to show Emerson that she could, she became a lawyer because of the injustice her family suffered eighty-four years ago.²

Jesse Lee Bond was a sharecropper in Shelby County, Tennessee, who was brutally murdered in broad daylight on April 28, 1939, when he was only twenty. Earlier that day he asked for a record of his purchases at the S.Y. Wilson Store in Arlington; he asked for a receipt for a \$12 to \$15 purchase so that when it came time to settle accounts with the store owner, that price couldn’t be increased.³ This was something that occurred during that era. Because he requested a receipt – and was given one – the store owner (who wasn’t there at that moment) ordered Mr. Bond’s return.⁴ Mr. Bond came back with his aunt; they suspected that the owner either wanted the merchandise returned, the debt cleared at that moment, or additional backing on the loan (which is where the aunt came in).⁵ Instead, Mr. Bond was shot and his body mutilated before he was thrown in the river. His body was found five days later, and his death certificate lists



Jesse Lee Bond (found via FindaGrave.com.)

the cause of death as “an accidental drowning.”⁶ He left behind a family devastated by the tragedy.

Because he asked for a receipt.

There was a huge funeral at the church founded by his family and the crowd in attendance was from all over the area⁷ (at this point, I’d like to remind readers that Otis M. Smith was a seventeen-year-old in Memphis at this time and it isn’t a far leap of the imagination to consider that he heard of this incident).

Even though it was broad daylight and there were multiple witnesses to the crime, his murderers – Charles R. Wilson and William Johnson – were acquitted after what was surely a sham trial.⁸

When Justice Bolden was entering Grand Valley State University, her great-grandmother told her this portion of her family’s history; and Justice Bolden switched her future career to law to ensure that other families would know justice in a way that her family had not.⁹

6 See *An Accidental Drowning Available for Online Viewing*, <<https://lynchingsitesmem.org/news/accidental-drowning-available-online-viewing>> (accessed March 15, 2023).

7 Doty, *Arlington Must Tell Truth About Lynching*, The Commercial Appeal (April 28, 2018), p 8A.

8 *Two Are Exonerated Of Murder Charges*, The Commercial Appeal (January 28, 1940), Section IV, Page 2.

9 Lobe, *5 Have Eye on 2 Mich. Top Court Seats*, Lansing State Journal (October 1, 2022), p 5A.

1 Lobe, *5 Have Eye on 2 Mich. Top Court Seats*, Lansing State Journal (October 1, 2022), p 5A.

2 Readers can learn much more about Mr. Bond’s “quiet lynching” via the Lynching Sites Project Memphis on <https://lynchingsitesmem.org/lynching/jesse-lee-bond>.

3 *Death Of Colored Tennessee Tenant Farmer Cited As Example Of “Quiet Lynching” By N.A.A.C.P.*, The Pittsburgh Courier (March 9, 1940), p 18.

4 See *A Longer One-Hour Version of the Jesse Lee Bond Story*, <<https://lynchingsitesmem.org/news/longer-one-hour-version-jesse-lee-bond-story>> (accessed March 15, 2023).

5 *Death Of Colored Tennessee Tenant Farmer Cited As Example Of “Quiet Lynching” By N.A.A.C.P.*, The Pittsburgh Courier (March 9, 1940), p 18.

It is incredibly meaningful to know that Jesse Lee Bond's daughter – Justice Bolden's grandmother – was there at the November 22, 2022, press conference in the Hall of Justice with Emerson and the rest of the family to see this historical event occur.

It was both a privilege and an honor to speak to Justice Bolden. While she is well-aware she's made history, it isn't something she focuses on regularly. The daily job is to ensure justice for all Michiganders; it's just an extra plus to be an example to remind everyone that they can be anything they set their minds to.

African American Justices on the Michigan Supreme Court

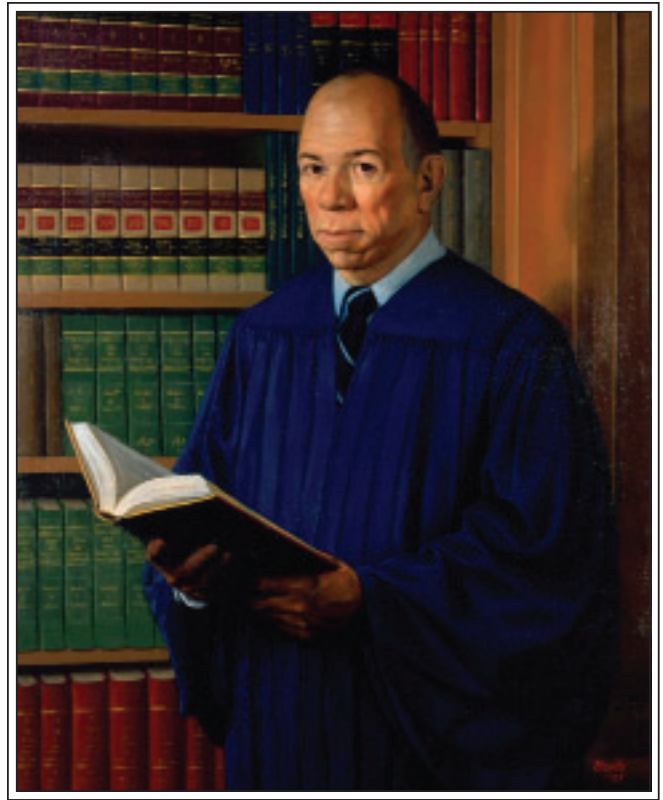
While Justice Bolden is the first African American woman to serve on the Court, she's the sixth African American overall, starting with Otis M. Smith, who was appointed to the Court in 1961, sixty-two years before Justice Bolden. In a remarkable connection, all six initially came to the Court through appointment: Justice Smith was appointed by Governor Swainson; Justice Archer and Justice Mallett were appointed by Governor Blanchard; Justice Young was appointed by Governor Engler; and Justice Wilder was appointed by Governor Snyder.

Otis Milton Smith

(February 20, 1922 – June 29, 1994)

*As published in the 2015 Edition of the *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*

Otis M. Smith, the first African American justice on the Michigan Supreme Court, was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 20, 1922. He attended Fisk University and Syracuse University. In 1950, Smith graduated from Catholic University Law School in Washington, D.C. In January of 1951 he was admitted to the bar and immediately began to practice law in Flint, Michigan. In addition to his practice of law, Smith took part in many civic organizations and functions. His community service brought him recognition from the Junior Chamber of Commerce in the city of Flint as the Outstanding Young Man in Flint in the year 1956. In 1954,



Justice Smith's official portrait is on the 6th floor of the Hall of Justice.

the prosecuting attorney of Genesee County, a Republican, appointed Smith as assistant prosecuting attorney, recognizing his skills. He was a man who considered public office to be a trust of the highest magnitude, second only to serving God. He was an honest man, a man of intellect, solid values, and character. Five Michigan governors thought so too and appointed him to prominent positions in state government where he broke many barriers as the first black to hold such posts. In 1956, Governor G. Mennen Williams appointed him chairman of the Public Service Commission of the state of Michigan and, in October 1959, auditor general of the state of Michigan. In October 1961, Governor John Swainson appointed Smith to the Michigan Supreme Court to replace Justice Talbot Smith who had left for a seat on the U.S. District Court in Detroit. Otis Smith won the vacancy election in November 1962 for the remainder of Talbot Smith's term, but he lost the election in November 1966 for a full eight-year term. Otis Smith's civility and courtesy in all of his personal relationships, even in the presence of abusive provocative conduct, were particularly important to the court during the very stressful years of his service. After leaving the supreme court, Smith hoped to be appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, but he was not. He later acknowledged that this disappointment was a blessing in disguise as he joined the legal staff of Gen-

eral Motors where he served for thirteen years, advancing to vice president and general counsel.¹

More Resources Online!

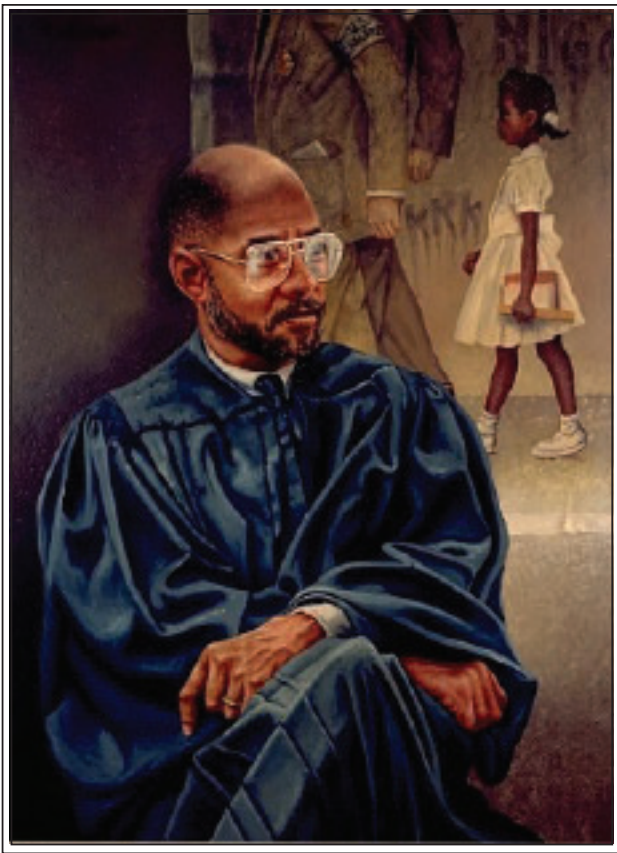
Website Biography - <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/otis-smith/>

Presentation of Portrait - <https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-honorable-otis-m-smith/>

Oral History - <https://d.lib.msu.edu/mscj/38>

Memoir -

Looking Beyond Race: The Life of Otis Milton Smith by Otis Milton Smith and Mary M. Stolberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000)



Justice Archer's official portrait is in Justice Zahra's office in the Hall of Justice

Dennis Wayne Archer

(b. January 1, 1942)

*As published in the 2015 Edition of the *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*

¹ Chardavoyne and Moreno, *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), p 112-113.

Dennis Wayne Archer was born on January 1, 1942, in Detroit, Michigan. In his formal education, Archer did not originally steer his career toward law. He attended Wayne State University with the intention of studying pharmacology. He then transferred to the Detroit Institute of Technology and transferred once again to Western Michigan University. At this point, Archer wanted to pursue a career as a history teacher, yet ended up becoming a special education teacher. He received a BS degree from Western Michigan University in 1965. Archer's wife, Trudy DunCombe Archer, herself a future judge, encouraged him to pursue a law career, and Archer began taking night classes at the Detroit College of Law, where he received his degree in 1970. He eventually became a partner in the Detroit law firm Dickinson Wright. In November 1985, Archer was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court, effective January 2, 1986, by Governor James Blanchard to replace Justice Ryan who had left for the U.S. Court of Appeals with a year left on his term. Archer was elected to an eight-year term in November 1986, but he resigned from the court in 1990 to resume private practice. In 1993 he was elected mayor of Detroit. As mayor, Archer stressed "a desire to improve the chances of success for the city's children." Mayor Archer was popular with the electorate but faced opposition from other candidates and would-be candidates who thought themselves loyalists of his predecessor, Coleman Young. Archer was reelected in 1997 but chose not to run in 2001. Instead he returned to private practice. Archer is a member of a number of professional organizations, has served on the board of directors of the Detroit College of Law and on the board of trustees of Western Michigan University, and is also a life member of the NAACP. In 2003 Archer was elected president of the American Bar Association, the first African American to hold that position.²

More Resources Online!

Website Biography - <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/dennis-archer/>

Investiture - <https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/swearing-in-ceremony-for-justice-dennis-w-archer/>

Presentation of Portrait - <https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-hon-dennis-w-archer/>

Oral History - <https://d.lib.msu.edu/mscj/20>

² Chardavoyne and Moreno, *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), p 134.

Memoir -

Let the Future Begin by Dennis W. Archer and Elizabeth Ann Atkins (Grosse Pointe Farms: Atkins & Greenspan Writing, 2017)



Justice Mallett's official portrait is in the Commissioner's Offices at the Hall of Justice

Conrad L. Mallett, Jr.

(b. October 12, 1953)

*As published in the 2015 Edition of the *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*

Conrad L. Mallett Jr. was born on October 12, 1953, in Detroit, Michigan. He received his BA from the University of California-Los Angeles in 1975. He also received his MPA and JD from the University of Southern California in 1979. Mallett was admitted to the Michigan Bar in 1979 and immediately began his involvement in many legal organizations. His career in public service began when he served from 1983 to 1984 as the director of legislative affairs for Governor James J. Blanchard. From 1985 until 1986, Mallett was the political director and executive assistant to Detroit Mayor Coleman Young. In December 1990, Mallett was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court by Governor James Blanchard in the place of Justice Dennis Archer. Mallett won the vacancy election in November 1992 and was reelected to an eight-year term in 1994. Mallett was the first African American to serve as chief justice on the Michigan Supreme Court. Justice Mallett retired

from the court at the end of 1998. Since leaving the court, Mallett has practiced law and has held many senior executive positions at the Detroit Medical Center.³

More Resources Online!

Website Biography - <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/conrad-mallett-jr/>

Presentation of Portrait - <https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-the-honorable-conrad-l-mallett-jr/>

3 Chardavoyne and Moreno, *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), p 136.



Justice Young's official portrait is in the Conference Center in the Hall of Justice

Robert P. Young, Jr.

(b. 1951)

*As published in the 2015 Edition of the *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* and the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society Website

Robert Preston Young Jr. was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1951. He earned two degrees from Harvard University, a BA cum laude from Harvard College

in 1974 and a JD from Harvard Law School in 1977. Young practiced law for fifteen years with the law firm of Dickinson, Wright, Moon, Van Dusen & Freeman. In 1992, he was named vice president, corporate secretary, and general counsel of AAA Michigan. He served as a member of the Michigan Civil Service Commission from 1992 until 1995 and of the Central Michigan University Board of Trustees from 1988 until 1995. In 1995, Governor John Engler appointed Young to the Michigan Court of Appeals, First District; in 1996, Young won the election to retain his seat. On January 2, 1999, Governor Engler appointed Young to fill a seat on the Michigan Supreme Court vacated by Chief Justice Conrad L. Mallett Jr. In November 2000, Young won the vacancy election for the rest of Mallett's term. In November 2002 to 2010, Young was reelected to additional eight-year terms. Young was elected chief justice by the other justices in January 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Young is a member of several local and national bar associations, including the State Bar of Michigan, the Wolverine Bar Association, and the National Bar Association. In addition, he is a member of the Association of Black Judges of Michigan. He serves his community in many ways, often focusing on causes related to children.⁴ He was a trustee of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce Leadership Detroit Program and the Comprehensive Youth Training and Community Involvement Program and was a member of the Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice Concerning Child Abuse and Neglect. He served as a trustee for the Grosse Pointe Academy and the Detroit Institute for Children. In addition he is a trustee of Plymouth United Church of Christ, Director of Vista Maria, and a member of the United Way Community Services Community Leaders Council. Young has had his work published in Michigan Civil Procedure and The Detroit.⁵

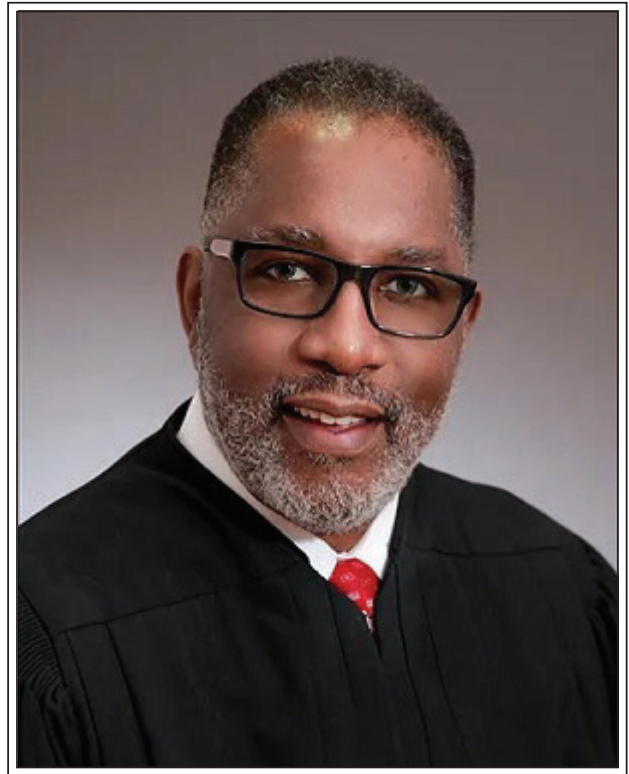
More Resources Online!

Website Biography - <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/robert-young-jr/>

Presentation of Portrait - <https://www.micourthistory.org/special-sessions/presentation-of-the-portrait-of-robert-young/>

4 Chardavoyne and Moreno, *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), p 141

5 <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/robert-young-jr/>



Justice Wilder's official portrait will be dedicated later this year

Kurtis T. Wilder

*As published on the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society Website

Justice Wilder was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court by Governor Rick Snyder in May 2017. Before his appointment to the Supreme Court, Justice Wilder was appointed by Governor John Engler to serve as a judge on the Michigan Court of Appeals from December 1998 to May 2017 and a judge of the Washtenaw County Trial Court from March 1992 to December 1998. The 112th Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Justice Wilder graduated from the University of Michigan with an A.B. degree in Political Science in 1981, and from the University of Michigan Law School with a Juris Doctor degree in 1984. After graduation from law school, Justice Wilder practiced law with the law firms of Foster, Swift, Collins & Smith, P.C. (Lansing) and Butzel Long, P.C. (Detroit). Justice Wilder holds memberships in the Fellows of the Michigan State Bar Foundation; the Association of Black Judges of Michigan; the Federalist Society, Board of Advisors, Lawyers Division-Michigan Chapter; and the Wolverine Bar Association. He has served as a member of the Model Criminal Jury Instruction Committee, the Fam-

ily Division Joint Rules Committee, and the Family Court Implementation Task Force. He is a Past President of the Michigan Judges Association, and Past Chairman of the State Bar Judicial Conference. Justice Wilder was also the Court's liaison for issues related to courthouse security. Justice Wilder has been active in many civic and philanthropic endeavors during his career. He is a former chair of the State of Michigan Community Corrections Advisory Board, former board chair of the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan and Nonprofit Enterprise at Work, former board member of The Sphinx Organization, Rotary Club of Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Symphony, and American Red Cross, Washtenaw County Chapter. Justice Wilder currently serves on the Boards of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation, and Interlochen Center for the Arts. He is an Elder and Chancel Choir member at First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. Justice Wilder resides in Canton and has two adult children.⁶

⁶ <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/kurtis-t-wilder/>

MICHIGAN LEGAL MILESTONES

STATE BAR OF MICHIGAN

Celebrating Percy J. Langster

This year's Michigan Legal Milestone will honor another important African American legal first in Michigan. On Friday, August 25, 2023, the State Bar of Michigan will honor the life and legacy of Percy J. Langster, the first African American Prosecuting Attorney elected in the United States. This important 44th Michigan Legal Milestone will be dedicated with a reception held at the Yates Township Hall located at 6437 South Nelson Road in Idlewild, Michigan.

Attendees can register online at <https://www.michbar.org/milestones>. If you're planning on attending, please register soon, as space is limited.

Speakers will include

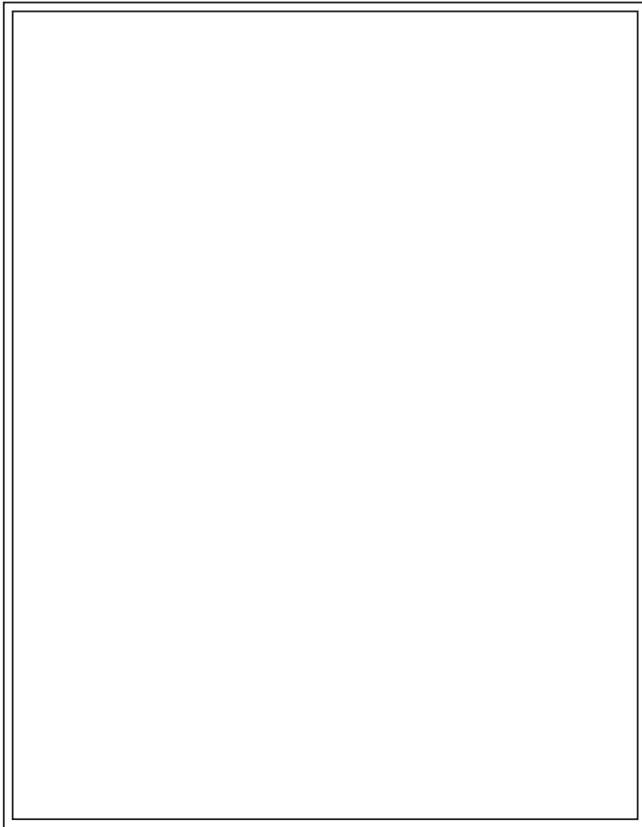
Hon. Jacquelyn McClinton, 36th District Court and Chair, Michigan Legal Milestones Committee;

Peter Cunningham, SBM Executive Director and Society Board Member;

James Heath, SBM President, 2022-2023;

Nancy Vogl, Author and Historian (currently writing a screenplay about Percy Langster).

Readers can learn more about the Michigan Legal Milestone program and Percy J. Langster at <https://www.michbar.org/programs/milestones>.



An early African American law student graduate, sometimes considered to be Gabriel F. Hargo

(Credit: Edward J. Littlejohn Papers, Box 36, Binder 1. Image, Gabriel Franklin Hargo; Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

African Americans in Michigan's Legal History

Michigan has a wealth of African American legal history. Wayne State University Professor Edward J. Littlejohn “is one of the leading experts”¹ in this subject and his invaluable papers and research are housed at the Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit. For those unable to make the trip, his publication *Black Lawyers, Law Practice, and Bar Associations—1844-1970: A Michigan History* contains an incredible amount of information. Here are some notable figures from that book along with other sources:

¹ Wayne State University: Edward J. Littlejohn Biography <<https://law.wayne.edu/profile/af7168#definition-Biography>>(accessed March 8, 2023).

One of the first African Americans to practice law in Michigan courts was John C. McLeod. The 1870 case where he was the attorney was also highlighted as the first in Michigan to have an entirely African American jury.²

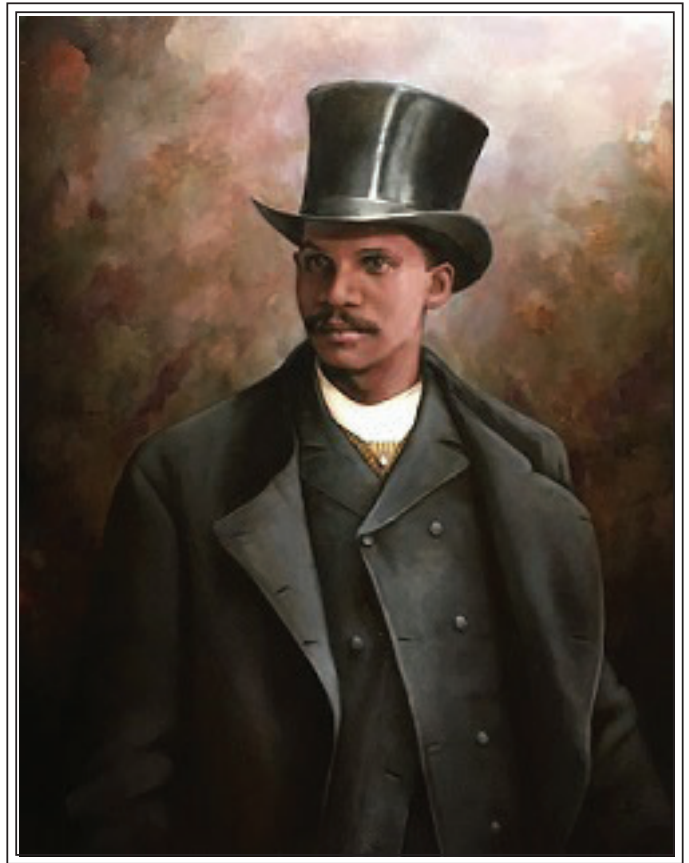
First African American man to graduate from the University of Michigan Law School – Gabriel Franklin Hargo in 1870.³

William W. Ferguson is more readily known as the plaintiff in Michigan’s early civil rights case, *Ferguson v. Gies*, but he was also a graduate of University of Michigan Law School and the first African American to serve in Michigan’s House of Representatives.⁴

² *The Law's Equality: The First Colored Jury in Michigan*, Detroit Free Press (April 6, 1870), p 1.

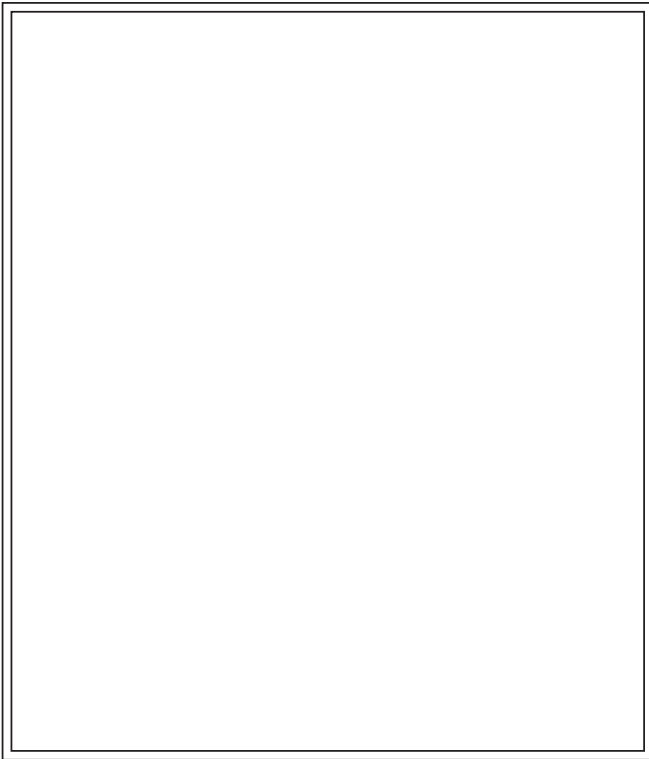
³ Leary and Snow, “Gabriel Franklin Hargo: Michigan Law 1870” (2009). *Miscellaneous Law School History & Publications*.

⁴ Legislative Biography: William Webb Ferguson <<https://mdoe.state.mi.us/legislators/Legislator/LegislatorDetail/1204>> (accessed March 8, 2023).



You can visit this portrait of William W. Ferguson in the Michigan State Capitol Building. It’s right outside the old Supreme Court chambers.

(Credit: Michigan State Capitol Collection)



Walter H. Stowers, co-founder of *The Plaindealer*

(Credit: Edward J. Littlejohn Papers, Box 36, Binder 2. Image, Walter H. Stowers; Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

His daughter, Norine, married another early African American attorney, Leonard C. Thompson.

You can view his portrait at the Michigan State Capitol Building in Downtown Lansing; it is just outside the old Michigan Supreme Court chambers on the third floor.

Ferguson v. Gies was also likely the first time an African American attorney argued before the Michigan Supreme Court.⁵ That attorney was D.A. Straker.

Co-Founder of *The Plaindealer*, “Detroit’s first successful Black newspaper” – Walter H. Stowers. The newspaper was in existence from 1883 to 1894; Stowers graduated from law school in 1895 and practiced in Detroit.⁶

The Michigan Manual of Freedman’s Progress, published in 1915, lists a number of African American attorneys practicing in the state, including Oscar W. Baker, Robert C. Barnes, Byron M. Henderson, Lindsay E. Johnson, Benjamin F. Lester, Wm. Hayes McKinney, C. Henri Lewis, Jr., Charles H. Mahoney, Eugene J. Marshall, Ira J. Pettiford, Charles A. Roxborough, Walter H. Stowers, Leonard C. Thompson, Samuel G. Thompson, Francis H. Warren, Charles R. Webb, Charles E. Williams, and Robert J. Willis. Each of those individuals has a fascinating life.⁷

First African American man to graduate from the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law – Henry H. Tarrant in 1922.⁸

First African American woman attorney in Michigan – Grace Costavas Murphy, who graduated from what is now the Michigan State University Detroit College of Law in 1923.⁹ She practiced law until her death in the 1930s, and it’s possible that she served as “of counsel”

⁷ You can read the full Michigan Manual on GoogleBooks. The list of attorneys-at-law begins on page 45 covers six pages with brief biographical sketches of each attorney.

⁸ Sharlow, *Michigan Lawyers in History: Henry H. Tarrant*, 99 Mich B J 46-47 (Sept 2020).

⁹ Littlejohn, *Black Lawyers, Law Practice, and Bar Associations-1844-1970: A Michigan History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p 49.



This portrait of Henry H. Tarrant was dedicated at the Detroit Mercy School of Law in early 2020.

⁵ You can read more about David Augustus Straker at <<https://strakerlaw.org/about.php>> (accessed March 8, 2023).

⁶ Buchanan, *Saluting Our History*, 100 Mich 14-15 (Feb 2021).

in a case that went before the Michigan Supreme Court in 1926.¹⁰

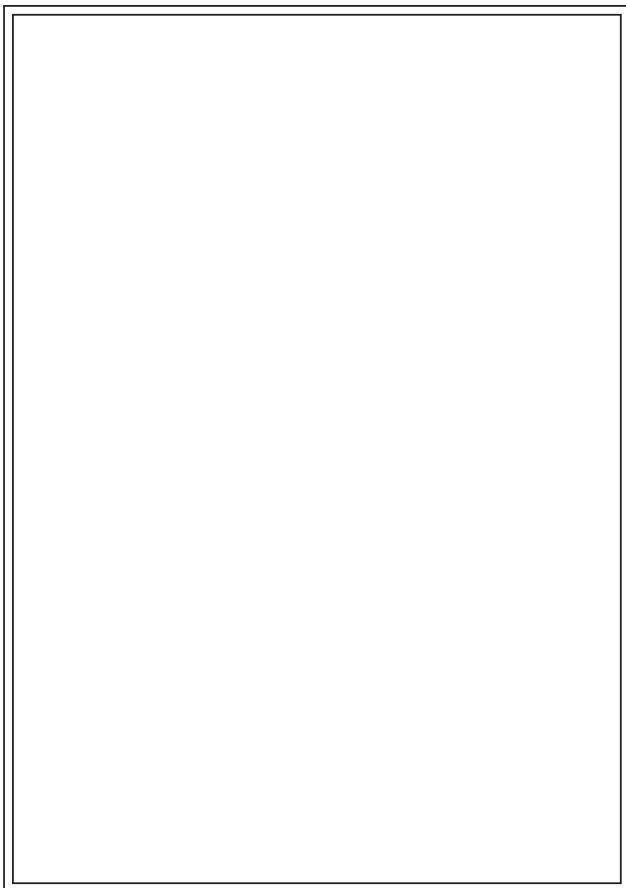
Benjamin F. Dunning was another early African American attorney practicing in Detroit around the same time.¹¹

One of the first African Americans to work in a white-color job in Detroit City Hall¹² – Jessie Pharr Slaton, who started that job in 1933. She graduated from law

10 *Jones v. Wayne Circuit Judge*, 236 Mich. 313; 210 N.W. 319 (1926).

11 *Brings Suit for Recent Accident: John Whalen Asks Damages, Not Exceeding \$5,000, of H.H. and Mazie Munroe; Was Head-On Collision; Emily C. Mead, Battle Creek, Appointed Administratrix of Jeannette Mead Estate*, *The Battle Creek Enquirer and Evening News* (June 27, 1923), p 6.

12 Wikipedia Article: Jessie Pharr Slaton, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jessie_Pharr_Slaton> (accessed March 8, 2023).



Cora Mae Brown, first African American woman to serve in the Michigan State Senate

(Credit: Edward J. Littlejohn Papers, Box 36, Binder 1. Image, Cora M. Brown; Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

school 1951. She swore in Governor Milliken “for the term that would make him Michigan’s longest-serving executive.”¹³

First African American woman to graduate from the University of Michigan Law School – Jane Cleo Marshall Lucas in 1944.¹⁴

First African American man to serve as judge – Charles W. Jones, who began his service in 1950.¹⁵

First African American attorney to set up office in the Lansing area – Stuart J. Dunnings, Jr. who arrived in the area in 1950.¹⁶

First integrated law firm in Michigan – Goodman Crockett Eden & Robb, which opened in 1951.¹⁷ Its name partners were Ernest Goodman, George Crockett, Mort Eden, and Dean Robb. George Crockett, of course, would go on to represent Michigan’s 13th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives for a decade.¹⁸

First African American woman elected to serve in the Michigan State Senate – Cora Mae Brown in 1952, who graduated from law school in 1948.¹⁹

First African American appointed as a delegate to the United Nations, representing the United States – Charles H. Mahoney in 1954. Mahoney was a graduate of University of Michigan Law School and a Detroit attorney.²⁰

13 Sharlow, *Michigan Lawyers in History: Jessie Pharr Slaton*, 99 Mich B J 34-35 (Aug 2020).

14 Ed, Smith, “Breaking New Ground with Grace: The University of Michigan’s First Black Woman Law Graduate,” *Rebels in Law: Voices in History of Black Women Lawyers* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp 86 to 89.

15 *Michigan Black Lawyers “Firsts,”* 94 Mich B J 20 (May 2015).

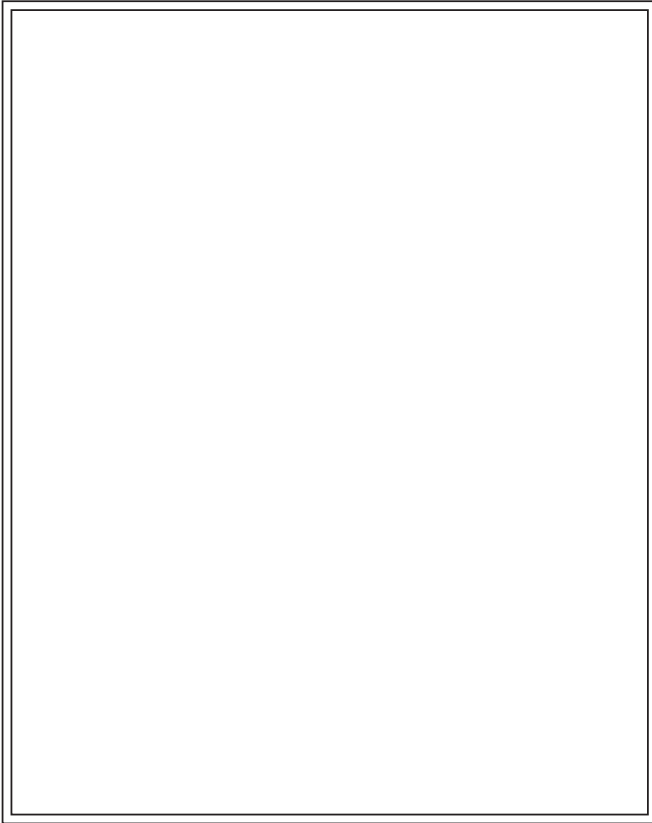
16 *Opens Office: Stuart J. Dunnings, Jr.*, *The Lansing State Journal* (September 11, 1950), p 3. and Rook, *Dunnings Jr. Remembered as a Force in Courtroom; Civil Rights Activist, City’s First Black Lawyer Dies at 85*, *Lansing State Journal* (March 12, 2010), p 1.

17 Babson, Riddle, and Elsila, *The Color of Law: Ernie Goodman, Detroit, and the Struggle for Labor and Civil Rights* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2010), p 185.

18 Wikipedia Article: George Crockett, Jr., <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Crockett_Jr.> (accessed March 11, 2023).

19 Sharlow, *Michigan Lawyers in History: Cora Mae Brown*, 99 Mich B J 38-39 (Mar 2020).

20 Wikipedia Article: Charles H. Mahoney, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_H._Mahoney> (accessed March 11, 2023).



Geraldine Bledsoe Ford and her father Harold Bledsoe

(Credit: Edward J. Littlejohn Papers, Box 36, Binder 1. Image, Geraldine Bledsoe Ford with Harold Bledsoe; Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

First African American man appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court – Otis M. Smith in 1961.

First African American woman to serve as judge – Geraldine Bledsoe Ford, who was elected in 1966.²¹ Her father was the legendary Harold Bledsoe whose Detroit-area firm was the launching pad for a number of other African American legal firsts.²²

First African American appointed to the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals – Wade H. McCree, Jr. in 1966.²³ When McCree resigned from that seat in 1977 to serve as Solicitor General, he was replaced by the legendary Damon J. Keith. You can, of course, read more about Judge Keith in his biography, *Crusader for Justice*.

21 *Michigan Black Lawyers* "Firsts," 94 Mich B J 20 (May 2015).

22 *Once Aided Clarence Darrow: Pioneering Black Lawyer Bledsoe Dies*, Detroit Free Press (March 28, 1974), Section A, Page 3.

23 Wikipedia Article: Wade H. McCree, Jr., <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wade_H._McCree> (accessed March 11, 2023).

First African American woman to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan – Judge Anna Diggs Taylor, appointed in 1979.²⁴

First African American woman appointed to the 3rd Circuit Court – Claudia House Morcom in 1983.²⁵

First African American man to serve as president of the State Bar of Michigan – Dennis W. Archer (1984-1985), who is also the first African American to serve as president of the American Bar Association (2003-2004).

First African American to serve as Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court – Conrad L. Mallett, Jr. in 1997.

First African American woman to serve as president of the State Bar of Michigan – Judge Victoria A. Roberts (1996 to 1997).

First African American chairperson of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission – Judge Karen Fort Hood in 2021.

24 Wikipedia Article: Anna Diggs Taylor, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Diggs_Taylor> (accessed March 11, 2023).

25 Elmwood Historic Cemetery: Claudia Clementine House Shropshire Morcom <<https://www.elmwoodhistoriccemetery.org/events-tours/biographies/98-claudia-clementine-house-shropshire-morcom>> (accessed March 8, 2023).

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www.micourthistory.org.
Our newsletter archives
are available <https://www.micourthistory.org/about-us/newsletters/>.

When a Tall Tree Falls...

Readers may recognize the name of the legendary Detroit attorney Wade Hampton McCree, Jr. Mr. McCree practiced law in Detroit in the late 40s and early 50s, before his appointment to the Wayne County Circuit Court where he served until 1961 (first African American in that position both by appointment and later election).¹ That same year, he began his service on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan (again, the first African American in that position) before he was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit (once again, first African American in the position) in 1966.² In 1977, he was appointed United States Solicitor General, the second African American in that office (the first was Thurgood Marshall).³ He ended his career teaching law to the next generation at the University of Michigan Law School.⁴

It was an extraordinary, legendary career, and anyone Mr. McCree considered a mentor surely must have been a remarkable individual. He considered Harold Bledsoe to be just that: “When none of the big law firms would even give me an interview because of my race, Harold Bledsoe opened his office to me and dozens of others.”⁵ And many of those “dozens of others” became legends and leaders along with Mr. McCree, enough that Mr. Bledsoe would be called the “Father of the Black Lawyer.”⁶

Which brings us to Mr. McCree’s beautiful sonnet. He was called “the poet laureate of the Sixth Circuit”⁷ and certainly wrote several pieces, but this one is a favorite. As the story goes, in 1974, Mr. McCree attended Mr. Bledsoe’s funeral: “He wasn’t satisfied with the minister’s eulogy, so he whipped off 14 lines and handed them to the widow as he left the church.”⁸ It is below in full and a tribute to any mentor, but especially Harold Bledsoe.

When a tall tree falls, it makes a thund’rous sound
To tell the forest that a giant is dead,
And now, there seems an empty plot of ground
Where once a stalwart presence raised its head.
But if we look, the ground on which it stood
Brings forth green seedlings, reaching for the sun
To find their place as stalwarts in the wood
Beginning as their parent had begun.
And so, the great soul whom we mourn today
Has not left us without a legacy
A host of fledglings studied ‘neath his sway,
Each one may someday be a mighty tree.
Thus God, His will inexorable ordains
To make us mortals know that He still reigns.⁹

1 *Solicitor General: Wade H. McCree, Jr.*, The United States Department of Justice, <<https://www.justice.gov/osg/bio/wade-h-mccree-jr>> (accessed April 5, 2023).

2 *Id.*

3 *Id.*

4 *Id.*

5 *Detroit Mercy School of Law: Harold E. Bledsoe '25*, <<https://law.udmercy.edu/alumni-giving/get-involved/bledsoe.php>> (accessed April 5, 2023).

6 *Id.*

7 *Solicitor General: Wade H. McCree, Jr.*, The United States Department of Justice, <<https://www.justice.gov/osg/bio/wade-h-mccree-jr>> (accessed April 5, 2023).

8 Fitzgerald, *Judge, Poet, Gentleman: Wade McCree Has Class*, Detroit Free Press (January 17, 1977), p 12-D.

9 *Id.*

2023 Annual Luncheon Photographs

On April 20, the Society held its annual luncheon at the Detroit Athletic Club. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge (and former member of the Michigan Supreme Court) Joan L. Larsen gave an inspiring lecture on “Lessons from Thomas M. Cooley.” Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement, State Bar of Michigan President James W. Heath, and Society President Carl W. Herstein offered brief remarks. You’ll be able to read those in the fall newsletter. For now, we’ll share some photographs of the event.



Historical Society President Carl W. Herstein welcomed luncheon attendees



Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement introduced her colleagues in attendance



James W. Heath, 88th President of the State Bar of Michigan, offered remarks



Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Joan L. Larsen gave the John W. Reed Memorial Lecture



(L to R) Retired Judge Robert Colombo, Jane Colombo, Former Chief Justice Markman, and Retired Judge William Giovan



(L to R) Professor Gerard Fisher, Former Justice Maura D. Corrigan, and Justice Kyra Harris Bolden



(L to R) Former Justice Maura D. Corrigan, Marcia McBrien, Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement



(L to R) Daniel Corrigan Grano, Marianne Grano, and Thomas J. Davis



(L to R) James W. Heath, State Bar of Michigan President, Bradley Hall, and Erin Rodenhouse



Judge Joan L. Larsen, and Justice David F. Viviano, with luncheon attendees.



Dickinson Wright table sponsor



(L to R) Retired Judge William Giovan, Jane Colombo, Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement, and Retired Judge Robert Colombo



State Bar of Michigan Appellate Practice Section table sponsor



Board Member Denise Langford Morris and Bradley Hall



Justice Megan K. Cavanagh and Society President Carl W. Herstein



Justice Megan K. Cavanagh and State Bar of Michigan Executive Director Peter Cunningham

2023-2024 Board of the Historical Society*



Carrie Sharlow (staff), Gregory J. DeMars, Denise Langford Morris (Secretary), Joseph J. Gavin (Treasurer), John G. Fedynsky, Mary Massaron, Mark Bendure, Carl W. Herstein (President), Hon. Stephen J. Markman, Deborah Gordon, Julie I. Fershtman, Matthew C. Herstein, Lynn Seaks (staff)

*Not pictured - Frederick M. Baker, Jr., Mark Bendure, Hon. Fred L. Borchard, Lori A. Buiteweg, J. Mark Cooney, Maura D. Corrigan, Bruce A. Courtade, Peter Cunningham, Hon. Mary Beth Kelly, Shenique A. Moss, Lawrence P. Nolan (Vice President), John D. Pirich, Angela K. Sherigan, Janet K. Welch

Request for Membership Input - What Would You Like to Read About?

The Society is interested to know what you, the members of the Society, would like to read about in this quarterly newsletter. The Society is in the process of creating an index of the past issues to gather more insight into what has yet to be covered. In the meantime, if you have an idea or a subject of interest that would fall under the purview of the Society, please email us at carriesharlow@micourthistory.com or lynnseaks@micourthistory.com.

Upcoming articles include the scandalous second marriage of Justice Isaac Christiancy and the divorce that followed; the better halves of the Big Four; highlights of the Society's artifact collection; and hopefully some pieces on recent justices' lives after retiring from the Court.

In the meantime, since we have William W. Blume's *Transactions of the Supreme Court of the Territory of Michigan* (six volumes covering 1805 to 1836), is anyone interested in extending the Verdict of History series back through 1805?

Society Welcomes New Board Members

At the April 20 Board meeting, the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society elected four new Board members:



Frederick M. Baker, Jr.

Since 2018, Frederick M. Baker, Jr., has practiced solo, after of counsel relationships with Schiff Hardin (2017-2018) and Willingham & Cote, P.C., (2013-2017). Before that, he served for over eight years as a Michigan Supreme Court Commissioner, nearly two decades as a partner at Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn (trial and appellate litigation), six years as a shareholder at Willingham & Cote, P.C., and three years as an assistant professor at T.M. Cooley Law School. He served as law clerk to the late Robert J. Danhof, Chief Judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals, and as a Court of Appeals prehearing attorney. He began his legal career in 1975 as an instructor of law at Wayne Law School, and also taught as an adjunct professor at T. M. Cooley Law School (1980-1996) and Michigan State University College of Law (2001-2012).

A graduate of Washington University Law School at St. Louis, and the University of Michigan, Baker has received several awards and honors for his legal writing, scholarship, and contributions to the profession, including the Urban Law Annual Writing Award (1975), the T.M. Cooley Stanley Beattie Memorial Teaching Award (1980), the State Bar's Cummiskey Award for pro bono public service (1984), the Roberts P. Hudson Award (the State Bar's highest award), the Ingham County Bar Association's Distinguished Volunteer of the Year Award (2000), and two T. M. Cooley Law Review Distinguished Brief Awards, for his Supreme Court Briefs in the leading Headlee Amendment case, *Bolt v City of*

Lansing (the "rain tax" case) (1999) and *Kreski v Modern Wholesale Electric and Consumers Power* (adopting the "Fireman's Rule") (1988).

In addition to these cases, Baker was counsel of record in over 40 published state and federal appellate decisions, including the Supreme Court decisions in *Stockdale v Jamison* (establishing measure of damages for wrongful refusal to defend and settle); *MacDonald v State Farm Mut Ins Co* (eligibility for no-fault work-loss benefits when illness independently renders the insured unable to work), and *General Motors v Department of Treasury* (prohibiting double use and sales taxation of goodwill repairs performed after warranty expiration). In each Supreme Court decision Baker secured, the Court reversed after the lower courts ruled against his clients.

Baker has devoted substantial efforts to pro bono and Bar work, including: 24 years as Chair, Michigan State Bar Publications Committee (1987 to 2011); Reporter, State Bar Grievance Committee (1982-84); State Bar Young Lawyers Section Council (1981-84); Chair, State Bar Committee for Delivery of Legal Services to the Elderly (1978-88); Founder and President, T. M. Cooley Law School's Sixty Plus Law Center, Inc. (1978-87), and Board Member and Secretary (1987 to present). With John Voelker, a/k/a Robert Traver, and Richard F. Vander Veen III, Baker founded the John D. Voelker Foundation, which has provided over 34 law school scholarships to Native Americans, one of whom, Allie Maldonado, was recently appointed to the Michigan Court of Appeals. He also serves as a trustee and chair of the Lansing Area Community Trust and Lansing's W.B. and Candace Thoman Foundation, which provide grants to promote civil liberties and assist Lansing community and educational programs.

Baker is listed in *Who's Who in: America, American Law, and the World*; enjoys Martindale-Hubbell's highest (A-V/Preeminent) rating; is the author of numerous scholarly publications and book reviews; and has edited scores of articles and four books. He has been married to Irene Baker, R.N., N.P., for 53 years, with whom he has two daughters and 4 grandchildren.



Mark Cooney

Mark Cooney is a professor at Western Michigan University Cooley Law School, where he chairs the Research & Writing Department. He is a past chair of the State Bar’s Appellate Practice Section and served on the founding board of the Historical Society Advocate’s Guild.

Professor Cooney was Editor in Chief of *The Scribes Journal of Legal Writing* for six volumes and continues to serve as a Senior Editor. He has published nearly 50 articles on legal writing, appellate practice, and other topics, along with various book chapters and a book collecting his Bar Journal “Plain Language” essays. Appellate courts in multiple states have quoted and cited his articles.

In 2018, Professor Cooney was a co-recipient (with Prof. Joseph Kimble) of the Center for Plain Language’s ClearMark Award for Legal Documents, presented at the National Press Club. In 2022, he received a Distinguished Service Award from Scribes—The American Society of Legal Writers.

Professor Cooney has presented on legal writing and appellate practice nationally and in the UK, appearing at events sponsored by the Association of Legal Writing Directors, Clarity International, the Defense Research Institute, the Institute for Continuing Legal Education, the Legal Writing Institute, the Michigan Appellate Assigned Counsel System, the Michigan Appellate Bench-Bar Foundation, Michigan Defense Trial Counsel, Scribes, the State Bar’s Appellate Practice and Young Lawyers Sections, and others. He has also presented national CLE webcasts on appellate practice and stare decisis.

Before teaching, Professor Cooney spent eleven years in private practice with civil-litigation firms, primarily the Southfield firm Collins Einhorn Farrell, where he handled appeals in professional-malpractice and other tort cases. He has successfully briefed and argued cases in the Michigan Supreme Court, the Michigan Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for

the Sixth Circuit. He was also a co-recipient of the Cooley Law Review’s Distinguished Brief Award, which recognizes the most scholarly briefs submitted to the Michigan Supreme Court in a given term.



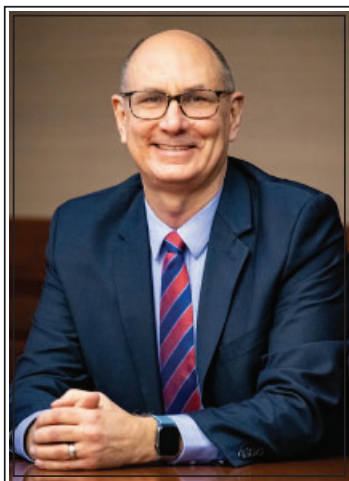
Maura D. Corrigan

Maura Corrigan is Counsel to Butzel Long. She previously served as a Justice and Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Judge and Chief Judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals, Director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, Assistant U.S. Attorney and Chief Assistant, and Assistant Prosecutor in Wayne County. Former Chief Justice Corrigan also served as a Visiting Fellow with the American Enterprise Institute. She currently concentrates her practice on appeals and litigation strategy, and continues to work locally and nationally in child welfare advocacy and poverty studies.

You can be read more about Justice Corrigan on our website at <https://www.micourthistory.org/justices/maura-corrigan/> and <https://www.micourthistory.org/women-and-the-law/maura-corrigan/>. Be sure to join us later this month for her portrait unveiling on Wednesday, June 14, 2023. We’ll include photos and remarks of the event in the Fall Issue of the Newsletter!

Order Pu

You can order any of the Society publications by contacting Sharlow at carriesharlow@micourthistory.com. We have co
The Bench (\$10.00) as well as *The Michigan Supreme Co*



Peter Cunningham

Peter Cunningham is the executive director of the State Bar of Michigan. He also serves on the executive committee for the Justice for All Commission and is a member of its Resource and Communications committees.

Cunningham also serves on the executive committees of the Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Michigan Judiciary and the Institute of Continuing Legal Education. A fellow with the Michigan State Bar Foundation, he also is a member of the National Association of Bar Executives and the American Bar Association.

Cunningham began his appointment as the sixth executive director of the State Bar of Michigan on March 1, 2022. He joined the State Bar staff in 2012 as director of governmental relations and assumed the responsibilities of assistant executive director in 2015.

Before joining the State Bar staff, Cunningham served as executive director of the Michigan Campaign for Justice, a nonprofit created to promote improvement in Michigan's indigent criminal defense system. He also worked for the Michigan Legislature in various roles including chief of staff for the speaker of the House of Representatives.

Cunningham earned his bachelor's degree in political science and government from Juniata College and his master's degree in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He continued to study anthropology at Michigan State University and served as president of the Michigan Archaeological Society. He lives with his wife and two children in Okemos.

Publications

Contact Lynn Seaks at lynnseaks@micourthistory.com or Carrie for copies of the former Chief Justice Thomas E. Brennan's novel *Portrait Historical Reference Guide, Second Edition* (\$30.00).

Save the Date -

Wednesday,

June 14, 2023

Former Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan Portrait Unveiling

Wednesday,

October 4, 2023

Opening Session for the 2023-2024 Court Year

Saturday,

October 28, 2023

Justice Kyra Harris Bolden Investiture

Wednesday,

November 29, 2023

Former Justice Kurtis T. Wilder Portrait Unveiling

Thursday,

April 11, 2024

Society Annual Luncheon at the Inn at St. John's, Plymouth



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Save the Date! New Location!
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44045 Five Mile Road in Plymouth

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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Assistant Executive Director:

Carrie Sharlow

Society Update is published quarterly by the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society. Writing submissions, article ideas, news, and announcements are encouraged. Contact the Society at: 3rd Floor Hall of Justice, 925 W. Ottawa Street, Lansing, MI 48915 Phone: (517) 373-7589 Fax: (517) 373-7592