

# History of the Cook County Bar Association

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## INSTALLMENT I

**S**EVEN score and thirteen years ago our forefathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived and dedicated to the proposition that all men were created equal, but 153 years of practice since then had demonstrated that all men in this great nation are considered equal, except the members of our Race; that if we wish equality we must plead for it, fight for it and perhaps die for it.

Various bar associations do not openly deny us membership and equality, but find it expedient to have their application blanks state the nationality of the applicant, and we believe that some of them decide the question of admittance on the answer to this interrogatory.

The Cook County Bar association was organized for the purpose of admitting to membership lawyers regardless of their race, color or creed, and now constitutes the oldest and largest local bar association in the United States having no restriction to race, color or creed.

Edward H. Wright, first president and founder of the association, held office from 1914 to 1915.

Mr. Wright was a man of great political sagacity. He became an assistant corporation counsel under the first administration of Mayor William Hale Thompson in 1916, and bears the distinction of being the first special attorney for the city of Chicago from our group at the salary of \$100 per day. He assisted in the drafting of a proposed traction ordinance.

Mr. Wright was also the first Negro to be appointed a member of the Illinois commerce commission and served in that capacity until he was disabled by physical illness from performing his duties.

Under Mr. Wright's administration the Bar association gained membership and laid the foundation for future success.

Mr. Wright was succeeded by Henry M. Porter, one of Chicago's well known orators and an assistant state's attorney for some years. Mr. Porter was endorsed by the Deneen faction of the Republican party in Chicago in 1923 as a candidate for judge of the municipal court on their slate. He received a large number of votes.

During the administration of Mr. Porter the terrible race riot of 1919 occurred. The Cook County Bar association had developed such confidence on the part of public officials that the association was requested by the state's attorney and judges of the criminal court to appoint members of the association to appear at various police courts and defend Negroes charged with assault and other crimes; also to attend all inquests made by the coroner and to defend Negroes indicted and charged with crime and violence during the riot. The corp of lawyers representing the association succeeded in keeping many innocent Negroes from being sent to the various penal institutions because of false charges made against them, and also succeeded in collecting hundreds and thousands of dollars in damages from the city of Chicago for damage to their property, injuries to their person and death. The lawyers were fearless in attending inquests and trials in various parts of the city where the cases were being heard.

Mr. Porter was succeeded by James A. Terry, who afterward became an assistant state's attorney and whose administration continued the advancement of the organization.

During Mr. Terry's administration various bar associations in the Seventh judicial district of Illinois, which includes Chicago, affiliated together and representatives of the Cook County Bar association were invited to attend and did attend. This affiliation has created a common interest between the various associations and a sympathy for their problems which afterward developed into an advantage to members of the Cook County Bar association.

Mr. Terry was succeeded by Richard E. Westbrook, well known Chicago attorney and also afterward appointed an assistant state's attorney. During Mr. Westbrook's administration the membership was increased and the association received signal recognition from the judges.

Mr. Westbrook was succeeded by the late Willie E. Mollison, nationally known as one of our foremost orators.

Mr. Mollison culminated a brilliant career by holding office as the fourth president of the association and succeeded in increasing the prestige of the organization by making closer contact with the judges and the public officials of Chicago.

The annual banquet of the organization inaugurating Mr. Mollison's administration was featured by the presence of a large number of judges and public officials.

C. J. Waring was the successor to Mr. Mollison and the oldest member of the association to hold the office. Mr. Waring aroused the interest and support of the present active members of the association due to his kindly and considerate manner and progressive spirit and afterward called "The Grand Old Man of the Cook County Bar Association."

During the administration of Mr. Waring, Albert B. George, now sitting on the bench of the municipal court of Chicago, was elected to office and the members of the association contributed largely to his success by working actively and strenuously for his election. Every member of the organization used his efforts either on the public platform, or by personal appeal, to obtain votes for Judge George. After the election of Judge George the association honored him with a banquet attended by nearly all of his fellow jurists elected with him and presented him with a gold star set with a diamond, which is one of Judge George's treasured possessions.

During the administration of Mr. Waring, the chief justice of the criminal court, having such confidence in the association that he requested the president to supply him with a list of members of the association who would volunteer to defend Colored persons charged with crime being tried in the criminal courts and who lacked funds to retain an attorney. This practice has been continued by every chief justice of the criminal court since it was inaugurated by Judge Sullivan.

The newspapers of Chicago also printed notices and reports of the

activities of the association and have continued to do so since then, so that the association and its members never lacked opportunity for publication of any matter they consider important to the public or to the members.

The National Bar association was launched in Chicago during Mr. Waring's administration and Mr. Woodson, the first president, has often stated that it was only through the aid and encouragement given to him by Mr. Waring and his administration that the launching of the National Bar association was a success, the first meeting of the National Bar association, held in Des Moines, Iowa, being attended by President Waring and a large number of members of the Cook County Bar association.

Mr. Waring's administration started with very few financial members and ended with 63.

He was succeeded by C. Francis Stradford, now president of the National Bar association and one of the most brilliant presidents of the Bar association. The Cook County Bar association feels that it has contributed a distinct and lasting contribution to the history of the National Bar association when it sponsored the election of C. Francis Stradford for president and Mr. Mollison for secretary. Mr. Stradford has just finished two years of successful administration as president of the Cook County Bar association when he was elected to the presidency of the National Bar association, and the members of the Cook County Bar association having explicit confidence in the ability of Mr. Stradford to successfully manage and increase the prestige of the National Bar association selected him as its first candidate for president. Mr. Stradford with the able assistance of Mr. Mollison has justified the confidence placed in him by the members of our organization by keeping the National Bar association continually before the public and by increasing its membership from 63 during the last convention to 200 during this convention, also by arousing the interest and support of the attorneys in Detroit and other cities east of Chicago.

Mr. Stradford's administration as president of the Cook County Bar association was distinguished for its increase in membership from 63 to 103 members and other achievements, as follows:

Sullivan's Law Directory of Chicago after several years of persuasion finally designated the members of the Cook County Bar association by name and have continued to do so, thereby increasing the prestige of the organization and its members.

The judges of Chicago continued to recognize the influence of the association and requested representatives of the association to be present whenever any important matters were being considered by them.

The treasury increased in funds, 500 per cent providing a large amount of cash which was utilized by the present administration to rent a permanent headquarters at 4500 Michigan Ave. and to equip its headquarters with furniture, billiard room and an extensive law library.

During Mr. Stradford's administration the moral of the association was increased to such an extent that the grievance committee instituted and successfully prosecuted two proceedings to disbar members of the association. During Mr. Waring's administration the grievance committee of the Chicago Bar association exhibited confidence in the grievance committee of the Cook County Bar association by referring all grievances involving members of the Cook County Bar association to our committee and continued to do so during Mr. Stradford's administration.

Judge DeYoung of the supreme court and now chief justice of the supreme court of Illinois, delivered a brilliant address at one of the annual banquets during Mr. Stradford's administration. The second annual convention of the National Bar association was held in Chicago and Attorney Calloway of Kansas City was elected president. The sessions of the convention were attended by a large number of Chicago and visiting attorneys and citizens and a large public reception given in honor of the visiting delegates and was attended by some of the most prominent Chicago people.

The public mass meeting after the convention was featured by a brilliant address by Hon. Edward H. Wright, then a member of the commerce commission of Illinois and committeeman of the Second ward. Mr. Wright is considered the political Warwick of our group in Chicago, having managed the campaigns and sponsored the candidacy of Judge George, Senator Roberts, Members Kersey, Turner, King and Griffin of the legislature, and a number of assistant state's attorneys, city attorneys, corporation counsels, aldermen and a member of the industrial commission.

I succeeded Mr. Stradford and have continued the policies and activities of the former administrations and believe I have increased the prestige of the association, aroused the interest of the members, created greater confidence by the public and maintained the dignity of the profession in Chicago.

The association has furnished and maintains a permanent headquarters, including facilities for recreation and amusement, and a law library for the members. This headquarters is located in one of the finest mansions, and on one of the most beautiful corners on Michigan Ave. in Chicago. To the south of the building is a beautiful garden shaded with trees and shrubbery. It has developed into the social mecca of the South side.

The attorney of the association during the last two years has succeeded in having the association definitely designated as having the power and authority to conduct disbarment proceedings brought during Mr. Stradford's administration.

The association conducted an active campaign to have a member of the association endorsed by both Republican and Democratic parties in Chicago and placed on their tickets for

judge of the circuit court at the election in November. Definite and positive promises were made by a number of the Republican and Democratic leaders in Chicago that members will be considered and selected. Congressman DePriest and every Colored leader pledged their efforts to have members selected and endorsed, and if members had been selected and endorsed and a coalition slate agreed upon between the various political parties their election would have been assured.

Only one Colored man in Chicago had ever been endorsed as a candidate for judge of the circuit or superior court, namely, Edward H. Morris, who was defeated because of the landslide against the ticket sponsored by Mayor William Hale Thompson at that time. So many various activities and matters of public interest are being engaged in by members of the organization that it is almost impossible to remember them.

During 1923 and 1929 The Chicago Defender and Chicago Bee newspapers printed news from the association almost every week. Column after column was given to the sessions of the National Bar association held in Chicago in 1923, the daily sessions and the reception given in honor of the visiting delegates was attended by all of the leaders in our group, both political, social and financial, more than 500 persons attended the reception.

Before the last election members of the Cook County Bar association were holding important public offices as follows: Judge of the municipal court, six corporation counsels, four state representatives, two city prosecutors, one special attorney general, 13 state's attorneys, one city attorney, one attorney general, one alderman, one assistant to the judge of the court of domestic relations and one assistant United States attorney.

Other members held important and remunerative private positions such as general counsel of The Chicago Defender, general counsel and member of the board of directors of the Liberty Life Insurance company, Binga State bank and Douglass National bank, general counsel of various fraternal organizations and insurance companies.

Indorsement of the Cook County Bar association has been sought by almost every candidate to the bench in Chicago during the past 14 years.

(Read Installment II Next Week)