

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



March 1998



ALLEGORY OF CHATTANOOGA—This is the name of the mural that is behind the bench in the third-floor courtroom of the U.S. Courthouse at Chattanooga. The mural is 18 feet wide and five feet high. It was installed in 1937. It depicts the history of the Tennessee Valley from early settlement to the development of TVA in the early 1930s. “This magnificent mural is a historical panorama of the people and events that are a part of the growth and makeup of the Chattanooga area. As our eyes move across the painting, each figure encountered is so complete and different from the others that it becomes a mini-painting within itself,” wrote Professor Howard Hull in his book *Tennessee Post Office Murals*.

The Chattanooga Mural

The sketches of the people depicted in the mural on the wall of the third-floor courtroom of the federal courthouse in Chattanooga—where **Judge R. Allan Edgar** presides—were given considerable scrutiny by officials before the artist was given final approval to proceed. The purpose of this examination was to assure that the message conveyed by the mural was not offensive to anyone, according to **UT Professor Howard Hull**, who wrote about murals in government buildings in Tennessee. Details about the review of the artist’s preliminary work came from Professor Hull and from 1936

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

After months of delay while we awaited a decision by University of Tennessee Press, we have contracted for publication of Dr. Pat Howard’s book on the history of the District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee by Providence House Publishers of Franklin, Tennessee. We were disappointed when UT Press rejected the manuscript, particularly after very encouraging preliminary responses. The rejection encouraged publication of the manuscript, but stated that it was not a “scholarly monograph” of the type usually selected by university presses. We had never been advised that UT Press limited its publications to “scholarly monographs,” and never intended or expected to produce one.

In any case, we have had considerable contact with Andrew B. Miller, PHP president and publisher, and his associate publisher, Mary Bray Wheeler, and are enthusiastic about working with them. We have inspected a number of books published by PHP and found them to be of impressive quality. Perhaps more important, we have been assured that the book will be available for distribution by late August, a much earlier time than we could have otherwise obtained. Having a significant event in the court’s history coincide with the book’s release is an advantage, and the dedication of the renovated and expanded Howard H. Baker Jr. United States Courthouse in Knoxville is planned for early September.

The Society’s board has decided to adopt a conservative approach, initially ordering only a thousand copies of the book even though we hope sales will eventually be at least double that. The book will be assigned a Library of Congress number, and we are told that it should generate a significant demand (possibly 200 copies) from libraries. The decision to tell the story of the court’s history largely through accounts of several interesting cases, or groups of cases, from different time periods, should insure that it will appeal to non-lawyers in a way that a more conventional historical narrative might not. Readers of all backgrounds will be impressed by Pat Howard’s extensive research.

Don’t fail to renew your Society membership when renewals are due in a few months, and invite a friend, lawyer or not, to join us.

Jack Wheeler

correspondence between the artist and Treasury Department officials supervising the work, copies of which were obtained by Professor Hull from the National Archives and given to the Court Historical Society.

One of the figures originally was depicted as a prisoner in a striped uniform with a ball and chain attached to his leg. Before final approval was given, the ball and chain were stricken, and the striped uniform was changed to regular work clothing, Professor Hull said. Concerning another figure in the mural, a letter from **Edward B. Rowan**, superintendent of Treasury's Painting and Sculpture Section, to the artist, **Hilton Leech** of Sarasota, Florida, said: "It is agreeable that in the case of the missionary, the cross is omitted in accordance with the suggestion of Mr. Hunt." (This was **R. H. Hunt**, the principal architect for the building who, in 1937, four years after the courthouse was completed, served as one of five members of the committee that selected the artist to do the mural.) The missionary was at first sketched standing and holding a cross on a staff, and he was dressed in a long robe and was wearing a hat. The figure was changed to depict a man seated, dressed in a dark suit, and a Bible opened on his lap. There may have been other changes, but these are the only ones discussed in documents that Prof. Hull provided.

Greeneville and LaFollette

What do the federal courthouse at Greeneville and the post office at

LaFollette have in common? **Howard Hull**, professor of art education at UT, found out when he did a study of artwork in the post offices of Tennessee. The mural in the post office at LaFollette was painted by the daughter of the artist-sculptor who created the two carvings on the wall of the U.S. District Courtroom in Greeneville. The LaFollette mural was painted in 1939 by **Dahlov Ipcar**, daughter of **Marguerite** and **William Zorach**. It was William Zorach who, in 1940, carved the teakwood panels that today are on the Greeneville courtroom wall. Marguerite Zorach, herself an artist, left her mark in Tennessee also. In 1939, she painted the mural that is in the post office at Ripley in West Tennessee. It is an oil painting titled "Autumn" that is 12 feet by six feet. It is described by Professor Hull as "perhaps the most modern looking of all post office murals in the state."

Professor Hull's research dealt with the "New Deal" art programs that were designed to keep artists working during the Depression years. During that period, the federal government commissioned local artists across the country to paint murals or create artwork for 1,100 post offices, some of which, of course, were joint post offices and federal courthouses. Professor Hull said artwork was commissioned for 30 such buildings in Tennessee, and one-third of them were in East Tennessee. Most of these works of art are still in existence, he said. Professor Hull wrote a book about his findings. It is titled "*Tennessee Post Office Murals*." His research produced some interesting information about

the mural behind the bench in the third-floor courtroom of the U.S. Courthouse in Chattanooga. **Please see the story and picture on page one.**

Major Accomplishment



Mary Ellen Coleman is shown arranging some of the Court Historical Society's files.

We have been building a collection of historical memorabilia over the past few years, but we really did not know just how we were doing—until now. As we reported in the October 1997 newsletter, UT Law College senior **Mary Ellen Coleman**, who has a degree in history, worked as a volunteer for the Society inventorying our collection. We are pleased to report that she compiled a 12-page, single-spaced list of the Society's materials. In history circles, such a list is called a finder's guide. Having the guide available will be helpful to anyone wishing to search through the Society's collection.

To give members an idea of the contents, we will list a few of the items here:

Historical data on the district's four courthouses

A list of the judges who have served this district and the dates they served

A list of the court clerks who have served this district

A note from Helen Keller to Supreme Court Justice Edward T. Sanford, who served as a district judge in the Eastern District of Tennessee from 1908 to 1923 before going to the Supreme Court, where he served until his death in 1930

Audiotapes and transcriptions of many of the memorial services held in the Greenville courtroom annually to pay tribute to Northeastern Division attorneys who died in the previous year

Rules and standing orders of the court in force in 1927

A 1943 manual for United States Commissioners, an office that preceded the U.S. magistrate judge position

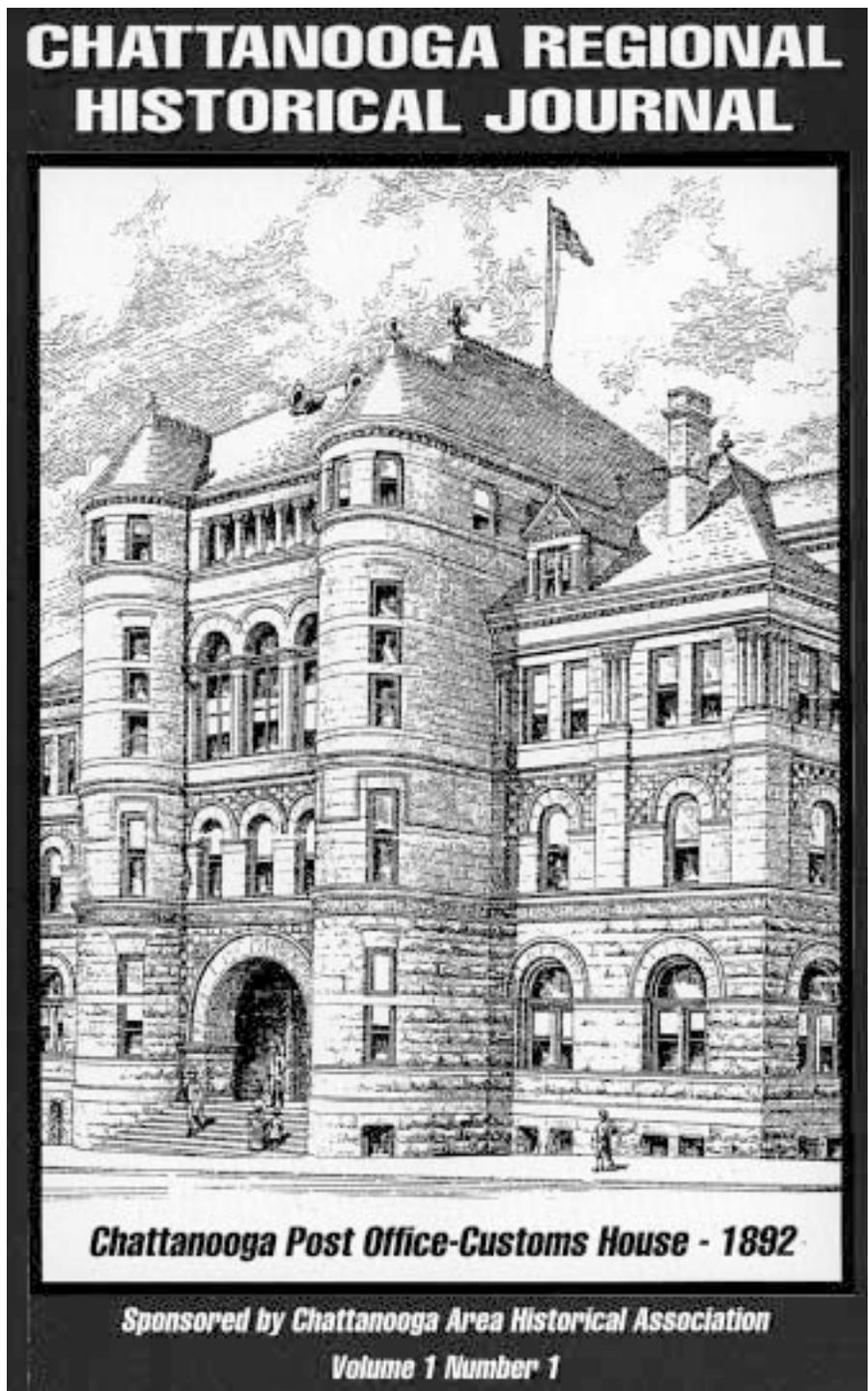
Background on the formation of the four divisions of the Eastern District of Tennessee

Copies of programs of memorial services for several former judges

Numerous files on personnel who have served the district over the years

The historical materials fill 11 file drawers and a storage closet in a small room in the clerk's office at Knoxville. Our chairman, **John W. Wheeler**, also has a small collection of additional materials that have accumulated at his office since the Society was formed and he became chairman in 1992. Ms. Coleman organized those as well. Chairman Wheeler expressed appreciation to her for all that she did for the Society and said he was impressed by the volume and variety of materials that have been accumulated. He added, "In fact, some of our members may find that they will be interested in reviewing portions of the material."

We should note here also that there is a small repository of historical memorabilia in each divisional office.



Customs House History

Society member **Mary Lynn Wilson**, who is a member of **U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Thomas Stinnett's** staff, has written a monograph on the Historic U.S. Courthouse in

Chattanooga, a structure she refers to as the "Grand Lady of Eleventh Street." Her article is one of five historical essays that appear in the first issue of the *Chattanooga Regional Historical Journal*, a publication sponsored by the Chattanooga Area Historical Association
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Association, an organization in which Ms. Wilson is very active.

The Historic U.S. Courthouse was completed in 1892 and was hailed as "the second finest building in the state, the capitol at Nashville being the only exception," Ms. Wilson writes. It housed the post office, the federal court operations, and several other federal offices until the present federal courthouse was built on Georgia Avenue in 1933. By the late 1980s, various federal offices had begun to outgrow their space and moved elsewhere. In 1991, the Bankruptcy Court, badly in need of additional space, returned to the refurbished historic old courthouse, which had become somewhat of a showplace, thanks largely to a \$2.6 million renovation in the mid-1980s by its owner, TVA.

At the end of her article, Ms. Wilson adds a note of dedication in which she recognizes **U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Ralph H. Kelley**, "who encouraged this endeavor," the writing of the monograph. Judge Kelley, who was chief bankruptcy judge at the time of the move, was instrumental in turning the attention of the U.S. Courts and GSA to the availability of the historic courthouse.

Our thanks to Ms. Wilson for sending the Court Historical Society a copy of the *Historical Journal*.

Current History

History is a great teacher. Because of the difficulty we have had in rounding up details about court events and court buildings of the past, we have gone to great lengths to preserve everything we can about current developments. As part of

that effort, **Deputy Clerk Jim Smollon**, who is skilled in video and photography, was given the assignment by **Court Clerk Murry Hawkins** to videotape at various intervals the construction of the courtrooms being added at the Howard H. Baker Jr. United States Courthouse in Knoxville. He has film footage of the courtyard as it appeared before construction began and footage of the construction as it has progressed. One of his most recent shootings was of the hoisting on January 6 of the steel framework for the dome of the rotunda entrance to the building. Altogether, the video makes for an interesting review of the construction project, and it will be of even greater interest to generations to come. In addition, we have made a number of photographs of the project in progress.

More Darr Papers

Judge Leslie Darr's commission as a federal judge—signed by **President Franklin Roosevelt**—has been added to the Darr collection at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library. The judge's daughter, **Mrs. Katharine Hastings** of Chattanooga, added to the collection last September. In a note to the Society, she said, "I thought it might be of interest that on the back of my father's commission as United States District Judge was handwritten the following":

Entered of Record in Min. Bk #12
on June 20, 1939 at Greeneville,
Tenn.

Lee A. Beeler, clerk
By Frankie Harrall
N.M.

Other documents added to the collection by Mrs. Hastings were Judge Darr's certificates of appointment as a state judge, his license to practice law, and various other citations and certificates.

As reported in earlier newsletters, Mrs. Hastings donated Judge Darr's papers to the library at the suggestion of the Court Historical Society. Judge Darr served this district from 1939 to 1967.

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