

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



September 1999

Interest Is High

Other federal court historical groups continue to contact our Society for advice, the latest being the First Circuit Court of Appeals, Boston, which was referred to this district by the Federal Judicial Center. "We are looking for your help and advice in making" our society "as effective as possible," wrote **Circuit Executive Vincent Flanagan**. "You will be aiding us greatly."

And at Dayton, Ohio, **Dr. Roberta Alexander** of the University of Dayton Pre-Law Program was searching for court historical society information in the university's library, saw a listing of our court's available oral histories, and requested a sample. Upon learning about our Society's extensive work, including the book *Justice in the Valley*, she requested additional information and said finding us was a bonanza. Her search began after **U.S. District Judge Walter Herbert Rice**, chief judge of the Southern District of Ohio, asked her to compile and write a history of that district.

Sanford's Funeral

Notes from the book *The Marble City, a Photographic Tour of Knoxville's Graveyards*, by **Jack Neely**:

Knoxville's **Edward T. Sanford**, Eastern District of Tennessee judge and later U.S. Supreme Court justice, died on March 8, 1930, five hours before former **Chief Justice William Howard Taft** died, both in Washington. Taft was only recently retired at the time. Sanford's burial at Greenwood Cemetery in Knoxville was attended by dozens of judges, including four of the eight surviving justices of the Supreme Court. "One was the newly inaugurated **Chief Justice [Charles Evans] Hughes**. All left the brief burial service quickly in order to board the train for a speedy trip back to Washington in time for Justice Taft's funeral at Arlington."

The Book Report

As we approach the one-year anniversary date (September 8) of the publishing of the

Society's book, *Justice in the Valley*, by **Dr. Patricia Brake**, we are pleased to report that fewer than 200 copies remain of the printing of 1,000 copies. The book will eventually become a collector's item, so those who have not yet purchased one will want to do so. Proceeds from the sale of the book so far total \$8,838, half coming from direct sales by the Society and half from sales by the publisher. There are other proceeds yet to be paid to the Society by the publisher, which pays royalties only twice a year. A further delay in payment results from the way in which the publisher receives payment from the book wholesaler and from bookstores, but all in all, the book can be considered a financial success. We expect that in the end, much of the cost of printing the book will be recovered by proceeds from sales.

White Marble Palace

For years after the completion of the old federal courthouse in Knoxville, people referred to it as "our white marble palace," according to **Steve Cotham**, head of the Knox County Public Library's McClung Collection, who spoke recently to the East Tennessee Historical Society. This is the 125th anniversary year of the building, which, when built in 1874 at the corner of Market Street and Clinch Avenue, was the first structure built in Knoxville as a post office and courthouse. These facilities had previously been in rented space, he said.

The Hoffa Trial ...Recollections

The following is an excerpt from the oral history of the deputy marshal who guarded **U.S. District Judge Frank W. Wilson** during the period of the **James R. (Jimmy) Hoffa** trial in Chattanooga in 1964. The trial of the infamous labor leader was one of the most notable ever held in that city. The deputy marshal, **Granville M. Sertel**, guarded Judge Wilson at the courthouse and at the judge's home during the trial and on up until after the sentencing. Mr. Sertel was the supervising deputy U.S. marshal in charge of the Chattanooga office until

his retirement in 1978. He returned to government service in 1983 as deputy-in-charge of the Chattanooga office of the clerk, a post he held until 1987. Mr. Sertel died in 1994. The trial obviously was a very serious event, but there were humorous moments too. The following account is about one of the amusing incidents that occurred:

The Raccoon Coat

THE WORDS OF MR. SERTEL:

We would change crews of deputy marshals about every week up there [at Judge Wilson's house]. So I used to have a lot of fun — I'd always tell them when they got up there, I said, "Now if the house catches on fire or blows up," I said, "that guy in the bottom bedroom, right over there on the right," I said, "get him out first." And they said, "Oh, that's where the judge stays," and I said, "No, that's where I stay." But the judge had coffee for them and they could come in the kitchen and we'd play — one of the boys could play the piano, and Mrs. Wilson played the organ, and it was real sociable. But one day we were going home, and I was just about half asleep going up the hill [Signal Mountain]; the judge was driving, and he stopped at that first red light going up the mountain, and he had to stop real fast and it woke me up, you know, and when it did, I just happened to look over there, standing over there on the side of the street was a big old burly guy who had a raccoon coat on, like the college boys used to wear years ago.

And so that caught my eye. And then, of course, I didn't think any more about it. So about 10 o'clock that night, the judge — everybody had gone to bed and I'd gone to bed — and the doorbell rang. So I got up and half dressed and went to the door and looked through the peephole and what did I see but that raccoon coat. So, I opened the door and asked, "What do you want, fella?" I could see he was drinking, too. I shook him down right quick and took a half pint of whiskey off him. And I asked him,

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"What are you doing up here?" He says, "I'm wanting to see the judge." I said, "What about?" He said, "About doing some yard work." And I said, "I believe you've come to the wrong place," and anyway, it had woke Mrs. Wilson up upstairs and so she came down. It shook her up. I said, "Go ahead," I said, "Helen, call the Signal Mountain Police; we'll have him put up." And then in just a little while the judge came down. It really shook the judge up, and so when the police got there I told them, and they said, "Aw, he's just the town drunk." I said, "Well, he may be," but I said, "We can't take these chances." I said, "Don't take him home. Take him down and book him because we want to talk to him tomorrow." And so they did, and the FBI questioned him, but I don't know how long, and the Attorney General's office questioned him, and this went on for about 2-3 days. They wouldn't let him make bond and everything. So it turned out to be that he was the town drunk. Of course, they turned him loose, and about a week after that....We'd always have company at night, neighbors came in — and so one night we went to a PTA meeting — Randy and Frank Carl were just young boys at the time; they were going to grammar school, and the PTA was having a dinner. So we all went to the dinner, me and the judge and the boys, and on the way back home, Helen says, "Frank, what's happened to all our company? We haven't had any company now in a long time." You know the judge was witty, and he said, "I don't guess so. The last company we had was put in jail!" They tell me that guy never drank another bit of liquor. He straightened up and got to be a Christian.

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Editor's Note—The court provided the Chattanooga Area Historical Association a summary of the 15 pages from Mr. Sertel's oral history that cover the period of the Hoffa trial. That excerpt was published by the Association in its 123-page booklet, *Chattanooga Regional Historical Journal*, in July. The excerpted pages covered Mr. Sertel's entire experience with the Hoffa trial, both during and after. Permission to reprint the excerpt was requested on behalf of the Chattanooga group by **Mary Lynn Wilson**, deputy clerk of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Chattanooga, herself a historian.

The Magic of America

Naturalization ceremonies, federal court proceedings that do not involve litigants and lawyers, are held once or twice a year in each of the Eastern District of Tennessee courts. One of the more notable speakers at one of these ceremonies was award-winning author **Alex Haley**, now deceased, who spoke at a naturalization ceremony held in Knoxville on March 13, 1991, presided over by **Judge Jarvis**. Mr. Haley's speech was reported for the court records by district court reporter **Jolene Owen**, who was instrumental in conveying to Mr. Haley the invitation to speak at the ceremony. (In her off-duty hours, she reported and transcribed an event that took place at his Anderson County farm and volunteered to ask him to speak at the ceremony.)

THE OPENING PORTION OF MR. HALEY'S REMARKS:

It's obviously a privilege for me to be able to speak on this occasion. I was thinking, sitting there watching and hearing, that at one time, say 200-300 years ago, all across Europe the most exciting single word to be heard was *America*. When that word was heard, families which had been together for generations immediately began to think about who was going to go there and who would stay in the old country, as it came to be known. The people who made the decisions were generally the older men of those families. And finally there came a day in the history of the

ancestry of everyone in this room who is of European ancestry that the family gathered somewhere. There were children, parents, grandparents, dear friends, and there was hugging and kissing and crying, because people knew that they were hugging and kissing and crying with other people dear to them, indeed who they probably would never see again.

Then the day came when the steerage tickets were bought and those who were going to this magical place called *America* got on immigrant ships and came across the Atlantic Ocean, and then in that way, a family which had been one big family in Europe had split, and then on this side of the Atlantic Ocean those who had come began to have children, and on the other side, those who had stayed began to have children, and one of the most exciting things in the field of genealogy or family searching today is how, in this country, virtually everybody who is of the European ancestry has anywhere from dozens to scores of literal blood cousins somewhere in Europe who don't even know the cousins on this side, and likewise the cousins on this side don't know who the ones over there are. So the big exciting thing now in genealogy is trying to bring together the families which were split 100, 150, 200 years ago by the magic of that word *America*.

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