



Court Historical Society NEWSLETTER *Eastern District of Tennessee*



NOVEMBER 2015

Justice Sanford Symposium



JUSTICE HONORED--Dr. John M. Scheb, UT Political Science professor, outlined the life and career of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Edward T. Sanford, shown on the screen above him, at a Knoxville symposium in late October.

Washington when I knew that I would never have again that most delightful of intellectual exercises. I ... hope that I shall always be called a lawyer, in a profession that defends the weak and gives justice among men."

Sanford served as a District Judge from 1908 until 1923, when he was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The interview referred to above was included in the detailed portrayal of the justice's life, given by **Dr. John M. Scheb**, University of Tennessee Political Science Professor, at a symposium October 29 honoring the late jurist.

The symposium, held at the East Tennessee History Center in Knoxville, was sponsored by the Court Historical Society and the East Tennessee Historical Society. Justice Sanford is the only Knoxvillean to ever serve on the high court.

Dr. Scheb reviewed for the nearly 100 people in attendance at the symposium several important opinions written by Justice Sanford, adding that the jurist likely would have written many more significant opinions had fate not cut short his career. Justice Sanford died in March 1930 after developing uremic poisoning following a routine tooth extraction.

When Knoxville lawyer **Edward T. Sanford** was offered a federal judgeship for the Middle and Eastern Districts of Tennessee in 1908, he said, "I did not want to go on the bench, for I loved the profession of the lawyer."

He made that comment in a 1923 interview, adding, "I remember that one of the saddest days of my whole life was when I made my last argument before the Supreme Court in

Recognition for Executive Director

In 1995, when the Knoxville division of our court moved into the Whittle Communications building--today the Howard H. Baker Jr. U.S. Courthouse--two rooms on the first floor were set aside to house, for historical purposes, a few pieces of outdated furniture that had been used by court personnel for more than 60 years.

Those rooms were later designated as the History Suite, and your Society executive director, **Don K. Ferguson**, then the Chief Deputy Clerk of the court, worked to place additional historical items in those rooms, especially after his retirement from the Clerk's Office in 2001.

Over the past 15 years, a number of historical items, court memorabilia, oral histories, significant photographs of our judges and notable visitors to the court have been added, along with hundreds of documents--speeches, newspaper clippings, investiture programs, naturalization programs--all indexed and preserved for future researchers.

This work has been done by Ferguson and various volunteers and temporary paid helpers who served from time to time.

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*SURPRISE ACT--Don K. Ferguson holds the plaque presented to him, naming the History Suite in the Howard H. Baker Jr. U.S. Courthouse the "Don K. Ferguson History Center," action taken by the judges of the Eastern District of Tennessee that was a surprise to the honoree. The judges present for the ceremony, all members of the Court Historical Society, are, from the left, **Chief Judge Varlan, Judge Reeves, and Senior Judges Phillips and Jordan.** The announcement was made at the conclusion of a symposium honoring former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Edward T. Sanford.*



THE PLAQUE HANGING--Don K. Ferguson, right, with Chief Judge Varlan, who serves as the Honorary Chairperson of the Court Historical Society, at the hanging of the plaque that names the History Suite in the Howard H. Baker Jr. U.S. Courthouse in Knoxville as the "Don K. Ferguson History Center." The Center is just inside the Cumberland Avenue entrance to the courthouse.

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On October 29, in a move that was a surprise to Ferguson, the district judges of the Eastern District of Tennessee officially named the suite the "Don K. Ferguson History Center," and a plaque bearing the new name has been placed on the history center wall.

The names of the district's four active district judges--**Chief Judge Thomas A. Varlan, Judge J. Ronnie Greer, Judge Harry S. Mattice Jr., and Judge Pamela L. Reeves**--and the four senior judges, **Judge Leon Jordan, Judge R. Allan Edgar, Judge Thomas W. Phillips, and Judge Curtis L. Collier** are listed at the bottom of the plaque.

The announcement of the name change came at the end of the October 29 symposium honoring former **U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Edward T. Sanford**, who also served as the District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee. (See story and picture elsewhere in this newsletter--EDITOR.)

We Are Among Few

What is being done by the federal courts to preserve their history, and how many courts across the country are actively engaged in this work?

Currently, 24 of the 94 district courts have historical societies. We, of course, are one of those, and we've been in existence since 1993.

Actually, there are only 14 district court historical societies. The

other 10 technically are branches of the Eighth Circuit Court Historical Society, although they effectively function as separate, local entities, according to **Daniel Holt**, Associate Historian with the Federal Judicial History Office of the Federal Judicial Center in Washington. Of course, there might be other courts that we do not know of that informally preserve their history without the benefit of a society.

There are five other active historical societies at the circuit level. The Sixth Circuit does not have a society, but it is believed that **Sixth Circuit Historian Neil Reed** is the only person in the federal judiciary officially titled court historian, Holt said.

We tell you, our members, this to let you know that you are a special group. We recently asked Holt for an overview of the types of history projects that court historical societies across the country are doing, and he reported that the work of these societies is much like that which we are doing: publishing newsletters and books, compiling oral histories, archiving memorabilia, providing historical displays, and sponsoring lectures.

Holt's information comes from a report he made recently to the District of Columbia Circuit Court Historical Society, which asked for an update on the kinds of activities being undertaken by court historical societies throughout the country.

We thought it worth sharing with you to let you know the extent of the accomplishments of your Society--work that we are able to do largely through your support, and to tell you how we measure up with other federal court societies.

*THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Don K. Ferguson
Executive Director and Newsletter Editor

*Howard H. Baker Jr. U.S. Courthouse • 800 Market Street, Suite 130
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902
865/545-4234, Ext. 2222 • Don_Ferguson@tmed.uscourts.gov*