You were fortunate, indeed, to have been a member of the Dallas Bar Association in 1959. John Jackson was president, and almost each week you received the DBA Newsletter with a “President’s Report” which — like Mr. Jackson, himself — was charming, witty, and eloquent.

His reports ranged from Shakespeare to Mencken. They educated us, gently. They prodded us, subtly, toward a greater recognition of the true meaning and the very real responsibilities of the legal profession. My favorite John Jackson column — which has become a classic among Dallas attorneys — is reprinted here, just as it appeared in 1959, in the January 29 Dallas Bar Newsletter:

"The First Thing We Do, Let's Get Our Context Straight."

"In Shakespeare’s Henry VI, Part II, Act IV, Scene II, there is a line which reads ‘The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.’ The line is occasionally quoted with pejorative implications, but the truth is quite to the contrary. In Shakespeare’s version a hood by the name of Jack Cade, who had taken the name of Mortimer, had assembled some riffraff for a rebellion. Among the group was Dick, the butcher, who Shakespeare portrays as a gabby wisenheimer. Here is the context of the quoted line:

‘CADE Be brave, then; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common; and in Cheapside shall my palfry go to grass: and when I am King, as King I will be. —

ALL God save your Majesty!

CADE I thank you, good people; there shall be no money: all shall eat and drink on my score; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers, and worship me their lord.

DICK The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.

CADE Nay, that I mean to do. . . .

"At this point a wretched egghead was brought before Cade for trial on the charge of being able to read and write. Without any of the delays that sometime plague the processes of justice as administered by lawyers, Cade disposed of the case instanter:

‘CADE . . . Dost thou use to write thy name? or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?

CLERK Sir, I thank God. I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.

ALL He hath confessed; away with him! He’s a villain and a traitor.

CADE Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and inkmort about his neck."
"It seems clear that Shakespeare used Cade to pay the bard's respect to collectivism. Perhaps we can say that, unless Cade was a completely cynical demagogue, he had a popular platform in opposing the short beer and in promising to be an aggressive check grabber. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of our profession the oft-quoted line epitomizes Shakespeare's genius for the flashing insight. If one were resolved to establish a communistic regime, how better could he start than by killing all the lawyers."

1. In the play, Cade claims that to the marriage of Edmund Mortimer (Earl of March) and the daughter of the duke of Clarence were born two children; that the elder was stolen by a beggar-woman and became a bricklayer and that Cade was the son of such child. The claim is authenticated by impeccable logic. A chimney, built by the bricklayer, still stood and was offered as irrefutable proof.

2. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Cade and his followers were pardoned. Unfortunately, Cade's pardon was granted to him in the name of Mortimer and when this variance was discovered Cade was promptly done in. It is probable that if Cade had retained legal counsel his lawyer could have gotten him a valid pardon.