



MY OPINION

BY BOB BLACK

PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

Our Shared History

It would be nice to represent to you that I have loved history since I was a young child. Alas, the truth is less shiny. I became a history major in college because I did not know what I wanted to major in and because my introductory level American History professor was kind enough to scribble a note on my first test: “You should consider becoming a history major. Please come see me.”

Through Dr. Kenneth Shover’s kind efforts, I did become a history major and I have always been grateful for it. I later learned that he had not singled me out but instead wrote the same note on most every test with an “A” or “B” result! No wonder he was a beloved chair of the History Department at the University of Texas at El Paso, my alma mater, for years. I enjoyed history so much that I aspired to teach history. This led to a confrontation with my parents who had this strange idea that I should become a lawyer. Thank you, Mom and Dad.

A love for history has led me through Macedonia to Rome to Alexandria to London to Boston to Saratoga to Gettysburg and to our present day. It has enriched my life and expanded my world.

As the years have raced past, I have come to cherish the American experience, our magnificent democracy in all its glory and turmoil. My presidential initiatives are rooted in my love for our country and for our institutions, particularly our judicial system, of which we as lawyers are a vital part. My chief initiatives as president have been:

- (1) To educate the public, particularly school children, about the third equal branch of government and the important role our profession and courts play in our society.

Thus, *Oyez, Oyez, Oh Yay!* and *We Are Lawyers* were born;

- (2) To foster preservation of our rich legal heritage in Texas and then to use that heritage to educate the public in an entertaining and interesting way about our profession’s very significant role in our democracy; and
- (3) To discuss with lawyers throughout the state the importance of self-governance of our profession and the need for a unified, integrated State Bar of Texas.

In 2009, when Chief Justice **Wallace B. Jefferson** and the Supreme Court formed the Texas Court Records Preservation Task Force, chaired by **Bill Kroger**, the State Bar had a great opportunity to collaborate with the Task Force and help sponsor its efforts. Bill and I served on the State Bar Board of Directors together and he called and invited me to visit the Harris County courthouse. When I arrived, he and Judge **Mark Davidson** showed me their treasures: a legal filing hand-written by Sam Houston among many other fascinating documents. The three of us were like school kids with our toys. Not every county has been as prescient as Harris County in preserving records. The Task Force did a survey of the state of court records in Texas counties, in and of itself a stupendous accomplishment in a state with 254 counties.

The Task Force has done amazing work in evaluating the state’s historic court documents and its progress in preserving our legal history will resonate for generations to come. This issue of the *Texas Bar Journal* features vignettes of 21

historically important and fascinating records. You will also have the opportunity to view these documents at the Annual Meeting in Houston in June. I hope you find these records as compelling as I do.

Our legal history illustrates why our profession is both loved and loathed. Our democracy entrusts the courts and our profession with the major issues of the day. Through the pages of our legal records we see chronicled our struggles with race, slavery, American Indian issues, the rights of women, property rights, elections, and many more. Sometimes, our legal system shines and sometimes it does not. But it is *our shared history*.

The State Bar is committed to preserving our legal history. How can you help? The Texas Bar Historical Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization chaired by **Ken Raney**, is a key to further efforts. In a state as large as Texas, records preservation costs can add up. If you are in a position to help, I encourage you to make a tax-deductible contribution to the Texas Bar Historical Foundation (please designate for court records preservation). You can mail contributions to:

Texas Bar Historical Foundation
P.O. Box 12487
Austin 78711-2487

One of the most enjoyable parts of being president of the State Bar is visiting with lawyers from across the state of Texas. Despite the economic and other challenges our profession currently faces, there is a deep reverence for what we as lawyers do every day. Let’s help preserve for future generations a record of our profession and our courts.