



The State Bar Archives Department offers research and reference services. State Bar Archives Specialist Caitlin Bumford, left, and State Bar Archives Director Alexandra Myers generally have a turnaround time of 48 hours.

# Historical Scavenger Hunt

BY PATRICIA L. GARCIA

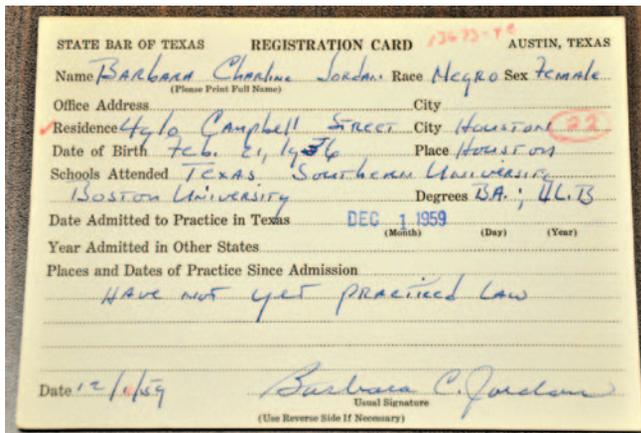
In 1954, Conrad Krez passed the Texas Bar exam. But he never went on to practice law. Instead, he taught math in California. Not much else is known about Krez's short, if puzzling, legal career. It's a mystery his birth daughter, Bunny Wilder, and her cousin hope to unravel.

With the help of the State Bar Archives Department, Wilder and her cousin, John Edward Powell, have been able to learn more about her father through his State Bar record. While the pair knew that Krez took the bar exam, they didn't know the details. They later learned that he lived in Corpus Christi and that he did not join the State Bar. "The real gem in all of this was that he was residing in Corpus Christi," says Powell, an architectural preservationist and architectural historian based in Bakersfield, Calif., who has aided Wilder in her search. "The Corpus Christi part of it ... was a big discovery for us, since it meant we could narrow down our search. Learning small details has taught us more about who he was and his interests."

Such cases are not rare for the archivists in the State Bar Archives Department, says Director Alexandra Myers. Each day, she and Archives Specialist Caitlin Bumford play a small part in a complicated sort of scavenger hunt, assisting Bar members and members of the public discover more about Texas' legal past or individuals who played a role in it. "Our goal is to have a genuine conversation with those who call us to discover exactly what they're trying to find," Myers says. "Often the initial question is asked hesitantly, so we work to

help them refine their question or feel more comfortable asking multiple questions. Many of our callers become repeat customers once they discover the services we have to offer."

The official repository for the State Bar of Texas, the Archives Department was created in 1991 in conjunction with the Gov. Bill and Vara Daniel Center for Legal History to accommodate the collection of the Texas Bar Historical Foundation. Located in the Texas Law Center in Austin, the State Bar Archives contains 1,520 square feet of storage and office space. Its holdings include records of the State Bar Board of Directors; the Junior Bar of Texas; the Texas Young Lawyers Association; the *Texas Bar Journal*; committees and sections of the Bar, including newsletters and journals; State Bar departments and programs; the Texas Bar Foundation; TexasBarCLE and its predecessor, the Professional Development Program (PDP); TexasBarBooks; local bar associations; and the Texas Bar Historical Foundation. The collection consists of documents as well as photographs, artwork, rare books, audiotapes and videotapes, artifacts, and digital documents and includes items donated by individuals such as J. Chrys Dougherty. Some noted items in the collection are former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan's hand-written State Bar registration card; law licenses from 1853, 1858, and 1912; and more than 1,000 notebooks of handwritten notes from Roland C. "R.C." Vaughan, a judge of the 15th District Court in Sherman from 1952 to 1985.



Former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan's State Bar Registration Card.

The State Bar's collection is accessible to both Bar members and the public. Digital surrogates are provided when a record is fragile or damaged, but the original is always available should the digital one not be sufficient.

In addition to research duties, the Archives Department is charged with maintaining the State Bar's collection and donated items. The goal is to preserve items for at least another 100 years, Myers says. "Dust, grime, and pests are our enemies, so we need to make sure that we are providing a suitable environment for these records." That means storing records in the most appropriate housing available, such as acid-free boxes, and storing items at a constant 68 degrees.

An essential duty of the Archives Department is processing, arranging, and describing — essentially creating a comprehensive catalog of the State Bar's collection. This archival processing step allows the department to quickly retrieve items. "A lot of our job is the value-added contextualization of bar history," Bumford says. "The historical information is here, but if you don't know where to find it, it's useless.

"One of the benefits that archivists provide is that all of the work we do creates an added value to the historical documents that we have in the collection," Bumford says. "So every answer that we provide someone helps us learn more about our collection, and, in turn, that helps those who may have a question in the future about the same thing."

Nowhere is that added value more evident than in State Bar historical exhibits. The James R. Dougherty Historical Pavilion, located in the lobby of the Texas Law Center, currently showcases "According to the Tenor: Creating the Texas Law Center." The exhibit contains photographs and documents of how the State Bar acquired the land under the Texas Law Center and how the permanent headquarters for the State Bar was first housed in a much smaller building. The exhibit includes a program from a May 22, 1976, time capsule, listing all the items intended to be viewed in 2026. Without the work of archivists such as Myers and Bumford, those viewing the exhibit wouldn't necessarily contextualize the documents.



The State Bar Archives Department has a total of 1,520 square feet of storage and office space, including this room, where documents are stored at a constant 68 degrees.

Debra Blacklock-Sloan, a Houston-based historical researcher and genealogist, says the work that the State Bar Archives Department, along with other archives in Texas, provides is invaluable. She recently requested information from the department on early black attorneys in Texas for a planned biographical database. "These types of records are essential because they are documentation of African-American accomplishments," she says. "I've written several historical marker applications over the years, and I am always ecstatic when such detailed information is readily available. More important, because of proper storage, these records will be around for future generations."

Bunny Wilder agrees. While she loved her stepfather and his family, she felt that the lack of knowledge of her biological father created a missing piece in her life. "Historical documents are so important. For me, it helped me make a connection to my father's family," she says, adding that she was thrilled to later find a photograph of her paternal grandmother. "I'm finally able to see the whole picture."

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For more information about the State Bar Archives Department, to initiate a research request, to request a tour of the State Bar Archives, or to inquire about archival donations, contact the Archives Department at (800) 204-2222, ext. 1311 or (512) 427-1311 or by email at [archives@texasbar.com](mailto:archives@texasbar.com).