

Local and Special-Purpose BAR ASSOCIATIONS

By Francine Cullari

From the formation of the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association to the recent creation of the Judge Charles Pratt Bar Association, local and special-purpose bar associations have promoted service to the public and members of the State Bar of Michigan for almost 180 years.

While each association has its own goals and objectives, the common threads are educating the public and attorneys, serving the community, promoting ethical behavior of attorneys, and fostering camaraderie among attorneys and judges.

The associations work with the State Bar and the court systems to advance accessibil-

ity to justice, uniformity in practice, technological advances in the courts and attorney offices, and simplification of legal processes.

In this issue, the *Michigan Bar Journal* launches a series focusing on local and special-purpose bars written by members of those bars. We thank the authors for enlightening us on the history of their associations and the services they provide. For the few attorneys in Michigan who are not members of a local bar association, we hope this series encourages you to become active in one. ■

If your association would like to be featured, contact Francine Cullari at cullarilaw@sbcglobal.net.

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The Evolution of the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association

Surviving and Adapting for 180 Years

By Margaret A. Costello

The Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association (DMBA) has a rich heritage. The second-oldest bar association in the country, it was founded in 1836 as an association of lawyers and formally incorporated in 1881.¹

During the past 180 years, the DMBA has evolved from a small group of men concerned with developing a community to foster the ethical practice of law. It has survived significant social and economic changes in the Detroit legal market and the profession. Over the past 50 years, membership in the

organization hit a high of nearly 5,000 members and a low of approximately 500 members. Its current diverse membership of nearly 800 is focused on "Raising the Bar through Networking, Practice Development, and Community Service."²

The beginning of the first bar association in Michigan

In 1836, a small group of men gathered and formed the Bar of the City of Detroit. Early records reflect an active grievance

committee and periodic meetings over the next 45 years, but no regular documentation of the organization's activities between the 1840s and 1881.³ By 1880, there were 128 lawyers per 100,000 residents in Michigan, most of them in the Detroit metropolitan area.⁴ Even in the late nineteenth century, Michigan had a diverse bar.⁵ The DMBA law library was officially established in 1853⁶ and became a staple in the Detroit legal community for 146 years. The Association of the Bar of the City of Detroit was formally incorporated on May 6, 1881; its purpose

Photos courtesy of the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association



"Ask a Lawyer" Law Day event

was "[t]o maintain the honor and dignity of the profession of the law; Increasing its usefulness in promoting the due administration of justice; Cultivating social intercourse among its members."⁷

The formation of the Detroit Bar preceded the organization of the State Bar of Michigan by more than 50 years. At the 30th Annual Meeting of the Michigan State Bar Association in 1920, held in Detroit and hosted by the Detroit Bar Association, Hon. Clarence E. Wilcox welcomed the attendees. His address reflected the legal environment at the time as he stated, "Detroit has problems different from the rest of the state, and faces certain questions in a different way, but there is a cordial feeling on the part of the people of Detroit toward the rest of the state."⁸ It is also notable that meeting records

reflect motion hearings were held on Saturday mornings.⁹

The twentieth century brings changes

In 1909, the Legal Aid Society of Detroit (now Legal Aid and Defender Association) was founded when the Detroit Bar Association appointed a committee to provide free civil legal services for the city's poor, particularly recent immigrants from Europe and those who moved to Detroit from the South. The effort was led by Fred and Henry Butzel.¹⁰

At the 1931 annual meeting, 50 years after the association's incorporation, primary issues of concern were the study and drafting of proposed legislation to increase the

usefulness and importance of the common pleas court, standardization of fees for attorneys appointed to represent indigent defendants in the recorder's court, and the work of the grievance committee.¹¹ As a result of the committee's work, eight attorneys were disbarred that year.¹² During this time, there was also discussion of a comprehensive reorganization and incorporation of the Michigan State Bar into a "statutory integrated bar."¹³

The later twentieth century brought considerable change. In 1999, the DMBA Foundation library closed as online services flourished and the cost of maintaining a large book collection became cost prohibitive.¹⁴ In that same year, the DMBA moved its offices from the Buhl Building to the Penobscot Building.¹⁵ The 1990s also saw a marked decline in membership as lawyers and law firms moved from Detroit into neighboring counties, and economic conditions affected others. To accommodate change, the DMBA opened the Attorney Resource Center or "Lawyers' Lounge" in the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center in 1992.¹⁶ The center provides a comfortable place for State Bar members to work and meet with clients or others when in Detroit

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DMBA event at the Motown Museum, circa early 1990s

along with Internet access and copy, fax, and printing services.¹⁷

During the past 25 years, the DMBA has provided its members with opportunities to engage in numerous and varied activities, including annual bench-bar luncheons to recognize retiring judges, Law Day events such as Ask the Lawyer, Detroit Bar on Stage (a variety show featuring members), and events at local venues including the Rooster Tail and Motown Museum. Sections and committees also have sponsored a variety of educational presentations.

Detroit bar members expand their leadership and service beyond the DMBA

Fourteen DMBA presidents have gone on to lead the State Bar of Michigan, beginning with George E. Brand, the third State Bar president (1937–1938).¹⁸ Others were Frank H. Boos, Nathan B. Goodnow, A. DeVere Ruegsegger, George E. Bushnell Jr. (who also served as president of the American Bar Association), Ivan E. Barris, George T. Roumell Jr., John A. Krsul Jr., Fred L. Woodworth, Thomas G. Kienbaum, Edmund M. Brady Jr., J. Thomas Lenga, and W. Anthony Jenkins.¹⁹ Member Dennis W. Archer served as president of the American Bar and National Bar associations, Michigan Supreme Court justice, and mayor of Detroit. Federal

District Court Judge Denise Page Hood is a former DMBA president, and current U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan Barbara McQuade formerly held leadership roles in the DMBA. Many DMBA attorneys have gone on to lead as managing partners of law firms, judges, prosecutors, and officers and board members of other organizations.

The DMBA Barristers

The Barristers Section, comprised of lawyers admitted to practice for 10 years or less, has become the DMBA's most active service-oriented section. Its activities include the School Partnership Program, which evolved from the MELL (medical, education, legal, and law enforcement) program initiated by Archer in 1990 and includes mentoring, résumé writing, and interviewing workshops; a mock trial; and an essay contest as well as school visits and presentations for Detroit high school students.²⁰ Community service is a primary focus, with activities such as the Holiday Food Fund Drive and Race for Kids.²¹ The section currently sponsors a Happy Feet Sock Drive to collect socks and other clothing for the Fort Street Open Door Program and volunteers at Gleaners Community Food Bank.²² The section also meets monthly for Bar Review—which features judges and attorneys

sharing practice tips and allows for networking—and hosts a party for summer associates and law clerks as well as Pin 'n' Pinstripes bowling outings.²³

The DMBA Foundation

The DMBA Foundation is a recognized 501(c)(3) charitable organization and funds the association's charitable and community service activities.²⁴ Specifically, it supports the initiatives of the Access to Justice Committee of the foundation, which grew from the Volunteer Lawyers Program and includes the Detroit Legal Services Clinic, a partnership between the foundation, area legal service providers, and private law firms and corporate legal departments.²⁵ Other foundation-supported programs include the Wayne County Legal Resources Consortium, which supports the Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center located in the Penobscot Building; the Pro Bono Mentor Program; and the Federal Civil Pro Bono Project.²⁶

The foundation's signature community service program is For the Seventh Generation.²⁷ Established in 2005, it provides non-legal services donated by doctors, dentists, retail and service companies, and others to wards of the Wayne County juvenile foster care system.²⁸ Programs include The Help Closet, a source of clothing, furniture, computers, and toys; Play It Forward, which matches children with music instructors for a year to provide private lessons on the instrument of the child's choice; Smile It Forward, a partnership with the University of Detroit School of Dentistry and private orthodontists to provide braces and orthodontic care; the annual Holiday Bazaar; Prom Palooza; and the Book Fair. In 2014, For the Seventh Generation served more than 1,000 children and families in Wayne County.²⁹

The foundation raises most of its revenue through two events—the Dennis W. Archer Public Service Award event and the In Seventh Heaven Gala.

The Dennis W. Archer Public Service Award event recognizes outstanding public service in the Detroit metropolitan community by a member of the legal profession.³⁰ Archer received the first award in 2002; Judges Gerald Rosen and Steven Rhodes of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District

of Michigan were the 2015 recipients of this prestigious honor.³¹ Since its inception in 2004, the award has publicly honored those members of our profession who exemplify the mission and goals of the DMBA and its foundation. During the award event, the foundation acknowledges DMBA members who have not only excelled in their personal and professional lives but have also made significant contributions to the work of the foundation—the incoming class of Fellows. And because the foundation is dedicated to showcasing Detroit as a vibrant and vital city, each year it selects an interesting and architecturally significant venue for this signature event.

The In Seventh Heaven Gala is held every spring and offers food, live music, and auction items. All proceeds go to the For the Seventh Generation program.³²

The DMBA today

The DMBA continues to focus on the needs and interests of Detroit-area lawyers. It sponsors the swearing-in ceremony for new lawyers and offers free annual membership in the association.³³ It launched the Inn of Court Program in 2012.³⁴ Its 25-member Judicial Candidate Evaluation Committee vets Wayne County judicial hopefuls and publishes the DMBA's ratings before elections.³⁵ In 2010, the association created its highest award, the Frank Murphy Award, given to an attorney whose career reflects exemplary service to the justice system and legal profession. The award has been bestowed on George T. Roumell Jr., Hon. Cornelia Kennedy, Roman Gribbs, Barbara McQuade, and Ernest Goodman (posthumously).³⁶ Recent association activities include a Night Out with the Bench and Bar; cosponsoring the movie, *Against the Wind: Blacks in the Business of Law*; the MentorJet program at law schools; and cohosting with the Wayne County Circuit Court the 2015 Law Day Program, which draws several hundred Detroit high school students and includes a mock trial.³⁷

The DMBA has evolved into an organization relevant to today's legal community, not straying far from its original purpose of maintaining honor and dignity in the profession, promoting the administration of justice, and cultivating social and profes-

sional relationships. As former DMBA President George Roumell said upon receiving the Frank Murphy Award, "When God asks at the pearly gates what I have to say for myself, I will proudly tell him I was a Detroit lawyer!"³⁸ ■



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ENDNOTES

- DMBA, *Raising the Bar through Networking, Practice Development and Community Service* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed November 18, 2015.
- Id.*
- Porter, *Dean Pound and Bar Association Beginnings: A Survey Request for Primary Data*, 37 ABA J 269, 270 (1951) <<https://books.google.com/books?id=Qnfi1aB4jh8C&pg=PA270&lpg=PA270&dq=detroit+bar+association+founding&source=bl&ots=rlnUOCPT4&sig=zCG0ihLzrwRtkzxNjsZNhn6w&hl=en&sa=X&ei=9gUQVaanCMA8ggTNuoO4DQ&ved=0CFMQ6AEwCDgK#v=onepage&q=detroit%20bar%20association%20founding&f=false>>. The Detroit Bar Association was the fourth documented bar association in the country (Philadelphia in 1802; Bar Association of Mississippi in 1825; Cumberland County, Maine in 1829).
- Hylton, *The Bar Association Movement in Nineteenth Century Wisconsin*, 81 Marquette L R 1029, 1042-1043 (1998). Michigan had the third largest concentration of lawyers in the Midwest, behind Iowa and Illinois.
- Id.* at 1046. In 1870, foreign-born attorneys accounted for 43.4 percent of the bar in Detroit and only 26.7 percent of the bar in New York City.
- The Bench and Bar of Detroit*, 3 Magazine of Western History 680-681 (1885). The Detroit Bar Library was incorporated on July 21, 1853. The capital stock was \$15,000 and the value of books in the library was \$3,000.
- Half a Century in the Field*, 1 Detroit Bar Quarterly 1 (1932).
- Michigan State Bar Association, *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Meeting* (June 25 and 26, 1920), p 8 <<http://www.books.google.com/books?id=gY8DAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA7&dq=Thirtieth+annual+meeting+of+the+Michigan+State+Bar+Association+in+1920&hl=en&sa=x&ei=qZIVVY7XL8f3yQSVjHoAw&ved=DEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Thirtieth%20annual%20meeting%20of%20the%20Michigan%20State%20Bar%20Association%20in%201920+f=false>>.
- Id.* at 10 ("there are some two hundred and fifty motions scheduled for Saturday morning, which will occupy the time of three or four hundred attorneys").
- See Legal Aid and Defender Association, *History* <<http://lada.detroit.org/history.php>>.
- Activities of the Association, Committees Deal with Problems of the Profession*, 1 Detroit Bar Quarterly 1 (1931).
- Id.* at 1-2.
- Essery, *An Incorporated Bar at Work, Plan Adopted in Many States Raises Prestige of the Bar*, 1 Detroit Bar Quarterly 3 (1931).
- At the time of the library's closing, reports indicate that it had an annual operating cost of more than \$350,000, with annual usage of fewer than 200 people.
- Id.*
- DMBA, *The Attorney Resource Center* (or "Lawyers Lounge") <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/arclawyerslounge.html>>.
- DMBA members receive discounted rates on most services.
- See State Bar of Michigan Presidents <http://www.michbar.org/file/generalinfo/pdfs/BOC_presidents.pdf>.
- Id.*
- DMBA, *The DMBA Barristers Section: Service to the Community, Service to the Bar* <<http://www.detroitlawyr.org/dmbabarristerssection.html>>.
- Id.*
- Id.*; see also DMBA, *Upcoming Events* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/upcomingevents.html>>.
- DMBA, *Upcoming Events*.
- DMBA, *The DMBA Foundation* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/dmbafoundation.html>>.
- Id.*
- Id.*
- DMBA, *For the Seventh Generation Program* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/dmbafoundation/fortheseventhgeneration.html>>.
- Id.*
- Id.*
- DMBA BarNews, *Recent Event: 2014 Archer Award* (December 2014) <<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs178/1000834829196/archive/1118950117785.html#LETTER.BLOCK63>>.
- Id.*
- DMBA, *Upcoming Events*.
- DMBA, *New Attorney Mass Admission Ceremonies* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/admissionceremonies.html>>.
- DMBA, *The DMBA Inn of Court* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/dmbainnofcourt.html>>.
- DMBA, *Judicial Candidate Evaluation Committee (JCEC)* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/judicialcandidateevaluationcommittee.html>>.
- DMBA BarNews, *Recent Event: 2014 Raising the Bar* (September 2014) <<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs178/1000834829196/archive/1118181516831.html#LETTER.BLOCK56>>.
- See DMBA BarNews (May 2014) <<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs178/1000834829196/archive/1117314102412.html>>.
- DMBA, *Raising the Bar through Networking, Practice Development and Community Service* <<http://www.detroitlawyer.org/home.html>>.