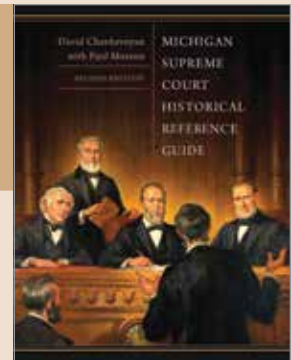


Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide (2d ed)

By David G. Chardavoyne, with Paul Moreno, published by Michigan State University Press (2015), hardcover, 312 pages, \$34.95
<http://msupress.org>



Reviewed by Frederick Baker Jr.

The *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide* (2d ed), published in 2015, was years in the making. Indeed, planning and work on it began almost as soon as the first edition was published, in 1998. I was delighted to be asked to write a letter in support of the *Guide's* nomination for the American Association of State and Local History's Leadership in History Award, which prompted this review.

As I surveyed the justices listed in the table of contents, I was surprised to find that I corresponded with, knew, argued before, or worked (as a Supreme Court commissioner) with more than a quarter (33 out of 121) of the justices who have served the Court during its 211-year history. When I chaired the State Bar's Publications and Website Advisory Committee, we arranged in 2008—with the help of the Michigan State Bar Foundation and the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society—to distribute (free of charge) a reference work entitled “The Verdict of History” to our approximately 40,000 members as a special supplement to the *Michigan Bar Journal*. That scholarly study of 20 of the Court's most consequential decisions was the first phase of the revision of the first edition and became the core of one of the *Guide's* major features.

The *Guide* is one of the signal achievements of the voluntary, member-supported Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society. Founded in 1988, the Society comprises approximately 450 members. It collects, preserves, and displays documents, records, and memorabilia relating to the Michigan Supreme Court and the other courts of Michigan, promotes the study of the history of Michigan's courts, and seeks to increase

public awareness of Michigan's legal heritage. The second edition of the *Guide* is a substantial milestone in those efforts. It is meticulously edited and remarkable for its organization, scale, and scope. It is plainly intended for use by both the serious amateur and the scholar. Its paper, binding, layout, printing, and cloth are excellent; it is designed to be used. It bears none of the earmarks of individual vanity so often found in mere “commemorative” works published by more parochial organizations.

The Society takes its historical mission seriously; it demanded, and the *Guide's* authors and publishers have produced, a durable reference work of genuine historical scholarship. The result is a publication worthy of legal historian David Chardavoyne and Hillsdale College History Professor Paul Moreno, the outstanding scholars the Society selected to research and write it.

Though the *Guide* is colorfully jacketed and suitable for display, it also possesses the utilitarian hallmarks of a true historical reference work: the multiple points of entry and means of locating the information it contains necessary for it to be truly useful, not merely ornamental. It includes a detailed table of contents. Its copiously dated lists and tables pinpoint each stage of the Court's development and evolution, from territorial court to the present, and locate and identify its jurists in time. The detailed biographies of each justice are brilliantly illustrated and describe their tenures in historical context. The summaries of the Court's most notable decisions are written in a style accessible to nonlawyers, but sufficiently detailed, specific, and authoritative to be useful to advocates and scholars of legal history alike. They reflect the quality

and impact of the decisions of a Court that played an outsized role in the development of nineteenth and early twentieth century American state court jurisprudence (especially for the jurisdictions included in the West Publishing Company's Northwest Reports, which often looked to the Michigan Supreme Court for guidance when precedent was scarce) and continues to occupy a prominent place among state courts to this day. More than 25 pages of notes referencing both legal and historical sources supplement the *Guide's* case summaries. Finally, the *Guide* includes the kind of detailed index necessary for it to serve as a genuine reference tool useful to both the historical researcher and the diligent amateur.

Importantly, because it revises and expands the earlier (1998) edition, the *Guide* promises to be part of a work in progress that will be revised again when the present has become history. With publication of the *Guide*, the Society has served faithfully its goal of preserving the Court's past and tradition by producing a reference worthy of the Court's proud history. ■



Frederick Baker Jr. served 28 years on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee, the last 24 as its chair. He continues to contribute occasional reviews of books by Michigan authors or on Michigan law-related subjects. Formerly a Supreme Court commissioner, he retired in May 2013 to rejoin his former partners at Willingham & Coté in an of-counsel role.

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