

Michigan Lawyers in History

Glenn M. Coulter

By Carrie Sharlow



The state of Michigan was built by the lumber and auto industries, agriculture, and the lawyers who lived, studied, and practiced here. The articles in this occasional series highlight some of those lawyers and judges and their continuing influence on this great state.

If you've visited the State Bar of Michigan building at 306 Townsend Street in Lansing, you may appreciate knowing about Glenn M. Coulter.

In the June 1962 *American Bar Association Journal*,¹ the ABA celebrated the 27-year-old State Bar of Michigan and its 3-year-old office building. Before 1959, the Bar rented offices in the Olds Tower and, after that, the Hollister Building; finally, it had its own headquarters. In lauding the volunteers who had made such a thing possible with their campaigning and solicitation of funds, the article's author noted that "Glenn M. Coulter stands far above them all."² The building was a result of "his idea, his dogged and brilliant chairmanship and general all-around persevering leadership..."³

Coulter was born August 8, 1893, in Chittenango, New York, to Fred and Florence Coulter. He came to Michigan for his education, attending the University of Michigan and obtaining both his BA (1916) and JD (1920). During World War I, he trained in France at the school of ambulance transportation corps. He married fellow U of M student Doris McDonald and the couple had two children.⁴

Coulter was treasurer of the Detroit Bar Association in 1940–1941, its president in 1942–1943, and its director from 1936 to 1943. He was general chair of the Hosts' Committee during the 1942 ABA Annual

Meeting, chair of the State Bar of Michigan Committee on Professional Ethics, and chair of the Special Committee to Study Distribution of Office Supplies. He served as a member of the ABA House of Delegates and was chair of its Credentials and Admissions Committee.⁵ In 1957, he was elected to the ABA Board of Governors.

While holding these professional positions, Coulter remained active in University of Michigan alumnae affairs—he was eventually given an honorary doctor of law—and was director of the Executive Committee for the Community Chest of Detroit. His friends warned others that closeness with Coulter often meant involvement in the attorney's latest community endeavor.⁶

He also grew roses and dabbled in stained glass and mosaics.⁷

On November 28, 1952, in a regular meeting of the Executive Committee, Coulter made a comment that the State Bar should have its own building. He was immediately appointed chair of a committee studying the subject.⁸ The matter of a State Bar building consumed Coulter for the next seven years.

When the initial research was complete and the decision to build approved, the Board of Commissioners appointed Coulter chair of the General Committee of the building project. On May 21, 1954, Coulter resigned his position as the State Bar's first vice president (he could have been the Bar's 20th president, but Henry L. Woolfenden

later filled this position)⁹ upon realizing that the committee would require the majority of his attention. And he was right: the general committee contained 10 subcommittees. The building project required planning, fundraising, lobbying, and more planning. More than 50 percent of the Bar membership donated over \$300,000 for the new building and its furnishings.¹⁰

In 1959, State Bar President Raymond H. Dresser had the honor of telling members "[w]e are no longer tenants."¹¹ The Bar had its own building. In a special Law Day ceremony on May 1, 1959, Coulter presented to Dresser the keys to the new State Bar building.

One would think Coulter earned a break after volunteering for such a lengthy task. He didn't agree. From 1959 to 1965, he served as treasurer of the American Bar Association. Afterwards, Coulter served on the State Bar Committee for Bar Building, all while continuing to serve as a delegate to the ABA.

In 1970, Coulter celebrated his 50th anniversary as an attorney and member of the State Bar. An acknowledged expert in professional ethics and responsibility, he served on the Committee on Ethics, Professional and Judicial and the Special Committee on the Code for Professional Responsibility in 1970. His service to the Bar and his community continued until his death on November 5, 1974.



HEADQUARTERS BUILDING FOR STATE BAR OF MICHIGAN
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Architect's rendering of the State Bar building.



The State Bar of Michigan building as it looks today.

Photo by Mike Smith for the State Bar of Michigan

The building at 306 Townsend Street still stands and has been improved to serve the Bar and its growing membership. Next time you visit, remember Glenn M. Coulter. Without him, this lovely building would not have been possible. ■



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If you are interested in State Bar history or have a suggestion for "Michigan Lawyers in History," please e-mail her at csharlow@mail.michbar.org.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Our state bar associations: The State Bar of Michigan*, 45 ABA J 563 (1962).
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*
4. *Michigan Supreme Court appoints commissioners-at-large*, 26 Mich St B J 14 (1947).
5. *Id.*
6. *White, How it was done!*, 38 Mich St B J 48 (1959).
7. *Former treasurer Coulter dies*, 61 ABA J 380 (1975).
8. *White, supra* at 48.
9. *Glenn M. Coulter resigns first vice-presidency: Henry L. Woolfenden elected*, 33 Mich St B J 37 (1954).
10. *White, supra* at 47 and 49.
11. *Grasser, Message from the president*, 38 Mich St B J 8 (1959).



The May 1, 1959, dedication of the new State Bar building.

Michigan Bar Journal photographs