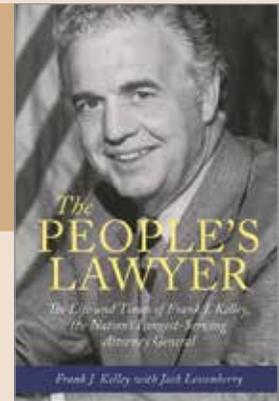


The People's Lawyer: The Life and Times of Frank J. Kelley, the Nation's Longest-Serving Attorney General

By Frank J. Kelley with Jack Lessenberry, published by Wayne State University Press (2015), hardcover, 256 pages, \$34.99
<http://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/peoples-lawyer>



Reviewed by Paul F. Novak

One disadvantage of Michigan term limits is that the electoral success of Michigan Attorney General Frank J. Kelley will never be replicated. Over 10 elections, Michigan voters acknowledged the dedication to public service that Kelley embodied with more than 16 million votes—nearly 6 million more than his opponents. In *The People's Lawyer*, Kelley and Jack Lessenberry recount that electoral success and the upbringing, triumphs, losses, and lessons that made for one of Michigan's most endeared public servants.

Starting with his upbringing in Depression-era Detroit through his rough-and-tumble days as a newspaper boy on its streets and his high school summers working on the shipping docks of Mackinac City (the Mackinac Bridge had yet to be constructed), Kelley had ample opportunity to accumulate street smarts. And his father, who died too early, was a clear influence that Kelley acknowledges with respect, humility, and affection for his formative years.

But Kelley and Lessenberry's narrative serves as much more than a personal history. The book also provides an excellent and engaging resource for any student of Michigan political history in the twentieth century. Kelley's political career springboarded from an unlikely source: city attorney of Republican-dominated Alpena in the early 1960s. From there, his path was assisted by a fateful call from Michigan Governor John Swainson, a trip to Lansing for a "short list" interview and—to Kelley's shock—Swainson's decision to appoint him as attorney general.

One of the earliest, and most politically courageous, court battles that Kelley waged came early in his tenure. In 1961, before

Kelley had been appointed attorney general, a young black man named Grady Little had been walking through Palmer Park in Detroit when he was confronted by a group of white men. A confrontation ensued, and Little was stabbed to death. The Detroit police investigated the matter and recommended issuance of an arrest warrant in the case, but Wayne County Prosecutor Samuel Olson declined.

At a time when whites comprised two-thirds of Detroit's population and made up an even greater share of Wayne County, Kelley wondered whether the prosecutor was engaging in racist politics. When Olson failed to act, Kelley filed charges and waged his own criminal prosecution.

As Kelley put it, "[A]ll hell broke loose." He faced a hostile judge who immediately reduced the murder charges to manslaughter. No blacks were included in the pool from which the jury would be drawn. And in a bizarre and indefensible maneuver, the defense in the case called Olson to testify about his opinion of the defendant's culpability. Kelley's office lost the case, but in the process, the newly minted attorney general staked a bold position in opposition to politically opportunistic racism.

Kelley's position was part of a broader idealism, embodied in youthful optimism

and a belief in public service, that was an emerging feature of national politics in the early 1960s. John F. Kennedy had just been elected as the youngest president of the United States and articulated a clear vision of national service. In Michigan, Swainson had been elected as one of the state's youngest governors and Jerry Cavanagh served as the 33-year-old mayor of Detroit. Kelley's youthful baptism at age 36 came under fire. As he states, "I became attorney general ten months prior to a statewide election in which millions of voters, most of whom had never heard of me, would decide whether to keep me in my job." In his first election in 1962, the voters gave him their support. And the rest, to put it colloquially, was history.

The People's Lawyer devotes deserving discussion of Kelley's greatest accomplishments: his groundbreaking efforts in consumer and environmental protection. It describes his early case against General Motors that alleged the fraudulent substitution of Chevrolet engines into Oldsmobile cars without sufficient disclosure to consumers that their oil filters would need to be substituted as well. He opposed Consumers Power's continued attempts to construct the Midland nuclear plant in the face of mounting, disastrous cost overruns. Similar consumer protection initiatives involving tainted

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meat, home-repair frauds, and other scams assisted Kelley in supporting the Michigan legislature's groundbreaking passage of the Michigan Consumer Protection Act in 1976.

Kelley and Lessenberry also give substantial and fascinating attention to the governors with whom Kelley's service coincided (taking effort to note that, as a separate and constitutionally elected public official, Kelley didn't "work for" any of them): Swainson, Romney, Milliken, Blanchard, and Engler. Also recounted are Kelley's interactions with national Democratic Party figures like John, Bobby, and Ted Kennedy; Scoop Jackson; Edmund Muskie; and Bill and Hillary Clinton. His fondest and most inspirational recollection may be of a one-on-one visit with U.S. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy that occurred at the very start of his tenure as Michigan attorney general.

The book also describes Kelley's one electoral defeat: an unsuccessful run for the U.S. Senate in 1972. Kelley provides opinionated positions on several of Michigan's late twentieth-century political hot-button issues, from race relations to capital punishment (whose opposition was a bonding issue between Kelley and Gov. Engler) to casinos (which Kelley believes suck the lifeblood out of Detroit) to term limits (which he feels undermine legislative experience and collegiality and encourage short-term thinking with disastrous results for education, roads, and municipal service funding.)

Kelley concludes with a call to service, quoting John F. Kennedy's inaugural address and articulating the hope that a young reader will be inspired by his story, take up the fight to improve things for ordinary Americans, and "do it better" than he did. With such an incredibly devoted record of accomplishment free of any hint of scandal over 37 years of public service, that is a challenging and difficult demand indeed. ■



Paul F. Novak is a partner at the Detroit office of Milberg LLP and head of the firm's antitrust practice group. From 1989 to 2004, he served as an assistant attorney general under attorneys general

Frank Kelley, Jennifer Granholm, and Mike Cox.



Meeting Directory

Lawyers and Judges Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous

The following list of meetings reflects the latest information about lawyers and judges AA and NA meetings. Those meetings marked with "*" are meetings that have been designated for lawyers, judges, and law students only. All other meetings are attended primarily by lawyers, judges, and law students, but also are attended by others seeking recovery. In addition, we have listed "Suggested Meetings," which others in recovery have recommended as being good meetings for those in the legal profession. For questions about any of the meetings listed, please contact the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program at (800) 996-5522 or jlclark@mail.michbar.org.

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings

- *Monday 12:00 PM**
St. Joseph Hospital East, Bailey Room A
Parkview and North Streets
Mt. Clemens
- *Monday 7:00 PM**
Lawyers and Judges AA Meeting
St. Paul of the Cross
23333 Schoolcraft Rd., Detroit
(I-96 south service drive, just east of Telegraph Rd.)
- *Wednesday 12:00 PM**
First Presbyterian Church
321 W. South St., 3rd Floor, Room 301
Kalamazoo
- *3rd Wednesday of each month 5:30 PM**
Hunan Restaurant (back room)
3109 Bay Plaza Dr., Saginaw
- *Wednesday 6:00 PM**
Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church
1340 W. Long Lake Rd.
(1/2 mile west of Telegraph)
Bloomfield Hills
- *Wednesday 7:30 PM**
Westbrook Recovery Center
3210 Eagle Run NE, Ste. 200
Grand Rapids
- Wednesday 8:00 PM**
Sense of Humor AA Meeting
Michigan State University Union
Lake Michigan Room
(S.E. corner of Abbot and Grand River Ave.)
East Lansing
- *Thursday 4:00 PM**
Al-Anon of Berrien County
4162 Red Arrow Highway
Stevensville
- *Thursday 7:00 PM**
Central Methodist Church
2nd Floor
(Corner of Capitol and Ottawa Streets)
Lansing
- *Thursday 7:30 PM (Barefoot Meeting)**
Maple Grove
6773 W. Maple Rd.
Group Room 141
West Bloomfield Township
- *Friday 12:00 PM**
Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association
645 Griswold
3550 Penobscot Bldg.
13th Floor
Smart Detroit Global Board Room 2
Detroit

Narcotics Anonymous Meeting

- *Monday 7:00 PM**
St. Paul of the Cross
23333 Schoolcraft Rd., Detroit
(I-96 south service drive, just east of Telegraph Rd.)

Gamblers Anonymous Meetings

For a list of meetings, visit <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirMI.html>. Please note that these meetings are not specifically for lawyers and judges.

Suggested Meetings

- Monday 12:15 PM**
Lawyers, Judges, and Friends Meeting
Henry Ford Macomb and Select Specialty Hospital
215 North Ave., Mt. Clemens
(Use main entrance off parking lot in rear of building, then upstairs to Bayley Meeting Room)
- Tuesday 7:00 AM**
Antioch Lutheran Church
33360 W. 13 Mile, Farmington Hills
(Corner of 13 Mile and Farmington Rd., use back/north entrance, basement)
- Tuesday 12:05 PM**
Professionals in Recovery
Human Potential Center
22 W. 2nd St., Monroe
(Closed meeting; restricted to professionals who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol)
- Tuesday 6:00 PM**
St. Aloysius Church Office
1232 Washington Blvd.
Detroit
- Thursday 5:30 PM**
Professional Women's Group
Brighton Hospital, Room 35
12851 E. Grand River
Brighton
- Thursday 8:00 PM (also Sunday 8:00 PM)**
Manresa Stag
1390 Quarton Rd.
Bloomfield Hills
- Friday 8:00 PM**
Rochester Presbyterian Church
1385 S. Adams (South of Avon Rd.)
Rochester
(Closed meeting; men's group)

For other AA or NA meetings, see listings in your local phone book or call:
Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, (800) 996-5522