

Chief Judge Merrick B. Garland's Remarks
On the Historical Society's 25th Anniversary

Now it is time to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit.

The Society was created in 1990, at the suggestion of then Circuit Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Chief Judges Pat Wald and Aubrey Robinson enthusiastically endorsed the project. Judge Ginsburg asked Dan Gribbon of Covington & Burling to organize the Society as its first president and asked Judge Louis Oberdorfer to Chair a Board of Judges and prominent attorneys. The Society then engaged Professor Jeffrey Morris of New York's Touro Law Center to write a history of the courts of the D.C. Circuit, entitled "Calmly to Poise the Scale of Justice." It's a great book; I encourage you to read it.

The Historical Society's activities have multiplied since that first venture. When you walk through the courthouse today, you will see Society exhibits that describe the historic work of our courts and of their judges and litigants. The Society also publishes periodic newsletters that reveal fascinating details about the Circuit's rich past. And it has held more than 20 programs that have recounted or reenacted major matters heard in our courts, including Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, and Iran-Contra.

Oral histories are another important part of telling the story of the courts and those who served them. The Society has recorded 89 oral histories, most of which are available on its website at www.dcchs.org. Another 43 are currently in progress.

I also want to mention the Society's Mock Court program, in which more than 80 D.C. public high school students participated this year. They were mentored by 26 lawyers, who helped them argue before 10 of our real judges. One issue presented: Did the police violate the Fourth Amendment by affixing a GPS device to the bicycles of certain student leaders?

The Society has also begun a "Law Clerk's Initiative," aimed at gathering current and former clerks for programs. The first program featured Justice Elena Kagan, who humorously recalled her own experiences as a law clerk on the Circuit.

The courts of this circuit are greatly indebted to the Society's current leadership, in particular to President Steve Pollak and Executive Director Linda Ferren, who are carrying on the traditions and successes of the founders. We all look forward -- or at least the younger of us do -- to celebrating the Society's 50th Anniversary 25 years from now.