



# Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit

Newsletter # 19

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Thurman ARNOLD  
*A Biography*



Spencer Weber Waller

## TAKING A LOOK BACK

### A New Feature

We have asked the biographers of judges who have sat on the Courts of the D.C. Circuit to write articles about those judges for the Society's website. The first judge in this new series: Thurman Arnold, the subject of Spencer Weber Waller's fascinating biography, "[The Short Unhappy Judgeship of Thurman Arnold](#)." A founder of Arnold & Porter, Judge Arnold epitomized the best in Washington lawyers and was one of the most intriguing individuals to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Mr. Waller explains why in the article he wrote especially for the Society.



## From Deep Within the Files of the Circuit Court for the District of Columbia

Before the Civil War, Washington D.C. was a police state for African Americans. They could be stopped at any time and asked for papers to prove they were free. Without papers, they might be arrested and sold at auction. Such was the 1835 case of Nancy Jones that author and lawyer Ted Pulliam found in the files of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia and writes about in "[The Dark Days of the Black Codes](#)."



Return Jonathan Meigs

## The Clerk of Court Who Turned Down a Judgeship

[Return Jonathan Meigs](#) came to the clerkship of the D.C. Circuit with a great name and even better political connections. Fellow Tennessean Andrew Johnson had recommended him to President Lincoln, who made the appointment in 1863, and Johnson later offered him a judgeship only to be turned down because Meigs felt he was too old. He was wrong: he lived another twentyfive years. He begat a family of court clerks, with a son who was clerk of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia and a granddaughter who was the first woman to be an assistant clerk.



## THE MOCK COURT EXPERIENCE 2014

Over 100 high school students from across the District have signed up to participate in this year's Mock Court Program. Each student will argue a case before one of our judges after having worked with a lawyer mentor from one of nine area law firms. The Society has invited the students to join the participating judges and mentors for lunch in the Atrium following their arguments.



**Judge Oberdorfer**

## GETTING INSIDE AN ORAL HISTORY

In a newly released addition to his oral history, [Judge Louis F. Oberdorfer](#) describes life on the bench, the role of law clerks, and how new laws, such as those calling for tougher drug sentencing, moved the court's workload toward the criminal which, for Oberdorfer, took much of the pleasure out of being a judge.



## ON DISPLAY IN THE COURTHOUSE: THE PORTRAIT OF HON. SKELLY WRIGHT

J. Skelly Wright championed desegregation in America even when the expression of his views came at personal cost. As district judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana, he ordered the integration of New Orleans public schools and was instrumental in the integration of transportation and sporting events. Elevated to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit by President John F. Kennedy in 1962, Judge Wright served for 26 years, three of which he spent as Chief Judge. Throughout his judicial career, Judge Wright authored decisions protecting the rights of the poor and First Amendment rights.

Judge Wright died before the Society's oral history project began. The oral history of [Helen P. Wright](#), the judge's wife, is available.



**David McCarthy**

## MEET THE SOCIETY'S NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSOCIATE

On the job for just over two months, David McCarthy is already sharing his technical and writing skills with the Society. Not surprising. Recently retired after spending 26 years serving the Federal Judiciary, David worked first in Information Technology in the Third Circuit and then managed a major automation project for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. Lured to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, David served as programmer and key automation specialist for almost 20 years.

David has done extensive genealogical research, tracing one family line back to mid 18th Century County Cork, Ireland, and discovering, through DNA, that some of his ancestors were Vikings. A travel enthusiast, David has visited all continents but Australia. His liberal arts education and interests combined with his IT knowledge and experience make him a valuable addition to the Historical Society staff.



## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Check the [Society's website](#) in the coming weeks to read the oral histories of Judge John M. Facciola, Stephen J. Pollak, Henry F. Schuelke III, and Harriet S. Shapiro.