



# Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit

Newsletter #42 - January 2020

Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit - [www.dcchs.org](http://www.dcchs.org)

---



## Happy 30th Anniversary, Historical Society!

It was in 1990 that Ruth Bader Ginsburg (pictured left), then a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and not yet a national celebrity, asked Linda Ferren, then Circuit Executive, to come to her chambers. “We should commission a book on the history of the D.C. Circuit Courts,” suggested the future Justice. From this seed germinated the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit.

Thirty years on, the Historical Society is the premiere repository of information about what is widely regarded as the nation’s most significant set of federal courts. The book that Justice Ginsburg hoped might be written about the Circuit’s storied history was authored by Jeffrey Brandon Morris and published in 2001: *Calmly to Poise the Scales of Justice: A History of the Courts of the District of Columbia Circuit*. The Historical Society’s website – recently redesigned and modernized – attracts thousands of visitors annually. The Historical Society has sponsored and published more than one hundred oral histories of judges, court staff, attorneys, and others associated with the District of Columbia federal courts – a treasure trove of historical memories and anecdotes. Each year the Historical Society stages a reenactment and discussion of a landmark judicial event; past programs have covered topics as diverse as Watergate, the *Chevron* doctrine, the AT&T case, and the assassination of James Garfield. A visitor to the Courthouse can appreciate the richness of the Circuit’s heritage by reviewing in the Great Hall the Historical Society’s exhibition of colorful panels displaying rulings, photos, and commentary from historically significant cases. Under the Historical Society’s sponsorship, high school students participate in moot courts, where they offer oral arguments to sitting federal judges. And each fall, judicial

law clerks past and present gather for a program of scholarship and fellowship hosted by the Historical Society.

The Historical Society has grown to depend on the volunteer efforts of forty current officers, board members, and historians. It has become a membership organization, supported by generous contributions from the two courts as well as local law firms and individuals. It has greatly benefited from the guidance, support, and active participation it has received over the years from the judges of the Court of Appeals and the District Court. It has been ably led by Judge Louis F. Oberdorfer, Daniel M. Gribbon, E. Barrett Prettyman, Stephen J. Pollak, and now James E. Roca III. In the three decades since its founding, the Historical Society has remained true to its mission: to record, preserve, and publicize the life and history of the Courts of the D.C. Circuit.

By Steven A. Steinbach

## A BEQUEST

Doris Brown (pictured right), former Aide first to Judge Gerhard Gesell and then to Judge David S. Tatel and Administrative Assistant to the Historical Society, showed her devotion to the Courts of the D.C. Circuit and the Society by making a generous bequest of \$130,000 to the Society. In tribute to Doris and her interest in, and dedication to, the Society and specifically to its Oral History Project, the Society is initiating the Doris Brown Video Project, which will videotape interviews of judges, lawyers, and others who have given their oral histories. These video interviews will highlight the most interesting events in these histories and will be streamed on the Society's website.



Doris will long be remembered for her generosity, commitment, intelligence, loyalty, and hard work. According to Judge Gesell, Doris “breaks in all the law clerks and she knows ahead of time what I’m going to think, and often tells me what I must do next.” In Judge Tatel’s view, “It’s hard to think of anyone who was more devoted to our courts than Doris Brown. Her values, her integrity and hard work, her wit, and her deep devotion to these important institutions were an inspiration to our entire court family.”

## FEATURING OUR ORAL HISTORIES

Newly Released – the Oral Histories of Frederick Douglas Cooke, Jr. and Ronald C. Jessamy



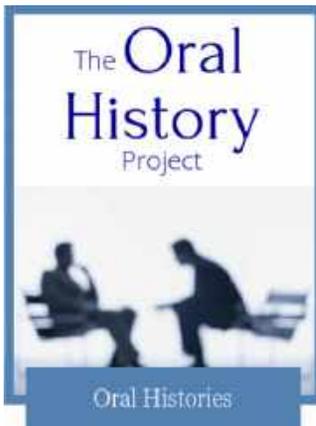
### **Frederick D. Cooke, Jr.**

A native Washingtonian, graduate of McKinley Technical High School, Howard University and Howard University Law School (1972), Frederick D. Cooke, Jr. (pictured left) gives his [oral history](#) on interview by Bart Kempf. Read about Cooke's young years growing up in D.C. and his many years in private practice and public service, including the tumultuous 28-month period 1987-1989 during which he served as Corporation Counsel (now Attorney General) in the administration of Mayor

Marion Barry. There's much more in this newly-available chronicle of one of DC's leading lawyers.

### **Ronald C. Jessamy**

What a resume! Over 40 years in practice. Active in professional, business, and civic activities in the District. Recipient of many awards and honors: Council for Court Excellence, Charles A. Horsky Plaque, Washington Bar Association's Ollie May Cooper Award, Washington Bar Association Hall of Fame. Pleasant Brodnax conducted Ron Jessamy's (pictured right) [oral history interviews](#), which include discussion of sexual discrimination cases (*Turner v. WMATA*) and employment discrimination cases (*Kinsey v. First Regional Securities*), among many other topics of historical interest.



### Highlights from Oral Histories in the Society's Collection

Go behind the scenes and read articles that reveal insights of, and stories about, judges and lawyers drawn from their oral histories. Read about: [Judge William Bryant](#), [Judge James L. Buckley](#), [E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr.](#), and [Charles Ruff](#).

### The Long Arm of the Society's Oral History Program

Ninety-four of the oral histories the Society has taken are on the Society's website at [www.dcchs.org](http://www.dcchs.org). Visitors to the site have been reading the articles about the histories as well as the histories themselves. Additionally, six law review articles have cited the histories. Among others: Chief Justice John Roberts referenced Helen Wright's interview about her husband, Judge Skelly Wright; Judge Abner Mikva's views on

opinion-writing have been cited; and Lloyd Cutler’s description of one of Charles Fahy’s tactics as a Supreme Court advocate have been quoted. The histories have also been referenced in books, federal agency reports, and bar journals.

## THE COURTROOM AS CLASSROOM

The Perils of Smoking in  
the Bathroom – Mock  
Argument on Student  
Rights under the Fourth  
Amendment.



(Pictured above: Students join (l. to r.) Judges Srinivasan, Tatel, and Ketanji Brown Jackson after the program.)

Over 160 D.C. public school students came to the Courthouse on December 18, 2019 to watch the re-enactment of *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case addressing whether high school students were entitled to protection under the Fourth Amendment from unreasonable search and seizure by school officials.



Judges David Tatel, Sri Srinivasan, and Ketanji Brown Jackson played the roles of the Supreme Court justices and answered a variety of questions posed by the students. Former and current judicial law clerks presented the arguments and engaged the students in a discussion about the issues. (Pictured left: A student asks the judges a question.)

A program highlight: Lois De Julio, the New Jersey public defender, who represented the teenage defendant T.L.O. and argued the original case before the Supreme Court, traveled to D.C. to share her personal experiences in events leading up to this landmark decision with the students. At right, she talks with attorney Tiffany Wright, who played Ms. De Julio in the mock argument.





Arrangements are being made for the Society's 15th annual Mock Court Program for D.C. area high school students. As area schools sign up to participate, we ask attorneys willing to help prepare the students for their day in court to

contact Society President, Jim Rocap, at [jrocap@steptoe.com](mailto:jrocap@steptoe.com). (Pictured above: A group of high school students who participated in the Society's 2018 Mock Court Program.)

## CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

Hidden treasures abound. You can [watch a film](#) about the life of District Judge Harold Greene (1923 – 2000), including his flight from Nazi Germany, his legal career beginning with service as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, and continuing in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, where he was the principal drafter of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. You will see and hear about his handling of what may arguably be the biggest case ever tried in U.S. Courts – the AT&T antitrust break-up case, which brought competition to the telecommunications industry.



The film was produced by 18th Street Media under the leadership of former Greene clerks Stuart Newberger and Eleanor Smith

---

### Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit

E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse  
333 Constitution Avenue, NW., Room 4714  
Washington, DC 20001-2866

202-216-7346

[www.dcchs.org](http://www.dcchs.org)



[Email Us](#)

mailer lite