How Linda Ferren Brought Then-Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Vision of the Society to Life

Linda Ferren, after 30 years of exemplary service as Executive Director of the Historical Society, retired March 31, 2021. Today's Society is a monument to Linda’s creativity and drive.

In 1990, Linda, then-Circuit Executive, received a call from then-Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Judge Ginsburg invited Linda to come to her chambers to discuss an idea - the creation of a historical society for the D.C. Circuit Courts. In particular, Judge Ginsburg wished to facilitate the writing of a history of these Courts. Responding to the request, Linda brought together judicial and bar leaders to establish the Society in 1990. Primary among the Society’s early accomplishments was the publication of Jeffrey Morris' *History of the Courts of the DC Circuit* published in 2001.

Linda’s vision for the Society went well beyond the book. She brought the Oral History Project into being in 1991 and has managed it ever since. The archive available on the Society’s website now includes 110 lifetime histories of judges, lawyers and court staff. Fifty-two additional histories are in progress.

Linda has had a hand in every new activity the Society has undertaken, from the annual Mock Court for DC high schoolers now in its 16th year to the Judge Patricia Wald Programs on Life and Law in the Courts of the DC Circuit. When websites were still considered the domain of spiders, Linda led the Society to create one and publish its work product there. Take a look at [www.dcchs.org](http://www.dcchs.org).

The good news for the Society is that Linda has now joined the Board of Directors. Celebrating Linda’s service as Executive Director, the Society’s Board unanimously adopted the following resolution at its April 29, 2021 Annual Meeting:
RESOLVED, the Board of Directors and Officers of the Society honor and thank Linda Ferren for 30 years of exceptionally creative and dedicated service as executive director, with reluctance accept her retirement effective March 31, 2021, and with enthusiasm look forward to working with her as a new member of the Board.

Carl Stern’s Life of Service to Journalism, Law – and the Historical Society

Journalist, attorney, professor, DOJ spokesman, lecturer, and Peabody and Emmy award winner, Carl Stern is best known for his quarter century of on-air reporting as Law Correspondent for NBC News, where he came to exemplify the finest alloy of investigative journalism and legal erudition. And for the past two decades, the Historical Society has found itself the fortunate beneficiary of Carl’s engagement, wisdom, and generous volunteer efforts. Thus, it is with no small measure of pride – accompanied by gratitude – that the Historical Society now adds Carl’s oral history to the rich collection of legal reminiscences on our website.

Apropos of its subject, it should be no surprise that the oral history of such a legendary Washington journalist is all of the following: engrossing, entertaining, insightful, fascinating – and “newsworthy” in its own right. Covering everything from Watergate to the Supreme Court to the Branch Davidian crisis to his own crucial role as a FOIA plaintiff, Carl recounts his many decades reporting on the D.C. federal courts for NBC News. After reading Judy Feigin’s summary of Carl’s recollections, it will be impossible not to want to read the oral history itself – if only (among many other things) to learn more about how Carl knew the result in United States v. Nixon the night before the decision.

Carl’s many contributions to the Society include: Board member for several terms; service as a moderator for many of the Society’s programs (including memorable panel discussions about Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, presidential power, and the insanity defense); Communications Committee member (with responsibility for adding content to the website); interviewer for two of the Society’s oral histories; author of nearly a dozen other oral history summaries; and frequent contributor of articles, summaries, and “historical factoids” to the Society’s newsletter.

In Carl’s words, “The Society’s activities have enabled me to become friends with some wonderful members of the D.C. legal community I might otherwise never have met.” The feeling is mutual.

Judy Feigin served as interviewer for Carl’s oral history.

Sally Determan’s Oral History
Sara-Ann Determan (Sally) graduated in 1967 from George Washington University Law School where she was Editor-in-Chief of the Law Review. After a one-year clerkship for DC Circuit Judge Henry W. Edgerton, she joined Hogan & Hartson in 1968. She became the firm’s first female partner, concentrating on taxation, trusts and estates.

In eight interviews during the period June 2005 through December 2006, Sally describes a life of challenges and accomplishments across a broad swath of personal and professional experiences. She served as President of the D.C. Bar 1990-91 and was Chair of the ABA’s Death Penalty Representation Project 1986-94. An early leader in the campaign for gender equality, Sally was a founder and longtime Board member of the National Partnership for Women and Families. Among numerous recognitions, she received the National Legal Aid and Defender Association Exemplar Award for outstanding leadership in promoting and supporting equal justice.

Sally’s oral history is spiced by interesting anecdotes, too many to count. Representative is a story that tells of her maternal grandfather, born in the United States of a family that emigrated from Wales. Unable to read or write, he worked as an hourly laborer with the New Jersey Zinc Company. Sally recalled that when people would assert a fact her grandfather didn’t believe, he would say, “Paper can sit still for people to write anything on it.” When a client asked if she or he could be sued, Sally would quote her grandfather, “Paper will sit still for anything to be written, including a complaint, but my job is to help you not be successfully sued.”

Brooksley Born, an Arnold & Porter Retired Partner and former Chair of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, served as interviewer for Sally’s 262-page oral history as part of the ABA’s Women Trailblazers Project.

Our New Executive Director

On May 17, 2021, the Society welcomed Margaret A. Gaines (Margie) as its new Executive Director. Margie is very familiar with the Courts of the District of Columbia Circuit, having served since 2013 as a member of the Panel of Mediators handling cases in both the District Court and the Court of Appeals. Over the course of Margie’s legal career, she has constantly interfaced with federal courts and judges. Margie served as Staff Attorney for the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit from 1977 to 1983. In 1983,
Margie began a long career with the National Labor Relations Board, Appellate and Supreme Court Litigation Branch, first as an appellate litigation attorney, arguing cases in all federal courts of appeals across the country, then as a supervising attorney, and finally, as Deputy Assistant General Counsel and Settlement Director from 2005 – 2017.

Margie’s personal interests also mark her as well suited for the Historical Society position. She is an enthusiast for vintage posters (“they hold clues about how people lived”) and an insatiable explorer of D.C.’s many museums. “I am honored to have been chosen as the Society’s new Executive Director”, says Margie. “I look forward to helping to preserve the legacies of the D.C. Circuit and District Courts, and to helping to make those legacies accessible to a wide community.” The Society looks forward to Margie’s leadership in the years to come. Margie can be reached at margie.gaines@dcchs.org.

**In Process: Brief Histories of the 48 United States Attorneys for the District of Columbia, from 1801 to 2020**

Chris Todd, Kellogg Hansen partner and former Board member, is assembling a book of brief histories of the 48 men and women who served as United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, from 1801 to 2020. The Society and several of its Board members are excited to be working with Chris to review, edit and otherwise support the project. With a working title of *A Brief History of the Forty-Eight Men and Women Who Served as United States Attorneys for the District of Columbia, 1801-2020*, the book is patterned on a similar work Chris compiled on the United States Attorneys for the Southern District of New York [*225 Years (1789-2014) The United States Attorneys for the Southern District of New York*].

The book will provide a one-of-a-kind overview of those who have served in the office. Many of the District’s United States Attorneys later served in some of the Nation’s other most important positions. Eric Holder became Attorney General. Henry Wells served as Provisional Governor of Virginia in 1868 during Reconstruction. Eight became judges of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Others gained enhanced fame for different reasons. Francis Scott Key, who served as the District’s chief prosecutor for nine years (1833-1841),
famously wrote the words to the Star Spangled Banner. His son, Philip Barton Key II, also a United States Attorney, was shot dead in Lafayette Park in 1859 by Congressman Daniel Sickles, shortly after Sickles’ wife admitted to an affair with Key.

No doubt, Chris’ book should be a fascinating read for attorneys and others interested not only in the history of U. S. Attorneys, but also in the history of the District of Columbia.

Welcome to our New Board Members

At the virtual Annual Board of Directors meeting on April 29, 2021, the Society welcomed eight new board members: Michelle Bradford (Barnes & Thornburg); Anjali Chaturvedi (Northrup Grumman); Linda Ferren (former Society Executive Director); Carrie Johnson (National Public Radio); Jonathan Kravis (Munger Tolles); Hon. Amit P. Mehta (U.S. District Court); Hon. Cornelia T.L. Pillard (U.S. Court of Appeals); and David C. Vladeck (Georgetown University Law Center). The Society is proud to have such talented individuals ready and willing to join its leadership and participate in ongoing activities.

And Thank You to Our Departing Board Members

The Society is grateful for the service over the past six years of its retiring Board members: Meredith Fuchs (Plaid, Inc.), who chaired the Society’s first Compensation Committee; Hon. Ketanji Brown Jackson (recently confirmed to the U.S. Court of Appeals), who was a leader in the Society’s education programs for D.C. middle and high school students; Amy Jeffress (Arnold & Porter), who chaired the Oral History Committee; Hon. Patricia A. Millett (U.S. Court of Appeals), who annually worked to increase judicial involvement in the Mock Court program; Channing D. Phillips (now Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia), a consistent volunteer on the Mock Court program and oral history project; Stuart S. Taylor, Jr., who made significant contributions through his extraordinary writing talents, his guidance in upgrading the Society’s website, and as a co-creator of the tribute to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; K. Chris Todd (Kellogg Hansen), the driving force behind the emerging book of biographies of D.C. U.S. Attorneys from 1801 to date; and Helgi C. Walker (Gibson Dunn), a standout performer in the Society’s 2013 program on Women in the Life and Law of the Courts of the D.C. Circuit and a leader on the Society’s Programs Committee. Thanks to all for your invaluable service.

In Recognition of Ruth Gordon, the Society’s Website Impresario

For over 17 years, Ruth Gordon has shared with the Historical Society her computer know-how and artistic and design talents. Foremost, in 2004, Ruth developed and organized the Society’s website, www.dcchs.org.
Since then, Ruth has worked with the Society to expand and improve the website. As the Society generated new content memorializing the history of the Courts of the Circuit, Ruth created new sections of the website to display the material. She created a Portrait Gallery to showcase the portraits of judges who sat on our Courts, exhibits to highlight the history of the Courts and their groundbreaking decisions, and other now-familiar collections. Ruth worked in harness with Dawn Bellinger and Small Bytes in 2018 and 2019 to transfer the website to its current WordPress platform.

Ruth has been responsible for designing and publishing the Society’s quarterly Newsletter. She started with black and white text, selected colorful photos and graphics to catch readers’ attention and bring stories to life, and maintained the list/serve of recipients.

Ruth also worked to increase the Society’s media presence. She created a Facebook page, a Twitter page, and a You Tube channel.

As Ruth steps back from her work with the Society, the Society is grateful for the high quality of her work, her cooperativeness, her creative ideas, and her can-do attitude that endeared her to everyone with whom she worked.

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