

HERBERT LEROY “TOMMY” THOMPSON

The year 2022 marks the 60th anniversary of the passing of one of the legends of the local legal community. Herbert Leroy “H.L.” Thompson, known to most as “Tommy”, was one of the founders of Thompson & Colegate which, along with Best Best & Krieger, is one of the pioneering law firms in the Inland Empire. Thompson & Colegate (known in the community as “T&C”) celebrated its 100th anniversary back in 2015.

Thompson served as president of the Riverside County Bar Association back in 1924. Since that time, T & C has had four other members of its firm serve as RCBA presidents (George Sarau ’29, James Wortz ’64, James Ward ’73, and Geoffrey Hopper ’94).

Born in Ellisburg, PA on January 25, 1885, Thompson had the misfortune of having his father John burned to death when he was three days old. During his younger years, he worked at miscellaneous jobs including the handling of structural steel, working in the mines, washing dishes, working in a bowling alley, serving as an orderly in a hospital, and demonstrating the use of Fels Naptha soap.

Thompson attended the University of Michigan Law School and graduated in 1911 with an LLB degree. It was about this time that he met Richard North, the son of John W. North, the latter of whom was the founder of Riverside. Based upon this meeting, Thompson decided that year to move to Riverside where he purportedly had a plan to raise chickens. Instead, he met H.L. Carnaham on his first day in Riverside. Carnaham was a prominent attorney in Riverside who would one day become Lt. Governor of California.

Thompson was hired that first day to work in Carnaham’s law office. He was admitted to the California State Bar in September of 1911 and was assigned bar #1619. He eventually left the firm in 1912 to start his own office. He married Margaret Hosp of Riverside on November 4, 1913. The couple never had any children.

On January 1, 1915, Thompson was hired by District Attorney Lyman Evans to become Riverside’s first deputy district attorney. In old copies of the *Riverside Daily Press*, some of Thompson’s exploits as a deputy district attorney are described.

In the January 6, 1915 issue of that newspaper, it was noted that Thompson won his first case as a public prosecutor in the Corona branch of the court. He was able to obtain a conviction against W.P. Thompson (no relation), described as a “blind pigger” who was selling booze at a camp in Tin Can Canyon which was an offshoot of Temescal Canyon.

The paper further reported in its February 18, 1915 edition, that Thompson was prosecuting Charles McCormick and Halbert Stansell for the killing of Mike Dacouma on January 17, in Arlington. Apparently, alleged criminals were brought to trial much quicker in those days.

On April 21, 1915, it was reported that he had obtained a conviction against Joe Ross (aka Dan Sullivan) for picking a man’s pocket in Corona on Thanksgiving Day. Meting out early old west justice, the jury took just three minutes to convict Ross.

After Thompson had worked for the DA’s office for just six months, the *Riverside Daily Press* reported on June 14, 1915 that Thompson had decided to leave to become a partner in the Law Office of

Craig, Sarau & Thompson. Hugh H. Craig, who had been practicing in Riverside since 1906, was later appointed to the bench in 1916, and the firm then became Sarau & Thompson.

Thompson seems to have done many types of legal work during his tenure with the firm. For example, on September 30, 1921, the *Riverside Daily Press* reported that he was defending a company which was being sued by two women who were injured when a bus struck their vehicle.

During that same year, it was also reported that Thompson had attended the 12th Annual Meeting of the California State Bar Association which was held on October 20-22 at the Mission Inn.

Sarau & Thompson lasted for thirty years. During that time, a branch office was opened in 1936 with Roy Colegate in charge. Colegate was eventually made a partner in 1943 and the firm became Sarau, Thompson & Colegate. George Sarau ultimately departed from the firm in 1945 and it then became Thompson & Colegate on July 1, 1945.

This lawyer who was known by most people as Tommy, earned numerous accolades during his prestigious legal career. He served on the Board of Governors for the California State Bar in 1939. In 1951, he became a Fellow in the prestigious American College of Trial Lawyers. During his later years in Riverside, he and his wife Margaret lived in a scenic home overlooking the Victoria Country Club. He enjoyed golf, fishing, and playing cards.

Tommy passed away on November 8, 1962. When they learned of his demise, the judges of Riverside County Court signed an order which was entered into the minutes of open court on that date, and expressed their feelings of great loss which they had suffered with his passing. It was noted that they had lost "an outstanding citizen, an able lawyer and a good friend". The minutes were ordered to be sent to his wife.

Written by Bruce Todd.