

Alexander Aira Adair - RCBA's First President

The beginning of the Riverside County Bar Association (RCBA) was reported as having occurred on January 29, 1894, when a committee of attorneys met in the Riverside County Superior Court room for the purpose of organizing the Association. It was then agreed the president of the new organization would be A.A. Adair, vice president to be Robert Duncan, that Wilford M. Peck would be secretary, James Mills selected as treasurer, and Judge J. F. Crowe, A. L. Bartlett, and David A. Givens designated as the executive committee. Every practicing attorney in the county in good standing would be eligible to membership upon the payment of dues and the amount of \$0.50 per month.

Who was this A.A. Adair?

Mr. Adair has been mentioned in a variety of RCBA articles over the years. We have been told Alexander Aira Adair was born August 25, 1857 in London, Ontario Canada. His parents, John, a blacksmith by trade, and Rose, were immigrants from Scotland. Adair and his wife, Jennie Elizabeth (nee Knight), married in 1882, and had three children, Ada Darling, Jean M., and Alexina. Adair was admitted to practice law in Osgoode Hall, Toronto, in May of 1882. By mid 1888, Adair was appointed by the Canadian Government as the Crown Attorney for Muskoka and Parry Sound in Ontario, which position he held until October 1890 when he resigned and moved to Riverside, California.

But, again, who was Alexander Aira Adair?

Within just two months of arriving in Riverside, Adair purchased a home lot for the hefty sum of \$5,000. One can only guess Adair immediately set up a law practice. It does appear it did not take long for the Adair family to become accustomed to the Southern California lifestyle. Adair and his family regularly spent time at the beach to beat the summer heat of the Inland communities. Redondo Beach was the popular place in the summer of 1892.

By 1893, opportunity was “knocking” for Riverside. On May 9, 1893, Riverside County was officially formed, being carved out of San Bernardino and San Diego Counties.

In just the few years of being a Riverside resident, Adair was one to rely on in community involvement. The new County Board of Supervisors established a Law Library naming Adair and E. B. Stanton Lyman as the new library trustees. He was also part of a group of prominent businessmen incorporating and developing a new Y.M.C.A. facility. His varied volunteer efforts included:

- Participating in the formation of a County Sunday-school Association;
- Advocating local political positions, such as Saloon regulation;
- The creation of Society of Associated Charities;
- Participating in the Celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee;
- The creation of a new gas company;
- A community leader for the relocating of the Sherman Institute;

- A Calvary Presbyterian Church Trustee including being a part of the Church
- Erection Committee (the Church still stands to this day);
- A Continuing Law Library Trustee;
- A Riverside National Bank Founder and board member;
- Organized the Riverside Investment Company;
- A Riverside Chamber of Commerce Director;
- An officer of Pan American University;
- A member of the Present Day Club (community organization)
- The City Attorney Pro Tempore while his law partner, then City Attorney Purington, took a leave of Absence.

Politics were also part of A.A. Adair's spare time. Adair was nominated by the Republican Party for Riverside County District Attorney. He was a delegate at the State Republican Convention which supported President McKinley and his policy of the Spanish American War; fellow delegates included Frank A Miller of the Mission Inn and John G. North, son of Riverside founder John W North. Adair was thought to have had a desire to be a legislator in Sacramento, but that did not happen.

Adair also dabbled at real estate development being a part owner with C. L. Nye in 55 acres, valued at \$100,000, located in Beaumont; Adair and his partner eventually swapped the land for a lot, 100 feet by 108 feet, in the City of Los Angeles at the corner of First and Figueroa streets.

If all of the foregoing was not enough to keep anyone busy, A. A. Adair was still primarily an attorney. And his law practice was varied.

For the most part, Adair domiciled his law practice in the Loring Building on Market Street. Adair handled probate, divorce, civil as well as the criminal matters. Of particular note, Adair participated in *People v. Marshall*. Adair represented Charles Marshall who infamously holds a footnote in county history for being the murderer of the first Riverside County Sheriff Deputy to be killed in the line of duty. The *Marshall* case required two appeals to the State Supreme Court and a few visits by Adair to Northern California.

Another sensational criminal case requiring Adair representation was *People v. Cummings*. Cummings was accused of the murder of T. C. Naramore at his ranch in Box Springs Canyon.

Adair was also the attorney for the Gage family after whom the Gage Canal is named. Adair successfully retained the canal rights for the Gage family in a litigation, which started long before Adair arrived in Riverside. The case made its way to the State Supreme Court. In a latter case for Mrs. Gage versus Bank of California, Mr. Adair's opponent was John G. North.

Adair also practiced "water law" participating in an action between the City of San Bernardino and the City of Riverside over rights to water volume claimed by the City of San

Bernardino.

Adair was counsel for the Harada family in the historically important case known as *People vs. Harada*. *People v. Harada* was the test case to determine the constitutionality of laws preventing Japanese immigrants from owning property in California. "California's Webb-Haney Act (also known as the Alien Land Law of 1913) barred "aliens ineligible for [U.S.] citizenship" from owning property in the state." It appears Adair's friend, Frank Miller of the Mission Inn, helped support the endeavor.

Then there was the libel suit contemplated for Riverside's Judge Noyes against the Los Angeles Times.

At one point in his legal career, Adair even contemplated a judgeship. In 1905, Riverside's then sole judge, Noyes, was thought to lose his judicial position in the upcoming election because of his views on temperance, among other reasons. Area attorneys considered running against Judge Noyes including, A William Collier, attorney for the Santa Fe Railway, as did W. A. Purington, as well as Adair. Purington and Adair being law partners chose to draw lots to decide who would place his hat in the ring for the position. Purington won the draw. Neither became the judge.

1914 must have been an important time for lawyers in Riverside, what with 22 individuals and firms agreeing to slow down the "hustle and bustle" of the busy practice of law, jointly agreeing to reducing their workload from 6 days per week to 5 and one-half.

Adair's partner, W. A. Purington, died in April 1918. A new firm of Adair & Winder was commenced.

By 1920, the RCBA's annual meeting was attended by 43 attorneys. Nevertheless, by 1921, Mr. Adair was just one of three attorneys listed for the City of Riverside in the American Bar publication of lawyers. Therein Adair was referenced as follows: "General Practice. Specialize in Probate and Corporation Law" with representative clients including, "First Nat'l Bank; Citizens Nat'l Bank; Nat'l Bank of Riverside; Security Investment Co.; Security Savings Bank; Glenwood Mission Inn; Riverside Water Co., Riverside Abstract Co.; Title Insurance Co.; Riverside Chamber of Commerce; Press Printing Co.; Riverside Mortgage Co."

For thirty years, Adair had made quite the name for himself in his legal profession. By 1921, Riverside County had grown sufficient to justify a second judge. Although A.A. Adair was "regarded as the dean of the local bar, [he] would not be a candidate for the new judicial position. Governor William Dennison Stephens was a Republican, which leads one to conclude the choice not to be judge was Adair's.

Adair's wife, Jennie, died June 10, 1923. Less than a month later, A.A. died on July 3, 1923. Both Jennie and A.A. are buried at Evergreen Memorial Park in Riverside (Jennie's mother was buried years earlier in Olivewood Cemetery).

One final note (of levity perhaps), Adair was respected enough that his name was considered to be worthy of an endorsement; prominent attorney says, “Cobbs Celebrated Hair Tonic” “prevents baldness” and dandruff.

Written by Christopher G. Jensen