

Miguel Estudillo
RCBA PRESIDENT 1917
By Chris Jensen



Some 20 years ago, while investigating the missing years of RCBA Presidents, then immediate past RCBA President John Vineyard inquired of Retired Associate Justice, John Gabbert (and RCBA President in 1949) about names of the past including Miguel Estudillo. Justice Gabbert opined it was hard to believe Miguel Estudillo had not also been a president of the Association. Of course, who would know better than Justice Gabbert whose early career overlapped for fifteen years with the end of Estudillo's (1934 to 1949). To Justice Gabbert, knowing some of Estudillo's career highlights, it must have seemed Estudillo had to have been an RCBA President. It turns out Justice Gabbert was correct. Miguel Estudillo was President in 1917.

The Estudillo family roots are part of the beginning of California. Miguel Estudillo's great grandfather, Jose Maria Estudillo, was born in Spain in 1772, married in New Spain (Mexico) in 1795 and shortly thereafter was part of the colonizing of Alta California. Eventually Jose Maria became Spain's Comandante of the Presidio of San Diego. Miguel Estudillo's grandfather, Jose Antonio, whose adobe home still stands in San Diego, was granted over 26,000 acres of what is now the area from Temecula to San Jacinto. At one point, the family owned over 110,000 acres in Southern California alone.

Miguel's father and uncle constructed identical two-story mansions on what remained of the family's extensive property holdings; the one by his uncle in San Jacinto and the other just inside the Soboba Indian Reservation. The San Jacinto home has been restored to its beautiful original luster; the other is in a state of disrepair.

Miguel was born 20 September 1870, in San Jacinto, then San Bernardino County. His great-grandfather, his grandfather, his father, and other relatives all served extensively for the governments of New Spain, Mexico and the United States. Miguel was destined to serve.

The Estudillo family never considered themselves Mexicans. They were Spanish, then Californio, then citizens of the United States. During the 26 years California was considered part of Mexico, the California residents, who arrived during the Spanish era, considered themselves Californio and for the most part independent of Mexico City because of abandonment or loyalty to their new independence. Miguel's mother, Carman Rubidoux, was the daughter of the celebrated mountain man, Louis Rubidoux, namesake for the town and Riverside's iconic mountain, Mt. Rubidoux.

Miguel attended and graduated from Santa Clara College, California, in 1890. Shortly thereafter he became a deputy clerk for the San Diego County court serving in that position until 1893. For two years thereafter, he was as the clerk of the Board of Supervisors for the County of San Diego. All during the time he worked for San Diego County, Miguel studied the law during his "leisure time." As was done at the time, at the end of the studies Miguel was granted admission to the California State Bar. One of Miguel's earliest cases took him to Mexico for three years undertaking multiple matters. Upon his return to California, Miguel focused his practice in the city of Riverside. But the practice of law was not enough for Miguel.

In 1903, Miguel married Minerva Cook, a descendant of a Mayflower passenger and of a revolutionary war patriot.

By 1904 Miguel garnered sufficient support from a faction of Republicans who opposed the William Collier (who would become the 1914 RCBA President) political machine eventually achieving the nomination from his party for, and the eventual seat in the California State assembly.

Miguel was an ardent supporter of the Teddy Roosevelt conservation policies. During his term as assemblyman, he authored assembly Bill number 248 to transfer land from the state of California to the federal government for the purpose of creating Yosemite Valley and the National Park as we know it today. A grateful letter of thanks was sent by John Muir to Miguel.

Estudillo also co-sponsored the University of California's legislation to create the UC Citrus Experiment Station in Riverside which would eventually become the University of California, Riverside, campus.

One of Estudillo's questionable moments as assemblyman was widely reported by the press when he and his brother-in-law, a fellow assemblyman from San Diego, Percy Johnson,

both appointed each other's wives as their committee clerks allowing both to be placed on their respective payrolls increasing the family per diem.

In 1908 Estudillo's influence was growing and he was elected to the California State Senate. During his term as Senator, he was known as being a major supporter for the Anti-salon faction.

After his terms as Senator, Miguel returned to Riverside and his law practice. In 1918 Estudillo became the City Attorney for the city of Riverside, a one-year appointment. He was reappointed in 1941 and served in that position into 1949.

As did many of his colleagues, Estudillo practiced in a variety of legal arenas. One case of note was the civil rights case of *People v Harada*, representing the People opposite the firm of Purrington & Adair, A.A. Adair (Adair was the first RCBA President).

It appears Estudillo's first governing involvement in the Riverside County Bar Association was in 1915 when he was elected as a director. His position was renewed in 1916.

By 1917, Estudillo was elected president of the Riverside County Bar Association. One of his tasks as president was to select two legal advisors for the purpose of drafting a questionnaire for determining exemptions from the World War I draft. Another project undertaken was advocating for Riverside hosting the California State Bar annual convention which eventually took place in 1921; the 12th annual meeting being held at the Riverside Mission Inn.

Miguel Estudillo was a member of the California National Guard, a Captain in Company M, seventh Regiment. He also organized the Riverside Red Cross Ambulance Corps. Estudillo was a member of the Riverside Elks Club, a very active philanthropical community group, and was also a member of Riverside's Victoria Country Club as well as the Riverside Country Club.

Estudillo's home where he resided from 1918 until 1950 is still standing in Riverside. It is known as the "Gamble-Estudillo Holmes Home" located at 4515 Sixth Street.

Miguel Estudillo died April 29, 1950, aged 80 years. He was survived by his wife and two sons, one of whom, Francis Estudillo, was then a Riverside County Municipal Court Judge (later a Superior Court Judge in 1967). On the day of Miguel's funeral, the Judges of the Riverside Courts adjourned for the day as did the City Council their regular meeting, so all could attend and honor Miguel Estudillo. Most major newspapers in California reported Miguel's death and legacy. The American flag was lowered to half mast over Riverside City Hall.

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