

## GEORGE ADOLPH SARAU

### RCBA President 1929

In the RCBA History Committee's effort to publish biographies for each of the past presidents of the Riverside County Bar Association, we focus this month on George Adolph Sarau who served as the president for the 1929 term.

Sarau's major claim to fame, at least in terms of Riverside legal history, was that he was one of the earliest members of what became the pioneering law firm of Thompson & Colegate which is considered to be one of the oldest (if not the oldest) law firms in Riverside.

Sarau was born on March 12, 1879 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin to Christian Sarau (1839-1903) and Augusta Hoffman Sarau (1843-1881). His siblings included Christian, Augusta, Meta Louise and Mary. His father Christian was involved in numerous public affairs including service as a member of both the upper and lower houses of the state of Wisconsin.

During his time in Wisconsin, Sarau attended public school and eventually enrolled in law school at the University of Wisconsin from which he was graduated in 1900. He started a legal practice in 1901 with Fred E. Clark in Princeton, Wisconsin. He returned to Oshkosh in 1903 as result of the death of his father and he continued his legal practice in that city until 1912. For reasons undetermined by this writer, Sarau decided to move to Riverside, California in 1912. By this time of his move, he had already married Minchen H. Rimpler in 1905. They eventually had one son (Christian).

Shortly after moving to Riverside, he was admitted to the California bar with the assignment of bar license #2234. In April of 1912, he formed a law partnership with Herschel L. Carnahan. This firm eventually ended when Carnahan was appointed as California Commissioner of Corporations. Carnahan would later serve as Lt. Governor of California from 1928-1931. He committed suicide in 1941.

Following his legal association with Carnahan, Sarau joined Hugh H. Craig and H. L. Thompson in June of 1915 as Craig, Sarau & Thompson. This firm was only in existence for about nine months when Craig was appointed to the bench and the firm became Sarau & Thompson.

Once he had settled in Riverside, many of Sarau's activities were reported in the local press. For example, on May 20, 1916, the *Riverside Enterprise* noted that he had hosted Arlie Mucks at his home. Mucks, who was a student at the University of Wisconsin, had hurled the discus a then world record distance of 155' 2". He had been the first public high school athlete to compete in the Olympics when he competed in the Stockholm games in 1912.

Some of Sarau's legal cases also started being reported in local newspapers. It is evident from these articles that he handled a wide variety of cases.

In the *Riverside Enterprise* dated December 14, 1914, it was reported that Sarau was defending Joe Uyemura, a Japanese man, who struck Sing Chung, a Chinese man, with a three-foot gas pipe near Riverside's Chinatown. Sarau contended that his client had been acting as a spy on behalf of the Riverside Police Department and that his client's identity had been discovered and that he was threatened to "get out of Chinatown". His client was allegedly defending himself from Chung whom he thought was going to harm him. This defense was apparently unsuccessful since Sarau's client was sentenced by Judge Densmore to a year at San Quentin Prison.

The *Riverside Enterprise* reported on October 5, 1917 that Sarau was defending Edward Schmidt in a personal injury lawsuit brought by H. O. Sorkness who was alleging damages in the sum of \$13,450 for Schmidt's negligence in allowing his automobile to collide with a horse and buggy with Sorkness at the reins.

In the September 4, 1919 issue of the *Riverside Enterprise*, it was noted that Sarau was representing Joe Winkel and Louis Castro who were described as "bootleggers" who had been arrested in Temecula for selling a "bottle of wine" to an undercover detective.

On April 3, 1920, the *Riverside Daily Press* reported that Sarau was representing Cora A. Boos who had been charged with bigamy by the District Attorney's Office. Cora's husband Albert A. Boos preferred charges that his wife had married N. B. Standley while she was still married to Boos. Standley paid Cora's bail in the sum of \$5,000. Nothing further was reported about the outcome of this matter.

Sarau also developed an expertise in water law and, as reported in the *Riverside Enterprise* dated September 18, 1919, he was appointed as the attorney for the newly organized Moreno Mutual Irrigation Company.

He was also active in numerous community activities while living in Riverside. For example, he was a long-time member of the Elks Lodge and, from 1917-18, he served as the Exalted Ruler of Chapter 643 in Riverside. It was reported by the *Riverside Daily Press* on September 19, 1922 that, as a member of the Elks, he was one of the speakers who paid tribute to deceased former Exalted Ruler Hugh H. Craig (his former law partner) at a memorial service at the local Elks Lodge.

The *Riverside Enterprise* reported in its issue dated January 27, 1917 that Sarau had been elected to serve as the secretary for the Riverside County Bar Association at its annual meeting at the Victoria Country Club. This writer could not find any subsequent articles mentioning his later election as president of the RCBA.

The same paper also reported on February 7, 1918 that Sarau was one of many important people (including Mission Inn founder Frank Miller) who were responsible for March Air Field being converted into a military base.

Sarau served as Director of the Riverside Public Library from 1919 to 1927 and was also a Director of the Riverside Law Library. He was a Director of the Riverside Chamber of Commerce in 1923 and 1924. He also served for many years on the State Board of Bar Examiners.

Sarau's life also made the social pages in the local press. On June 11, 1919, it was reported that he was constructing a "beautiful new residence" on Rubidoux Heights at 1550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> St. in Riverside. The house was described as going to be "one of the handsomest in that section of the city". Famous local architect G. Stanley Wilson was designing it in a Spanish Colonial style.

Sarau's prominence as an attorney resulted in the tendering to him of an appointment as a judge by then Governor William D. Stevens. Ironically, he would be replacing his former partner Hugh H. Craig who had recently resigned. Sarau apparently had some trepidation about the position because the October 19, 1921 edition of the *Riverside Enterprise* reported that "he was contemplating about whether to accept it". One day later, the same paper reported on October 20, 1921 that Sarau had decided not to accept the appointment. Despite apparently many pleas from his friends to accept the position, Sarau said that

“It is one of the highest honors that can come to any attorney in California and, if my health and other circumstances would permit, I would unhesitantly accept.”

Regarding the aforementioned H. L. Carnahan, the *San Bernardino Sun* reported on April 6, 1941 that Sarau was one of his pallbearers following “Carnahan’s suicide the previous Monday”. Carnahan was entombed in the Evergreen Mausoleum in Riverside.

As late as May 20, 1944, the local press was still mentioning his cases. The *San Bernardino Sun* reported on that date that Sarau had filed a Complaint seeking \$50,000 in damages on behalf of four clients who were injured in an automobile accident when their vehicle was struck by a vehicle operated by Marion Arnett.

By 1945, however, it was reported on December 7 by The *Desert Sun* that Roy Colegate had revealed that Sarau had departed from Sarau, Thompson & Colegate and that the firm would simply be known as Thompson & Colegate. Roy Colegate had joined the firm in 1943.

Sarau ultimately passed away on April 4, 1955 after what was described as a long illness. His death was reported in numerous places including the April 16, 1955 edition of the *San Bernardino Sun*. He is currently buried in the Evergreen Memorial Park in Riverside (Section R). His wife Minchen survived until 1970 and is also buried in Evergreen.

*Written by Bruce E. Todd*