

Justice James D. Ward

RCBA President 1973

“Creator of the RCBA Past Presidents’ Dinner”

Justice Ward was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in 1935. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of South Dakota in 1957 and his J.D. degree from the University of San Francisco in 1959. From 1959 to 1960, Justice Ward served on active duty in the U.S. Army. Then, from 1960 to 1965, he served in the Army Reserve and rose to the rank of First Sergeant. He was admitted to the California State Bar in 1960, at which time he came to practice in Riverside. He lived in Riverside County for 60 years, a place he loves.

In 1960, Justice Ward recalled the Riverside County Bar Association (RCBA) was a small, loosely organized association. The luncheon meetings were held on the second floor of a café on 7th Street. There was little formality to the association, but there was socialization. Attorney John Ganahl from Corona (and the well-known Ganahl Lumber Co. family member) had an annual picnic for the members of the RCBA at his ranch in Corona.

From 1960 to 1961, Justice Ward served as a deputy district attorney for Riverside County. He then went into private practice with the law firm of Badger, Schulte & Ward, where he worked from 1961 to 1964. Justice Ward left this firm to go into civil litigation practice at Thompson & Colegate, dealing with media-related law, from 1964 to 1993. During this time, Justice Ward successfully argued two landmark First Amendment cases in the United States Supreme Court on behalf of the Press Enterprise. It was also during this time that Justice Ward served as President of the RCBA, with his presidency commencing in 1973.

During Justice Ward’s presidency, the RCBA board established the Distinguished Service Award named after Jim Krieger, a distinguished Riverside attorney who had died in a plane crash. Also, the RCBA board election process became inclusive of the entire association membership. Previously, the officers were selected by the attendees at an annual election luncheon meeting rather than through a more formal voting process. Justice Ward also arranged for former United States Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark to speak in Riverside and invited the justices of the Court of Appeal to attend. Amongst other many great things Justice Ward accomplished for the RCBA during his term, what we now know as the Lawyer Referral Service was introduced during Justice Ward’s term, at which time the board was working on a phone answering service where members of the public were able to receive answers to basic questions about the legal system, small claims, and obtaining counsel, among other things. This national service, Tel-Law, Inc., with licensees in several other states, received significant recognition.

On November 29, 1993, Justice Ward was appointed by Governor Pete Wilson to the Superior Court of California in the County of Riverside. Less than three years later, on April 24, 1996, Governor Wilson appointed Justice Ward as associate justice of the California Court of Appeal, and his appointment was confirmed on November 3, 1998.

Justice Ward's hobbies reveal his vast experiences. He has skied at 60 different ski resorts before he turned 60 years of age. He visited 130 countries. He met his wife Carole in Paris, France. Justice Ward loves to write and has published over 100 pieces, including poetry.

The RCBA Past Presidents' Dinner is a day all past presidents of the RCBA look forward to, and Justice Ward is to credit for the annual event. Justice Ward hosted the first Past Presidents' Dinner in 1983 by inviting all past presidents to a lunch held at a hotel in Downtown Riverside. This idea stemmed from Past President Mike Clepper's installation dinner in 1983 when almost three dozen past presidents attended. Since then, RCBA past presidents look forward to this annual event held exclusively for past presidents and the current president. Justice Ward in good humor noted that Mike Clepper would never attend any Past Presidents' Dinner until he checked to see how many past presidents agreed to attend. If it was close to his record for attendance at his installation dinner, he would not attend in order to maintain his installation dinner record. As of the date of writing this biography in 2023, Mike Clepper's record has yet to be broken.

As noted, Justice Ward wrote poetry, and I conclude this piece with one of them. It is called "THE CON-TIN'-U-ANCE," which was published in the Daily Journal in January of 2002.

Once was a lawyer
as dumb as a post,
loath to appear
before the judge host.
The lawyer knew his only chance
was to secure a con-tin'-u-ance'.

Ill-prepared was he -
not ready at all,
he wanted to flee
from his final downfall.
Therefore, to avoid breaking his lance,
he simply asked for a con-tin'-u-ance'

The judge, normally defiant,
he never would budge;
but concern for the client
caused him to fudge.
"Shape up, no flying by seat-of-pants
and I will give you a con-tin'-u-ance'."

Judge to lawyer, after years,
"back to court" -
brought to tears,
gave same retort.
"Oh, woe is me, just one more chance -
I beg of you, a con-tin'-u-ance'."

It must have been Christmas
or the judge's birth-day,
for again, alas,
the jurist did sway,
"This is the end, your ultimate dance:
here is your last con-tin'-u-ance'."

Trial day finally came -
much pain on the bench -
lawyer's conduct so lame,
judge's stomach did wrench.
One thing of note - good perchance?
Nary a mention of con-tin'-u-ance'!

The case was agony to the judge:
for Maalox, his bailiff he did send -
his intestines growled, 'twas such a drudge -
as to the trial, he saw no end.
It crossed his mind, while in a trance,
it is I who needs a con-tin'-u-ance'.

The lawyer droned on,
his case was so weak -
at last, in despair,
the judge did shriek.
"Lest this case 'neath the sod, my body plants
I'm giving myself a con-tin'-u-ance'."

Written by Sophia Choi, RCBA President 2020.