

The American Inns of Court: A Brief History



The American Inns of Court are patterned after the English Inns of Court that began in 1292 when King Edward I directed his Chief Justice to satisfy a growing need for skilled advocates at the Royal court at Westminster. The English Inns of Court grew in number and importance during the Middle

Ages. They emphasized the value of learning the craft and culture of lawyering from those already established in the profession. Their collegial environment fostered common goals and nurtured professional ideals and ethics.

In 1977, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and other American lawyers and judges spent two weeks in England as part of the Anglo-American Exchange. They were particularly impressed with the collegial approach of the English Inns of Court and with the way in which the Inns passed on to new lawyers the decorum, civility and professional standards necessary for a properly functioning bar. Following his return, Chief Justice Burger authorized a pilot program that could be adapted to the realities of law practice in the United States.

Chief Justice Burger, former Solicitor General Rex Lee and Senior United States District Judge A. Sherman Christensen founded the first American Inn of Court in 1980. The Inn was affiliated with the J. Reuben Clark School of Law at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. The number of Inns increased slowly at first, but grew rapidly with the creation of the American Inns of Court Foundation in 1985. Today there are over 350-chartered American Inns of Court in forty-eight states and the District of Columbia. The American Inns of Court movement actively involves more than 25,000 state, federal, and administrative law judges, attorneys, legal scholars and students.

As Justice O'Connor observed in her most recent book, *The Majesty of the Law*, the American Inns of Court are "the product of [late Chief Justice Warren Burger's] idea for improving the skills of the working bar." As Justice O'Connor recounts in her forward to *The American Inns of Court: Reclaiming a Noble Profession*, the American Inns of Court movement, born nearly a quarter century ago, has been a resounding success story:

"In the 1960s, well before his appointment to the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Burger envisioned an organization that would help lawyers improve their Advocacy skills, with an emphasis on the importance of professional integrity and ethics. He visited England in 1977 in connection with the Anglo-American Legal Exchange program, returning with the idea of creating in the United States an organization patterned after the English Inns of Court, which have for hundreds of years provided mentoring to young lawyers. A number of prominent members of the legal community...joined the Chief Justice to hone his ideas into a workable concept. Forty-four members participated in the first American Inn of Court in Utah in 1980. Today, there are more than [350] active American Inns, with a collective membership of [more than 25,000]. The Judicial Conference of the United States, the Conference of Chief Justices, the ABA Commission on Professionalism, and the ABA Judicial Administration Division have strongly endorsed the American Inn program."

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