

A Brief History of the American Inns of Court

The American Inns of Court concept was the product of a discussion in the late 1970's among the United States' members of the Anglo-American Exchange of Lawyers and Judges, including Chief Justice of the United States Warren E. Burger and Judge J. Clifford Wallace of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Burger subsequently invited Rex E. Lee, then Dean of the J. Reuben Clark School of Law at Brigham Young University and later U.S. Solicitor General, and Dallin Oaks, then president of Brigham Young University and later justice of the Utah Supreme Court, to test the idea.

At the suggestion of Lee, a pilot program was entrusted to Senior U.S. District Court Judge A. Sherman Christensen, who shaped the idea into a workable concept. The first American Inn of Court was founded February 2, 1980 in the Provo/Salt Lake City area of Utah, and included law students from Brigham Young University.

Within the next three years, additional American Inns formed in Utah, Mississippi, Hawaii, New York, and Washington, D.C.

In 1983, Chief Justice Burger created a committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States to explore whether the American Inn concept was of value to the administration of justice and, if so, whether there should be a national organization to promote, establish and assist American Inns, and promote the goals of legal excellence, civility, professionalism and ethics on a national level.

The committee reported to the Judicial Conference affirmatively on the two questions and proposed the creation of the American Inns of Court Foundation. The Judicial Conference approved the reports and, thus, endorsed the American Inn concept and the formation of a national structure.

In 1985 the American Inns of Court Foundation with 12 Inns nationally, was organized to support the Inns and to promote the goals of legal excellence, civility, professionalism and ethics on a national level. The establishment of the American Inns of Court Foundation was celebrated at a dinner in Salt Lake City in June 1985. Speakers at the dinner program included Judge Christensen, Judge Aldon J. Anderson, and Dallin Oaks.

The American Inns of Court movement has grown faster than any other organization of legal professionals. Today there are nearly 400 chartered American Inns of Court in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Tokyo. There are more than 30,000 active members nationwide encompassing a wide cross-section of the legal community, including federal and state judges, lawyers, law professors, and law students.

Our Mission

The American Inns of Court inspire the legal community to advance the rule of law by achieving the highest level of professionalism through example, education and mentoring.

Who We Are

The American Inns of Court is an association of lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals from all levels and backgrounds who share a passion for professional excellence. Through regular meetings, members are able to build and strengthen professional relationships; discuss fundamental concerns about professionalism and pressing legal issues of the day; share experiences and advice; exhort the utmost passion and dedication for the law; provide mentoring opportunities; and advance the highest levels of integrity, ethics, and civility. Our Inns have gained a national and international reputation as an organization that bridges the gap between formal law school education and legal practice by offering career-long continuing education in the Common Law tradition.

This uniquely non-partisan association encourages meaningful mentoring relationships. We are one of the very few legal organizations that involve the whole spectrum of the profession: from law students to Supreme Court Justices; every level of federal and state judges, small firms to large firms; legal educators to law students. All have the opportunity to learn and grow without limit.

Membership is divided into "pupillage teams," with each team consisting of a few members from each membership category depending on the members' level of experience. Each pupillage team conducts one program for the Inn each year. Pupillage team members gather informally outside of monthly meetings in groups of two or more. This allows the less-experienced attorneys to become more effective advocates and counselors by learning from the more-experienced attorneys and judges.

In this collegial environment, outside the courtroom and pressure of daily practice, members discuss legal practice, principles, and methods. Academicians, specialized practitioners, and complementing generalists provide a mix of skill, theory, experience, and passion. This fluid, side-by-side approach allows seasoned judges and attorneys to help shape students and newer lawyers with practical guidance in serving the law and seeking justice.