



Handbook

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www.innsocourt.org/inns/bedellinn

Civility · Ethics · Professionalism · Legal Excellence

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1. Introduction

This handbook is to acquaint new members and reacquaint existing members with the history, purpose, organization, and activities of the American Inns of Court and the Chester Bedell American Inn of Court. Additional information can be found on the websites:

www.innsofcourt.org

www.innsofcourt.org/inns/bedellinn.

2. History

The American Inns of Court

The concept for the American Inns of Court was developed in the 1970s by distinguished lawyers and judges, including Chief Justice Warren Burger, Chief Circuit Judge Clifford Wallace, Dean Rex Lee of Brigham Young University Law School (and later Solicitor General of the United States), Senior District Judge Sherman Christensen, and Professor Sherman Cohn of Georgetown Law School.

The first local Inn was formed in 1980 in the Salt Lake City area, and included law students from Brigham Young University.

Not long after, an ad hoc committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States was formed to consider “whether some method of developing professionalism and mentoring could be instituted in the United States.” The Honorable Susan Black, then a United States District Judge for the Middle District of Florida, was a member of that committee. The Judicial Conference of the United States endorsed the concept in 1985, and the American Inns of Court Foundation was organized. Judge Black was one of the Foundation’s first seven trustees.

There are now more than 350 local Inns in the United States. There are Inns in every state, with over 27,000 active members and over 100,000 active and alumni members.

The Chester Bedell Inn of Court

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court received its charter in 1985 and operates in accordance with its bylaws, as amended. It was the 13th American Inn of Court. The organizers were the Honorable Susan Black, then a United States District Judge, and Dean Frank Read of the University of Florida College of Law. Charter members included Albert Datz, John DeVault, the Honorable Henry Adams Jr., George Gabel Jr., the Honorable Major Harding, Mark Hulsey, the Honorable Howell Melton, Rutledge Liles, the Honorable Ralph Nimmons,

James McLean, the Honorable Louis Safer, Mary Phillips, William Adams III, Professor James Pierce, Professor Gerald Bennett, James Rinaman, Edward Booth, Edward White, James Cobb, and William White.

3. Vision, Mission, & Purpose

Vision: “A legal profession and judiciary dedicated to professionalism, ethics, civility and excellence.”

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.

While serving as Solicitor General of the United States, Rex Lee explained the purpose of local Inns:

Don't attempt to analogize [the Inns] to anything else. That was one of the mistakes that was made in the first place. It's our custom as Common Law lawyers to analogize—we live by precedent and analogy ...

The American Inns of Court borrows in a sense from other programs, but the worst mistake that you can make, I think, is first to analogize it to a law school program. It is not ... and you'll kill it dead in months if it becomes a law school program.

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It's not a CLE program. ... It is certainly not like a legal fraternity, and I guess that's the last thing that I would have it, because its purposes are not primarily social.

And finally, it really isn't like the English system. [In England] the Inns are central to the entire litigation system, ... and so we have to take as much from them as we can.

Part of the genius of the organization is that its membership involves people at several different phases of their careers—law students, young practicing lawyers, middle level practicing lawyers, the established moguls of the Bar, and then the law teachers.

Now the reason it will carry itself once you get it going is because [everyone] will get something out of it. ... [There] has been no place where one lawyer or judge really gets some insight into what another lawyer or judge is doing in such a comprehensive context. There is no setting in which that can occur so completely. ...

It gives you a chance to pry into the consciousness and the soul and the mind of other good lawyers.

4. Membership

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court has four classes of membership and 120 members (not including Pupils). The classes are: Masters of the Bench (Masters or Benchers), Barristers, Associates, and Pupils.

Masters, also called Benchers, are the most experienced members of the profession: attorneys in public or private practice, members of the judiciary, and professors of law. Masters have more than 15 years of legal experience after bar admission. There is no required tenure for Masters.

Barristers have between 5 and 15 years of legal experience after bar admission. Barristers typically serve staggered three-year terms, so that approximately one-third of the Barristers will be succeeded each year.

Associates have between 1 and 5 years of legal experience. The term of membership for Associates is one year.

Pupils are law students at any level who have been recommended by their schools. The term of membership for Pupils is one year. Initially established in association with the University of Florida School of Law, the Inn also now enjoys

affiliations with Florida Coastal School of Law and Florida State University School of Law.

Alumni are former Pupils, Associates, and Barristers who have not become Masters. Up to 10 alumni can attend each meeting, except the annual banquet, for which the Inn tries to accommodate as many alumni who want to attend.

Inactive Members. The Executive Committee may confer Emeritus and Honorary Membership status. Emeritus membership is based on distinguished service to the Inn, and Emeritus members may retain such membership status for as long as they want. Honorary memberships are based on distinguished service to the bench or the bar, in the education of law students, in furtherance of Inn objectives, or in the achievement of other noteworthy accomplishments.

Membership is not expressly restricted by the nature of a member's practice or legal activity, although the membership and programs are generally focused on litigation practice.

The American Inns of Court and the Chester Bedell American Inn of Court both emphasize diversity among its membership and the profession of law in general. The American Inns of Court's Diversity Policy can be found at

www.innsforcourt.org/media/35140/AIC_Diversity_Policy.pdf

5. Meetings

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court holds monthly dinner and program meetings from September through April, omitting December. At our meetings, Pupillage Groups present one-hour programs. Members of each Pupillage Group meet before their scheduled program to select, prepare, and practice their programs. CLE credit is often available.

The typical meeting agenda is cocktails from 5:00 to 6:00, followed by announcements, a “mentor moment” from a Master in the hosting Pupillage Group, dinner, the program, and a toast from a Pupil in the hosting Pupillage Group.

The meeting schedule can be found at www.innsforcourt.org/inns/bedellinn.

6. Attendance

Membership is a privilege. The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court furthers its goals by the active involvement and efforts of its members. Therefore, all members are expected to attend Inn meetings and participate in Inn activities. If a member misses three meetings, that member will be contacted to determine if the member wishes to remain in the Inn.

7. Pupillage Groups

Pupillage Groups are the core membership units of the Chester Bedell American Inn of Court. The Pupillage Groups consist of proportionate numbers of Masters, Barristers, Associates, and Pupils. Pupillage Groups are normally constituted for a single membership year. Each Pupillage Group is led by a Group Chairperson (usually a Master) and a Program Chairperson (usually a Barrister).

Each Group Chairperson is responsible for organizing meetings to choose a presentation topic, prepare a presentation, and present the program at a regular meeting of the Inn. Programs should emphasize the Inn's focus on ethics and professionalism and create ways to keep the audience engaged. Ideally, they will be eligible for CLE credit. The American Inns of Court maintains an excellent program library from local Inns around the country that can be found at www.innsocourt.org/for-members/member-programs/program-library.aspx.

Each Group Chairperson is also responsible for organizing other meetings for his or her Pupillage Group throughout the membership year on an informal basis for discussion, mentoring, and outreach purposes.

In addition to working with the Group Chairperson in selecting and organizing a program, each

Program Chairperson is responsible for completing a program submission form and submitting it to the national office, developing table topics for the dinner, choosing a Master to speak for a few minutes at the beginning of the program about a “mentoring moment” in his or her career, and choosing a Pupil to prepare a brief toast for the end of the meeting. Information on submitting a program can be found at www.innsofcourt.org/for-members/member-programs/program-library.aspx.

8. Governance

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court is led by Officers (President, President-elect, Counselor, Counselor-elect, and Secretary/Treasurer) and an Executive Committee. The officers serve a one-year term unless the Executive Committee recommends, and the Masters approve, a two-year term. Except for the Secretary/Treasurer, the officers may succeed themselves only once. The Secretary/Treasurer may serve additional terms.

The President, with help from the Executive Committee, presides over the Inn. The Executive Committee is composed of the officers and other active members as determined by a majority vote of the Masters present at a meeting called for that purpose.

The Executive Committee is the primary group responsible for overseeing Inn membership and operations. Its responsibilities include supervising and appointing members to committees, establishing and monitoring Pupillage groups and mentoring programs, overseeing finances, and facilitating relationships with the law schools and other Inns and the American Inns of Court. It meets regularly and is chaired by the President.

The Executive Committee nominates new Masters upon recommendation of the Bench Selection Committee for the selection of Masters at the annual elections meeting. It nominates new Barristers upon recommendation of the Barrister Selection Committee for selection by Masters at the Annual elections meeting. It also selects Associates upon recommendation of active members of the Inn or based on written applications and selects and extends membership to Pupils based on recommendations of law professors or written application. The Executive Committee may also grant Emeritus status to active Masters and to nominate persons for election as Honorary Members.

If the President or Counselor ceases to be able to hold office, the respective officer-elect serves as that officer for the remainder of the term of office vacated, and then serves as officer for the term for which he or she had been selected.

A listing of the officers and the Executive Committee members and the Inn bylaws can be found at www.innsocourt.org/inns/bedellinn.

9. Committees

Much of the Chester Bedell American Inn of Court's work is carried out through standing and ad hoc committees. Various members of the Executive Committee and Inn members are tasked with heading up the Inn's efforts at Mentoring, Membership, Outreach, and other core competencies.

10. Finances

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court is funded by membership fees paid at the beginning of each membership year. The membership year runs from July 1 through June 30. The Executive Committee sets the fees to enable the Inn to meet its financial obligations (primarily the cost of the monthly dinner meetings and the annual dues to the American Inns of Court Foundation). The fee amounts vary depending on membership category. A schedule of such fees can be found at www.innsocourt.org/inns/bedellinn.

11. American Inns of Court Foundation

The American Inn of Court Foundation, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, organizes and leads Inns throughout the United States.

Members of the American Inns of Court receive “The Bencher,” which is a publication of the national organization.

12. Chester Bedell



Chester Bedell (1904-1981) was a trial lawyer for 57 years. Built upon daily excellence in courtroom work, a deep respect for the law, and an unquestioned reputation for professionalism, he was recognized as the most outstanding trial lawyer in Florida. In 1977, he was awarded the annual American Bar Foundation Service Award. In presenting the award, Chesterfield Smith, President of the American Bar Association, said that if the members of The Florida Bar were to cast a secret ballot, Chester Bedell would be the

overwhelming choice as the best trial lawyer and the most gracious and ethical gentleman who practiced law in Florida. His memory and legacy is preserved through the Chester Bedell Memorial Foundation, The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court, the Chester Bedell Mock Trial Competition (sponsored by The Florida Bar) and the Bedell Building.

Chester Bedell was honored by the American Bar Foundation in 1977 as: “the lawyer in the United States who for more than 50 years has epitomized the best of the American Trial lawyer.”

13. Reclaiming a Noble Profession ¹

A nation's laws are an expression of its people's highest ideals.² At times, regrettably, the conduct of our nation's lawyers seems to be an expression of the lowest. Many lawyers appear to have forgotten the integrity and civility that once distinguished our profession. One study reports that 82% of attorneys surveyed think the profession is growing increasingly uncivil.³ Another tells us that more

¹*The American Inns of Court: Reclaiming a Noble Profession*, Matthew Bender & Co., Inc., 1997.

²George William Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1967) 259-276.

³Rocco Commarere, "Lawyers in Survey Agree: Colleagues Are More Discourteous," *New Jersey Lawyer* (10 June 1996): 22.

than 50% of lawyers describe their colleagues with the word "obnoxious."⁴ As one Judge characterized the situation:

*The legal profession is no longer a "profession." Lawyers are now men. They use cut-throat tactics and are no longer professional. The almighty dollar seems to be the only thing that counts.*⁵

The public apparently shares this view of our profession. The number of people who have little or no respect for lawyers nearly doubled in the 1990's.

This failing public image of the legal profession is attributable, in part, to a decline in professionalism. Dean Roscoe Pound once said that a profession is a "group ... pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service—no less a public service because it may incidentally be a means of livelihood." His statement recognizes that professionalism entails obligations: obligations toward clients, obligations toward other attorneys, obligations toward legal institutions, and obligations to the members of the public. All too

⁴Katherine Schwett, "Law Too Tension-Filled, Survey of Lawyers Shows," Chicago Daily Law Bulletin 24 (21 May 1990): 1.

⁵Gordon Hunter, "In their Own Words," Texas Lawyer 3 April 1995): 29.

often, lawyers today seem to believe that there is no room for those who believe that practicing law carries with it such responsibilities.⁶

The all-too widespread belief is that all lawyers are expensive, evasive, manipulative, and arrogant. This belief is the very opposite of what lawyers must be as true professionals.⁷

14. Achieving Excellence

The Achieving Excellence program is a nationally implemented, achievement-based program that recognizes activities in which Inns are already involved and builds on an Inn's successes.

Each level (Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum) recognizes an Inn's progress toward mastering effective practices in each of the five core competencies of Inn management: Administration, Programs, Communications, Mentoring and Outreach. A checklist describing each competency can be found at www.innsofcourt.org/for-leaders/achieving-excellence.aspx.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ From "Law—A Profession or Just Another Job?" by LeRoy Costner, in *The Professional*, a publication of The Henry Latimer Center for Professionalism of The Florida Bar, Summer 2006, Volume VII, No. 4.

The Chester Bedell American Inn of Court was awarded Platinum status for the first time in 2012 and earned that status again in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016.

15. Leadership Summits

The American Inns of Court sponsors leadership summits in various places throughout the year. “The goal of each leadership summit is to give you an opportunity to share with your national leaders and staff, and other Inns in your area the successes and challenges faced by your Inn. While these summits are targeted toward specific regions based on judicial circuits, any Inn leader can attend any leadership summit across the nation.”

“Sending at least one leader to a leadership summit is the most important thing an Inn can do to enhance its chances of growing and remaining strong and vital since Inns rise and fall on the strength of their leadership.”⁸

16. Celebration of Excellence

The American Inns of Court holds an annual black-tie event, the Celebration of Excellence, at the

⁸American Inns of Court website, “Inn Leadership Summits,” available at <http://home.innsofcourt.org/for-leaders/events/inn-leadership-summits.aspx>

Supreme Court of the United States. The event honors those who have given exceptional service to further the ideals of the American Inns of Court.

17. Professional Creed of the American Inns of Court

Whereas, the Rule of Law is essential to preserving and protecting the rights and liberties of a free people; and

Whereas, throughout history, lawyers and judges have preserved, protected and defended the Rule of Law in order to ensure justice for all; and

Whereas, preservation and promulgation of the highest standards of excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills are essential to achieving justice under the Rule of Law;

Now therefore, as a member of an American Inn of Court, I hereby adopt this professional creed with a pledge to honor its principles and practices:

I will treat the practice of law as a learned profession and will uphold the standards of the profession with dignity, civility and courtesy.

I will value my integrity above all. My word is my bond.

I will develop my practice with dignity and will be mindful in my communications with the public that

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what is constitutionally permissible may not be professionally appropriate.

I will serve as an officer of the court, encouraging respect for the law in all that I do and avoiding abuse or misuse of the law, its procedures, its participants and its processes.

I will represent the interests of my client with vigor and will seek the most expeditious and least costly solutions to problems, resolving disputes through negotiation whenever possible.

I will work continuously to attain the highest level of knowledge and skill in the areas of the law in which I practice.

I will contribute time and resources to public service, charitable activities and pro bono work.

I will work to make the legal system more accessible, responsive and effective.

I will honor the requirements, the spirit and the intent of the applicable rules or codes of professional conduct for my jurisdiction, and will encourage others to do the same.

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