

**A Brief History of
The Patrick E. Higginbotham American Inn of Court**



The Patrick E. Higginbotham American Inn of Court, formed in 1988, was the 56th Inn of Court chartered by the American Inns of Court Foundation in the United States. Originally named the Dallas Inn of Court LVI, the Inn changed its name in 1996 to honor its founder and first President, Judge Patrick Higginbotham of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Inspired by the efforts of the early proponents of the Inn of Court movement in the United States, including Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and Judge J. Clifford Wallace, Judge Higginbotham believed it would be valuable to bring judges, lawyers, and law professors together in an Inn of Court in Dallas, Texas to promote professionalism in trial practice. The Southwestern Legal Foundation, now known as The Center for American and International Law, assisted with the formation of the Inn, and has been the Inn's sponsor ever since.

Judge Higginbotham invited twenty-one prominent members of the Dallas bench and bar to be Masters of the Bench. All accepted the invitation, and the first meeting of the Masters of the Bench was held on July 18, 1988.

In addition to Judge Higginbotham, the original Masters of the Bench were:

Louis A. Bedford, Jr.	Morris Harrell	Fred Misko, Jr
James E. Coleman, Jr.	Hon. Merrill L. Hartman	Hon. Joseph B. Morris
Jim E. Cowles	John L. Hauer	Prof. Frederick C. Moss
Hon. Catherine J. Crier	James H. Holmes, III	Hon. Barefoot Sanders
Ernest E. Figari, Jr.	Jerry P. Jones	Charles P. Storey
John A. Gilliam	Prof. John E. Kennedy	Stephen D. Susman
John H. Hall	John L. Lancaster, III	Windle Turley

At their first meeting, the Masters of the Bench decided that there would be thirty Barristers and fifteen Pupils to round out the inaugural members of the Inn, with the Barristers serving three-year terms and the Pupils serving one-year terms. Meetings were to be held monthly from September to May, with each meeting to begin with dinner and then a substantive presentation. The members were to be assigned to pupillage groups to promote mentoring, with an appropriate mix of Masters of the Bench,

Barristers, and Pupils. Each group was to be responsible for a substantive presentation during the Inn year. All these traditions have continued throughout the Inn's history, although the designation for the junior lawyers was changed from "Pupil" to "Associate."

In its early years, the Inn held its monthly meetings in the ceremonial courtroom of the United States Courthouse in Dallas. Over the years, Inn meetings have been held at a variety of locations in Dallas. Early in the Inn's history, the May meeting became an annual banquet featuring a prominent speaker, with the Inn welcoming returning Inn alumni and celebrating its members whose terms have concluded. This is a photograph taken at the 2001 annual banquet of the Inn's first seven Presidents:



(From the left: Hon. Patrick E. Higginbotham (1988-91); Charles P. Storey (1991-93); James E. Coleman, Jr. (1993-95); Hon. Merrill Hartman (1995-97); Hon. Joseph B. Morris (1997-99); John A. Gilliam (1999-01); Hon. Barbara M.G. Lynn (2001-03))

During the 1990's the Inn began a practice of opening each meeting with a Master of the Bench offering a Toast to the Constitution. That practice, which Judge Higginbotham began after observing the English Inns of Court open their meetings

with a Toast to the Queen, has become a tradition, not only at the Higginbotham Inn but at Inns across the United States. In that same timeframe, the Higginbotham Inn began another tradition aimed at mentoring the Inn’s junior members—a Master of the Bench telling a “war story” from their practice, whether funny, sad, embarrassing, or inspiring.

The American Inns of Court Circuit Professionalism Awards recognize lawyers and judges whose life and practice display sterling character and unquestioned integrity, coupled with ongoing dedication to the highest standards of the legal profession and the rule of law—wonderful examples for the junior members of the Inns of Court around the County. The award originated when Judge Higginbotham was President of the American Inns of Court Foundation. James E. Coleman, Jr., one of the Higginbotham Inn’s original Masters of the Bench, was the first recipient in any federal circuit, and was considered the standard for the award. Chief Judge Henry A. Politz presented the award to him at the 1996 Fifth Circuit Judicial Conference, before an audience including three United States Supreme Court Justices and hundreds of lawyers and judges. All the other federal circuits eventually adopted the practice of presenting the professionalism award, with a national committee of the American Inns of Court Foundation selecting the awardees. Three other Higginbotham Inn Masters of the Bench have also received the American Inns of Court Fifth Circuit Professionalism Award—the Honorable Patrick E. Higginbotham in 2007, Kim J. Askew in 2015, and the Honorable Sidney A. Fitzwater in 2018. In 2022, the Professionalism Award in the Fifth Circuit was permanently endowed and became known as the James E. Coleman, Jr. Professionalism Award in the Fifth Circuit, and Richard G. Stewart, Jr., a Higginbotham Inn Master of the Bench Emeritus, was selected as its inaugural awardee.

In 2002, all the Inns of Court in the Dallas-Fort Worth area began holding a joint meeting each January and established the Serjeant of the Inn award. The Serjeant of the Inn concept originated in 13th Century English Inns of Court. Candidates for Serjeant of the Inn from the DFW Inns must be a Master of the Bench in their Inn. They must have either significantly contributed to the profession and the community throughout their career; or must have made one or more significant contributions to the profession and the community which are deserving of recognition. The Serjeant of the Inn honorees from each Inn are recognized at the annual joint meeting. The Higginbotham Inn’s Serjeant of the Inn honorees are:

Hon. Patrick E. Higginbotham	Sylvia M. Demarest	Terrell W. Oxford
James E. Coleman, Jr.	Jim E. Cowles	Harriet Miers
Hon. Merrill L. Hartman	Prof. Frederick C. Moss	Sherri T. Alexander
Hon. Barefoot Sanders	Nina Cortell	Kim J. Askew
Hon. Jay Patterson	Hon. Joseph B. Morris	Hon. Sam A. Lindsay
John A. Gilliam	Richard G. Stewart, Jr.	Hon. Sidney A. Fitzwater
	Robert Cohan	Barry Sorrels

In 2014 the Inn began inviting a select group of students from law schools in Dallas-Fort Worth who have an interest in litigation to join the Inn. Those students, whom the Inn has designated as Pupils, are assigned to a pupilage group and have been able to participate fully in the Inn’s activities.

Masters of the Bench of the Higginbotham Inn also have provided national leadership through service on the Board of Trustees of the American Inns of Court. Judge Higginbotham served as President of the American Inns of Court from 1996 to 2000, Judge Barbara M.G. Lynn has served as a Trustee for several years and will become President in 2022, and Kim Askew serves as a Trustee.

In the thirty-four years since its formation, the Higginbotham Inn of Court has championed the vision of the American Inns of Court--a legal profession and judiciary dedicated to professionalism, ethics, civility, and excellence--among the over one-thousand lawyers, judges, law professors, and law students who have been members of the Inn.