

History of the Women's Bar Association of Maryland

By Judith A. Arnold and Elizabeth Lewis

The first woman admitted to the Maryland Bar was Etta H. Maddox. Although Ms. Maddox graduated in 1900, she was not admitted until, after bitter debate, a bill permitting women to practice law in the State was passed by the General Assembly in 1902. It would not be until half a century later that women would realize the right to be members of all the major local bar associations.

Nineteen twenty-seven seems to have been the year when Maryland's women lawyers first sought to form their own organizations. In March of that year, one group, claiming to be the first, formed under the name of the Inez Mulholland Law Club. Inez Mulholland was a New York attorney famous for her attacks on discrimination against women, and the group apparently adopted her name with the intent of carrying on her struggle against discrimination. The first president of this group was Helen Elizabeth Brown. The group held monthly meetings, and eventually it became the Alpha Delta Chapter of Phi Delta Delta, an international women's legal fraternity.

Only a month later, on April 11, 1927, fifteen women assembled for the first official meeting of the Women Lawyers' Association of Maryland. The seven founders of that association were Henrietta Stonestreet (president), Sarah Burke, Ida Kloze, Turn the page

to make themselves eligible for membership in state and national bar associations by forming their own local group. The newspaper quoted Henrietta Stonestreet as saying that the four founders had applied for membership in the City Bar Association in order to test whether that association truly represented the Bar of Baltimore City. Although Ms. Stonestreet explained that she had previously opposed the idea of a separate women's bar association, she told reporters that the new group would be wholly independent of the men's bar group.

Late in 1934, the Women's Bar Association campaigned for the appointment of its third president, Sophie Nordenholz, to the staff of the State Attorney General. President Nordenholz also attempted in that year to hold successful candidates for legal offices in Maryland to their promises to support Association members for other State and local offices.

By 1936, the Association, then known as the Women's Bar Association of Baltimore City, had 40 members. Regular meetings were held in members' homes, and at the meetings, papers on "timely subjects" were read. An annual dinner was also held, at which some member of the judiciary was traditionally honored. At the annual dinner held on May 7, 1936 at the Southern Hotel, Ms. May Bige- Turn the page

Inter-American Bar Association. This affiliation was continued until the end of 1967.

As of June, 1944, Maryland's was the only state bar association that did not admit women. On October 22, 1946, however, Rosé Zetzer was finally admitted. She had been trying to join the Maryland State Bar Association since 1927.

One of the specific campaigns waged by the Women's Bar Association of Baltimore City in the 1940's was aimed at securing the right of women to serve on juries. In 1947, the year when H. Larue Parke became president of the Association, the General Assembly finally passed a partial Women's Jury Service Bill. Acts 1947, ch. 595.

In 1950, the Women's Bar Association, under the leadership of president Margaret Wright, compiled a list of "Women Lawyers Admitted to Practice in Maryland as of December 15, 1949." In that year, too, the Association recommended Rose Zetzer and Helen Elizabeth Brown to fill vacancies on the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City. In July, Henrietta Stonestreet, who had been the first president of the Women Lawyer's Association of Maryland, attended a conference of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, held in Rome. Ms. Stonestreet was one of the

founders of the International Federation.

One of the members of the Women's Bar Association, Dorothy Jackson (Miller), was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1950 and again in 1954. In 1951, Emma Robertson was installed as president of the Women's Bar Association.

Nineteen fifty-two was the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Women Lawyer's Association-Women's Bar Association, and an anniversary banquet was organized. Speaker at the event was the Honorable Burnita Shelton Matthews, judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Serving as toastmaster was the Honorable Helen Elizabeth Brown then Magis-

trate of the Baltimore Housing Court. Officers of the Association during its anniversary year were: Constance Putzel, president; Mary Arabian, vice-president; Caroline McBride, corresponding secretary; Charlotte Main, recording secretary; and Ruth Bishop, treasurer. A short history in the program of the anniversary banquet concluded that women lawyers would "continue to strive for their ultimate goal — to be recognized as lawyers in a profession without discrimination because of sex".

Two women who later became judges of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City, Mary Arabian and Shirley Jones, served as presidents of the Women's Bar Association in 1953 and 1954, respectively.



The Baltimore Skyline, circa 1900.

*Congratulations to the Bar Association
of Baltimore City on Your*

The Baltimore Bar Centennial, 16 May 1980

Adelaide Lindenberg, Goldie Miller, Helen Sherry, and Jeanette Wolman. The Baltimore *Sun* reported the founding of the association in articles published on April 12 and May 2, 1927. According to the articles, the constitution of the new organization stated that it was organized for "the purpose of promoting fraternalism and an interchange of ideas" among Maryland's women lawyers. This group, too, had monthly meetings, and any female member of the State Bar was eligible for membership. In 1929, Emilie Doetsch succeeded Henrietta Stonestreet as president.

Nineteen twenty-nine saw the establishment of yet another woman lawyers' group. In that year, four women who had applied for and been refused membership in the Bar Association of Baltimore City founded a Women's Bar Association. The founders were Henrietta Stonestreet, Emilie Doetsch (the first female Assistant City Solicitor), Marie Pressman (a member of the State Board of Motion Picture Censors), and Helen Sherry (the first woman to try a case before the Court of Appeals of Maryland). The first president was apparently Helen Elizabeth Brown; she was followed by Florence Laynor. The Baltimore *Sun* of February 20, 1929 reported that the aim of the founders was

low, a lawyer with the Farm Credit Administration, spoke on the topic, "This Business of Being a Woman Lawyer", expressing her belief that there ought to be no distinction of women lawyers from men and that all should be recognized equally as lawyers.

On May 10, 1938, the Women's Bar Association of Baltimore City, then led by president Anna Carton, held its annual dinner at the Lord Baltimore Hotel to honor recent women law graduates. Guest speakers were Judge Annabel Matthews, the first woman on the U.S. Board of Tax Appeals and president of the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia, and Judge Oscar Leser, of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City.

The speaker at the 1940 annual dinner was Judge Florence E. Allen of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit; she spoke on the Constitution and First Amendment. The president of the Association in that year was Rose Zetzer. Ms. Zetzer and past-president Anna Carton, in April, 1940, formed Baltimore's and Maryland's first law firm restricted to women lawyers.

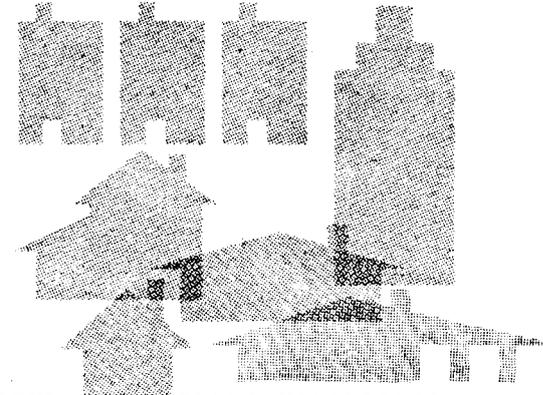
In 1941, the Women's Bar Association of Baltimore City became the first women's organization to join the newly formed

of Baltimore City on 100th
100th Anniversary!



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