

# A look back: milestones that changed the practice of law in Virginia during the VSB's first eighty years



**April 1, 1938.** The General Assembly approves the State Bar Act authorizing organization of the Virginia State Bar as an administrative agency of the Supreme Court of Virginia. The legislation acknowledged the court as the main public agency responsible for defining the practice of law, prescribed a code of ethics governing the professional conduct of lawyers, and established a procedure for disciplining and suspending lawyers. In August 1939, 200 members attended the first annual bar meeting of at the roof garden of the John Marshall Hotel in Richmond.<sup>1</sup>

**August 6, 1947.** The VSB and voluntary Virginia Bar Association form a permanent committee of cooperation to discourage recurring efforts to merge the two organizations. Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina are the only states, along with the District of Columbia, that retain mandatory and voluntary state bar organizations.<sup>2</sup>



**January 1953.** Six pages long, Vol. 1, No. 1 of the “Virginia Bar News” is published. VSB President B. Drummond Ayres writes, “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. . . . Let us hope, however, that you will not look upon the Virginia Bar News as just another legal bulletin. This one is peculiarly for Virginia lawyers.”



**September 11, 1963.** The Supreme Court of Virginia affirms the state bar’s right to use mandatory bar dues for legal education, publications, and enjoining lawsuits against the unauthorized practice of law in *Button v. Day*, 204 Va. 546. The decision followed a closely watched ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court upholding bar integration in Wisconsin in *Lathrop v. Donohue*, 367 U.S. 820 (1961).<sup>3</sup>



**1976.** The Clients’ Protection Fund is started to reimburse persons who suffer a financial loss because of dishonest conduct by a Virginia lawyer — and, in doing so, fulfill an obligation to self-regulation and help uphold the dignity of the legal profession.

**1977.** The Virginia Lawyer Referral Service is founded to help connect Virginia lawyers to clients across the state.

**September 1983.** The Supreme Court approves a bar petition to institute a mandatory continuing legal education course on the revised Code of Professional Responsibility. In 1988, Virginia became the first state to introduce a professionalism course as a requirement for licensure.<sup>4</sup>





By 1987, the Virginia Commission on Women and Minorities in the Legal System was working to integrate the overwhelmingly white male legal system. WHRO public television videotaped a panel that included Judge Barbara M. Keenan of the Virginia Court of Appeals, Elaine R. Jones of the NAACP (and the first black person admitted to the University of Virginia), civil rights lawyers Oliver W. Hill and Samuel W. Tucker (whose grandfather was enslaved), and moderator William D. Dolan III.

Below: VSB president-elect Marni E. Byrum, left, with Veryl V. Miles (2nd from left), and Sylvia L. Clute (far right) with an unidentified guest at the 1987 Annual Meeting.



**September 1986.** The VSB joins with local and special bar associations to form the Virginia Commission on Women and Minorities in the Legal System to fight prejudice and discrimination in the profession. African Americans and women were admitted to the bar as soon as state law prohibiting them from practicing law in Virginia were repealed (in 1865 and 1923, respectively), but as late as 1960, 96 percent of attorneys in Virginia were white men. The Virginia Commission on Women and Minorities in the Legal System grew out of the work a special committee appointed in 1984 to investigate perceptions of discrimination. In 1988, the Bar Council pledged its commitment to developing policies to enhance participation of women and minorities at all levels of state bar activities.<sup>5</sup>

**1988.** The bar celebrates its 50th anniversary.

**June 1990.** The VSB Council adopts a Definition and Standard for Pro Bono Legal Services and creates a staff position for a pro bono services coordinator. Virginia's pro bono standard encourages lawyers to donate

approximately 2 percent of their professional time to providing legal services without charge. In 2016 the Council rejected by a narrow margin a proposal for mandatory reporting of pro bono hours. The Supreme Court of Virginia hosted its first biennial pro bono summit in 2010. At the fifth biennial summit held in April 2018 the state bar announced four new projects aimed at improving access to justice.<sup>6</sup>

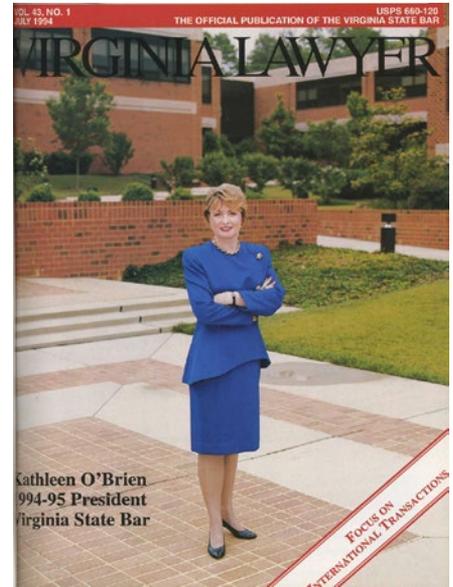
**June 1994.** Kathleen O'Brien of McLean becomes the first woman to become VSB president, serving for the 1994–1995 year.

**February 2001.** The VSB Council approves phasing out the private reprimand to improve accountability in the lawyer discipline process. By the late 1990s Virginia was one of only a handful of states still using the private reprimand to resolve a majority of cases heard by the discipline committee. As a consequence, the public did not have access to the names of most attorneys accused and reprimanded for ethics violations. VSB President Joseph Condo made improving transparency in the process a priority during his term, from 2000 to 2001.<sup>7</sup>

**2005.** The Indigent Criminal Defense Seminar is held for the first time. Over 9,000



Some things never change: beach volleyball, name tags, and refreshments at the 50th Annual Meeting in 1988.



Virginia attorneys accepting court appointed criminal cases have attended since then. In 2017, the seminar was named after Leroy Rountree Hassell Sr., the late Virginia chief justice who was a main proponent of the CLE.

**June 2017.** Doris Henderson Causey of Richmond becomes the first African American to become VSB President, serving for the 2017–2018 year.



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