

About three years ago, a few judges of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia decided that the rich history of their judicial district should have a permanent and formal home. The judges included Senior U.S. District Judges Henry Coke Morgan and Claude Hilton as well as U.S. District Judge Henry Hudson, Chief Bankruptcy Judge Douglas Tice, and U.S. Magistrate Judge William Prince.

After deciding to found a historical society, they approached Collin Hite, a partner at McGuireWoods in Richmond, Va., and asked him to serve as the historical society's first president. Well-known by the judges, Hite was the logical choice for the position: since 1997 he had served two terms as the president of the Richmond Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and also held the positions of president-elect and treasurer of the chapter. He has also been the on the FBA Litigation Section's board of directors since 2006. Shortly thereafter, the society was officially incorporated as the Historical Society for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia; its board includes some of Virginia's most prominent judges, lawyers, and court personnel.

The first order of business for the new society was to determine how formally to record the rich and complex history of the "Rocket Docket." The historical society hired Jackson Sasser, a Ph.D. candidate at the College of William & Mary, to write a book on the Eastern District. The book will highlight certain time periods of importance in the court's history. The first draft of the manuscript is due January 2010. Sasser has been researching the history of the court by reviewing donated papers at various repositories, speaking to court staff and judges, and conducting research at other archives and libraries. However, using the various judges' papers and records adds firsthand experience to the history.

Next, Hite suggested that someone should record oral histories of the judges and staff about their personal involvement in the Rocket Docket. Senior District Judge Henry Coke Morgan and Magistrate Judge William Prince

really took to this idea. A committee was formed, which also included Fourth Circuit librarian Karen Johnson. Together with Hite, this committee started to prioritize the order in which to conduct the oral histories and identified other staff and attorneys to include in the project. Rather than hire someone to conduct the oral histories, Hite looked within McGuireWoods and chose a partner and a historian, Christian Henneke, Ph.D.

"When I went to law school, I always thought that my background in history would be beneficial," said Henneke, "but I never thought my legal work would rely so heavily on my training as a historian." He has already undertaken the first three oral histories of Judge Mackenzie, Judge Payne, and Judge Williams; the ultimate goal is to obtain such a history of every judge for the Eastern District.

After the first round of the oral histories of the senior judges is completed, the plan is to house them in several places for easy access by historians, including the State Library of Virginia and the historical society. According to

Hite, "It is our goal to preserve the rich history this court. We want the public, bar members, and researchers to have access to the history." This unique project captures the recent history of the court in the judges' own words.

In addition, the historical society is beginning to host luncheon meetings for its members—most recently, a meeting in conjunction with the Tidewater Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. "This is a great way for our members to interact, network, and learn about each other's organization," said Hite. The meetings give attendees an opportunity to learn about the history of the court and to interact with the judges in an informal setting. Overall, the Historical Society of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia is off to a great start and shows how the Federal Bar Association can work with other organizations on behalf of the federal courts. **TFL**

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