

From The Beat To The Bench April 2011 Court Employees Over the Years

I thought it might be interesting to explore some of the history surrounding the Vermilion Municipal Court.

When the Court was first established in 1966 it was located on the second floor of the Fisher building on Liberty Avenue. In order to reach the Court there were two steep flights of stairs. There were a number of instances of people falling down the steps. People were known to have gotten lost in the labyrinth of rooms housing the Court and its employees.

There was no handicap access. When handicapped persons were in Court, the Court was held in the Mayor's office or court personnel met the person in their vehicle.

The economic situation in our area at that time was similar to today. Bailiff Harold Smith and Sgt. Joe Mayer went to Bellevue to get the wooden high back court room chairs. The wooden chairs were stored in a barn, which resulted in them being covered with pigeon droppings. The two men took them to a local business and steam cleaned each chair. Bailiff Harold Smith was a local contractor and used his craft to construct the courtroom tables, made from doors, and the Judge's bench. The court still has furniture from 1966. The Judge's desk, Jury wheel, book cases and wooden chairs used in the offices of the Court were donated by Central Trust Bank and many are still used today. The chair used by Judge Ryan had been used by retired Chief Kish. As you can see, when we purchase items for the Court we intend to use them for a very long time.

In those days Vermilion had one of the few "true" Night Courts. Night Court began at 7:00 PM and often went on til 11:00 PM. For those of us who worked, practiced law or were defendants ordered to be at night court it was an experience. The Vermilion Municipal Court was open between the hours of 8:00 am to 4:00 and then reopened at 6:00 pm. The "Night Court" was always busy.

Police men would bring prisoners from the old police station down Main Street to Liberty and up the steps. As for security, there was very little. The offices were all open to everyone from customers to prisoners. When paperwork was needed for a case the defendant was taken to the deputy clerk's desk for her to complete. Documents were hand written or typed on a manual typewriter.

Since the Vermilion Municipal Court was formed in 1966 only six Judges have been on the bench. When the Court was initially established, Joe Ryan was Judge. Marge Myers was Clerk of Courts, Harold Smith was Bailiff, Art Zeiher was Prosecutor and Roland Fleming was Chief of Police. In its first year of existence we had 128 civil cases filed with \$3,267.60 in costs collected and \$934.00 paid to the City of Vermilion. There were 881 ordinance cases and 292 state cases filed with \$38,704.90 in fine and costs collected with \$34,402.85 paid to the City of Vermilion. By comparison in 2010 we handled 577 civil cases and collected \$340,466.77 with \$78,402.36 paid to the City of Vermilion. There were

1638 ordinance cases filed and 2377 state cases filed with \$859,088.20 total collected and \$460,020.60 paid to the City of Vermilion.

Finally the Court's antiquated facilities and lack of handicap access resulted in the City purchasing the old Lawson's Store and AMVETS buildings. The Lawson's Store was converted into the Police Station and the AMVETS building became the Court/City Council offices. A total of about \$500,000.00 was used to renovate both the buildings. Many individuals including court personnel volunteered their time and efforts. Today the building is used for much more than Court hearings. City Council conducts their monthly meetings along with their committee meetings, town hall meetings and Erie County Juvenile truancy hearings. The complex is handicap assessable and provides ample parking.

Over the years we have had many dedicated employees at the Vermilion Municipal Court. The Judges who have served are:

Joseph T. Ryan was the first Judge of the Vermilion Municipal Court. His term began on January 1, 1966 to March 1972 when he resigned to pursue other interests with Central Trust Bank.

George Kuzoff 6/6/72-8/4/75 Judge Kuzoff was appointed by the Governor to fulfill Judge Ryan's unexpired term. Judge Kuzoff resigned before the end of his term.

David L. Daley 8/7/75-10/31/82 Governor James Rhodes appointed Judge David L. Daley to finish the term of Judge Kuzoff. Judge Daley was re-elected and served until October 31, 1982 at which time he resigned for medical reasons.

John A. Elden 11/18/82-12/20/83. Judge John A. Elden was then appointed to finish Judge Daley's term.

In the November, 1983 election Judge Joseph T. Ryan was elected for the term which began on January 1, 1984. He was re-elected for 2 additional terms. Judge Ryan was instrumental in getting the Court computerized and was involved with the remodeling of the new facility.

Elizabeth Wakefield was appointed by Governor Taft to finish the term of Judge Ryan who resigned due to medical issues. Judge Wakefield was sworn in as the first female Judge in the city's history. Judge Wakefield was elected for the term commencing on January 1, 2001. Judge Wakefield retired December 31, 2007 and serves this Court as a Visiting Judge.

Judge W. Zack Dolyk was elected to begin his term on January 1, 2008.

Marguerite Myers began working with the City of Vermilion in 1962 as the Secretary to Mayor Louis Rauh. Mrs. Myers also held other city positions. When the Court was established Judge Ryan appointed Marguerite M. Myers as the first Clerk of Court. Mrs. Myers remained Clerk of Court until her retirement on January 31, 1992.

Barb Akers was appointed Clerk of Court by Judge Joseph T. Ryan upon the retirement of Mrs. Myers in 1992. Barb had worked for the Court soon after graduating from high school. Barb was instrumental along with Mayor Davis in the

remodeling of the new court/council complex. Barb retired in 2005 after 30 years of service to the Vermilion Municipal Court. Tami Horton began working for the Vermilion Municipal Court part time in July 1985. In 1986 she became a full-time deputy clerk. In 1992 Clerk Barb Akers appointed Tami to Chief Deputy Clerk. Upon the retirement of Barb Akers, Judge Wakefield appointed Tami Horton as Clerk of Court in October 2005. Michelle Fiegelist was appointed to the position of Chief Deputy Clerk.

The Clerk of Court appoints Deputy Clerks whose main responsibilities are the processing of papers filed and serving the public. Some of the past Deputy Clerks are: Carol Feiszli, Marge Goll Tischer, Elizabeth Pretzer, Susan Peasley, Stephanie Kelley. Our current Deputy Clerks are Liz Henderson, Candy McDoniel and Stephanie Lukovics.

The presiding Judge appoints his or her bailiff. Some of the bailiff's who have worked at the Court are:

Mary Montgomery, Skip Griffith, Don Parsons, Annette Kerekanich, Edward West, Dale Watson, Jim Virgin, Michelle Fiegelist and Dick Baker.

When the Court was formed, security was mainly the job of Sgt. Joe Mayer of the Vermilion Police Department. Over the years the duties of the Security officer has changed. When moving to the new office on Decatur Street a metal detector was installed and retired Police Chief Nick Mayer provided security for the Court. Retired Vermilion Police Officers Ptl. Norm Stover and Lt. Norm Hendrickson handled the part time duties of Security Officer. They have both recently retired and Mike Levelle has assumed this part time position.

Judge Wakefield created the position of Probation Officer. She appointed retired police officer Don Bott. Upon his untimely passing Randy Strickland assumed the PO responsibilities.

The Law Director for the City of Vermilion appoints an Attorney to be the City Prosecutor. Some of the Attorneys who have served the City of Vermilion as the City Prosecutors have been: Joe Rader, Larry Schell, Edward Zaleski, Frank Horvath, Veronica Dever, Ralph Pisano, Jr., Jay Marcie, Jon C. Clark, Randal Strickler, RJ Budway and Margaret O'Bryon.

Joe Mayer can rattle off very memorable stories about the early days at the Court and Police Department. Recently in the news a person was caught stealing the gavel of a Magistrate in the Lorain Municipal Court. Joe recalled this happening many years ago at the Vermilion Municipal Court. Judge Daly had a gavel made especially for him and it was left on the bench. When on the bench, one court session, he noticed that it was missing. At that time there was no security cameras to view to see who was in the area and the person was not caught.

The personnel and physical facilities may have changed over the years but the goal has always remained the same, providing a legal forum in which justice is fairly and impartially dispensed.