

## A MEMORIAL TO BELMONT H. SCHLOSSSTEIN

This is a belated and previously overlooked Memorial to one of the early and formative members of our Tri-County Bar. May it give the members of today a flavor for what it was like to be a lawyer and a member of the Tri County Bar in those early and formative years of our Bar Association.

Belmont Harry Schlosstein of Cochrane, Wisconsin, was born June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1903. Belmont's parents were Fred and Margaret (Prader) Schlosstein. They operated a grocery store in Cochrane for many years. His grandmother Maria Prader of Alma was a graduate midwife who brought 1379 babies into the world in the Alma area and who was the midwife at his birth. Maria Prader's birth records were never officially recorded in a day when many births were never recorded but her personal records of the births in which she was the midwife are now on file at the Buffalo County Register of Deeds.

Belmont, or Bel as he was commonly known, attended the Cochrane Grade School. When he graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Cochrane started it's first High School with only one teacher and only a freshman class. Each year after that Cochrane would add one teacher and one class until they had a full 4 year high school program. In 1921 Bel graduated with Cochrane's first high school graduating class in a class of 5! In his High School years he played guard for Cochrane's first basketball team and would tell stories about how in those days playing Durand was an overnight trip by train.

Bel's father Fred had only a 5<sup>th</sup> grade education as his father, a Civil War veteran died young and Fred had to leave school to help support the family. Bel's mother Margaret or Maggie as she was

more commonly known had been a country one room school teacher and after they were married she taught Fred what he had missed by not finishing grade school. They both read voraciously to improve their knowledge. Fred served as Cochrane Village President for many years. Both valued education and wanted to see that their son could have a college education.

After finishing High School, Bel attended LaCrosse State Normal School graduating from the 2 year course in 1923 with honors. He then went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison receiving his B.A. in 1925. During his University of Wisconsin years he played the baritone in the University Band and was an ardent Badger fan all his life. During this time while he was home over summer and at a dance at the Bohri's Valley Dance Hall he met Melita Thoeny, more commonly known as Brit, the young lady from Winona whom he would marry.

Bel's mother had envisioned a career as an engineer for him but luckily for the Tri County Bar and the Buffalo County legal world he then entered the University of Wisconsin Law School. During Law School he was an editor for the Wisconsin Law Review.

Bel and Brit were married on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926 while Bel was attending Law School at the University of Wisconsin. Brit, who was a graduate of the Collegiate Business School and skilled in shorthand and secretarial skills then secured employment in Madison as secretary for the Wisconsin Attorney General at the State Capital.

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1928, their first child, Gary was born and in June of 1928 Bel graduated from Law School. His proud parents attended the graduation but Brit missed it as Gary was teething and fussing!

Bel's first position as a lawyer was with the LaCrosse firm of McConnell and Schweizer. After four years of "learning the ropes" he decided he was ready to open his own practice. In 1932 and in the heart of the depression he then moved to Cochrane, "hung out his shingle" and started his law practice. Economic times were very tough and his first clients often paid in chickens, eggs and ducks. E. A. Meili, the local doctor in Cochrane also started out at the same time and they would meet every noon to see if either had any customers and how they were going to market the chickens and eggs. Luckily Bel's parents had a local grocery store to help them in that area. In 1938, Bel and Brit's second child, Kent, was born on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

In 1938, Bel was elected District Attorney of Buffalo County and the \$65 a month salary was a great help in those depression years. Bel was always a dedicated public servant who always placed the needs of his District Attorney work ahead of his private practice. He served as Buffalo County District Attorney for a total of 14 years from 1938 to 1952. In July of 1943 he was elected as President of the District Attorney's Association of Wisconsin. He also served for many years as Cochrane Village Attorney.

He became a member of the Tri County Bar Association in it's fledgling years when it was still meeting at the Trempealeau cottages and later when it first moved to Judge Pattison's Radisson and rented several of the adjoining cabins. The bond which exists today between the members of the Tri County bar was formed in those years. The attorneys of the Tri County Bar of those years were excellent students of the law, had deep and mutual respect for each other and their word was their bond. In those years another Buffalo County attorney, Grover Broadfoot had become a member of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and Grover would bring the entire court to the Tri County Bar summer meeting.

Bel's private practice was essentially that of a family and business advisor. An old time Pa and Ma practice where your

lawyer was your trusted personal friend and your advisor. He did wills and probate, farm leases, land sales, mortgages, set up business partnerships and agreements and of course did income tax returns, a large part of legal practice in those years. Brit worked with him as his legal secretary and over the years the practice expanded and provided a good income. Bel would often say "Attorneys don't get rich, but they live good". In 1973 after 45 years of small town practice he was then developing significant symptoms of Parkinson's disease, and decided to retire from his private practice.

Attorneys often become involved in local area businesses and activities and Bel was no exception. When the Cochrane State Bank was incorporated in 1942 his father Fred was one of the initial incorporators and Bel became one of the initial directors. He served as a director of the Cochrane State Bank for over 36 years until his retirement on January 1, 1979 at which time he was Bank President and Chairman of the Board.

Bel was also instrumental in the development of the Cochrane Telephone Company where he was a director and the treasurer for over 40 years from 1936 to 1976. He was Manager of the telephone company for 22 of those years from 1946 to 1968. During these years the Schlosstein Law Office was the only office the Telephone Company had and the customers would usually come in and pay their telephone bills in person.

Bel had a high regard for the Boy Scouts and when he first moved back to Cochrane in 1932 he formed the first Boy Scout troop in Cochrane and served as Scoutmaster for many years. After many years of service the Gateway Area Boy Scout Council recognized his services by presenting him the "Silver Beaver" award for outstanding service to scouting.

In the fraternal world Bel was a member of the Alma Masonic Lodge and a Past Master of that lodge. He was a strong exponent of the personal values taught by Masonry and in 1955 he was appointed to the Wisconsin Grand Lodge serving as Grand Master of Masons in Wisconsin in 1963 and 1964.

As mentioned above, Bel and Brit had two children, Gary and Kent. Gary, born January 11, 1928, went on to also become an attorney, was District Attorney from 1954 to 1958, served as Buffalo County Judge for 32 years from 1958 to 1990 and now continues to serve as a Reserve Judge and Court Commissioner. Needless to say he has been a member of the Tri-County Bar since the 1953 summer meeting.

Their second son, Kent, born May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1936, attended the Cochrane Schools until his Freshman year when he received a scholarship to Philips Exeter Academy at Philips, New Hampshire. He graduated from Philips Exeter with honors and went on to the University of Wisconsin graduating in June of 1958. In October he enlisted in the U. S. Army for service with the Counter Intelligence Corps. He completed the Army Intelligence School at Oberammergau graduating 2<sup>nd</sup> in his class. Tragically he was killed on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1961, under circumstances never disclosed to his family and while serving in Germany with the Army Counter Intelligence Corps. His death left an irreparable hole in the hearts of his parents.

In his last years Bel became seriously afflicted with Parkinson's disease. He died from complications of that disease on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1986 at the age of 83. His widow Brit followed him in death on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1996 at the age of 92.



#### **BELMONT H. SCHLOSSTEIN**

Belmont H. Schlosstein, 83, of Cochrane died Wednesday, December 3, 1986, at the Pepin Manor Care Center in Pepin.

Schlosstein served as Buffalo County district attorney from 1938 to 1952. A lifelong resident of Buffalo County, he was born on June 27, 1903, in Alma, the son of Fred and Maggie (Prader) Schlosstein.

He married Melita Thoeny on September 1, 1926, in Winona. He received his law degree from the University of Wisconsin Law School in Madison prior to becoming district attorney in Buffalo County.

He was a member of the Wisconsin and Minnesota state bar associations. He was also a member of the Alma Lodge F&AM No. 184, the Zor Shrine, Knights Templar, and Eau Claire Consistory.

Schlosstein was a grand master of Mason for the state of Wisconsin in 1963, and was active in Boy Scouts at Cochrane for many years. He was also president of the Cochrane State Bank and served on its board of directors for a number of years before his retirement.

Survivors include his wife; a son, Judge Gary Schlosstein of Alma; three grandchildren; six great grandchildren; and two sisters, Mae Schlosstein and Vera Leiser, both of Seattle, Wash.

He was preceded in death by a son, Kent.

Funeral services were held Saturday, December 6, at the Stohr-Hagen Funeral Home in Alma, with the Rev. Richard Townsend-Anderson officiating. Burial was in the Buffalo City Cemetery.