

Justices and lawyers in early times

The early justices

The early justices of the Court were instrumental in helping to form the federal government. Thomas McKean, a friend of Thomas Jefferson and the first Chief Justice of Pennsylvania after the War of Independence, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Isaac Norris, the second Chief Justice of Pa., selected the text from Leviticus to be inscribed on the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof"

James Logan was another early Chief Justice – a close confidant of William Penn and his secretary. Apart from Penn himself, Logan was perhaps the best-known figure in the province where he served as head of the Provincial Council.

The justices of the early Court remain much with us today, not only because of their scholarly, precedent-setting opinions, but also because their names have become commonplace in many of our local communities.

For example, McKean County is named after Chief Justice Thomas McKean, and Shippensburg and Shippensburg are named after Justice Edward Shippen. In Western Pa., the town of Brackenridge bears the name of Justice Hugh Henry Brackenridge.

The early lawyer

In seventeenth century England and America, there were no law schools. Most justices of the peace and many judges of this period were not lawyers.

In fact, until the eighteenth century, not many lawyers settled in the new world where clients were likely to be relatively poor and where the philosophy of the law was not nearly so well developed.

As a result, many colonial judges were people who had no legal training at all, such as Benjamin Franklin. Some of

these judges learned the law on the job, and after a time became quite effective judges.

Toward the end of the century, legal training for those who could afford it consisted of attending the Inns of Court of England. Some trained by attending trials and taking detailed notes on the proceedings. These notes could be used in later trials as authority. Other aspiring lawyers were trained by pursuing a clerkship in an office of a local practitioner. Regardless of how the lawyer was trained, law students studied the same books and cases as their counterparts in Britain. Since the colonies were governed by the English crown, principles of English law remained applicable in Pre-Revolutionary America.

As remains true in some courts around the world, jurists in the Supreme Court's earliest days wore wigs as a sign of respect for the law. Legend has it that this "wiggling mirror" was used by Supreme Court justices to adjust those wigs before entering the courtroom in the old Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall). When the Court moved to its current location in Philadelphia's City Hall, the mirror was moved there, and in more recent times may have assisted jurists in donning their robes.



Embossed seals have been used for many centuries to designate official documents. The instrument shown here is an embossing press used to affix the Supreme Court's seal to official documents. This press was purchased in 1779 after it was decided that a new Court seal was appropriate in light of the "late and glorious Revolution." Philadelphia engraver David Tew was paid £15 (15 pounds sterling) – approximately \$2,600 in today's dollars - to engrave a seal that would include Pennsylvania's coat of arms, the words "Seal of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania" around the edge, and "such other device as the justices of the said court shall direct." A version of Tew's design is still used today.

