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SCHWABE WILLIAMSON & WYATT
Soon 100 Years Old & Going Strong

Excerpted from a history written by Sarah Munro

In 1992, Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt, Oregon's second largest law firm, will celebrate its centennial. Here we look at the firm's early history and at some of the men who helped build it.

Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt marks its beginning from December 21, 1892, the date its founder, Ralph W. Wilbur, was admitted to the Oregon bar. Wilbur and his partners began law practice during a time of growth and optimism in Portland and Oregon.

THE BEGINNING YEARS OF INSURANCE DEFENSE 1892-1930

The beginning years for the firm were filled with changes and uncertainties. Between 1892 and 1930 the founding partners practiced law under no fewer than 15 name changes and six address changes.

In the early 1900s, Ralph Wilbur built his practice on trial work dealing with insurance claims. Through most of his career, he shared his office with one or two other attorneys, managed his cases alone, and relied on a younger attorney only for occasional brief writing.

The first formal partnership agreement between Ralph Wilbur, Schuyler Spencer, and Harry Beckett dates from 1918. In 1925, the partnership of Ralph Wilbur, Harry Beckett, Franklin Howell, and Eugene Oppenheimer was formed and lasted through World War II. During this period, Wilbur's insurance defense trial practice remained the focus of the firm.

Ralph W. Wilbur

Ralph Wilbur was a native of Vermont, who received his law degree from Boston University in 1892 and immediately moved to Portland at the urg-



ing of his brother Earl, an assistant pastor in the city's Unitarian Church. In the early years of his practice, Wilbur had offices in the Labbe and Sherlock buildings.

In 1909 Wilbur joined Schuyler Spencer in the 1001 Board of Trade Building office where Wilbur remained throughout his career. Together the men specialized in general corporation and insurance practice, representing Portland's largest property owner, Portland Railway, Light and Power Company.

In 1913, Harry Beckett joined Wilbur and Spencer and in 1915 the firm name was changed to include him. The earliest known partnership agreement, dated 1918, allocated \$600 a month to Wilbur and Spencer and \$400 to Beckett.

Wilbur was active in various Portland clubs, and his wife Alice founded the local chapter of Camp Fire Girls. After a protracted illness and decline, he died in September 1952 at the age of 83. He was remembered by one friend as a man with a "beautiful character" and a "delightful sense of humor." The firm has continued the insurance defense practice that Wilbur established.

Schuyler C. Spencer

Like Ralph Wilbur, Schuyler Spencer moved to Portland in 1892. In his native Indiana, he had studied law in the office of an Indiana legislator named Crumpacker. After his arrival in Portland, Spencer shared an office with various attorneys in the Washington and Chamber of Commerce buildings. Unfortunately, little is known about his legal career.

Harry B. Beckett

The third member of Wilbur, Spencer & Beckett was several years younger than his partners. A resident of Kansas who obtained his law degree from the University of Missouri in 1907, Beckett started his law practice in Portland in 1909 with a law school classmate, a German named Frank C. Hesse. In the 1912 City Directory, Beckett was listed as vice president of Eastern Investment Co. and later as counsel for the Emergency Fleet Corporation. Some years after becoming a partner, he established Wilbur, Spencer & Beckett's corporate practice.

Beckett was a close friend of Hillman Lueddemann—vice president of Pope & Talbot, a lumber company then based in San Francisco—and did the local legal work for that company and its subsidiary, McCormick Steamship. Pope & Talbot, which moved its main offices to Portland in 1963, may be Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt's oldest continuous client.

Beckett also successfully represented seven-percent prior-preference stockholders in the bankruptcy of Portland

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New Directors and Officers Selected

At the November 1990 annual meeting, five new directors were elected to the U. S. District Court Historical Society board. They are The **Hon. Ellen Rosenblum**, Portland; **Professor Christine Olsen Rogers**, Portland; **Jeffrey M. Batchelor**, Portland; **Steven H. Corey**, Pendleton; and **Stephen P. Riedlinger**, La Grande.

Reelected to new terms on the board were **Randall Kester**, Portland; **Richard B. Solomon**, Portland; **John Kottcamp**, Pendleton; **Caroline P. Stoel**, Portland; and **Jack Collins**, Portland.

Two new officers have also joined the board. They are **Donald Cinnamond**, who succeeds Robert Christ as executive secretary, and **William Tramosch**, who succeeds Millard McClung as treasurer.

The Society wishes to thank **Bob Christ** and **Millard McClung** for their years of service. Both men go off the board as they pursue new activities in their respective retirements. Christ served for many years as clerk of the U. S. District Court for Oregon and McClung was associate director for the Oregon Historical Society.



C.E.S. Wood (right) with artist Childe Hassam painting in the Oregon high desert

C.E.S. Wood's Firm Hold a Reception in Connection with an Exhibit at the Oregon Historical Center

Scarcely any figure in our state's history holds as much fascination for modern-day Oregonians as Charles Erskine Scott Wood, variously described as a "Renaissance Man" and a "Romantic Rebel," who gained fame in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a lawyer, Indian fighter, scholar, poet, painter, and free thinker.

In connection with a new exhibit on Wood at the Oregon Historical Center in Portland, Wood's old firm, Wood, Tatum, Mosser, Brooks & Landis, is hosting a reception at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, May 30, in the Madison Room at the Oregon Historical Center. The center is located at 1230 S.W. Park Avenue in Portland.

The exhibit, *Poet in the Desert*, opens May 10 and closed August 30, 1991 in the North Wing First Floor Gallery. It features photographs from C.E. S. Wood's book, *Poet in the Desert* (which was inspired by his many visits to the Oregon high desert), and some of Wood's paintings.

Another C.E. S. Wood event of interest to our readers occurs on May 14, 1991 when University of Oregon professor emeritus Edwin (Bing) Bingham will present a lecture, *Charles Erskine Scott Wood: An Era and a Realm*, at 7:30 p.m. in the First Congregational Church, 1126 S.W. Park Avenue, near the Oregon Historical Center.

Dr. Bingham is currently writing a biography of Wood and has lectured and written extensively on Northwest history and literature. Tickets are \$6 at the door.

And a Wonderful Time Was Had by All

The 1990 annual meeting at the Oregon Art Institute last November 15 served up some wonderful food and good fellowship, but that's not all. It also offered food for thought, as two judges remembered their most famous cases.

The program's appeal probably explains the large number of members and guests who attended the event. "It was terrific," said Society President **Don Willner**, "Last year we had 68 in attendance and this year we had 140. Clearly, people were fascinated by the chance to hear some recent history from two of the men who helped to make it."

The first to speak was **Judge Edward Leavy**, who discussed some little-known facts about the Rajneesh Case. He was followed by **Senior U. S. Court of Appeals Judge Otto R. Scopil** talking about the Armsbury Fugitive Harboring Case.

"The program drew attention to the importance of collecting the oral histories of those who have taken lead roles in Oregon's federal court," said Program Chairman **Jim Westwood**, who also chairs our Society's Histories Committee. That committee uses volunteers to tape oral histories related to the court.

Expertly chairing the event again this year was **Arlene Schnitzer**, who helped plan the program, arranged catering with the Benson Hotel, and took care of the many details that made it a very special evening. The event was held in the Art Institute's Sculpture Court, which was beautifully decorated for the occasion with a fall motif.



Which Will It Be— The Archives or the Roundfile?

That's a question many lawyers and firms face, as they try to decide the importance of keeping old files on cases. "At this time," says Society President Don Willner, "our Historical Society has neither the space to store large numbers of files nor an expert archivist to advise firms about what to keep and what to toss. However, we are working with the Oregon Historical Society to develop a program that will save important files.

In the mean time, we ask that lawyers be aware of keeping any files that may have historical importance."

Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt continued

Electric Power Company (PEPCO), which was later reorganized into Portland General Electric.

Franklin C. Howell

Another lawyer from Missouri, who probably knew Harry Beckett at the University of Missouri, was Franklin Howell. A football coach, class president, and prize orator at the university, Howell came to Oregon and was admitted to the Oregon bar in 1910, beginning work with Wilbur and Spencer in 1912. His name was added to the partnership by 1920, when the firm was called Wilbur, Spencer, Beckett and Howell.

In 1918 Howell was elected to the Oregon Senate from Multnomah County, winning as a write-in to fill a vacancy left by resignation. He was elected in 1919 to the regular session.

Howell left the firm in 1944, when he was appointed a Multnomah County circuit court judge by Governor Snell. Howell was described by his colleague, Bob Mautz, as "a tall, benign gentleman" who probably never "had an unkind thought or said an unkind word in his life."

Eugene K. Oppenheimer

A native Portlander born in 1890, Eugene Oppenheimer studied law at the University of Oregon law department, which was then in Portland. He graduated and was admitted to the Oregon bar in 1915, but soon after setting up practice enlisted in the Navy and served in France.

After returning to Portland, Oppenheimer went to work at Wilbur, Spencer and Beckett for \$125 a month. He later said he thought at the time that he had the world by the tail. In 1924 the firm became Wilbur, Beckett, Howell and Oppenheimer.

Oppenheimer continued with the firm until 1950, earning a reputation as a tireless worker whose knowledge of law probably was not exceeded by any lawyer in Portland.

The next year, at age 61, he accepted an appointment by Governor Douglas McKay to serve as circuit court judge. In May 1952 he was elected to the same position, after 485 Portland attorneys signed a petition asking him to run. Oppenheimer served as a circuit court judge for 13 years.

THE BUSINESS PRACTICE DEVELOPS, 1930-1950

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression affected Portland especially severely because both wheat and timber sales had suffered since 1927.

During this period, the practice of Wilbur, Beckett, Howell and Oppenheimer grew, but slowly. However, the business and friendship ties that developed during the Depression laid the foundation for a

second generation of strong leadership for the firm. In particular, the dynamism of partners Robert Mautz and Calvin Souther propelled the firm to unprecedented growth after World War II.

In 1947 and 1948 Mautz and Souther were joined by Arno Denecke (later chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court), William Kinsey, and Wayne Williamson.

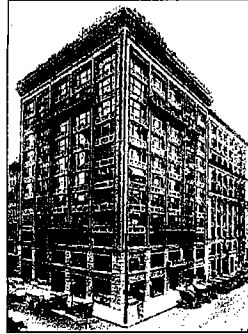
Robert T. Mautz

Before Robert Mautz became a lawyer, he gained national fame as a football player at the University of Oregon. A fine student, he graduated from Oregon Law School and passed the Oregon bar in 1927. During his career, personal injury defense cases formed the basis of his practice.

Mautz was also active in community and professional organizations. Among other things, he was involved with a radio program called "Circus Court on the Air," which was intended to raise money for Shriner's Crippled Children's Hospital. On each program, the defendant was a prominent Portland businessman or professional who was accused of a ridiculous crime. Mautz represented the defendant, who always lost so that a donation could be made to the hospital. The program became so popular it had to be moved out of KEX's regular studios and into an auditorium in the Terminal Sales Building.

Calvin N. Souther

Calvin Souther grew up in Portland, where he attended Lincoln High School and Reed College and earned his B. A. and J. D. degrees from the University of



For many years the firm had its offices in the Board of Trade Building.

Michigan. In 1930 he began practicing law in Portland and on January 1, 1934, he and his friend, Bob Mautz, became associates of Wilbur, Beckett, Howell and Oppenheimer.

Souther and Mautz always worked well as a team. Mautz did trial work and Souther handled brief writing. Gradually, their career paths diverged, though they remained lifelong friends and law partners.

Souther developed clients in lumber and shipping and became involved as an investor. He developed ownerships in particleboard and plywood companies and sawmills, had ownership interest in downtown Portland real estate, and became extremely successful and influential. As his business interests increased, his law practice became less active. Souther became, in fact, one of the firm's best clients. He died of bone cancer in 1979 at age 73.

Arno H. Denecke

Before joining Wilbur, Beckett, Oppenheimer, Mautz and Souther in 1947, Arno Denecke practiced law in his native Illinois, serving as house counsel to Montgomery Ward from 1939 to 1941 both in Chicago and in Oakland, California. He also taught at the University of Oregon Law School and Northwestern School of Law.

In 1959 Denecke was appointed to serve as a Multnomah County circuit court judge, and in 1962 he was elected to the Oregon Supreme Court, where he served for 20 years. Denecke was chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court from 1976 to 1982 during the reorganization of the local court system which provided that the state assume financing of the courts.

William H. Kinsey

William Kinsey came to the firm in November 1947 after graduating from the University of Michigan Law School, serving in the Navy, and working briefly for a New York law firm. He worked under Calvin Souther on tax and business matters.

Wayne A. Williamson

When Wayne Williamson joined the firm in 1948, after attending law school at the University of Oregon and Stanford and seeing active duty in the Navy, Wilbur's health was declining, as was Beckett's. Williamson was started at a salary of \$250 a month, which Beckett

growled was too much because Williamson, just out of school, wasn't worth anything, but it would reflect negatively on the firm if his kids went around with rickets. Williamson's practice was insurance defense litigation for various insurance clients. Among his many successful cases was a medical malpractice suit brought by Bill Walton against the Trailblazers' team physician, whom Williamson represented.

THE FIRM GROWS, 1950-1980

The growth begun after the war continued to accelerate through the 1950s, as firm members began to specialize.

Bruce Spaulding came in as a partner with 20 years of experience in criminal and civil litigation. He concentrated on insurance defense, developed specialties in forest fire litigation and medical malpractice, and on occasion handled major criminal defense cases. **Kenneth E. Roberts** became an expert in admiralty and maritime law and professional liability; **Gordon Moore** specialized in negligence defense; and **Forrest Simmons** specialized in business practice.

John L. Schwabe came to the firm in 1952, after distinguished military service during World War II, graduation from Ohio State University Law School, and four years of practice in Silverton, Oregon. Schwabe's practice focused on antitrust, securities and exchange, condemnation, contract and general business litigation.

In 1975, when **Wendell Wyatt** retired from the U. S. Congress, where he had served from 1964 to 1975, he joined the firm. Wyatt's early practice focused on natural resources and he represented



Wayne Williamson, John Schwabe, and Wendell Wyatt

the National Forest Products Association in their efforts to increase the budget for the sale of federal timber.

Others who served for a time with the firm were **Thomas Tongue**, who was later appointed to the Oregon Supreme Court; **Lee Johnson**, who was elected to the state legislature, became Oregon's attorney general, and sat on both the court of appeals and the Multnomah County Circuit Court; and **Robert Duncan**, who served in the United States Congress.

TODAY

Today, Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt has a staff of approximately 300, including 150 attorneys, and has offices in Portland, Seattle, Vancouver, and Washington, D. C.

Welcome, New Members

Lori Bauman
Ernest Bonyhadi
Barbara Dean Craig
JanMarie Dielschneider
Joyce Ann Harpole
Charles Hudson
Gregory Mowe
Glenn H. Munsell
William Okrent
Brent Summers
Robert H. Thompson
Todd Wetsel

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