Who Filled the Shoes as the First PBA President?

John W. Simonton (1826-1903) was the first president of the PBA and was the president judge in Dauphin County at the time.


Additional speeches followed Simonton’s and “the printed report of the meeting wound up with these monuments of legal scholarship. The emphasis was on the training of the mind. … No one who attended could have failed to realize he had been in at the start of something of lasting significance. Anyone who had not attended would, by turning over these pages, be made aware what he had missed. It was a strong start by strong men, well chosen,” Dolan wrote.

Simonton attended Lafayette College for two years and graduated from Princeton in 1850. Admitted into the bar in 1853, Simonton served as Dauphin County district attorney from 1865 to 1869 and was elected to the Dauphin County Court of Common Pleas in 1881 and re-elected in 1891 and in 1901.

Simonton was a charter trustee of the Harrisburg Public Library (known today as the McCormick Riverfront Library, part of the Dauphin County Library System). He was a charter member of the Historical Society of Dauphin County and was serving as the organization’s president when he died in 1903.

In addition to quotes from Dolan’s writings about the PBA, additional sources for this information are histories about the PBA written in 2010 by PBA Executive Director Emertus Theodore Stellwag and in 1995 by the editorial director of The Pennsylvania Lawyer magazine, Donald C. Sarvey; Simonton’s obituary published in the Harrisburg Daily Independent; the History of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania by Luther Reily Kelker, published in 1907; and the “History of the Dauphin County District Attorney’s Office” (online).

PBA Mission

To advance the science of jurisprudence;

to promote the administration of justice;

to see that no one, on account of poverty, is denied his or her legal rights;

to secure proper legislation;

to encourage a thorough legal education;

to uphold the honor and dignity of the bar;

to promote diversity throughout the profession;

to cultivate cordial intercourse among the lawyers of Pennsylvania;

and to perpetuate the history of the profession and the memory of its members.

The PBA Members’ Photo Album of Memories

Every Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) member is invited to submit up to three of her/his favorite photos from PBA-related meetings or events to include in an electronic PBA 125th anniversary photo album that is posted on Facebook.

Ideally, the online album will be a mix of recent photos and photos from decades ago.

Only electronic files of photos will be accepted. The Pennsylvania Bar Association will not return mailed hard copies of photos.

Members who don’t have electronic files of photos are encouraged to use their cell phones to take images of photos they wish to submit for the Facebook album and email them to this address: communications@pabar.org.

When emailing the photos, the member should include his/her name, a brief description of the events, the approximate dates when the photos were taken and list the names of others pictured in the photos from left to right. Here is an example of information to include with a photo: Jane Doe is pictured at the 1975 House of Delegates Meeting in Hershey. Pictured from left to right are John Smith, Jane Doe and Mary Jones.

Keep in mind that the Facebook album is “public,” meaning it is accessible for viewing by anyone searching the internet. The PBA reserves the right to post only photos it deems appropriate. For example, photos featuring alcoholic beverages are discouraged.

Our trivia contest celebrating #PBA125strong has begun. Two questions a month will be posted to PBA’s Facebook and Twitter. Members with correct answers will be entered into a monthly drawing for a Pennsylvania Bar Institute CLE ProPass (12 prizes total). More on the rules: www.pabar.org/site/125Strong/triviacontest.