



Kent Richland's Legacy to the California Supreme Court Historical Society

EDITOR'S NOTE: *At the June 2021 board meeting, the Society took note of longtime member and former president Kent Richland's decision to retire from the Board. As is evident from the remarks below, Kent's leadership and contributions to the Society have allowed it to survive and thrive well beyond his term. We wish him all the best in retirement.*

KENT RICHLAND BEGAN his service on the California Supreme Court Historical Society Board in 1998. He served as board president from 2000 to 2003. His service as president was truly transformational for this organization.

It is due in large part to Kent's efforts that the Society exists today. As of 2002, during his tenure as president, the Society was funded primarily through donations from large law firms. At Kent's urging, in April 2002 the board sought to investigate whether the Society could be listed as one of the organizations receiving a donation check off on the annual State Bar fee statement.

Kent, coordinating with board member (and current Court of Appeal Justice Elwood Lui), worked fast. In June 2002, they persuaded the California State Bar Board of Governors to authorize the check-off. Kent explained that the Society had lived a "hand-to-mouth existence" since its 1989 creation, and the Board of Governors determined it was an organization worthy of broader attorney support. At an October 2002 Society Board meeting, Kent confirmed that the 2003 State Bar fee statement would include an opportunity for attorneys to donate to the Society. The check-off on the State Bar fee statement has served as the Society's primary funding source for almost 20 years, thanks to these efforts.

More recently, since 2017 Kent has served as the Society's Nominating Committee Chair. The strength and depth of the current board are the result of his efforts.

Anyone working with Kent knows he is a true gentleman in every sense of the word. He is decent, and committed to his work, his family and any task he undertakes. Beyond that, he has a subtle, quick wit.

— *Jennifer King, Board member and former president*

WHEN JENNIFER KING asked if I'd like to say a few words about Kent, it gave me the occasion to look back at emails sent by Kent over the years. Some were to me, and some to others, but they all show the same personality — outgoing, enthusiastic, with a positive outlook, and a good word for all. Two of his most recent emails, the one from last month and another from three years ago, asking me to renew my terms on the board, have kind thoughts I will always treasure.

My memories of Kent go back to the beginning. He was president of the Society when I was first elected to the board 20 years ago, in 2001. I was invited to attend a reception after the board meeting to meet the members, and so my first impression of the group was Kent's warm welcome and his taking me around the room to introduce me to each member. Over the next few years, Kent continued to serve as president, and I had the opportunity to see the two aspects of him that continue to stand out — his able leadership and his genial manner.

As the saying goes, Kent, I wish you all the best!

— *Selma Moidel Smith, Board member*

WHEN I JOINED THE BOARD in 2002, Kent was president. I always looked up to him as the embodiment of the Society. Although there were and are many other active members of the board over the years, for me, especially in those early years on the board, he was the Society. I appreciated his wise counsel when I was president and later. Kent understood the Society and worked very hard on its behalf over his long tenure on the board. He will be missed.

— *David McFadden, Board member and former president*

I JOINED THE BOARD in 2000, and can confirm all that Jennifer and Selma have recounted about Kent's contributions and character. I'll add two prominent memories of him. The setting of the first, in that same year, was at the Supreme Court's oral argument session at the B. F. Hastings Building in Old Sacramento. Kent, as new president of the Society, was among those who spoke from the lectern to commemorate the court's sesquicentennial. He regaled the justices and assembled audience with a richly detailed story of the early days — involving a violent sword attack by the court's reporter of decisions, whom the justices were at that time attempting to remove from office, upon the clerk of the court.¹ I recall then thinking: Kent

1. As reported in O. K. McMurray, "An Historical Sketch of the Supreme Court of California," published in *Historical and Contemporary Review of Bench and Bar in California, S.F. Daily Journal*, 1926, 30, there was "a bitter feeling on [the part of Lee, the reporter] . . . toward the judges, and in a conversation with Fairfax, the clerk of the court, [Lee] gave vent to it in violent rage. Fairfax resented the attack, an altercation ensued,

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surely has stood at many appellate lecterns in his career, but this has got to be one of the more unusual presentations — and he faced no challenging questions from the bench. Indeed, the justices were smiling the whole time.

and Lee, who carried a sword cane, drew his sword and ran it into Fairfax's body, inflicting a serious wound in the chest just above the heart. A second wound, not so serious as the first, followed, and Fairfax drew his pistol as Lee raised his sword for a third thrust. He was about to shoot, but restrained by the thought of Lee's wife and children, let the pistol drop."

The next memory is more recent. In 2015 we discovered that we needed a few hundred hours of substantial cite checking and refinement work on the long pending project that we'd come to call "the court history book." Kent rose to the occasion, arranging for a highly able associate at his firm to assist. The polished final product, published in 2016 (Scheiber (ed.), *Constitutional Governance and Judicial Power — The History of the California Supreme Court*) reflects Kent's admirable dedication to that endeavor — and to the Society.

— *Jake Dear, Board member*

