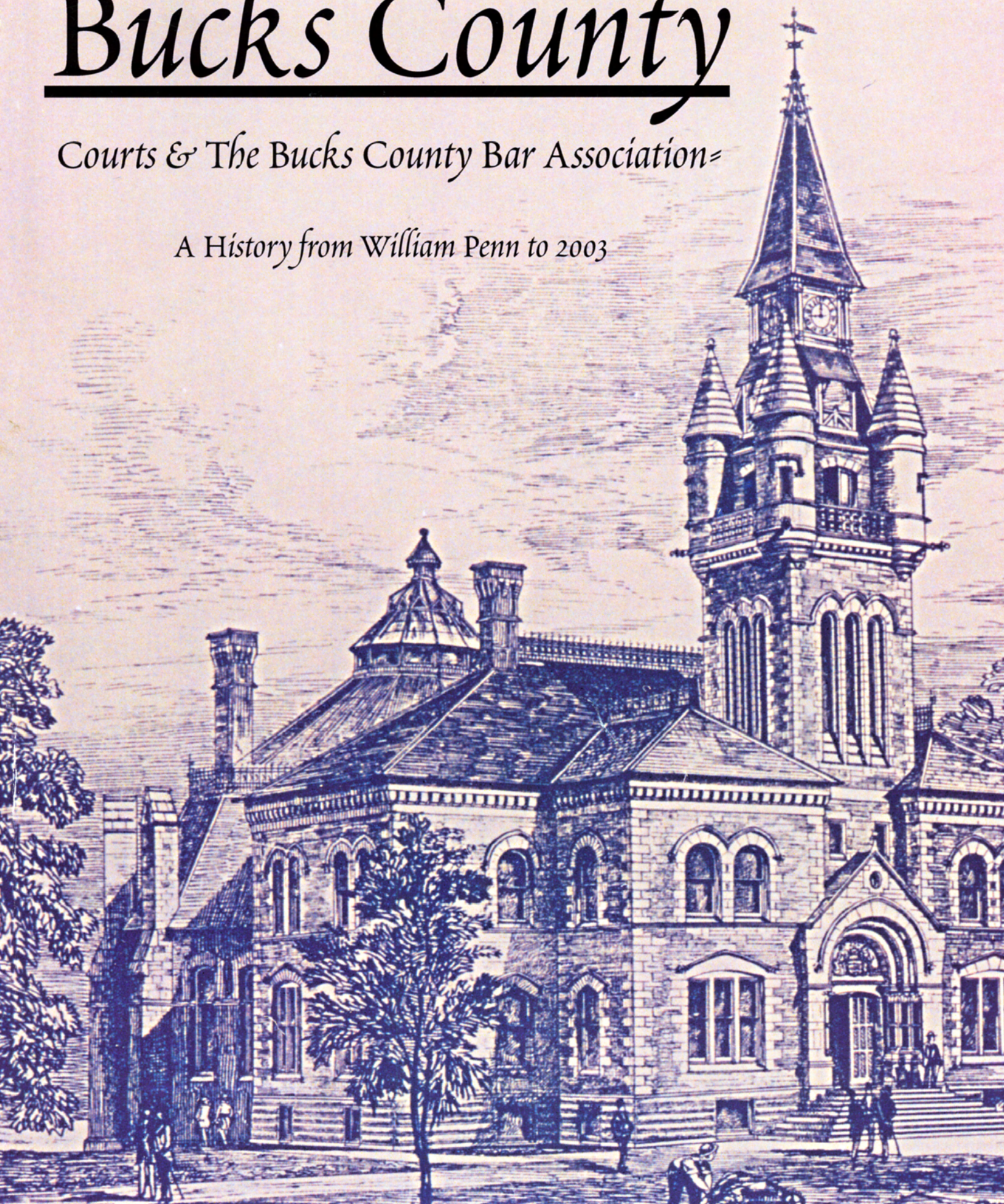
Bucks County

Courts & The Bucks County Bar Association

A History from William Penn to 2003



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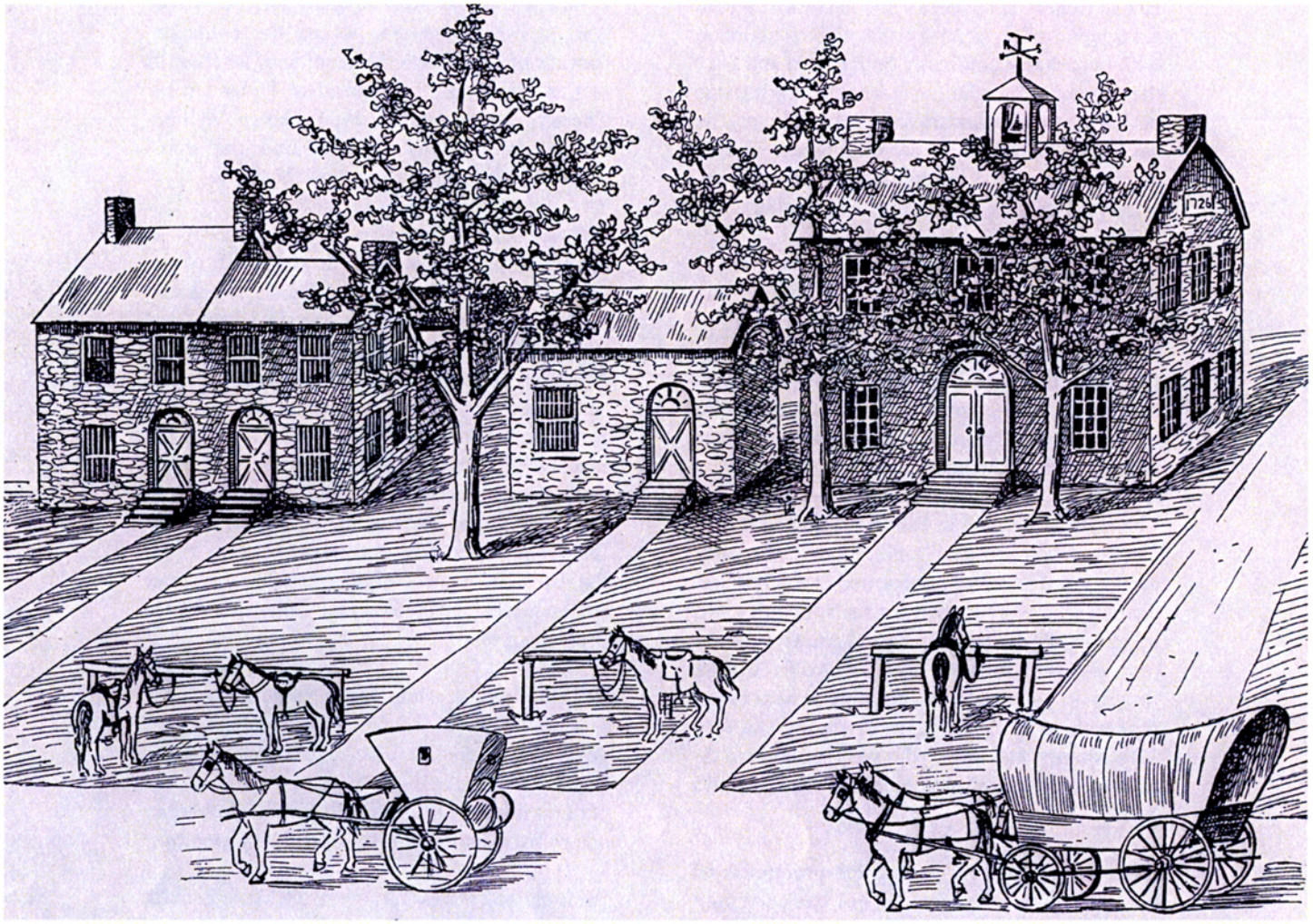
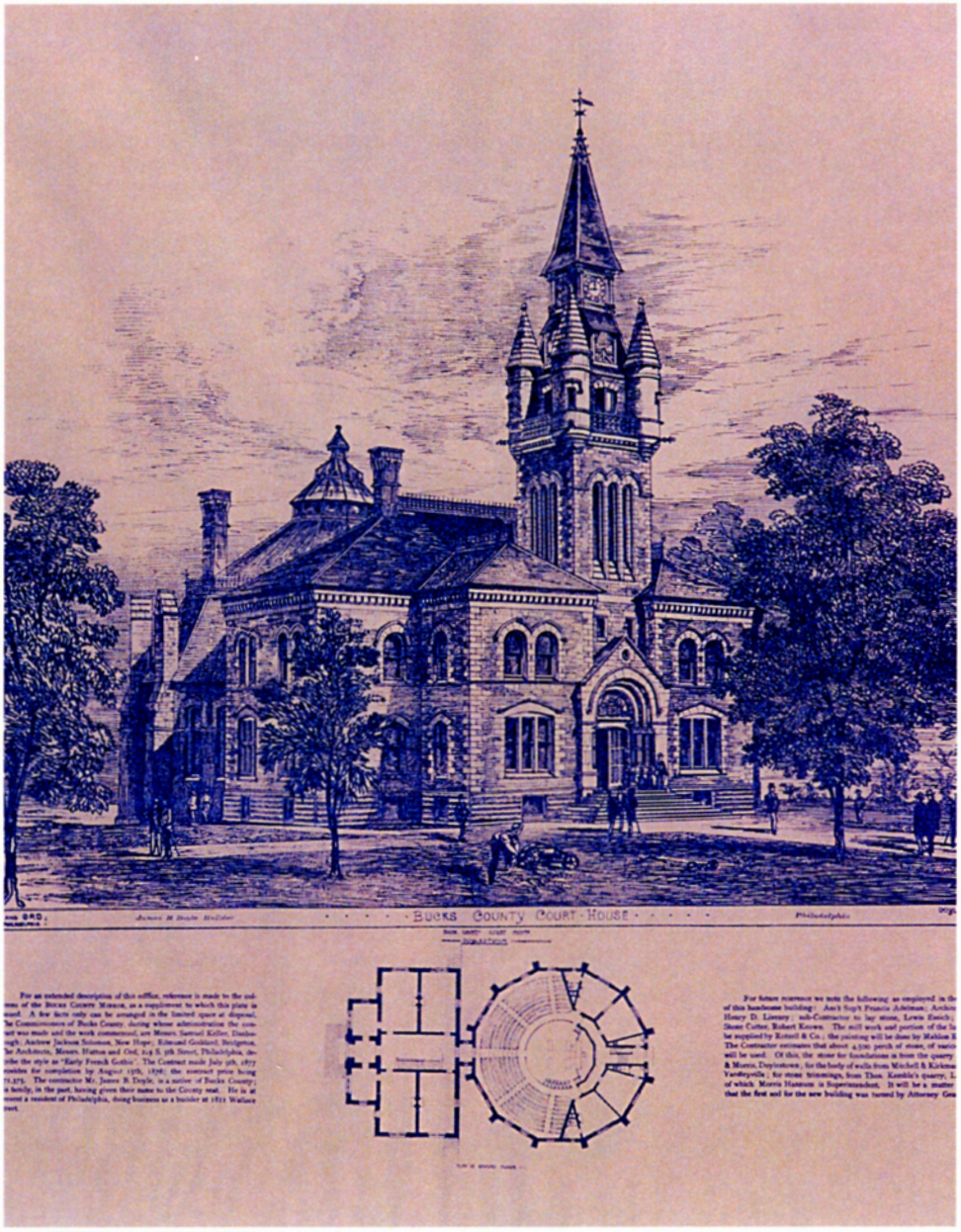
Chapter I

Early Courts and Lawyers in Bucks County: 1683-1853



The first Courthouse in Bucks County was built in Falls Township in 1684 and the second in Bristol in 1705. No images of either are known to exist. Pictured is the third Courthouse which was in use for 88 years in Newtown, commencing in 1725.
(Drawing courtesy of Newtown Historic Association.)



Courthouse picture compliments of Howard Gathright

About the cover - This etching is from the original architects rendering for the 1877 Courthouse, featuring a twelve-sided courtroom. The following copy is captioned on the lower portions of the plate.

For an extended description of this office, reference is made to the columns of the BUCKS COUNTY MIRROR, as a supplement to which this plate is issued. The Commissioners of Bucks County, during whose administration the contract was made and the work commenced, are Messrs. Samuel Keller, Danborough; Andrew Jackson Solomon, New Hope; Edmund Goddard, Bridgeton. The Architects, Messrs. Hutton and Ord, 215 S. 5th Street, Philadelphia, describe the style as "Early French Gothic." The Contract made July 9th, 1877 provides for completion by August 15th, 1878; the contract price being $71, 375. The contractor Mr. James B. Doyle, is a native of Bucks County; his family, in the past, having given their name to the County seat. He is at present a resident of Philadelphia, doing business as a builder at 1811 Wallace Street.

For future reference we note the following as employed in the erection of this handsome building: Ass't Sup't Francis Adelman; Architect's Sup't Henry D. Livezey; sub- Contractor to lay stone, Lewis Essich; Foreman Stone Cutter, Robert Keown. The mill work and portion of the lumber will be supplied by Rotzell & Co.; the painting will be done by Mahlon K. Dungan. The Contractor estimates that about 4,500 perch of stone, various grades, will be used. Of this, the stone for foundations is from the quarry of Meyers & Morris, Doylestown; for the body of walls from Mitchell & Kirkman's quarry, Yardleyville; for stone trimmings, from Thos. Kemble's quarry, Lumberton, of which Morris Hannum is Superintendent. It will be a matter of history that the first sod for the new building was turned by Attorney General Lear.

Prepared by

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Bucks County Bar Association Complex 2003

Foreword

Bucks County has a rich history that has been recorded by many authors from many viewpoints. Although several excellent studies, papers and articles have been written about the bench and bar in past years, no previous work has attempted to summarize the available information and bring it up to date.

With regard to the general history of the County, the masterwork, unquestionably, is the *History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania from the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time* by William W. H. Davis. He was a member of the first Association of the Bar of Bucks County that met in 1853 and the first board of directors of the incorporated Bucks County Bar Association that organized in 1883. This comprehensive text, the *History of Bucks County* by J.H. Battle, and others treat the origins of the bench and bar in Bucks County in substantial detail.

Just as the court system has grown in size and complexity, the bar association has expanded its membership and activities. Just as the court system adopted measures to provide for a Court Administrator with a substantial staff, the bar association found the need for an executive director with a substantial staff. Just as the court system has had to expand its physical plant and equipment and, at this writing, is about to expand again, the bar association has purchased a site and has renovated, expanded, and expanded again.

The events of the last half of the last century relating to our bench and bar, during which Bucks County has experienced dynamic and dramatic changes, have not, until this book, been chronicled.

This book was commenced with the dream of finishing it in 1983 at the 300th anniversary of the holding of the first court of justice and the 100th anniversary of the incorporation of the Bucks County Bar Association. History, however, never stands still. Now, 20 years later and 150 years from the first organization of the Association of the Bar of Bucks County, it is finally published with the impetus of H. Paul Kester, our volunteer contributor of the largest single part, and Thomas E. Mellon, Jr., current president of the Bucks County Bar Association. My great thanks go to members of the committee, each of whom contributed reminiscences to help make this book possible. I'm sorry Judges Satterthwaite and Monroe and lawyers Claire G. Biehn and Samuel S. Gray, Jr. did not live to see the end result. Of course, Lynn T. Bush deserves the highest possible praise for her steadfast pursuit from the beginning of the project to an excellent conclusion. Frank N. Gallagher, president the bar association in 1982, appointed this committee and himself to it. He has a great grasp of history, excellent ideas and perfect attendance at its meetings and those of Paul Kester's committee.

This book is dedicated not just to those who have labored so well at the bench and bar in years past, but also to those who will work to meet the tests ahead.

J. Lawrence Grim, Jr.

Preface

With the virtual completion of the work of the Committee on the History of the Bench and Bar of Bucks County under the able leadership of J. Lawrence Grim, Jr., in 1993, for several reasons, the publication thereof was deferred. However, interest in the project was rekindled in the late 1990s. As a result of the Strategic Planning Conference held at the Dupont Hotel in Wilmington, Delaware in January 2003, this interest was re-energized by President Thomas E. Mellon, Jr. who appointed the History Committee the mission of which was to bring the history up to date and have it published during his administration. The History Committee consists of H. Paul Kester, chair, Frank N. Gallagher, J. Lawrence Grim, Jr., Richard C. Howard, Jr., Dermot E. Kennedy, and Herbert K. Sudfeld, Jr. Lynn T. Bush continued to provide her inestimable knowledge, skills and abilities to the project. And, the ever present Pat Martin must be acknowledged for her availability and wise counsel.

While many accolades have been earned, Larry Grim should be singled out for continuing to devote his energy and resources to the project. It was he who arranged to have a professional photographer put all of the pictures and illustrations into a format suitable for publication. I am sure that all will agree that Stephen Barth of Springtown, Pennsylvania, has done a masterful job on our behalf. Also, members should know that a number of lawyers, judges and law firms have contributed articles, firm histories, pictures and money to support this effort. Accordingly, and with gratitude for all the work that has gone on before, it is with pride that we present herewith for your consideration, education and enjoyment *Bucks County Courts & Bucks County Bar Association, A History from William Penn to 2003.*

H. Paul Kester, Chair
History Committee

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When the Bucks County Bar Association celebrated its centennial in 1983, the association decided that a history of the organization should be prepared to inform members about the roots and growth of the bar association and to capture in a more permanent fashion the recollections present-day bar members have of their early years in the association.

Discussions of a written history were held with members of the bar association's Centennial Committee. They concluded that the history should deal not only with the 100 years of bar association history but should also trace the development of the court system in Bucks County, which celebrated its tricentennial in 1983. The committee decided that the recent history of the association -- that which could be gleaned from interviews with senior bar members -- was most important to preserve at this time since the period between 1935 and 1960 represented a period of major growth and change in the association.

Histories of the Bucks County court system have been written by other historians, and the committee felt that a review and summary of these histories would better serve their purposes than attempting to write its own version and could provide a context within which bar association history and development could be viewed. Much of the material contained in the first chapter of this history is summarized from broader histories of Bucks County. In particular, *The History of Doylestown - Old and New* by W.W.H. Davis, which contains details about the development of Bucks County during this period, may be of interest to readers. J. H. Battle's *History of Bucks County* has substantial detail about the judicial system in the pre-Revolutionary days that can only be summarized here. Terry McNealy's *History of Bucks County* covers the pre-Revolutionary history of Bucks County and discusses the early courts and governmental structure.

The minutes of the Bucks County Bar Association provided information on the association's activities from 1883 to 2003. Manuscripts and the personal papers of members of the Bucks County bar provided insight into the individual lives of lawyers who practiced here during the past century. Newspaper accounts of bar events provided information on bar activities, individual members, and on how these people and events were treated by the public and the press. Bar members throughout the history of the association have been active in politics and public affairs. Senior members of the bench and bar were interviewed.

The history strives to: (1) review the growth and development of the bar association and the issues with which its members have concerned themselves; (2) provide some insight into the lives and practices of bar members through the decades so that lawyers in the 21st century and thereafter may have a sense of what it was to be a member of the legal profession in previous eras; and (3) provide a brief history of the Bucks County court system, the framework within which the bar association grew and flourished.

Our contemporary goals and dilemmas are not unique. The themes of providing competent legal services, serving the community, creating an effective judicial system, and providing a framework for camaraderie among bar members are recurrent throughout bar association history.

The words of Richard Watson, a member of the bar and a judge in Bucks County during the 19th century, provide as good an introduction as could be written today.

(1873 - 1884)

"Our Bicentennial celebration is a fitting tribute to the memories of those who have lived before us, and who made Bucks County what the present generation found here. There were great and good men among them. We may profit by emulating their virtues and their works. But there is a glamour over the past that conceals the details and allows only the prominent features of the vision to be seen.... Men lived and worked and thought then much as they do now. They were prompted by the same motives, subject to like passions and frailties, possessed by the same virtues, influenced by the same religious feelings as men of today. In short, we are a people like unto them."

Richard C. Watson, speaking of the early lawyers and judges of Bucks County in an address given at the Bicentennial of Bucks County Celebration, August 31, 1882.

The members of the bar association Centennial Committee, under the chairmanship of J. Lawrence Grim, Jr., were enormously helpful in providing direction and material for the history. Their names are listed herein. All shared their recollections and assessments of the bar association, the court system, and fellow members. Arthur M. Eastburn, Jr., a member of the committee, researched and wrote sections on the early history of Bucks County and its courthouses, which have been used in this text. Samuel S. Gray, Jr. provided a comprehensive outline used as a guide throughout the project. Mary Catherine Cannon Fox (Mrs. L. Rodman Fox) presented a history of the Fox family. H. Paul Kester wrote the section on Bucks County court administration.

Many judges of the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas of the last three decades have had a chance to contribute to this volume, and many have done so. Judges Kenneth G. Biehn and Wm. Hart Rufe III have been particularly helpful.

The staff of the Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society made available manuscripts, books, papers, photographs, and other materials.

Lynn T. Bush

Author, Lynn T. Bush, and her husband, George M. Bush, a 40-year member of the Bucks County Bar Association

About the Author

Lynn T. Bush became involved in writing the Bucks County Bar Association history in 1983 when she was the public relations consultant to the association. She conducted the interviews, did the necessary research, coordinated the contributions of other writers, and, along with Larry Grim, encouraged others to make contributions to the text. She was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and received a master's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was married to the late George M. Bush, a member of the Bucks County Bar, to whom this work is dedicated. She is executive director of the Bucks County Planning Commission.

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