

4-27-2016

Courtside: Law Finds Order in a New History of the Greenville County Bar Association

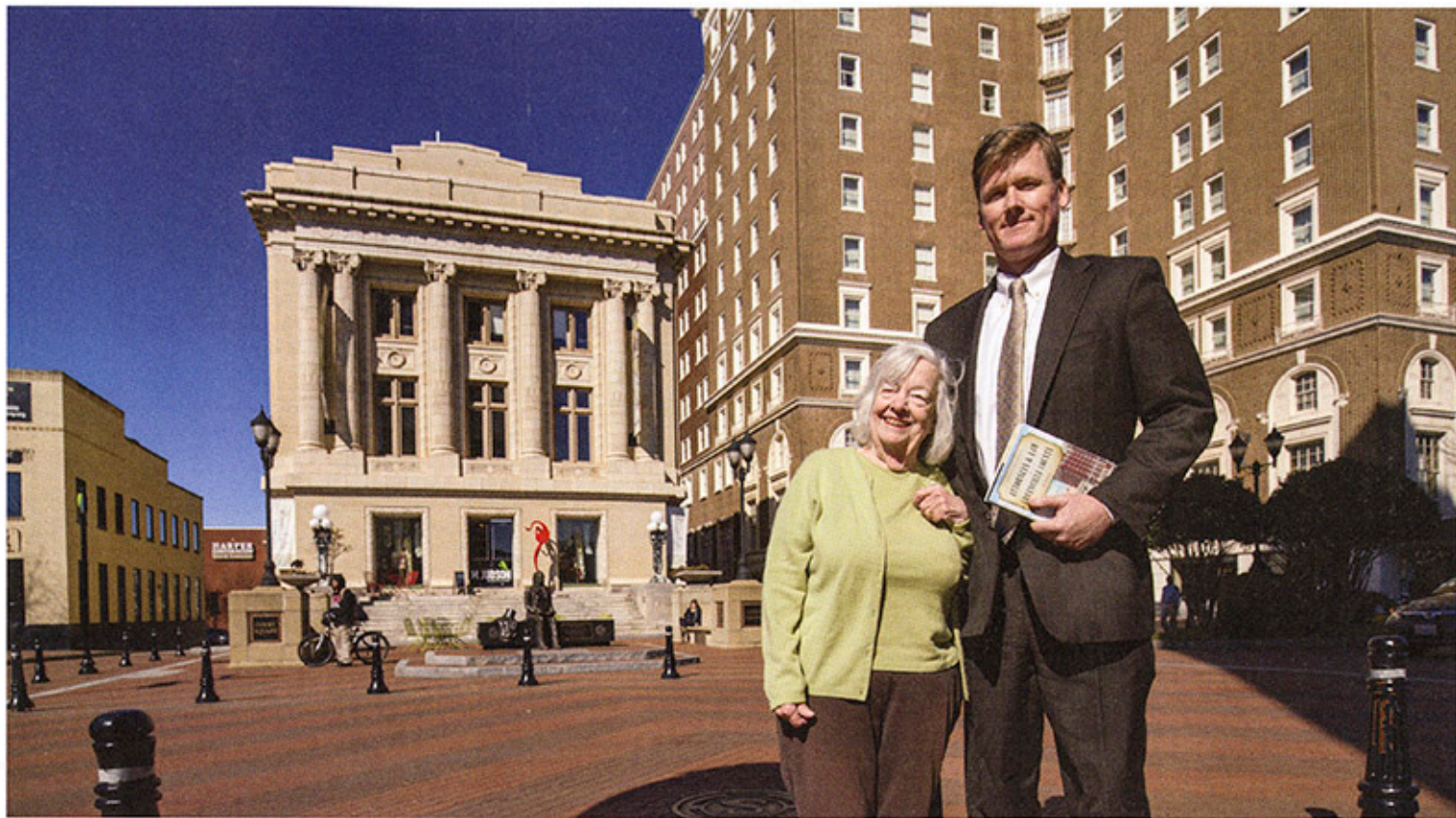
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Recommended Citation

Huang, Andrew '11 (2016) "Courtside: Law Finds Order in a New History of the Greenville County Bar Association," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 59 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol59/iss1/14>

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DYNAMIC DUO

A project about the history of law in Greenville was born out of a partnership between a Furman professor and a former student.

Courtside

Law finds order in a new history of the Greenville County Bar Association.

BY ANDREW HUANG '11

Former Furman professor and author Judy Bainbridge has long had an interest in local history. She is the writer behind *Academy and College*—a history of Greenville Woman's College, which merged with Furman—and a regular contributor to *The Greenville News*. However, she didn't originate the idea for her latest book *Attorneys & Law in Greenville County: A*

History. She credits a former student for that.

Kirby Mitchell '90, senior litigation attorney with South Carolina Legal Services, recounts a conversation he had with [Circuit Court] Judge Ed Miller approximately three years ago. "He spoke about the history of the Greenville Bar at a luncheon," Mitchell says. "In researching for his talk, he went to the archives and

realized that while the doctors, architects, and all these other professions in Greenville had written, documented histories, there was none on the Greenville Bar." Mitchell laughs, "There was this sudden consensus. Everyone was like, 'Of course we should [write a book]!' without any knowledge of how to publish a book."

With *Attorneys & Law in Greenville County*, Bainbridge patiently walks through more than two centuries of legal history in Greenville County, starting in 1786 with the establishment of the first county court. As Bainbridge details the interconnected lives of Greenville attorneys, the book adopts a certain resemblance to the Homeric catalogue of ships: an elaborate list of attorneys' names, provenances,

and personal histories follow. "These names are so much a part of Greenville: Donaldson, Townes..." she notes. "I was surprised by how much Furman was involved in the beginnings here, but for so long, [Furman's law school] was the only game in town."

As Bainbridge moves through time, she identifies several moments of significance. The 1947 Willie Earle Trial is one particularly infamous milestone. Willie Earle, an African-American man accused of robbing and fatally stabbing a white taxi driver, was removed from police custody and lynched. His murderers, despite multiple eyewitnesses and signed confessions, were subsequently all found not guilty—to the incredulity of the court and

THE 1947 WILLIE EARLE TRIAL IS ONE INFAMOUS MILESTONE. "IF THERE HAS EVER BEEN A TRIAL OF THE CENTURY, THAT'S THE TRIAL," SAYS BAINBRIDGE.

the outrage of national press covering the trial.

"If there has ever been a trial of the century, that's the trial," says Bainbridge. "Not only because of the trial itself, but the impact it had and what it showed about this place. And it wasn't nice at all. There were a lot of things in the history of the area that weren't so pretty, and you can't overlook that. But you can understand it, and that's what I'm trying to do."

Bainbridge also chronicles the Bar's diversification as it grew to include women, African Americans—anyone who wasn't a white, male Protestant—and the Bar's growing impact in the public sphere as the U.S. Supreme Court pushed for the establishment of a public defender's office and free legal services for low-income

residents in the 60s and 70s.

"The whole business of public defense is still underfunded," says Bainbridge, "but it flourished in Greenville because some people pushed to make sure it would stay."

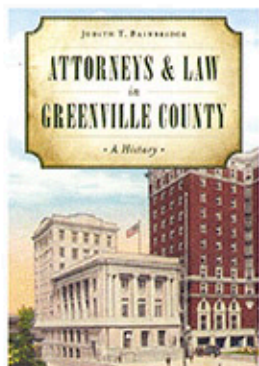
Furman alumni have certainly played a role in that push.

"I think there is a supportive environment [at Furman] for people who want to do things in the public interest," says Bainbridge.

Mitchell elaborates:

"In my opinion, there's this Furman contingent of public interest law-oriented people that we should be extremely proud of. The Furman grads that come back to Greenville—they tend to have an interest in seeing the continued progress and improvement in the aspirational side of law. They're trying to create equality and justice."

In that sense, *Attorneys & Law in Greenville County: A History*, which is available for purchase on campus at the university's Barnes & Noble bookstore, is more than a comprehensive accounting of a professional guild. It is a framing of Greenville's growth—in all its fits and starts, pain and triumph—from the perspective of those who have been (and continue to be) driving forces for that progress. ●



The book adopts a resemblance to the Homeric catalogue of ships.



NEXT

Reflection on Furman Going Forward

Last summer, two days after nine African-American men and women were slaughtered by a white supremacist in Charleston, thousands of people gathered all over the state to hold hands, process outrage, and acknowledge communal sins. As I watched 350-plus people from all races, creeds, and religious traditions pour into the Furman chapel that afternoon, I was hopeful about what a collective response to racism and xenophobia would look like for our country, for the state of South Carolina, and for this campus.

I was hopeful then. I am hopeful now.

Even so, I must be clear. That hope is not born out of ignorance. As a chaplain and as co-chair of Furman's presidential committee on diversity and inclusion, I carry a host of stories that pain me to my core. I know Catholic students who have been told they are going to hell, Muslim community members who have been told that their tradition is inherently violent, gay and lesbian students who have suffered slurs and blatant disrespect, international students told to go back to where they came from, and the painful list goes on. Perhaps we like to think these things do not happen here, but unfortunately, they do.

We have much to be proud of. We have a long way to go.

Amidst my awareness, exhaustion, and outrage over moments like the ones I just described, I hold to the seemingly outlandish conviction that it is within spaces of great difference—

personal, religious, social, and ideological—that the real project of the university comes to life.

Homes for higher education were never meant to merely conceptualize democracy for textbook consumption. The real project has always been to facilitate space, learning, and opportunities for the enactment of democracy. This enlivens and "enfleshes" discourse, calling us into one another's lives and stories. Here, we sit at tables and live in residence halls and actively listen in classrooms with people who help us grapple with our bias, reimagine community beyond our well-worn contexts, and embrace the complexity of difference we all pose for one another.

My hope for "what's next" at Furman is that we will intentionally and joyfully choose to be a place that presses into this grand experiment with equal doses of fervor and care. We must believe that the project is worth our time, and even at the cost of overdramatizing, the grounding force for civilization.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Maria Swearingen is in her sixth year as associate university chaplain at Furman University. Originally from Texas, she graduated from Baylor University and received her master of divinity degree from Duke University. She offers pastoral care and interreligious engagement to Furman's faculty, staff, and students, along with alumni and friends of the university.