

# Trailblazers of the Mississippi Legal Frontier

by Susan L. Runnels

To know where we are going, we must know where we have been. Because of the vision and determination of Richard T. “Dick” Bennett, former president of The Mississippi Bar, the Bar is doing just that – preserving its heritage by videotaping its venerable members who have created a legacy for others to follow. Dick proposed an oral history committee to select, interview and record well seasoned lawyers. The Committee instead chose videotape as its medium and renamed itself the Legal Heritage Committee. With the invaluable assistance of Anita Modak-Truran, a practicing attorney and partner at Butler, Snow, O’Mara, Stevens & Cannada, who is also a film maker and a movie critic, the Committee embarked on a two year adventure of script writing, filming and editing to produce six films, five of interviews of the individual attorneys which were shown at the 2002 Bar Convention and one composite film of the five interviews which was shown at the 2001 Bar Convention.

The Committee received funding from the Mississippi Bar Foundation. From that budget the Committee decided how many lawyers could be interviewed and selected the lawyers to be interviewed. The selection process was quite arduous, as there were so many deserving candidates.

Then the work began. Committee members became producers and directors and were no longer Committee members. They divided into production teams, each assigned to producing a video. With Anita’s guidance the producers/directors planned themes, wrote scripts, carefully selected and prepped interviewers, arranged for filming, and directed the filming on location. Professional videographer Eddie Nabors of Video South in Jackson and Oxford filmed the interviews. With the assistance of the producers/directors, Lida Gibson of Gibson Creative, Inc., a film and video production company in Jackson, edited the videos, adding titles, music, photographs, and voiceovers. Without Anita’s unending patience, expertise and dedication to the project, there would likely have been five videotaped depositions, but instead there are six professional quality movies that poignantly capture the careers of these attorneys.

The producers/directors (nee Committee members) include in addition to Anita, Cynthia Speetjens, Gerald Cruthird, Carol West, Bob Shepard, Ned Currie, Hale Freeland, Q. Davis, Curtis Boschert, John Chapman, Henry Clay, Gail Lowery, William Carter, and Susan Runnels, Executive Producer. The interviewers who had to do a lot of homework for this project include Cynthia Speetjens, Hal Miller, Len Blackwell, Guff Abbott, and Fred Banks.

This series is entitled “Trailblazers of the Mississippi Legal Frontier” because each of the lawyers interviewed has been a trailblazer in his or her own way. The trailblazers filmed include Reuben Anderson, Bob Cannada, Tommy Ethridge, Boyce Holleman, and Clare Hornsby.

Summaries of the individual videotaped interviews of each trailblazer follow. In the videos these individuals share their personal experiences as lawyers and their thoughts about the legal practice. The viewer soon realizes and appreciates the high moral standards and strong principles each of these individuals had adhered to throughout his or her life.

These videos are now available for purchase by using the order blank at the end of these articles. The project is continuing with a newly formed committee and perhaps this will be a permanent endeavor of The Mississippi Bar.

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