

# CBA 150th Anniversary Celebration

## A Time of Unrest and Change, 1949-1974

By Trisha Rich

**T**he Chicago Bar Association is celebrating its 150th year anniversary. To help commemorate the occasion, the *Record* is publishing a series of six articles, each examining a specific 25-year period during the Association's history. This is the fourth in that series, examining the Association's history and some of the major events that occurred between the years 1949 and 1974. The CBA's entire year of celebratory events and other information is available at [www.chicagobar150.org](http://www.chicagobar150.org).



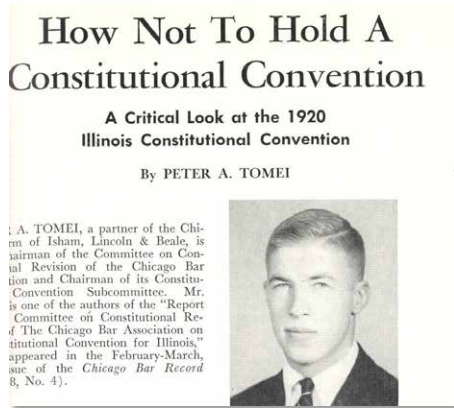
*Volunteer lawyers were recruited, many of them by the CBA, to facilitate the release on bond of scores of people arrested in the rioting that followed Martin Luther King Jr's assassination. Source: Kogan, Herman, The First Century: The Chicago Bar Association 1874-1974.*

### Social Change – and Unrest

The 50s, 60s, and 70s were socially tumultuous decades worldwide. The CBA was often on the front lines of important historical milestones. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, setting off a wave of civil unrest that culminated in political protests and riots around the country, with some of the biggest in Chicago. The unrest in Chicago resulted in over 500 people injured and 11 deaths. Mayor Richard J. Daley imposed a curfew, and

the Illinois National Guard was deployed to Chicago neighborhoods. Over 3,000 mostly Black men were arrested, and hundreds languished in jails because no preliminary hearings were held, or excessive bonds were set.

Alongside the American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Bureau of the United Charities of Chicago, the Cook County Bar Association decried the “deplorable breakdown in judicial processes.” The CBA acted quickly, organizing, and deploying over 150 volunteer lawyers. They provided legal assistance, which culminated in a marathon overnight session the Saturday before Easter Sunday at the Criminal Court Building, when bonds were reduced, and hearings held to free over 200 jailed men. The experience led the CBA to form its Committee on Civil Disorders, to propose procedures to implement fair and expeditious procedures to handle those arrested during large scale civil disorders.



*An excerpt from the February 1968 Record article, “How Not to Hold a Constitutional Convention,” by Peter Tomei.*

### Constitutional Convention

One major accomplishment in this era

was the Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention. The effort, spearheaded by Samuel W. Witwer and an organization he formed called the Illinois Committee for Constitutional Revision, had garnered widespread bipartisan support and over \$250,000 in donations. This was an important cause to the CBA: CBA leadership and the *Record* had been calling for a constitutional convention for nearly a decade. Early in 1968, a widely read and influential article appeared in the *Record*. Authored by Peter Tomei, the article went into detail about the defects of prior conventions and the then-current constitution, which, at that point, was over 100 years old. The electorate voted to approve the convention, and Tomei went on to chair the CBA's Constitutional Study Committee.

Immediately, the group began urging that convention delegates should be non-partisan and that any lobbyists at the convention should have to disclose both their identities and the sums they were spending. The *Record* published another Tomei article, in which he argued, “A constitutional convention is the institution through which the people exercise the ultimate power of government – the power to renew and repair the basic structure and machinery of the government under which we live.” Tomei's proposal was adopted, and a slate of delegates was elected on November 18, 1969. The convention itself convened on December 8, 1969.

Known in legal and political circles as “Con-Con,” the Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention concluded almost one year later, on September 3, 1970. It ultimately produced the fourth version of the Illinois Constitution, which was rati-

fied later that year and went into effect on July 1, 1971. This version of the Illinois Constitution still stands today. The new constitution boasted several important changes, including increased home rule for cities of more than 25,000 people, the establishment of the Judicial Inquiry Board, and civil rights provisions that included stronger bans of employment and housing discrimination.



*In a highly acclaimed number from the 1972 Christmas Spirits Show, “The Bench Connection,” longtime cast member and show writer, Julian J. Frazin, parodied President Richard M. Nixon.*

### Christmas Spirits Court Controversy

Although the Christmas Spirits show (now dubbed the Bar Show) was known for cutting edge, local, and sometimes stinging satire, 1969’s show proved to be more controversial than most. The show was titled “Heir” (in a nod to one of the cultural flashpoints of the era – long hair being associated with hippies and Vietnam war protestors). It included all of the expected targets – the President and Vice President (Nixon and Agnew), the Mayor and his son (Richard J. and Richard M. Daley), and Governor Ogilvie. One skit, however, hit a bit too hard.

The skit was set in a courtroom. It made a clear allusion to the ongoing trial of the Chicago 7 (which arose out of the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention that had attracted about 10,000 protestors, over twice as many law enforcement officers, and a nationwide TV audience for “the battle of Michigan Avenue”). In the bar show’s skit, one of the character defendants sat at the defense table, bound, and gagged – while an actor resembling Judge Julius Hoffman repeatedly shouted, “Off with his head!” Judge Hoffman, in the audience for opening

night, did not complain, but the Association did receive many complaints, including a letter from 10 prominent Association members, charging that the depiction was unethical because the case was pending.

The Board of Managers ultimately issued a skit-related public apology but refused calls to censor the Entertainment Committee going forward. Frank Greenberg, then President, wrote in the *Record*, “The show is either worth keeping as a free expression by the Entertainment Committee without censorship by the Board of Managers, or it is not worth keeping at all. We have seen the risks. But it seems to me that you either take the risk of the kind of reaction we have just had or take an even less acceptable risk of reducing the show to a level of cautious banality guaranteed to offend nobody and to interest few.”



*The YLS Architecture and the Law Committee sponsored an annual contest for the best law firm interior in the early 1970s. Borde and Berke provided this entrant.*

### Young Lawyers Section

In June 1971, a full 20% of the CBA’s membership consisted of lawyers who were aged 36 or younger. At the time, a small committee for young lawyers existed, but the Association’s new President, Milton H. Gray, saw the wisdom in formalizing a Young Lawyers Section to specifically serve the Association’s younger demographic. Gray pitched the idea to the incoming Chair of the existing committee, David Hilliard (who himself went on to become CBA President in 1982). This was not the first time the Board of Managers had been presented with this idea; a similar proposal had been defeated a decade

earlier. Nonetheless, Gray, with Hilliard’s support, took the idea to the Board of Managers, and in July 1971, the Board unanimously approved the formation of the Young Lawyers Section. The initial YLS charter stated it would exist to “provide leadership, programs, and facilities to encourage young lawyers to communicate and work together on their own ideas and programs for improving the community and the profession.” Indeed, Gray’s pitch to the Board had included the parameters that the YLS would have its own, semi-autonomous leadership; it would lead and operate its own committees and activities; it would have its own budget; and its own Administrative Director.

The YLS was one of the first young lawyer groups in the country. Upon formation, it immediately became the biggest, with over 3,000 members enrolled automatically. To this day, the YLS serves more than a quarter of the Association’s members. It is still one of the largest and most successful young lawyer organizations in the country, regularly winning national awards for its cutting-edge programming. One such program is the CBA’s podcast, @theBar. The CBA podcast was launched five years ago under then-YLS Chair, Jonathan Amarilio, and just celebrated its own anniversary (five years). With hundreds of thousands of downloads, it is the country’s most successful metropolitan bar association podcast.

Throughout this 25-year period, the CBA continued to be at the forefront of Chicago’s legal, social, and political community. The Association had also grown considerably: by the end of 1974, membership had ballooned to 11,321 members, twice its size at the end of 1949. ■



*Trisha Rich is a commercial litigator and legal ethicist at Holland & Knight LLP, CBA Secretary, and a member of the CBA Record Editorial Board.*

# Reflecting on My CBA Experience

Curated by Kathleen Dillon Narko, CBA Record Editorial Board Member

*I joined the CBA as a young associate. I had moved to Chicago after law school and did not have a built-in network here. The CBA offered me a chance to get to know the local legal community and get tangibly involved in making the legal profession better. I have developed so many personal and professional relationships through my work at the CBA. It's been worth my investment many times over.*

**Trisha M. Rich**, Member since 2006; CBA Secretary 2023-2024; Holland & Knight

*I arrived in Chicago with nothing but my law school acceptance letter. As an immigrant and a first-gen law student, I did not know a single lawyer in my family or as an acquaintance. The Chicago Bar Association was my introduction to the legal community of the Windy City, where I was fortunate to receive mentorship from exceptionally talented attorneys. The support and guidance I received from the CBA helped me navigate the challenges of law school.*

**Civ Leng**, Member since 2023; Young Lawyers Section Special Project Coordinator; Law Student, University of Illinois College of Law

*The CBA was fundamental in shaping my personal and professional growth. The friends I acquired helped celebrate significant milestones in my life and overcome personal obstacles. The discussions with colleagues regarding substantive law and litigation forged my ability to litigate complex matters.*

**Ruben R. Chapa**, Member since 1993; Young Lawyers Section Chair 2001-2002; United States Department of Labor

*I first joined the CBA because my law firm encouraged bar membership and was willing to pay my dues! I left the firm for a government job and have been paying the dues myself ever since. It's worth it. Thanks to CBA membership, I've made friends across the profession and have seen the contributions that lawyers make*

*to the fabric of this city. I've served on the CBA Board; attended lunches, dinners, receptions, and (best of all!) the bar show; and participated on committees. Most meaningful, for me, was the Development of the Law Committee, on which I served years ago with judges, academics, and thoughtful lawyers. Work on that committee, particularly on a challenging question of criminal procedure, served me well when, as a federal judge, I had to learn new areas of the law in a hurry.*

**Chief Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer**, Member since 1980, U.S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois



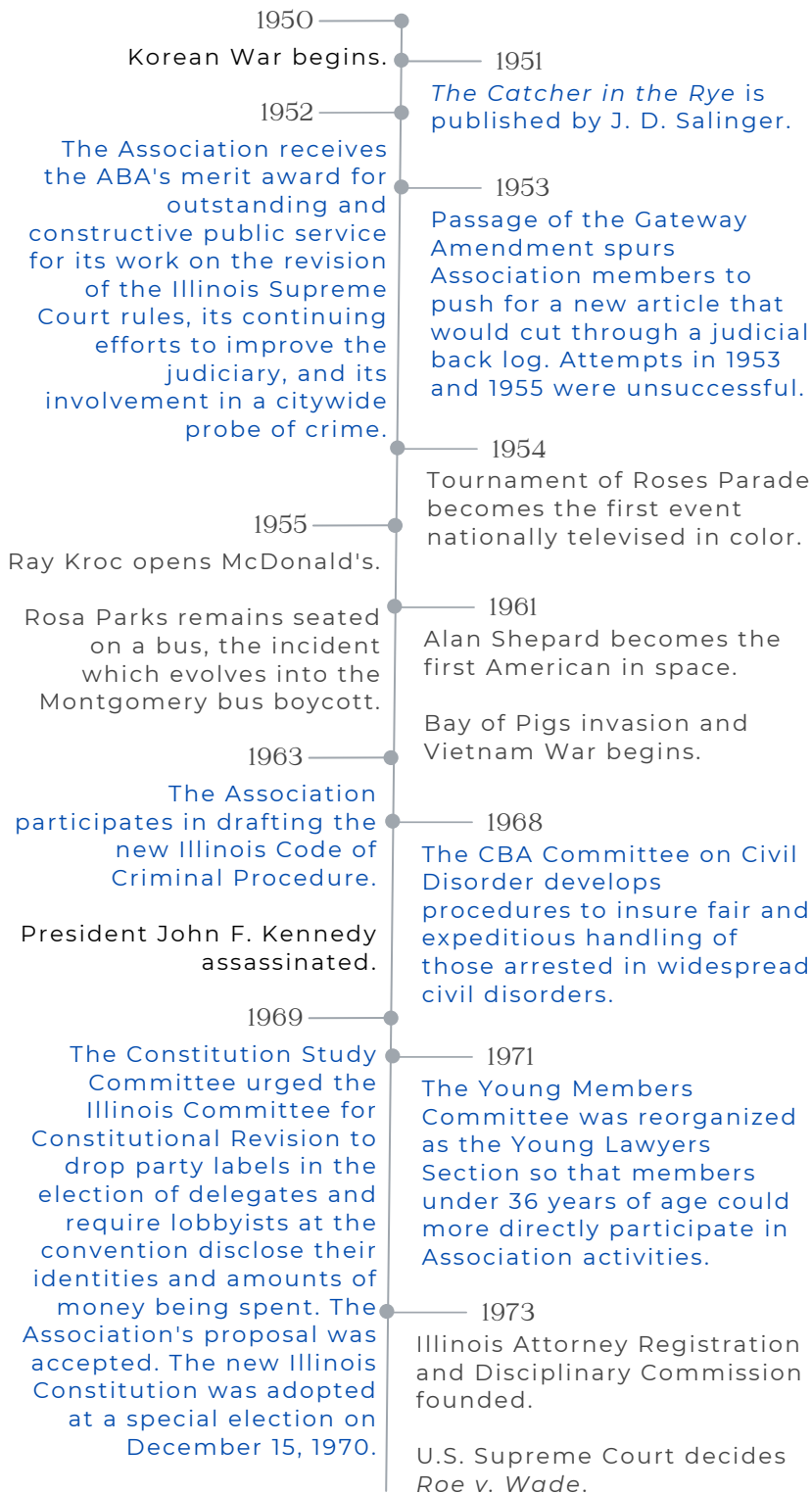
*The CBA always has been an important part of my law practice. During my time as CBA President, I saw firsthand the pivotal role the CBA plays in protecting the rule of law and improving access to justice. I am proud to be a part of the CBA's rich history and continuing efforts to support lawyers, create a welcoming legal profession, and help those in need*

**E. Lynn Grayson**, Member since 1987; CBA President 2021-2022; Nijman Franzetti LLP

What are your reflections about the CBA? We want to hear from you! Whether you are a new member or decades into your legal career, we want you to share your thoughts. Send us 50-100 words addressing one of the following topics: Why do you belong to the CBA? How has the CBA impacted your legal career? Or describe the CBA of 2048, 25 years from now. Email your reflections to [CBARecord@chicagobar.org](mailto:CBARecord@chicagobar.org). Thank you!

1949-1974

# CBA HISTORY



## Chicago Riots

Volunteer lawyers were recruited, many of them CBA members, to facilitate the release on bond of scores of those arrested in the rioting that erupted after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968.

Source: Kogan, Herman, *The First Century: The Chicago Bar Association 1874-1974*.



## Chicago Civic Center

In 1965, the Chicago Civic Center was completed in an area bounded by Randolph, Washington, Clark and Dearborn streets. It housed all level of courts. The building was renamed the Richard J. Daley Center in 1976 in honor of the late Mayor.

Source: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (architects). [www.som.com/projects/chicago-civic-center/](http://www.som.com/projects/chicago-civic-center/)

Complete CBA timeline available at [www.chicagobar150.org](http://www.chicagobar150.org)