
Historic Gathering for Oral Histories

BY JAKE DEAR

CHIEF SUPERVISING ATTORNEY, CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT

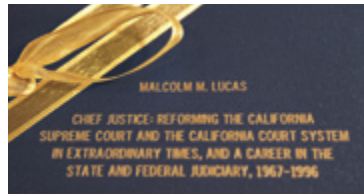
Four former members of the California Supreme Court were honored by the Society and the current justices of the Court at a ceremony celebrating the completion of the retired justices' oral histories. Immediately following the Court's April 7, 2009, session in Los Angeles, the Court joined with Society board members and special guests for the presentation to each retired justice of a bound copy of his own oral history.

Society President David McFadden opened the proceedings and welcomed the distinguished participants. He introduced Chief Justice Ronald M. George, who praised the Society's involvement in the oral history project.

"The California Supreme Court Historical Society funds a number of worthy causes and programs, but none is more important than our oral history program"

said the Chief Justice. "Over a period of many years, oral history interviews have been conducted of Chief Justice Gibson, as well as Justices Carter, Mosk, Newman, Broussard, Reynoso, and Grodin. Through these undertakings, we have literally preserved the living history of the Court and its members. To this list, we are very pleased to add today the oral histories of Chief Justice Malcolm M. Lucas, Justice Edward A. Panelli, Justice John A. Arguelles, and Justice Armand Arabian.

"I want to express my deep thanks to each of you for agreeing to participate in the oral history process. I also wish to express my personal thanks to Society board member Professor Harry N. Scheiber of Boalt Hall, and to oral historian Laura McCreery of the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley, who conducted all of these interviews." Scheiber has overseen



all of the oral history projects of the Society and is credited by McCreery for providing the “essential scholarly guidance.”

“Finally,” concluded the Chief Justice, “I want to comment briefly about some research that shows in a very favorable light the work of the Court under Chief Justice Lucas. A recent law review article published in the UC Davis Law Review reveals that not only has the California Supreme Court been the leading and ‘most followed’ state court in the nation since at least 1940, but also shows that the court under Chief Justice Lucas, in particular, narrowly edges out the next-most influential era of the Court — that of Chief Justice Donald Wright. Objective research like this confirms what many of us subjectively know: in general, we have much to be proud of regarding the Court; and in particular, we are proud of the four justices we honor today, all of whom have made important contributions to the Court’s history and ongoing reputation.”

The oral histories will eventually be available to the public at UC Berkeley’s Bancroft Library. (For a full description and excerpts, see Laura McCreery’s article in the Fall/Winter 2008 Newsletter.)



The honorees, their families and friends, together with the current justices and Society board members, had the opportunity to mingle at the reception following the ceremony. Board member Doug Littlefield was in charge of invitations, reservations, and the reception, with logistical support from Frederick Ohlrich, board member and Clerk of the California Supreme Court.

A highlight of the occasion was the staging of a photo of 11 justices — the seven current members of the Court and the four honorees. Board member Selma Moidel Smith, who was in charge of photo arrangements, found a propitious moment to secure this historic image. She handed a note to Chief Justice George just as former Chief Justice Lucas had begun his remarks, explaining that she wished to obtain a group photo before one or more justices might need to leave for other scheduled events. Chief Justice George rose and interrupted the former chief justice, saying, “there is only one person who can overrule two chief justices, and that’s our own Selma Smith.” The various justices were quickly arranged — present justices standing, and former justices sitting — and the photo was taken. A framed print now hangs in the corridor of the Court’s historic San Francisco headquarters near the chief justice’s chambers. ★

FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT

*Former Chief Justice Malcolm Lucas,
Chief Justice Ronald George, President David
McFadden and Professor Harry Scheiber*

*Associate Justice Carol Corrigan and
Board Member Joyce Cook*

Laura McCreery and Hon. Manuel Ramirez

Michael Bidart and Ricardo Echeverria

*Oral history book of former Chief Justice Malcolm
Lucas and (center photo) close-up of cover text*

*Associate Justice Marvin Baxter, Mrs. Jane Baxter
and former Associate Justice Edward Panelli*

Board Members Eric Joss and Daniel Grunfeld

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

*Former Associate Justices Armand Arabian,
John Arguelles and Edward Panelli,
and Chief Justice Ronald George*

*Associate Justice Ming Chin and
Board Member Selma Moidel Smith*

Board Member Mitchell Keiter

*Board Members Frederick Ohlrich (Clerk of the
Supreme Court) and Theodore Boutrous*

Board Member Molly Selvin

ALL PHOTOS BY GREG VERVILLE