

From the Oral History of
WILLIAM H. ROSENTHAL

As a member of the California State Assembly, William H. Rosenthal (1907–1991) initiated and carried to passage the bill to create the UCLA School of Law in 1947. He later served for many years as a judge of the Superior Court.¹

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BERNARD GALM (UCLA ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWER): Judge Rosenthal, we're really going to be speaking about the legislation that you introduced to establish the law school at UCLA, but I would like to begin by asking you to state how you arrived in the California Legislature in the first place. What was your background prior to becoming an assemblyman?



WILLIAM H. ROSENTHAL
*Courtesy California State Library,
 Sacramento, California*

¹ For further information, see the Editor-in-Chief's introduction on page 1 of this volume: 11 CAL. LEGAL HIST. 1 (2016).

ROSENTHAL: I was working for the city attorney's office in Los Angeles under Ray Chesebro, the city attorney at that time. I was appointed to that job in 1937. Prior to that I had been working as a practicing lawyer for three or four years. I was appointed at that time to become a trial lawyer, and I was earning the munificent sum of \$105 a month, which was a lot of money at the time. I worked from 1937 in the city attorney's office until 1942, when I decided to run for the vacancy of the State Assembly in my district, referred to as the Fortieth Assembly District, a district in which my brother, Judge Ben Rosenthal, left to be appointed by Governor [Culbert] Olson to the Municipal Court. With that vacancy I kind of decided that I should run for the Assembly, since I was somewhat politically inclined. Politics runs in our family. Both my brothers were in politics. And so I decided to run for the vacancy, which I did. After a very difficult contest I finally won by approximately six hundred votes. I started serving in 1943 at Sacramento.

The first term while I was there I was just a novice and naturally had to learn how to get around. I introduced many pieces of legislation but nothing of any particular note. The second term around I had no opposition at the polls, and I had no opposition for the next five terms, so that I was reelected without opposition, which was very helpful.

In 1945 I introduced a bill on behalf of the UCLA law school because I felt the need for boys and girls who didn't have enough money to go to 'SC [University of Southern California] or some of the other colleges at the time, as Stanford or even up to Boalt Hall [University of California, Berkeley], couldn't drive that far. So I decided it was time to have a law school in Los Angeles County near the major part of the population. I introduced it in 1945, and again being a novice, I didn't know just how difficult it would be. I didn't realize that California was the place where the law schools were maintained. California at Berkeley had all the money and dispersed it in their own way. I didn't realize, of course, that I was bucking a large organization. The bill died in committee. And again, I didn't know why, but I was young and a novice.

GALM: Now, when would you have introduced that bill? In '45?

ROSENTHAL: In 1945. I would say in January, probably, yes.

GALM: And then to what committee would that have been submitted?

ROSENTHAL: To the education committee [Committee on Education].

GALM: I see. Let me ask just one other question: What comprised your district that you represented?

ROSENTHAL: It was the Eastside, commonly referred to as Boyle Heights area, East Los Angeles. A poor district, composed of primarily Jewish people, Mexican people, Negroes, and many, many Asiatics. It was a conglomerate of different ethnic groups.

GALM: And how long had your brother served as assemblyman from that district?

ROSENTHAL: My brother Ben had served there for three terms.

GALM: So, the Rosenthal name was pretty established there?

ROSENTHAL: It was pretty much established, I would think. Nonetheless, I had a very difficult battle the first time, because I ran against the incumbent newspaperman who had access to the newspaper every day, and of course I had nothing.

GALM: Is this a Boyle Heights newspaper?

ROSENTHAL: I think it was called *Eastside Sun* if I remember correctly.

GALM: Who was he?

ROSENTHAL: He was Al Waxman. And incidentally, his nephew is now a congressman from the Fairfax area.

GALM: Henry Waxman?

ROSENTHAL: Henry Waxman. A very interesting observation. But nonetheless, I did win. I then ran as a member of the city attorney's office where I had served for three years or four years. In those days we didn't spend much money like we do today. I think the most I probably spent was \$250, only because that's all I could get — some loaned to me by my brothers, some loaned to me by friends, and very little that you could raise. There wasn't that much interest in politics. I would estimate I spent probably about \$250 in the whole campaign.

Then, as I say, I introduced the bill, and when I lost it in 1945, I re-introduced it in 1947. I introduced it as Assembly Bill No. 1361, introduced [in] the California Legislature, Fifty-Seventh (General) Session. It was numbered 1361. It was introduced by myself as the main author. Assemblyman Vincent Thomas; Vernon Kilpatrick; Glenn Anderson, who is now the congressman from that area and former lieutenant governor and, of course,