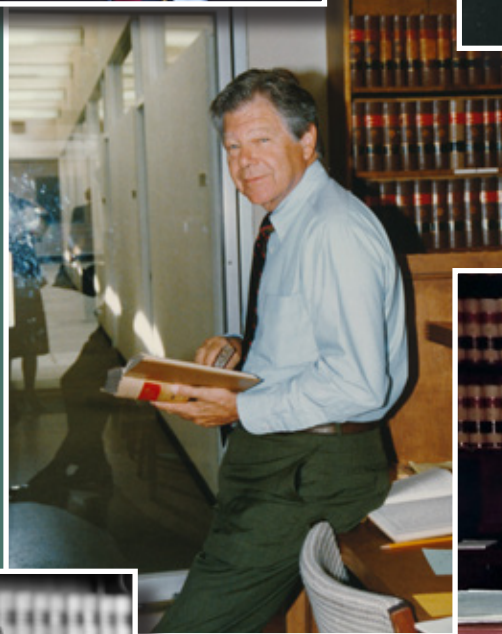


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MAGAZINE



IN MEMORIAM

Arthur Littleworth

MAY 2, 1923 – OCTOBER 18, 2021

IN MEMORIAM: REMEMBERING MR. ARTHUR L. LITTLEWORTH

by John E. Brown and Eric Garner

Mr. Arthur L. Littleworth, a member of the Riverside County Bar Association for more than 70 years, passed away on October 18, 2021. He practiced his entire career with the law firm of Best Best & Krieger. He was a preeminent California water lawyer, recognized nationally, and was called upon as a Special Master to the United States Supreme Court which twice unanimously upheld his decisions.

When Mr. Littleworth, as he was known by his law firm colleagues for decades, just plain, Art, to his friends, arrived in downtown Riverside on October 30, 1950 at the red brick and doomed Evans Building, he had reasons to be optimistic about his and the firm's prospects. Raymond Best had been practicing law since 1891 and founded and managed Riverside's largest title company, Riverside Abstract Company. Eugene Best, his son, following his admission to the California State Bar, joined his father in 1920 and both pursued the general practice of law, specializing in real estate and title law. Eugene Best soon founded the firm's public law practice becoming the City Attorney of both Riverside and Lake Elsinore in the 1920's. Best & Best were joined by John G. Gabbert in 1938 and James H. Krieger in 1946, and when Gabbert was appointed a Superior Court judge in 1949, the firm became Best, Best & Krieger. Gerald Brown and John Babbage joined the firm in 1949. When Art associated with the firm in late 1950, it was one of the oldest law firms in Riverside and San Bernardino counties with some of the most prominent lawyers in the region. Within a decade, they were joined by Enos C. Reid, James B. Corison, Glen Stephens, and Horace C. Coil, among others.

By the time the young Art walked up to the second floor of the Evans Building, he brought to the firm his own academic achievements. Born May 2, 1923, the son of English immigrant parents, he was a native Californian. Raised in Los Angeles, he was the valedictorian of that City's Washington High School and was awarded a scholarship to Yale University. Following his graduation from Yale in 1944, he served in the Navy during World War II, earned a master's degree in history from Stanford University, and graduated from Yale Law School with



Arthur L. Littleworth

honors in 1950. When Art later interviewed new hires at the firm, they all recalled affectionately an office setting right out of central casting. His degrees were framed on the walls, he sat at the secretarial oak desk of Riverside's founder, John Wesley North, with North's leather-bound law books shelved on the entire wall behind him.

When Art and his wife Evie, who had married in law school, returned to Los Angeles after he graduated, he received an offer of employment from the prestigious Los Angeles law firm of O'Melveny & Myers. Before accept-

ing that offer, his friend and fellow Yale graduate, Gerald Brown, invited Art and Evie to Riverside for the weekend. Arthur spent time with both the Bests and Jim Krieger and in years later, Art described Krieger as charismatic and almost evangelical in his belief that the firm could develop a specialized legal practice statewide and even nationally. Following an early morning walk up Mount Rubidoux, Art, a lifelong hiker, decided that Riverside was a great place to raise a family, provided opportunities to make a difference through community involvement, and chances to grow a law firm and his own legal practice. He accepted the firm's offer of employment.

In the 1950's, Raymond Best's 66-year legal career was concluding. On his 86th birthday in 1954, he told local historian, Tom Patterson, that there were several ways to



Passing the Bar Luncheon, circa 1951. Arthur Littleworth (left), Raymond Best (center) and Eugene Best (right) with unidentified secretaries.

achieve fame. “The easiest, the one I practiced, is longevity.” Raymond Best and Eugene Best had established themselves as pillars of the community through their decades of involvement in civic and community affairs, in addition to their long and distinguished careers in both local,



Art with son Todd and daughter Anne.



*Arthur Littleworth and
Michelle Ouellette,
RCBA Installation Dinner, 2004.*



*Peggy and Art Littleworth,
RCBA Installation Dinner, 2015.*

state, and national bar associations. Eugene Best had ended his twelve-year term as Riverside’s appointed city attorney in 1941 and recommended that the city hire a fulltime in-house city attorney. He remained the city attorney of Lake Elsinore into the 1950’s, in part because as an amateur pilot, he enjoyed flying his own Cessna airplane to Lake Elsinore, having reported in a 1946 news story that his commute had been shortened to 17 minutes. In 1954, as new doors were opening for the firm, the Lake Elsinore City Council appointed Art as city attorney to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Eugene Best. During the next twenty years, Jim Krieger and Art became two of the most important water lawyers in California.

Art formed a close professional and personal relationship with Jim Krieger throughout that time. Many have noted that they played to one another’s strengths. Jim Krieger was the more charismatic and outgoing of the two. He had worked as a radio actor in New York City before completing law school. He understood the changing landscape of and need for water in California in the 1950’s. He participated in the formation and representation of some of the largest water districts in the region. For more than 15 years, Jim Krieger served as chairman of the Southern California Water Council. He lent his legal and political advice to the efforts to bring water from northern California to the reservoir in Perris. Important politicians, like then Governor Pat Brown, sought his counsel. He was one of the leaders in the 1960s effort to bring Feather River water into the California Aqueduct. Quieter, more reserved and a legal scrivener of great repute, Art was at Krieger’s side during all those years.

As Krieger moved from one project to another, they were a band of brothers. Art represented Rancho California Water District concerning

the water rights of the United States Marine Corps and Camp Pendleton and was involved in a general adjudication of the Mojave River system. By the early 1960s, devoting himself fulltime to the practice of water law, Art represented the City of Riverside and over 1,000 Santa River area water pumpers in the massive litigation battle over the Santa Ana River and underlying groundwater between San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties. His defense of those water rights against the claims of Orange County Water District settled once and for all in 1969 Riverside’s rights to its principal source of water which are still in effect today. In 1987, his national reputation now established, Arthur was asked to referee a dispute between the States of Kansas and Colorado over water in the Arkansas River by the United States Supreme Court. He would joke that was just as close to being a Supreme Court Justice as one might get without being appointed to the court. When Jim Krieger died in a plane crash in 1975, many credit Art’s leadership, steady hand, and good humor with permitting Best Best & Krieger to soldier on after this tragedy.

Not only a legal scholar, but Art also loved to write. In 1995, he and his co-author, Eric Garner, published *California Water*, which is universally recognized as the most comprehensive and important books on California water law. In 2014, he published *No Easy Way: Integrating Riverside Schools – A Victory for Community*.

From 1958 to 1972, Art served on the Riverside Unified School District’s Board of Education, including 10 years as president. In 1965, he led the effort to integrate Riverside schools, one of the first integrations of a large school District in the nation. He noted later he considered that his most important contribution despite many other civic contributions, including successful efforts



Arthur L. Littleworth



Jack Clarke, Arthur Littleworth and Justice Richard T. Fields, RCBA Installation Dinner, 2019.



The Master



Arthur Littleworth with Cati Porter, Executive Director of Inlandia Institute and Lloyd Porter in 2019.



The Hippie



The Dalai Lama



The Conehead



The Blue Man Group

in 1976 to form the Mission Inn Foundation and save the Mission Inn, service to the University of California Riverside, and numerous other civic awards recognizing his contributions over the decades.

To those of us who were Art's colleagues in his last few decades of practice, his kindness, generosity, and affection for his employees and colleagues were exceptional. Art hosted the firm Christmas parties at his home, and when he stepped away, Santa Claus would make a surprise appearance. He reminded many of us of jovial Mr. Fezziwig in Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in those social settings and was always the first to call out "God bless us everyone." Art's luncheons for firm assistants and paralegals were welcome events and his annual firm Halloween appearances, even into his '90's, were emblematic of his love of people and Best Best & Krieger. His numerous Halloween personas, among others The Blue Man Group, a cone head, Dumbledore, and Olive Oyl will be missed, but not soon forgotten.

Art's wife, Evie, sadly passed away in 1982. His marriage to Peggy O'Neil Shaw in 1994 was an occasion of great joy. Peggy was Art's loving and constant companion during the later years of his life, and the couple remained constant fixtures of Riverside's civic life, of our law firm, and in educational and arts groups throughout the region. And, by the way, those children Art and Evie raised in Riverside, Anne and Todd, turned out just great. Congratulations, Mr. Arthur L. Littleworth!

John E. Brown is Of Counsel to Best Best & Krieger LLP and Eric Garner is the Managing Partner of Best Best & Krieger LLP. Many thanks to Tim Roche and Follow Our Courts for contributing to this article.

