

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

ELMORE MEREDITH

Vancouver

The Bar of British Columbia is continuing an experiment in publicity begun a year ago.

At the annual meeting of the Law Society in 1945 the matter of publicising the service that the members of the legal profession have to offer was brought up for discussion. Those who spoke favoured some sort of publicity and most preferred publicity in the advertising columns of newspapers.

The committee, appointed to study and report following this decision, recommended to the meeting of the Society in 1946 that publicity be proceeded with and that an appropriation be made for space in daily newspapers. The Benchers were, in the result, authorized to plan and put this resolution into effect. An appropriation for the purpose was made, based upon an annual expenditure of \$3,000.

It was considered that the best coverage and value for the money would be to take space in newspapers published in the cities of Vancouver and Victoria. Space was accordingly reserved in week-end editions of these newspapers. The appropriation was sufficient to permit publicity in alternate issues only. An insertion has therefore been made on one week-end in the Vancouver Daily Province and the Victoria Colonist and, on the next week-end, in the Vancouver Sun, the News Herald and the Victoria Times. The cost averages about \$25.00 an insertion.

The advertisements occupy a space four inches wide (that is two columns) by six inches in depth. A format for the advertisements has been evolved, designed to provide as much white space as possible to point-up the written material.

The experience of the Manitoba Bar Association and the State Bar of California has been generously tendered and was drawn upon in planning the campaign.¹

In Manitoba the members of the Bar have by voluntary subscription provided the money for the publicity. In California the script and format is provided by the State Bar Association and is given out to County Bar Associations who may then publish it at their own expense. In British Columbia the cost of publication is assumed by the Law Society. This publicity costs each member of the Bar of the Province approximately \$4.50 per annum.

¹ The Manitoba plan has been described by Samuel Freedman, K.C., *The Diary of Harold Lex* (1947), 25 Can. Bar Rev. 260.

The publicity appears to be popular with most members of the Bar. Some view it as a means of recruiting new business and therefore as of particular benefit to the junior members of the Bar. Others consider it valuable in breaking down resistance to the profession, in impressing upon the public the idea that lawyers are dedicated to service and have an important rôle to play in the life of the community. The publicity is satisfying to some in that it serves to answer the frustration which members of the profession have felt at not being able in some way to answer traducers of the profession.

The following are texts of some of the advertisements which have appeared:

No. 10

LEGAL SERVICE

Subject:

A FRIEND IN NEED

If you are in trouble it is important to get legal advice immediately.

Delay in seeking legal advice and guidance frequently results in matters becoming complicated, and in making the solution more difficult for your lawyer and expensive for yourself.

If the matter is not complicated, legal advice and guidance is available for a small fee.

CONSULT A LAWYER

Published by the Law Society of British Columbia.

No. 12

LEGAL SERVICE

Subject:

THE COMMON LAW

The Common Law of England is a great heritage.

It assures people of Justice in a degree achieved by no other legal system yet evolved.

Lawyers are its guardians and in general are the means through which its great privileges are made available to the people.

A lawyer's knowledge, training and experience are available for a small fee.

CONSULT A LAWYER

Published by the Law Society of British Columbia

No. 13

LEGAL SERVICE

Subject:

FREEDOM

One of the essential freedoms is that lawyers must be free to advocate a client's cause in any forum without fear or favor.

The interest of the legal profession is therefore the interest of all other people.

Lawyers are the jealous guardians of an independent judiciary and of the great heritage of English law.

CONSULT A LAWYER

Published by the Law Society of British Columbia

No. 17

LEGAL SERVICE

Subject:

TOO LATE!

'A stitch in time saves nine' is an adage which applies to legal matters as well as to ordinary affairs.

In special or unusual matters such as taking security for a loan, buying or selling real estate, property, chattels or furniture or leasing property, or entering into partnership — it is wise to take precautions beforehand lest 'the damage be already done'.

You can be advised for a small fee.

CONSULT A LAWYER

Published by the Law Society of British Columbia

We think it important to make the point in the advertisements that the service offered is not expensive, having regard to the magnitude, difficulty and complexity of the subject matter and the special skill involved.

Publicity is an integral part of any public relations programme. To have full effect it should be supplemented by other forms of publicity, such as releases to radio stations and to newspapers and other periodicals. Another possible outlet are the panel discussions in which the Bar Association of the City of Milwaukee is pioneering impressively. Advertising is cumulative in its effect and of little value unless persisted in.

The results of the advertising in the achievement of the designated objectives are not entirely apparent. In fact advertisements have, in reverse, stirred up some readers to cite or play up instances where they feel they have been badly served by lawyers.

New business has undoubtedly resulted in some cases; for example, readers seems to have been made "will-conscious". Once the ice is broken, people, to whom a law office is *terra incognita*, are likely to seek advice and guidance more frequently.

If the profession can be convinced of the value of publicity and the wisdom of pursuing an active public relations policy, members could be found, no doubt, ready to devote the time and effort to a follow-up of newspaper and other advertising: for instance, a planned, skilful and alert policy of press releases through an experienced publicity man on matters of interest and value to the public, and putting the lawyers in a proper light; some reciprocal arrangement, with trust companies, banks and others under which they would agree in their advertising to say a good word for lawyers — more valuable by far than anything lawyers can say for themselves. Aspects and incidents of a law business can be dramatised and published at little or no

cost, emphasizing the valuable part lawyers play in human affairs.

The Committee on Public Relations of the American Bar Association in a report published in 1946 made an analytical and valuable contribution to the subject.

These brief comments on the experiment in British Columbia are offered in the hope that they will be of value to others who may be thinking in terms of publicity.

THE LAWYERS KNOW TOO MUCH

The lawyers, Bob, know too much.
They are chums of the books of old John Marshall.
They know it all, what a dead hand wrote,
A stiff dead hand and its knuckles crumbling,
The bones of the fingers a thin white ash.

The lawyers know
a dead man's thoughts too well.

In the heels of the higgling lawyers, Bob,
Too many slippery ifs and buts and however's,
Too much hereinbefore provided whereas,
Too many doors to go in and out of.

When the lawyers are through
What is there left, Bob?
Can a mouse nibble at it
And find enough to fasten a tooth in?

Why is there always a secret singing
When a lawyer cashes in?
Why does a hearse horse snicker
Hauling a lawyer away?

The work of a bricklayer goes to the blue.
The knack of a mason outlasts a moon.
The hands of a plasterer hold a room together.
The land of a farmer wishes him back again.

Singers of songs and dreamers of plays
Build a house no wind blows over.

The lawyers — tell me why a hearse horse snickers
hauling a lawyer's bones.

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