

William W. “Bill” Daniel and the History of GACDL

- by Rees Smith, Founding Member

It all started in 1970 or 1971 when three distinguished lawyers, all who were former officers or board members of the GTLA (Georgia Trial Lawyers Association.), petitioned the Board of the GTLA for a section for criminal law.

The GTLA was snobbish and looked down their noses at Criminal Defense Lawyers. All three of the petitioners did some criminal defense work but were also well known and successful tort lawyers. They turned the petition down!

The three petitioners decided to start a new organization—hence GACDL was formed. Bill Daniels called a few criminal defense lawyers in the Atlanta area to a breakfast meeting in the cafeteria of the First National Bank Building where Bill had his law office. Bill was an early riser, he already had a prayer breakfast there several mornings a week—mostly lawyers.

Five lawyers showed up. Besides Bill: Glen Fell, Al Horn, Walter Henritze, Richard Rubin and Rees Smith. All agreed it was a good idea and Bill was elected President and Rees was elected Secretary/Treasurer.

By-laws were written and membership was advertised. Response was not overwhelming, even though dues were not expensive. The original group provided “seed money” and the first educational seminar was planned.

The first seminar was held on the top floor of the bank building at the corner of North Avenue and West Peachtree Streets. We planned for about 2-300 students. We also invited the prosecuting attorneys to come. When actually over 1,000 people showed up, we had a problem. The room was large enough and we borrowed chairs from all over the building.

The big draw was Henry Rothblatt, the former NY attorney whose reputation as a trial lawyer and speaker was well known. Henry gave a great motivational talk. He knew it was our first seminar and he spoke to the subject.

As a result of the large attendance, we made much money, even though the fee was modest. We put 10,000 in a savings account and an active operating account for the first time.

John Wright Jones and Walter Ovens recruited members out in the State. Neil Wester of Dalton and Bobby Lee Cook were early vice-presidents and helped obtain many members.

All of the work was done on letters by Bill Daniels from his law office. Remember he had not published his first book or been appointed judge at that time. All of the work of

GACDL was done out of two law offices: Bill and Rees Smith's. Each had only one secretary.

The early years were meager with no outside recognition. The usual administrative procedures were done such as postal permits and legislative monitoring etc. were done by the form people, Bill, Rees and two secretaries.

The seminar that put us on the map was what was called a "Dog and Pony" show. It was a seminar that had one hand-put, the same speakers and was given on separate Saturdays in 8 cities, Atlanta, Dalton, Columbus, Valdosta, Albany, Savannah and Gainesville. Each city had a vice president and made local arrangements and recruited members and attendees. It was a great success!

This time Bobby Lee Cook was the big "Draw." The local city always furnished a speaker, but most speakers came from Atlanta and around the state. GACDL owes a great debt to the speakers as they put GACDL on solid ground!

By the time Bill Daniels first book came out, he was appointed as a Fulton County Superior Court Judge. This did nothing to hurt GACDL. By this time the paperwork, correspondence and other administrative tasks had become too much for the two small law offices, so Colonel Jack Schacter was hired. This began a new era. He was GACDL's first executive director for 13 and a half years, succeeded by Joan Martin for another 13 and a half years.

Without Bill Daniel's leadership, his reputation throughout the state as a good, honest, fair lawyer, but most of all as a great gentleman, the organization would never have flourished and developed as it did.

Whenever I go to a law office and see the GACDL certificate hanging on the wall, I have a great sense of pride, especially when I see my signature, two years as Secretary/Treasurer and one as the second President.



--Rees Smith