



The original portrait and letter from President Teddy Roosevelt are pictured to the right. To the left is a presentation of the history of the jury in Roosevelt's 1915 trial, compiled by Carol Hellwig with help from the Onondaga Historical Society. Photo provided

Teddy Roosevelt's gift after winning trial in Syracuse comes home

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A century ago, Theodore Roosevelt giddily celebrated his triumph in a lawsuit at Syracuse's grand courthouse on Columbus Circle.

The 26th president shook the jurors' arms so enthusiastically it looked like a pump handle, an observer said. Roosevelt offered them each a token of thanks: a signed portrait of himself.

A five-week trial in 1915 pitted the former Republican president — he'd left office in 1909 — against state Republican titan William Barnes Jr., who accused the rough-and-tumble icon of libeling him in the papers. By the end, the jury actually wanted to award Roosevelt money; he requested only \$1.

Barnes, then publisher of the Albany Times-Union newspaper, had sued for \$50,000 — roughly \$1.1 million today when accounting for inflation. Roosevelt's trial, moved from Albany to ensure a fair jury, and attracted a media spectacle akin to the O.J. Simpson trial, said Judge James Tormey, currently the area's top state judge.

Now, thanks to a longtime Syracusan, the community can celebrate a piece of that remarkable history: one of the signed portraits and a personal letter from the president to one of the jurors.

The portrait and letter were put on display this week in the Onondaga County jury room at the new criminal courthouse, across State Street from where Roosevelt celebrated his victory in 1915.

Hundreds of people who report for jury duty each week can now see how much their service means — and how much has changed in 101 years, Tormey said.

Back in 1915, the jurors were all "white, well-to-do men," Tormey said. A photo of the jury in Roosevelt's case accompanies the exhibit.

Starting with the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s, juries have become more diverse, and now strive to represent all backgrounds and walks of life, Tormey said. That's evidenced by the people who report to jury service today, he said.

So how did Roosevelt's artifacts surface? They were donated by Carol Hellwig, of Syracuse, the granddaughter of juror George Boschert.

The successful Syracuse industrialist was immensely grateful for the president's portrait after the trial. But only months later, it was destroyed in a fire at his Tully cottage, Hellwig said.

So Boschert wrote the president, asking for a replacement. Roosevelt wrote him back twice, sending him one. Boschert proudly hung the portrait on his wall and bequeathed it to his son, who then left it to his son.

Boschert was especially fond of Roosevelt's politics, standing up for the common man against big corporate interests. In fact, it was the former president's biting criticism of

the political machine that led him to be sued.

The Barnes lawsuit stemmed from commentary Roosevelt made against "party bosses" and "corruptionists." He accused Barnes of being no better than the infamous Democratic political machine in power at the time.

"The state government is rotten throughout in almost all of its departments, and this is directly due to the dominance in politics of (Democratic leader) Mr. (Charles) Murphy and his sub-bosses, acting through such entirely sub-servient agents as Governors (John Alden) Dix and (Martin) Gynn, and aided and abetted when necessary by Mr. Barnes and the sub-bosses of Mr. Barnes. Mr. Murphy and Mr. Barnes are exactly the same moral and political type. Not one shadow of good comes from substituting one for the other in the control of our government."

Hellwig, the last of her grandfather's line, always planned on giving the portrait to the courts.

"The history belongs to all of us. I think it's high time that it belongs to the community," she said.

Hellwig thought the 100th anniversary in 2015 would make a good year. As it turns out, she was also called for jury service.

During lunch break while on a jury, Hellwig explored the courthouse. She discovered that she was a juror in the very courtroom her grandfather had served in. She was sitting in the very jury box where her grandfather had heard Roosevelt's long, entertaining testimony.

After her trial was over, Hellwig approached the judge. She figured a descendant of another juror would have already donated one of the portraits.

But state Supreme Court Justice Donald Greenwood was astonished. It turned out that he is also the head of the jury board.

Hellwig figured the artifacts would be displayed in the old courthouse. There's already a chair that Roosevelt sat in and other artifacts from the case. They're located in and around a ceremonial courtroom next to Tormey's chambers.

But Tormey insisted that the artifacts should be displayed in the jury room. More people would see them, he argued, and they would be a testament to jury service over the years.

Even the president of the United States can be brought before a jury of ordinary people, Hellwig said of the significance.

During a ceremony Monday in the jury room, Hellwig met two others who also had family connections to the Roosevelt trial: Current City Court Judge Ross Andrews' great-grandfather, Judge William Andrews, presided over the trial and attorney Marion Hancock Fish's grandfather, Stewart Hancock, represented Roosevelt at trial.

"We still all look pretty good," Hellwig joked.



Dedication of new Teddy Roosevelt artifacts at the Onondaga County jury room. From left to right: law librarian Ellen Fuller, Onondaga Community College associate professor and presidential memorabilia collector Dick Woodworth, state Supreme Court Justice Donald Greenwood, City Court Judge Ross Andrews, Carol Hellwig, Fifth Judicial District Administrative Judge James Tormey and lawyer Marion Hancock Fish. Photo provided