



Dean Jackson is sworn in as justice of the Kansas Supreme Court with Professors Ahrens and Bartlett in attendance. Photo from “The Ideal Place... for the Establishment of a Great Law School” History of Washburn Law School, 1903-2003 by James M. Concannon

Washburn Law and the Judiciary

Students are prepared as leaders in the judiciary.

Information compiled from “The Ideal Place... for the Establishment of a Great Law School”

History of Washburn Law School, 1903-2003 by James M. Concannon

It would be impossible to discuss the history of the Washburn University School of Law without also discussing the judges and justices who have shaped jurisprudence after graduating from the institution.

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, alumni have earned seats on the bench—in trial courts and appellate courts, state and federal, throughout Kansas and outside the state—where they have demonstrated that a Washburn Law education is a great preparation for leadership in the judiciary.

Since its earliest days, Washburn Law alumni have served as judges throughout Kansas trial courts, in other states, and abroad. Currently, just over 350 Washburn Law graduates are on the bench, or are retired from the bench, including in every one of Kansas 31 judicial districts and in trial courts in 17 other states. They oversee courtrooms in numerous practice

areas, including tribal, family, bankruptcy, probate, municipal, administrative, criminal, and civil courts. These judges rule on cases every day that impact the lives of people in communities around the state and across the nation, and that impact jurisprudence on the practical level, shaped by the foundations they received at Washburn Law.

The Kansas Supreme Court has boasted a significant number of Washburn Law alumni on its bench. Despite opening 25 years after the University of Kansas Law School, Washburn Law boasts the first three graduates of a Kansas law school to serve on the Kansas Supreme Court – **John Dawson, 1906**, **William A. Smith, 1914**, and **Edward Sloan, 1906** – two of whom, Dawson and Smith, would go on to become Chief Justice. In 1977, **Kay McFarland ’64** was appointed to the Court by Gov. Robert F. Bennett, the first woman to be named to the Court. In 1995, she became the first woman to serve as Chief Justice until her retirement in 2009.

In all, 21 graduates of Washburn Law School have served as a Kansas Supreme Court justice, more than any other law school. Currently, four of the seven seated justices are Washburn Law alumni – **Chief Justice Marla J. Luckert, '80, Eric Rosen, '84, W. Daniel Biles, '78, and Evelyn Wilson, '85.** In recent years, the justices have decided cases regarding school funding, caps on civil damages, voting rights, and most recently, the governor's authority during a pandemic. Through their actions, they continue to affect the Kansas judicial landscape, using their Washburn Law educations to shape jurisprudence in Kansas and the experience of future attorneys coming after them.

Washburn Law has also had a presence on the Kansas Court of Appeals since its founding in 1977. Out of the initial seven judges on the Court of Appeals, four of them – **D. Jerome**

Harmon, '35, Bob L. Abbott, '60, Sherman A. Parks, '55, and Corwin A. Spencer, '39 – graduated from Washburn Law, with Harmon serving as Chief Judge. Since then, many of the judges on the Court of Appeals have been Washburn Law alumni, including five of 12 sitting judges – former **Chief Judge Thomas E. Malone '79, Stephen D. Hill '75, David E. Bruns '84, Anthony J. Powell '91, and Kim R. Schroeder '82.** Two of the 14 seats awaited appointment and senate confirmation as of this article's writing. The numerous judges who have filled Court of Appeals seats over the years have helped set a body of case law within Kansas that has informed how Washburn Law students approach the law during their studies and once they enter their own practice.

On the federal level, Washburn Law alumni have served on U.S. District Court benches in Kansas and elsewhere. Currently,

WASHBURN LAW JUDGES HISTORICAL TIMELINE

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1931

1977

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nine Washburn Law alumni are judges in federal trial courts. Four alumni – **Sam Crow, '52, John Broomes, '03, Tom Marten, '76, and Eric Melgren, '85** – serve as district judges for the District of Kansas. Another three – **Kenneth Gale, '80, Gwynne Harris Birzer, '92, and Kelly Mahoney, '02** – also serve in the District of Kansas as magistrate judges. **Robert Berger, '86**, serves as a bankruptcy judge for the District of Kansas, while **Dennis Dow, '78**, is a bankruptcy judge for the Western District of Missouri. These judges represent Washburn Law on a national level in a way that shows the best of what the school has to offer.

In 2014, **Nancy Moritz, '85** was appointed by President Barack Obama to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. Prior to her appointment, Judge Moritz served on the Kansas Supreme

Court from 2011-14 and the Kansas Court of Appeals from 2004-11. With this history of experiences, Judge Moritz has been a great example for the last 16 years of how Washburn Law impacts the judiciary.

At every level, Washburn Law has had the chance over the last century to create a lasting impression on how the law is interpreted, and applied. Beyond that, these judges provide another great benefit, providing Washburn Law students and recent graduates with opportunities to learn from them through internships and clerkships that impart invaluable experience while helping ensure that Washburn Law will continue to impact the courts across Kansas and around the nation.

Kay McFarland would subsequently become the first woman to serve as Chief Justice until her retirement in 2009.

1995

2014

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