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Museletter

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GILES BEECHER JACKSON AND HIS LIBRARY

By John R. Barden,
Head, Reference & Research Services



In the Special Collections of the Muse Law Library is a row of 29 volumes. The titles might not seem impressive at first glance, because they reflect the routine practice of law in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Virginia: sets of the Virginia Code and its supplements, volumes of Virginia Reports, the American Digest, and so on. These books are significant because of who owned them: Giles Beecher Jackson, one of Richmond's preeminent African-American attorneys in the Reconstruction and "Jim Crow" eras.

Giles Jackson was born into slavery in Goochland County, Virginia, in 1853. After emancipation he moved to Richmond where he found work as a clerk in the law office of W. H. Beveridge. He studied law under Beveridge and was eventually admitted to the bar. There were ample opportunities for law practice in post-Civil War Richmond, and Jackson seems to have argued frequently in both civil and criminal cases, particularly those involving African Americans and their businesses. His collection of law treatises included works on equity, evidence, and taxation.

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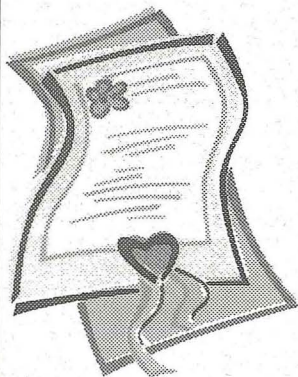
Spring 2005 Regular Library Hours

Sunday
10:00 a.m. - Midnight

Mon.-Thurs.
7:30 a.m. - Midnight

Friday
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday
9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.



Jackson's law practice combined with his other activities--he was editor of the weekly *Negro Criterion* and owned a thriving bakery--to give him considerable influence in the life of Richmond's black community. He became a director of the bank of the Knights of the True Reformers, which enabled him to speak as a leader of the business community as well as a lawyer. He is said to have known every United States President from Ulysses S. Grant through Calvin Coolidge, and Theodore Roosevelt made it a point to call on him in Richmond during a 1907 visit.

Jackson was known as a conservative Republican, which gained him the respect of the conservative white leadership in the city and beyond. Like his correspondent and co-worker, Booker T. Washington, Jackson adopted the posture that African Americans had to earn their economic and social advances on their merits and that certain desired goals, such as reestablishment of voting rights for black men, were not politically feasible in the current climate. If he placed an undue emphasis on the economic gains to be made by African Americans, he was not alone. Jackson was vice president of the National Negro Business League and spearheaded the development of an exhibit in 1907 to coincide with the Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition and focus on "the achievements of the Negroes of this country." The exhibition, a rousing success, provided a showcase for "industrial products combined with academic work." It also provided the basis for a 1908 publication co-authored by Jackson, *The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States*.

While some African-American editors criticized Jackson as an accommodationist for his self-help stance, many white leaders applauded. What the white leaders didn't know, however, was that behind his conservative facade, Jackson worked actively against the segregation laws set in place by the Jim Crow government, especially the laws requiring separate transportation of the type validated by the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In a letter to Booker T. Washington soon after the Court's ruling in *Chesapeake & Ohio Ry. Co. v. Kentucky* (179 U.S. 388), Jackson professed himself "so astounded at the decision of the Supreme Court, sustaining the infamous 'Jim Crow Car Law,' that I have felt as [if] I sustained an electric shock that has paralyzed my energy in the cause; however, I have somewhat recovered and now stand enlisted to assist in making a final effort to remove the cause of these infamous legislations." He went on to invite Washington to speak in Richmond, pledging that two-thirds of the profits of the event would be used to fight "in a cause very dear to you and myself and every other Negro in the land."

Despite his esteemed position in the Richmond community, Jackson had to labor against the prejudices of the day concerning the abilities of African Americans. The local newspaper, the *Richmond Dispatch*, by his own estimation, "seldom ha[d] a good word to say for a Negro," himself included. The Virginia legal press condescendingly filled accounts of his court appearances with regional colloquialisms. These depictions contrast sharply with the letters Jackson wrote to Booker T. Washington, which reveal him as an uncommonly gifted and polished writer.

Jackson's death in 1924 sparked a stream of memorials throughout Richmond, including homages by the *Richmond News Leader* and resolutions from the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, which stressed his "work for harmony" between the races and "his indefatigable efforts for the material advancement" of African Americans.

The surviving portions of his library were donated to the Muse Law Library by his granddaughter.

MERHIGE RECEIVES GATES LITIGATION AWARD

One of the Law School's most noted alumni, retired U.S. District Court Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr., was honored this past October by the American College of Trial Lawyers, which awarded him the Samuel E. Gates Litigation Award for "significant contribution to the improvement of the litigation process." Merhige, who sat on the bench in Richmond from 1967 to 1996, is noted for his role in managing complex litigation, particularly the convoluted "Dalkon Shield" case, as well as for his role in expediting causes in his courtroom, which helped earn the Eastern District of Virginia the nickname "Rocket Docket."

Judge Merhige was delighted to add this to his long list of honors, which also include the Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Award for Professionalism and Ethics, given to him by the American Inns of Court in 1993 for "exemplary service in the areas of legal excellence, professionalism and ethics." Judge Merhige is only the second person to win both of these awards, a distinction he shares with the late Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.

Judge Merhige's Gates and Powell awards are on display together in the Robert R. Merhige, Jr. Special Collections & Rare Books Room, which houses the Judge's papers, as well as the Law Library's other special collections. -JRB

American College of Trial Lawyers

The American College of Trial Lawyers is an organization whose membership is comprised of the best of the trial bar in the United States and Canada. Association is by invitation only. Invitations are issued to "experienced trial lawyers who have demonstrated exceptional skill as advocates and whose professional careers have been marked by the highest standards of ethical conduct, professionalism and civility."

<http://www.actl.com>

Legislative History at the Movies: *The Aviator*

In *The Aviator*, Howard Hughes and Senator Ralph Owen Brewster (Alan Alda) spar in a hot Congressional hearing about the legislation that would create a monopoly for Pan American Airlines, putting Hughes' TWA out of business. (Neither exists today!) Based on a recent interview for the CBS Early Show, Alda told Hannah Storm that the script was "almost verbatim" from the hearing transcript. Apparently it was the first time Congress filmed a hearing.

That scene actually ended the three-hour movie of Hughes' life, beginning with his megalomaniac tendencies in creating the film *Hell's Angels*, where he extended his family wealth to near bankruptcy. The movie was huge with fabulously choreographed nightclub scenes from the Coconut Grove, and nail-biting scenes of Hughes when he tested new aircraft, including the "Spruce Goose."

Searching for the legislative history proved tricky. Our favorite source, the *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* is not an option in this case, since the proposed resolution did not pass. I used the *CIS US Congressional Committee Hearings Index* for the period 1945-1952 (the hearings were in 1947 – a search in the *New York Times* Historical Index helped me find the year). The names index did not list Howard Hughes. I searched in the subject index under Civil Aeronautics entries and found nothing that appeared to be relevant. I then searched under "Pan American World Airways" and found an entry: "Brewster, Sen Owen, alleged offer to drop investigation of Howard Hughes airplane contracts in exchange for Pan Amer Airways-Transcontinental and Western Air merger (80) S844-8." The document entitled "Investigation of the National Defense Program: hearings before a special committee investigating the National Defense program, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, First Session Pursuant to S. Res. 46" included 180 pages of Hughes' testimony. The other option is the "historical indexes" link in the LexisNexis Congressional database, accessible through the library intranet. That service provided the same information as the print index, and had more search flexibility.

I enjoyed the movie, and recommend spending the money to see it on the "big screen." –gfz

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