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*'A Thousand to One:'*

*the story of Emilie N. Wanderer the first woman to practice law in Las Vegas.*

Emilie N. Wanderer and Joanne L. Goodwin

Las Vegas (Nevada) Women Oral History Project  
Women's Research Institute of Nevada  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
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## PREFACE

Emilie Norma Cohen first discovered her interest in the field of law as a high school student when she heard Clarence Darrow speak. His views on equality, civil liberties, and modern legal theory captivated her as a young woman and motivated her as a young attorney. She left the Boston area to study law at Fordham University School of Law in New York on the eve of the Great Depression. Forced to leave school in 1931 because of financial hardships, she nevertheless passed the New York State Bar exam. She volunteered with a distinguished group of female attorneys at the New York City Magistrate's Court and began her professional association with the National Association of Women Lawyers. While in New York, she met and married Henry Wanderer and gave birth to three sons. Seventy years later, Wanderer remembered the difficulties that had accompanied her legal education. Giving back to the community in which she made her home, Emilie Wanderer made a major gift to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas of one-half million dollars, most of which created an endowment for law student scholarships.

In 1946, Wanderer and her three sons set off on a cross-country trip with the intention to move to Arizona where the dry climate had been recommended for her son Philip's asthma. They stopped in Las Vegas on the way and the town of 20,000 became the family's home. With only 26 attorneys in town at the time, Emilie Wanderer believed that room existed for a woman attorney. She also recalled that some residents bet "a thousand to one" that she would fail and be gone in six months. Instead, Wanderer passed the Nevada state bar with two other women, Nellie Price and Charlotte Harner Arley, and was among the first 23 women admitted to the state bar. She was the first woman to

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establish a law practice in Las Vegas when she opened her first office in 1947.<sup>1</sup> She raised her three sons on her own as her husband remained in New York City.

Pioneering a field is rarely glamorous and although her practice flourished, she encountered numerous challenges in the small desert town. As she told a reporter for the *Las Vegas Sun* in 1999, "What chance did a Jewish woman from New York with no law degree and three young sons have in succeeding as a lawyer in Las Vegas in 1947? "In those days, women weren't welcome in the bar association," confirmed Wayne Blevins, executive director of the Nevada Bar Association in 1999. The small number of female attorneys in practice reflected the traditions and prejudices of those days. Yet, Wanderer was clear that her efforts paved the way for others. "I never thought of myself as a pioneer, but you never know what is going to happen in life."<sup>2</sup>

Wanderer accepted a variety of cases including criminal, inheritance, divorce, and child custody. Her first case in Nevada made headlines when the accused murderer claimed that God had told him to get "Lady Wanderer" to represent him. She served the Las Vegas chapter of the NAACP as legal counsel and president between 1948 and 1950. She worked to expand the "rights of the child" through the creation of the family court, particularly through her national organization ties. The president of the National Association of Women Lawyers appointed Wanderer to the organization's family life committee to investigate the creation of family courts in states where they did not exist, which included Nevada. During the 1950s, Wanderer worked with others to secure a family court in the state with a social worker and marriage counselor on staff. "It is the responsibility of the community as a whole to preserve the sanctity of the home" she told a reporter in 1955.<sup>3</sup> She ran for judgeships a number of times, but failed to secure a place

at the bench. She also served as president of the Nevada Chapter of the Federal Bar Association for the 1970-1971 term.

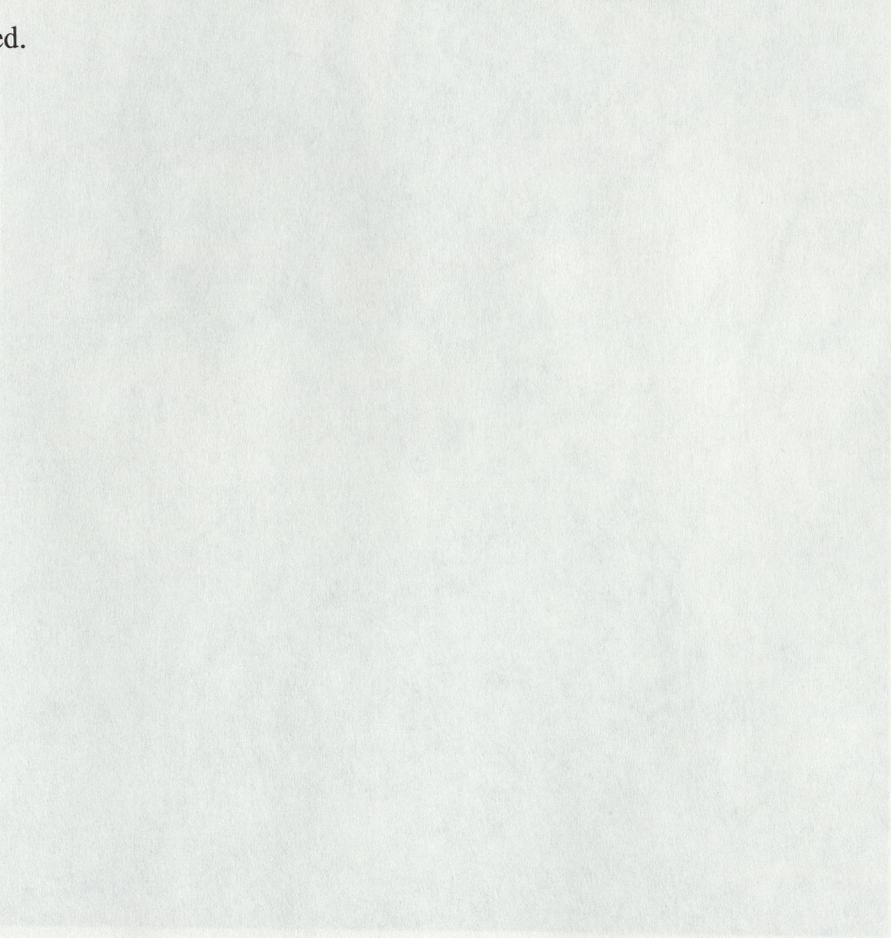
Emilie Wanderer and John Wanderer became the first mother-son team to practice law in Nevada when John joined the practice in 1974. After graduating from UNLV in 1971, he attended law school at Arizona State University in Phoenix and graduated cum laude in 1974. He was admitted to the Nevada State Bar October 10, 1974.<sup>4</sup> John continued the firm that his mother started when she retired from the practice in 1981. Her first son David died in 1978 at the age of 45. Philip is a businessman in Boulder City. Emilie Wanderer passed away March 3, 2005.<sup>5</sup>

Although it took decades, Nevada women began the process of integrating the field of law: entering and completing law school, opening law practices, and getting elected to judicial positions. Many of those women who worked in the field during that time knew Emilie Wanderer. She served as a mentor to many of them.

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The following narrative evolved from a series of interviews with Emilie Wanderer at her home in Las Vegas in February 2000. Although preliminary background research had been conducted and an interview outline constructed, no personal or professional archives from Mrs. Wanderer were available at the time. Consequently, the interviews did not follow an explicit chronological trajectory. Some subjects were covered with slightly different commentary in subsequent interviews. Several areas needed supplementary research from traditional historical sources. Specifically, a substantial amount of attention was dedicated to filling out the interview with archival research in newspaper files. In

addition, John Wanderer generously provided his personal collection of newspaper clippings, photos, and other documents later in the process. He assisted me by providing names, dates and other important details to the best of his knowledge. The interview that follows combines Emilie Wanderer's account in an edited narrative with additional documentary sources added. These sources have been placed in notes to disrupt as little as possible the original account given. As such it is unlike other contributions to the series on oral histories of women in Las Vegas because the transcript has been considerably reorganized.



*Emilie Wanderer with her three sons around the time of their arrival in Las Vegas.*

*Courtesy of John Wanderer*



Emilie Wanderer with her three sons around the time of their arrival in Las Vegas.

*Courtesy of John Wanderer*

## The Formative Years

I was born in Boston April 8, 1910. There was no record of it, there was no birth certificate. My mother had a midwife and sometimes they neglected to file the birth certificate.<sup>6</sup> When I got a passport, they figured out my age from other members of the family. I was the youngest of eight children and one of my sisters sort of took me over. She was the one that took me to nursery school. She talked them into admitting me; they didn't think that I was old enough. She gave them an age that she thought. [Chuckles] No one really ever knew. She had married at an early age and so she adopted me — she would do everything for me.

My mother, Sara [Ginsburg] Cohen, was born in Germany, Hanover, I think. She came over to the United States as a young girl. She had relatives that were friends and relatives of my father's. They met at a family function and he fell in love with her. She was very beautiful.

My mother's family had many rabbis in it. For nine generations without interruption, the men had been rabbis. In fact, one of my mother's cousins, the man after whom I was named, had studied to be a rabbi, and he went to London and he married Lady Asquith. They had a school where he taught Hebrew and his wife taught English. That was one of the professions that they invaded, too. They're a cultural people. My mother had a very big family in Boston. One of her cousins became the first Jewish man elected to the upper courts in Boston, Judge Lurie. He's very well known. They are nice people. They had prominent doctors and lawyers -- that was the badge of merit in those

days.

My father, Philip, was born in Poland on the border with Germany. When he found that he was going to have to go in the army, he left. He worked his way over to the United States. I don't remember much about his family. I knew that his nephew became a very successful doctor and they had relatives that were in the professions. Yes. Many of our early settlers were from the people of the soil, but in our family, they were destined to be professional people. Both of my brothers were patent attorneys and lawyers and had been assistants in the United States Patent Office. My father didn't enlarge upon his abilities, but he was a very self-sufficient person. He had modest skills, manual skills. My children are like that; the three of them used to read mechanical publications the same way kids would read comic books. I didn't let them have comic books. Of course, they had been brought up in a home where copies of cultural publications were scattered all over the place.

My mother had eight children, but she didn't raise eight. The first child passed away, died from a convulsion. There was one after me that didn't survive. But I was the last one. She raised six of us, and it wasn't canned food. She used to plant and grow things and everything was homemade. And she sewed. She was very active in household things and crafts and things like that.

Our home was in the country. We had a lot of trees and gardens and there were sheds in back, or barns, or places for our animals; we had horses and all kinds of animals. We lived very close to the Dutch land Farms. They were famous for their Holstein cattle. You've heard of Fred Fields Holstein Company? They were our next-door neighbor a couple of miles down the road.

My father manufactured soft drinks. He knew the Kennedys. One reason he moved away from the city was that he couldn't stand the political air. Joe Kennedy, he was very politically active. They came from South Boston, which was not the elegant part of Boston. They had a lot of money and a lot of political clout. My father got into liquor distribution before I was born. They limited the number of licenses they would issue and they told him that if he wanted a license, he had to give them \$20,000. So he remembered the words of Patrick Henry and he said "Millions for defense and not one cent for tribute." And he said "to hell with you and your license," and he moved from Boston out to an adjoining county, where he found this house, a big yard, and he set up his business there. He went on to manufacture soft drinks and he had a very good business going. He started out like Coca Cola Company, but it was called Philips Beverages.

I don't remember much about my school. It wasn't a big place, but it wasn't *too* country. We had to walk across a ravine on our way to school and there was a bridge there. Sometimes the kids would fall in the water, sometimes they would play instead of going to school. There was a great big estate that I remember where we used to play on the lawn. It was a nice life. Love for education was in your genes. I guess we took it for granted that you were going to go on and study and apply yourself.<sup>7</sup>

I had three sisters. There would have been five, but the first girl died. So there were four girls and two boys, because another boy had not survived. My brothers became lawyers. They first studied engineering at M.I.T. and then they went to law school and became patent attorneys. My brother Carl was the first patent attorney for RCA. He was the one that negotiated the patent with the inventor of the bulbs. They were assistant commissioners of patents in Washington, D.C. And that's how they went into patent law.

And my brother Harry was the partial inventor and patent attorney on the machine known as Technicon, and that was the machine that they used in the hospitals — with one drop of blood, they could do 40 tests. And the government recently got an action against a big hospital because they had charged separately for each blood test when they were supposed to have done it collectively.

My sisters married and had cultural projects that they did. My older sister wanted to be a doctor and she was aiming for that one until my father got sick. Everybody else in the family had marital obligations. And so she passed up her chance for an education and stayed home to help take care of my father until the time of his death. She had one child.

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We fortunately had an employee who had worked in the family, a Negro man (and he used to fool us and tell us that he was half white because he showed us the inside of his hands were not brown). Jack worked with her — helped — took care of her son. She gave up her studies and stayed home with my father.

In high school I had taken the cultural course — languages and sciences and things like that. I had a pretty good course in physics, things like that. Those were the things to which I gravitated. My family never tried to influence me to do one thing or another. I was old for my age. And I took myself very seriously. I wore flat heels and combed my hair back, and I wore glasses when I didn't need them, because I wanted to be taken seriously. Then my sister got hold of me

and started to remake me -- to get me to be a little more socially attractive. Meanwhile, I had laid a foundation intellectually. I took myself very seriously and others took me very seriously. I considered it a distinct honor to be on the debating team with the dean of the law school at Harvard University (I forgot his name at the moment). So those were the things that interested me the most.

I had a relative, the nephew of an aunt to whom I was very much attached, who used to hang around with his family. He thought I was cute and he used to like to do things with me. We used to talk about books and things like that. When he went to Harvard, he used to take me -- I was in high school then -- he would take me to hear some of the lectures. I went with him on several occasions to hear Clarence Darrow speak. I remembered Darrow's ideology of fair play; that everybody is entitled to the extent of the benefits that have been prescribed by the existing enactments and that people shouldn't be carried away by the lesser demand, but should keep those goals before them. I thought he was great and his ideas about decent conduct, his interest in the community as a whole, and his dedication to people who needed help. He challenged the cultural notion that women should have different protections from the court because of their sex. . Some attorneys tried to make the case that their female client deserved different treatment because she was in fact a mere woman. "What can you expect of a woman? She's defenseless in the world of humanity as it is presently constituted," they might argue. Darrow came out and said, "Forget all that hogwash. No one has such fury as a woman scorned." If she commits the crime she bears the burden of the punishment.

It was an era when people's minds were being broadened. Narrowness was being relegated to the ash heap and they were adopting new thoughts, because people like

Darrow were propounding certain things. I thought, "Well, this is what a lawyer should be like. What difference does it make if you are a man or a woman? That's what law really is." He probably did more to plant the seed of being a lawyer in my mind, but I wasn't quite old enough to get into a preparatory program.

My parents' values also shaped my commitment to social justice issues. My parents were very open-minded. They treated people according to what they were worth as people. I don't mean their financial worth, but their character, their morality, their aims in life, their relationships with other people. And they treated them in accordance with the niche that they belonged in, and not to relegate them to their race, color, creed, or religion. My father had started on a religious note and abandoned it for business because he had a family to support. And my mother was a very sweet person and very friendly to everybody; everybody loved her. Her greatest pleasure was when the family would bring their friends home and she would have an opportunity to extend her hospitality to them. So when you're brought up in that environment with that kind of people, the pettiness that some people engage in becomes excess baggage.

After high school I went to Massachusetts Normal Arts School for a couple of years and studied design — costume design. If I had wanted to follow through on that subject, I would have had to go to New York City. The garment industry was located in New York. But I was young and the family wouldn't hear of it. So, I stayed home as a good child and I decided to go to law school. I went to Northeastern for a year of law school because they didn't require a degree -- anybody could go there. I finished the year and passed the exams, but when I got to New York and I wanted to matriculate at Fordham, I found out that they wouldn't give me credit for that year, and I had to take it

over again. And I said, "So what?" I found it comparatively easy the first year, because I had a pretty good year of training at Northeastern. I don't know when Northeastern became recognized, but it later became Portia Law School.<sup>8</sup> I didn't keep in touch with Northeastern, because naturally I wasn't in love with it after I had spent a year paying tuition that I had earned and worked my own way through, I had to take it over again.

Well, I came to New York in 1929 to attend Fordham's Law School. I was still single. I lived at home and commuted, because my whole family came to New York. The boys had finished their education and they were on their way, and there were the three sisters. One had a job in New York that she got, a good job. And another one was married and had a husband and she designed millinery. And then the one that was studying medicine gave that up to concentrate on taking care of my father. In those days, girls didn't expect to live in apartments by themselves. I stayed at home until I was married. We lived in an apartment house up near the George Washington Bridge overlooking the Hudson River. We had a big apartment for the whole family less the boys who were in Washington. It was a 20-minute ride on the subway. Sometimes I used to go down on the bus if I got up early enough. But if I had to hurry I would go in the subway.<sup>9</sup>

I attended Fordham from 1928 to 1930. There were seven women in school at the time and about 150 students. But I was too busy to have much social life. I used to dash across the street to go to work as soon as the lecture was over. And there was no social life because the social life of Fordham was at the university before the people got to law school.<sup>10</sup> Of course, 1929 was the year of the bank closures. The political scene was being modified. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was Governor of New York and about to campaign for President. There were developments all around. Of course, I didn't have too much

opportunity to become a political student; I had enough to do to work and go back and forth; and obligations at home, too. It was an amazing time.

The professors that I had at Fordham were all outstanding people. One was John Lahr, who later became an appellate court judge. Professor Werner was a disabled professor with a speech impediment and a hearing problem who taught contracts. He gave the most wonderful course in contracts. I used to love to hear him because he was so careful to enunciate properly when it was an effort for him. And he was so brilliant. They were a very wonderful group of people. In fact, I get a lump in my throat because I feel so grateful and so inadequate, and it was such a privilege to have had them.

I had my first job in the legal field with the U.S. Attorney. I think that if I hadn't been going to school with this wonderful group of people who were known to the people in the United States Attorney's office [U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of N.Y.], they wouldn't have wanted me. I think that they just felt that they would benefit from the exposure that I was getting, being taught by these people. I would dash across the street from the Woolworth Building to the district attorney's office. I was supposed to work until 6:00; sometimes I'd work until 7:00. I never watched the clock. It depended on what I was doing. I never was a clock-watcher, except to get to the office on time, because I was so afraid that they might find it wasn't a profitable arrangement. I didn't realize that they really had a good deal going. They had good services for the big sum of \$35 a week.

When I started in New York, there weren't many professional women around., We were all struggling, trying to get a foothold in the field of endeavor where we could see opportunities to do some good for the world. After law school, I worked with Anna Kross, the first woman appointed to the magistrate's court in New York City. She was a

rarity. She had this flock of young women who wanted to be lawyers, still wet behind their ears as far as legal practice was concerned, and gave them an opportunity to get into court and to get a feel for the actualities of practicing law. She organized the group to work in the Magistrate's Social Service Bureau. Most of the people in the women's court were taken into custody and thrown into cells, and if they couldn't afford a lawyer, they would get no help at all. Women were treated like chattel and were not given the protection that the laws anticipated for them. There were prostitution cases, but also any kind of case. If a woman was involved, she went to the women's court.

I heard about the project when I was invited to attend a tea or something where Kross spoke. She was very inspiring and very definite about the need in this branch of the jurisprudence. There were quite a few young women who were very happy to cooperate with her. And we didn't feel that the money was the only thing to consider, it was the need.<sup>11</sup> She got these young girls all gung-ho about doing right by Little Nell, who had gone astray, and who would fight for their rights until it became a modus operandi for them. And eventually, there were more women who realized that it was the way it should be. When I passed the bar [in 1931], I was delighted to make my services available.<sup>12</sup>

I had one very important case of a woman whose sister was a doctor with whom I had been friendly. The sister was a victim of a frame-up by a doctor. He recruited the doctor's older sister, who was looking for a companion-governess job. She was a widow and had not been trained for anything. She had no help from family, so she was very happy to go to work for a doctor, because her sister was a doctor and she thought that these were good people. When this doctor hired her as a companion to his two children, and to help with light duties, taking the children to school and so forth, she just took the

job and was very happy. But she didn't know the trouble it was going to get her into.

After she had been with the doctor for about a week, he and his wife decided to go out for dinner, and they explained to her about how the children were going to be, and to take care of them, and where they were going to be. Shortly after they left, she smelled smoke and she ran to the master bedroom and she found a fire in there. She immediately called the fire department and they started an investigation. The doctor insisted that there had been a lot of money in one of his wife's garments and it had been removed.

They accused her of taking that money and accused her of having set the fire, and they threw her in the slammer in the woman's jail.

Who was the doctor's sister going to call? Me. So I went down there. I figured the thing out and I thought it was a very serious thing. But I didn't feel that I was in a position to take the responsibility entirely for this woman. So anyhow, I got her set up with a very prominent girl who was practicing in the community where it happened. We got her working and it turned out that this doctor — not my friend, but the father of these children — was in serious financial trouble. He saw a chance to have a loss in his home where he could recover money on the alleged stolen funds as well as the funds to cover the fire damage.

We got her cleared with a struggle. They held it over for trial and it was a lengthy trial. I participated only as a friend and did some research on it and showed the interest in her. In other words, the lawyer that had been hired couldn't possibly have been influenced by the prosecution to sell the client out for a plea. So, she actually went to trial and I helped during the trial and got her off. But we needed people to do that sort of thing. This was the reason Judge Kross had formed the Magistrates' Social Service Bureau and gotten young women attorneys involved.

In other words, wherever there was the necessity for legal assistance and there was no money to pay for it, we of the Magistrate's Social Service Bureau were delegated. But it was something that was invaluable, because it was something on which to cut our judicial teeth, and to find out the workings of these areas, what to look for and what to guard against. So as a result, it was a great help. These women attorneys started it, and then they started getting opportunities to put their activity where their ambition was. And then they realized that it was a political thing, and they started using political advantages to get recognition. I continued with the Magistrate's Social Service Bureau from the time right after I was admitted to the bar until I left New York — a matter of a few years.

I was a woman but I didn't take special privileges of a woman. You know, I went in as a businesswoman. I wore businesslike clothing — suits, and I wore hats, and I wore gloves, and I carried a briefcase and I wore my "orthopedic shoes" as I called them. And I didn't cry-baby before the judge. If I disagreed with him, I would let him know the basis of it and do it in what I thought was the right way to do it. I never went into court and said, "I want you to treat me like a man" either [laughs]. A woman said that one time and the judge said, "OK, we'll give you 60 days instead of 30 days." Well, that's it.

he met Around this time, I met my husband, Henry Wanderer, at a wedding. A girl I knew who was a lawyer was marrying a doctor who was a friend of my husband. And so he was the best man and I was maid of honor. He was a graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans. We became friends, then were married on May 5, 1931.

My husband came to the United States as a little boy with his father, [Maurice] Vandervelt. They changed the name to Wanderer because people would joke with him about it, and say, "Are you trying to mimic the Vanderbilts?" See, Vandervelt and Vanderbilt. So he started calling them Wanderer, the name they were known by in Germany. They were a very active family, not only in Germany but in Antwerp and the satellite countries. The family manufactured automobiles and typewriters. They were like Remington Rand here. During the Second World War, Hitler took over their factory. That's where they manufactured the Audi and the Volkswagen, and they changed the name of it. But when I traveled in Germany with Philip when he graduated from grammar school, I took him to Europe with me. Every place we went, they told me they knew the family, the Wanderers. That's the name they went under. But his grandfather on his father's side had tried to get away from the stigma of being accused of changing the name from Vandervelt because they had translated it literally.

His mother, Jennie [Greene] Wanderer, was one of the first women in New York who was active in building and things like that. She wasn't an architect. She had to hire the architect. She built her house on Third Street, on the East Side in New York [Manhattan]. That was downtown. And that's where she lived up to her death. She was an outstanding woman. She had been married, had six children, and then her husband died. Then she met my husband's father, Maurice Wanderer. He had never been married before

he met Jennie. She was a cute little person, round, short, and fat; very businesslike, very smart, very self-sufficient. So he married her and they had my husband.<sup>13</sup> In fact, I think that is what probably attracted Henry to me was the fact that he knew that I was a professional woman, and he had been brought up by a woman who was very self-sufficient.

I had been married almost two years when my father came to live with us [in Yonkers, NY]. My husband had diagnosed his condition better than the specialist that they had on it. So less than six months before my father died, he came and lived with us so my husband could take care of him. My mother and my sister and her child took an apartment nearby. I spent my second anniversary in the hospital, having my first son.

My professional organization was the NAWL [National Association of Women Lawyers]. That group made a big contribution toward the passage of the women's [suffrage] vote bill. I think that was in 1920. That's when it came into prominence. Adele I. Springer was president when I was involved. She was a little older than I was. Adele sort of took me under her wings and she brought me into these things. It was their investigation that found Nevada was one of the only states without a family court. So they appointed me chairman of the committee on family life to do something about it.<sup>14</sup> I was still in New York at the time.

We were having our regional conference set for April in 1945 and we had to postpone it because we had asked Eleanor Roosevelt to be our speaker. When the President died that spring, she cancelled her functions. So we had her speak in April of 1946. Then in July, I left New York.

### *The National Association of Women Lawyers*

In 1899, 18 women attorneys in New York City formed The Women Lawyers' Club which became the National Association of Women Lawyers in 1923. In 1911, the organization began a publication, the *Women Lawyers' Journal*, which continues in publication today. The first professional organization for women attorneys focused on professional issues specific to women as well as legal issues of concern to women in general. Laws determining divorce and marriage, property rights of married women, and labor laws drew the support and dedication of organization members. Similarly, the NAWL participated in the national campaigns for woman suffrage, women's right to serve on juries, the establishment of women judges, and for the equal rights amendment.

See Selma Moidel Smith, "The First Fifty Years," reprinted in the *Women Lawyers' Journal* 85:2 (Summer 1999), n.p. available at <http://www.abanet.org/nawl/about/history.html>.

## New to Las Vegas

I left the first of August and I spent 30 days traveling. I got here just before Labor Day. I had an old Ford for the trip out. [laughs] I wouldn't dare call it a car. I had owned an Oldsmobile, a real cute one, a two-seater with a rumble seat. My husband had a five-seater because he was the head of the family. So then the war came and we couldn't get gasoline. My husband could get it on account of his profession, but lawyers didn't count. I didn't feel it was ethical to cut corners to get gasoline, so I sold my beautiful Oldsmobile for about \$900. A couple of years later, when I decided that I was going to get my son out West come heaven or high water, I used that money to buy a broken-down flivver, a nickname that they used to give to these old Fords. It was a five-passenger Ford. My boys were thirteen, nine, and six. Oh, they loved it. Two of us sat in the front and two boys and baggage in back, and baggage on the roof. It's a wonder that I wasn't attacked or that the things weren't stolen when I checked in at motels on the way out.

We stopped at lots of different places and saw interesting things all the way out. I had never driven any distance by myself, so it was quite an experience. I had never done mountain driving before. So it was something new to me. I was scared stiff that I wasn't going to make it. We were interested in all the geographically prominent and important places. We wanted to see Salt Lake, because that was a big thing. In fact, we broke down in Utah. That was my introduction to a Mormon family, too. They towed me into their place and fixed the car so I could get as far as the next town. We spent a few days there and the boys loved it. And they were such good kids. I had no problems with them.

Everybody called them "the musketeers," one for all and all for one, and they were for

each other.

I was headed for Arizona. I would not have had to take the bar exam there, because that was the last year that the state of Arizona allowed lawyers from other states to be admitted on motion. (That was the way they admitted me to the bar in Illinois years later.) I didn't know much about Las Vegas and wasn't particularly anxious to be in Las Vegas. But en route, I had started hearing rumblings about the advantages of being here. I came here merely to visit the dam and show it to the boys, and then go on to Arizona. I would have gone to Phoenix if I hadn't had the experience of coming to Las Vegas first and seeing what there was here and being offered a job. I was so tired of driving. My trunk with clothing for the four of us had been shipped to Phoenix. I had to have that transferred to Las Vegas later on.

I came in on the main highway in August 1946. And it was such a small town, it was amusing. I had never seen anything like downtown -- all the gambling places -- I had never seen gambling places. It really was a hubbub. I had arranged to meet a friend of my brother at the Frontier Hotel. So when I got to [Las Vegas], my flivver loaded down with children and baggage, I asked somebody where the Frontier was. They said, "Lady, you want to go to the Frontier?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "That's no place for children. You'd better go out on the Strip." And what he meant was to the [Hotel Last] Frontier.

The first night, I got as far as the Strip and Oakey Boulevard. I thought I was lost, that there couldn't be anything else, and I checked into the Old West motel. That was a rattrap and it must have been dirty, because during the night my Philip had a terrible

attack of asthma. And there wasn't a doctor, or any place I could take him. There was a sleepy guy at the desk, and he didn't know anything about doctors. He said they don't need doctors at night. And he said "There's a hospital out on Charleston." So I went out on Charleston at 2:00 in the morning. Left the two older boys asleep and took Philip to the hospital. I asked the nurse if she could get a doctor for me. She said no doctor would be out at that hour. Anyhow, she kept me talking for a long time. I didn't have any more adrenalin. I used to give him a shot of adrenalin whenever he got an attack. She said she couldn't give it to him, because she wasn't licensed. And I said, "Well, sell me an ampule of it, because I know what to do with it and I know how to give it."

She said, "I couldn't do it."

I said, "Well, put it down on your desk and I'll steal it."

So anyhow, that's how I happened to stay in Las Vegas. That's why I'm telling you this. So she turned her back and let me steal the ampule, and I gave Philip the shot. I know how to do it, just how to rub his arm with alcohol and pinch the skin together and all of that business that my husband had trained me to do. And we sat and talked for over two hours, and she couldn't understand what I was doing by myself at night. She said women don't go off by themselves at night.

The next day we went out on the Strip and it was empty. The only hotel that was there was the El Rancho, and then a little further out was the Last Frontier. And then after I was there for a little while, they started building the Bingo Club. So, I went out on the Strip to the Hotel Last Frontier. I was able to get two rooms with no trouble at all.

The big thing was that I had been told to contact doctors that practiced here — Dr. Harry Fightlin and Dr. Joseph Chenin. They had lived in Phoenix with their children. Dr.

Fightlin supported the idea of moving to Las Vegas. "They could use a lady lawyer here," he said. "Aside from that, Phoenix is not a good place for asthmatics. I lived in Phoenix with my children when they first began irrigation there and they didn't have it under control the way it is today." His children were asthmatics and the effects of irrigation in Phoenix on the children were very, very bad. So he said, "I wouldn't recommend that you go to Phoenix." Then I spoke to Dr. Chenin and he told me the same thing. So on the advice of those two doctors, and being offered a job, and being tired and anxious to rest, we stayed in Las Vegas.

In 1946 there were only 60 Jewish families in Las Vegas. My husband had inquired about coming here and was told, "Well, they won't let you practice." Dr. Chenin had been a captain at Nellis and stayed here and practiced in the city. He told me that before he became active in dental circuits, they would not give a Jewish candidate an application to apply for a license to practice dentistry. He said that he understood my husband's reluctance to come here. Dr. Fightlin, who was taking care of my children, told him that he would probably have trouble getting a license to practice because he was Jewish.

When I came to Nevada, I found one of the two people that they had given me to contact about the Family Court, Felice Cohen. She was the only woman practicing in Reno, and she was very, very negative, and said, "Don't stay. You won't do any good. And if you get admitted, you'll have trouble, and especially because you're Jewish. You don't look Jewish and they're not going to think that you are. But when they find out, they won't forgive you because they'll think that you tried to hide it."

Well, I'm Jewish, but I never denied it. And they said that I had denied it. If I had

denied it, I wouldn't be teaching at the Sunday school. And I used to belong to the sisterhood of the temple. I tried to get my children to go to Sunday School, but they wouldn't. They had gone to Sunday School before we came out here, and their father disapproved of it.<sup>15</sup>

Since Dr. Fightlin and this other doctor had vetoed the efficacy of Phoenix because of the irrigation factor, I said, "I should stay here." And [my husband] said, "Well, I won't come. I'm not going to take an examination after 15 years." I said, "Well, I can't tell you what to do." I said, "But if you do, your family will welcome you. If you don't, we'll get along." I waited a long time before I got a divorce from him. It was on the simple grounds of incompatibility. The children were older and not concerned about it. David went to West Point, Philip was out of high school, and John was in his last year in high school.<sup>16</sup>

In 1946, I found this little house in Huntridge that I bought for \$4,250. My brother advanced the money and I gave him a note for it, which I paid off. The Nevada State Bank was the only bank here and they wanted to list the house as community property. I said no, Henry Wanderer had nothing to do with it. He didn't assist in family earnings. And I didn't know what was going to happen with my husband. I was about to file an action in court, when, after hemming and hawing and discussing it with the other 26 lawyers in town, they agreed to let me take title in my name as my sole and separate property. So that was the beginning of my changing the system. Today, any woman who comes here does not need to place earnings from another state in community property.

Then the first thing that I did was to get a decent automobile, because I didn't feel safe in this little rattletrap that I had driven all the way across country.

The boys loved school. They had gone to private school earlier, but they weren't snobby. They're very good kids. They wouldn't be the good men that they are. They attended John S. Park School in Huntridge and then they went to Las Vegas High School on Eighth Street. That was through high school.

There were 26 lawyers here.<sup>17</sup> I saw a couple of them; then I got this telephone call from Madison Graves. He said that he had heard about me and he was interested in someone with my background experience who would do work for them. And so I saw him. I saw Cliff Jones, who was Lieutenant Governor, and after he picked my brains for an hour about, "Do you do this and you do that," and I opened his eyes to legal procedures that were foreign here — they weren't using them at all. And he said, "Well, how fast can you take dictation?"

I said, "Well, I'm not applying for a job as a secretary. I'm a lawyer. I'm not a secretary."

He said, "We wouldn't hire a woman."

But if you look at the list of the first 100 women attorneys, you'll see that the next year, Kell Houssels and Jeanne Smith, who was then Kell Houssels' wife— they were divorced afterwards — had joined the firm. Not my firm, the Cliff Jones — Jones, Weiner and Jones. And they took a woman there because she was with her husband. But they never did any legal work, because Houssels became immediately interested in the ownership of one of the first big hotels.

Harold Morse and Madison Graves hired me to work in their office conducting

research and working on appeals. I made \$50 a week and stayed ten months to one year. I worked on the Richard Cooper Fitch case. They were the defendants. I did their research and prepared the authorities and so forth. It was the biggest case Nevada had at the time, and was settled in 1951.<sup>18</sup> Later we were opposed on quite a few cases.

Nobody in Nevada was giving a review course for the bar exam and I had to take a review course because there were aspects of law in the West, water rights for example, about which I had no knowledge or experience. I took a bar review course in San Francisco. The attorney who gave it was very highly regarded and considered a great authority. I was there for a couple of months. I took the exam in 1947 with two other Nevada women. Charlotte Hunter [Arley] would practice law in Reno and Nelle Price who lived in Las Vegas, but went to California for a couple years after being admitted to the bar.<sup>19</sup>

*... it was a rough-and-tumble place when I came here. It was fight every inch of the way.*

When I was admitted to the Nevada Bar in 1947, they asked for a speech. I said, "I consider it a privilege to be a member of the Nevada Bar and I will maintain its integrity and all that it stands for, but I want you to assure your wives that because a woman has been admitted to the bar, it will not have any effect on their domestic tranquility. And, to provide a chance to meet me and to get acquainted -- to see that the profession doesn't change a lady's tendencies — once a lady, always a lady," I said, "I'm having a cocktail party for all of you Saturday night at my home, and I promise to have all the hot cider

with cloves,” which was the Mormon drink ostensibly. On the side, it was Scotch. But this is what they told me to have in gallons. There were 26 lawyers and they all came and brought their wives. I had bought a lot of liquor, and I had to send out and get more

### *Nevada Women allowed to practice law*

In 1861, the territory of Nevada enacted legislation that defined who could practice law. Section 2 stated:

*Any white male citizen, of the age of twenty-one years, of good moral character, and who possesses the necessary qualifications of learning and ability, shall be entitled to admission as attorney and counselor in all the Courts of this Territory.* That same section was amended in 1893 to allow “any citizen of the United States” with the age, moral and learning requirements to practice law. To avoid any confusion that section ended with the following statement,

*“Under this Act females shall have the same rights and privileges as males.”*

Laura M. Tilden was licensed to practice law on July 22, 1893.

“An Act relative to attorneys and counselors-at-law,” approved October 31, 1861. *Compiled Laws of Nevada*, Chapter 39 of Attorneys and Counselors at Law, p 212.

“An Act to Amend an Act entitled ‘An Act relative to attorneys and counselors-at-law,’ approved October 31, 1861.” Approved January 31, 1893. *Laws of Nevada*, Sixteenth Session, Chap. III, pp 12-13.

Scotch. [Laughs] So that was the beginning, but it was a rough-and-tumble place when I came here. Believe me, there were a few years before another woman came here. It was fight every inch of the way. You couldn’t get a single courtesy that lawyers extend to each other today.

My first office was on Third Street. All the law offices were within walking distance at that time, right on Third Street. I had one-room on the second floor in the OK Plumbing Building. I paid \$150 a month to the owner and gave him free legal services which he didn’t use much. Then a suite with more room on the lower floor of the same building became available, and I leased that from him. It was really the first nice-looking law office in Las Vegas. Up to that time, law offices had a desk

and a chair, second-hand or third-hand, it didn't matter. My place was done with a female touch. I had Venetian blinds on the windows and cork floors and nice furniture.<sup>20</sup>

Nelle Price didn't practice here at all. She married several times and divorced several times and ended up in the arms of this tall, handsome Latino who said he was from the royal family of Italy. And it was convenient for him to find one lawyer, and then another lawyer to help carry on his lifestyle. And Nelle was one of the first who helped him. I didn't know her, really, until I went to a barbecue. They rented a house over in the west side, which is the Negro section now. And she was having a barbecue party there and my sister who was visiting had somehow or other got an invitation to it; I don't know how she did it. But she convinced me that I should go. She said, "She's a lawyer in town and you ought to know her. So I went to see her, and she said, "I knew about you because you're practicing and doing quite well."

I said, "Yes, I'm managing."

She said, "Well, I think I'm going to practice up here, then."

I said, "Well, be my guest." [Chuckles] She had a four-year-old child and a three-year-old child at the time, and she was just starting in Las Vegas.

When I first came to Las Vegas, I ran for Municipal Court.<sup>21</sup> There was a judge who sat in the municipal court here and he was an inebriate (putting it nicely). And he used to sign warrants as blanks and if anybody had a grudge against another person and had a friend in the police department, they could have a warrant executed at any time of the day or night. I was a victim of that practice.

The bar association used to have very nice dinner meetings at the El Rancho. We

would get a shrimp cocktail and a filet mignon with a salad and strawberry shortcake and coffee for \$3.50. So we used to go to that. And then there was music for dancing, so we would stay and dance. I had no husband, but there was a very nice lawyer, John Bonner, whose wife I knew, and who was very nice to me, so he would ask me to dance and he would take me home, and he was very nice. I was sort of reluctant to go out alone at night.

After returning one evening from such a dinner meeting, I was home and undressed and ready to go to bed, when the doorbell rang. Two officers in full uniform and drawn guns wanted to see me. And my housekeeper, who was a lovely person, wrung her hands and she said, "Mrs. Wanderer, I don't know what those officers want, but they pulled their guns and they said they have to talk to you." So I went to the door: "What is it, officer?"

"Get your things on and come with us. You have to go to court."

I said, "What for?"

"I have a warrant for your arrest."

And I said, "What are you talking about? What has happened?"

"Well, it's Section so-and-so," but they wouldn't tell me what it meant.

And I said, "Well, I don't carry a copy of every statute in my mind. Tell me what the nature of it is."

He said, "Well, you'll find out when you get to jail."

So they took me before this illustrious magistrate, and in his smug, drunken voice he said, "A violent violation."

"What is it for?"

things. It turns out I'm charged with failing to have stopped at a full stop sign at some corner. I had never been served with a summons, and before they have to get a warrant, you have to have a summons to show that you have ignored the warrant. So I called John Bonner, and that was the man who had been so nice. And he came down. I asked to be released in my own recognizance, because I'm an attorney. And the judge said, "You have to act like an attorney, and you don't." So he said, "Bail denied." So John informed him that he couldn't refuse me bail, that they had no right to execute a warrant in the nighttime on a traffic violation, and there was no proof of any previous violation to justify an arrest, and he convinced him to lower the bail, so he took \$10 for bail and let me go home. As it turned out later, it was dismissed.

But then I realized that this guy was really a tyrant. He probably didn't like the idea, or he had been tipped off, to give this woman lawyer a bad time because it was still in the short time when they were betting "1,000 to 1" that I wasn't going to last six months. And he probably was party to that. So I said, "Well, there's only one way. I can talk my lungs out and say that he isn't worthy of being a judge, but if I run against him for office, then I can say anything I want to. So I filed to run against him. And my kids -- all I had was little posters, and they used to go around and nail them to the trees and things. And this was my campaign. And of course there was no one to speak up for me, because nobody -- they didn't like the idea, the majority, I guess, of a woman coming in and upsetting the applecart.

And so I lost the election. And that was when the Anti-defamation League sent an investigator up here to look into the court, because there had been complaints about it. And they told him that there's a woman practicing in Las Vegas who knows about these

things. And she's from New York, and she can give you the lowdown on it. So he came up here, and before he saw me, he asked some of the Jewish people if they knew me. And they said, "Yes, but stay away from her. She's a Red." That was, you know, a Communist. So, he went back and made an adverse report. He didn't get anything out of me. So that was that.

ing about Las Vegas, "des, dem, and done guys." They were talking about Billy Moses. That was the big talk, because they were betting a thousand to one that he was going to the gas chamber. And they joked about it, they said, "And they've got this dame from New York. She thinks that she's going to get him off. She won't even last long enough; she won't even be practicing six months from now." So that's the first my sisters knew that I had passed the bar and that I was practicing here.

#### 'Get Lady Wanderer.'

The day after I was sworn in, the phone rang. The sheriff's office called to tell me that Billy Moses wanted me to defend him. I said, "Who's Billy Moses?"

"Data's you hear? He killed his wife's sister and beat his wife up."

I said, "I never heard of him. Are you kidding me?" I thought they were kidding, because I was in very bad repute with the sheriff's office. There were things they did that weren't proper. And they used to object to some of the things that I wanted to do. So, I thought they were just getting my goat and I didn't pay attention to it. And then I got a call from him and I said, "Well, who is this?"

He said, "This is Billy Moses."

I said, "Are you the man that is charged with murder?"

He said, "Yes. Will you come and see me?"

I said, "Yes."

## Practicing Law in Las Vegas

My two sisters used to come by train before they had proper air flights. In '47, after I was admitted to the bar, they were on the train in the club car and there were some guys sitting there talking about Las Vegas, "des, dem, and dose guys." They were talking about Billy Moses. That was the big talk, because they were betting a thousand to one that he was going to the gas chamber. And they joked about it, they said, "And they've got this dame from New York. She thinks that she's going to get him off. She won't even last long enough; she won't even be practicing six months from now." So that's the first my sisters knew that I had passed the bar and that I was practicing here.

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And when I got there, I said, "How did you happen to get my name? I was just admitted to practice here. I've been a lawyer for more than 15 years, but not here." I said, "Nobody knew me here."

He said, "Well, I prayed to the Lord to send me a lawyer that wouldn't be afraid of my enemies and would fight for my rights, and the Lord, he came to me in a burst of glory and he said, 'Get Lady Wanderer.'"

So I said, "That's very nice. Do you have confidence?"

He said, "Oh, I believe in the Lord and He said, 'Get Lady Wanderer.'"

So I said, "Well, have you got any money? It takes money to defend a murder case."

He said, "Well, I haven't got money, but I've got some property." He was under contract for that piece of land that the Last Frontier is on. The Last Frontier was just a motel. It didn't have anything else.\* The only places were the El Rancho and the Flamingo, and then the Thunderbird. It was something else before the Thunderbird, but it was on that property. And he said he could give me the contract to that. He paid \$1,000 a month. He had a pig farm where he made his money. And of course he had to do something with his money, because he was an intelligent person.

I said, "Well, that's wonderful. What'll I have to pay on it?"

He said, "Well, I pay \$1,000 a month."

"Well, I can't pay \$1,000 a month," I said. "I've just started here. I don't know what kind of money I'm going to make and I have three children to support." I had no

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\*The precise location of the property held by Moses is unclear. [JG]

idea it was going to be what the Strip was going to be. What I did receive from him I couldn't have bought. I could not. I had the front-page, in capital letters: "DIVINE REPRESENTED ATTORNEY."

I said, "Well, I'll speak to the judge and see if he'll appoint me, and the state will pay something. And then later on, if you can, we can talk about paying."

So I went to see Judge Henderson. I was in awe of McNamee, but I felt a barrier. Henderson was a guy that you could love. He was so sweet. He had sworn me in and I told him I had a favor to ask.

I said, "You have heard about the Moses case?"

He said, "Yeah, that's the guy that they say killed his wife's sister."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, how are you involved?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. That depends on you." I said, "He wants me to represent him but he hasn't any money."

And he said, "Well, you know, you find that when you practice law, you can't think in terms of money, you have to think in terms of what's best for the client."

I said, "Well, that's the way I was brought up; that's what I believe, too." I said, "I'd be willing to represent him. Would you make an order appointing me?"

He said, "Yes, I'd be glad to."

I said, "Well, you know, I'm well recommended."

He said, "Really? Who recommended you?"

And I told him about the divine-appointed attorney to represent Billy Moses.<sup>22</sup>

I got Billy off with life. He did less than six years in Carson City on the second-

degree murder that I got him. And then he opened up a shop with his leather business.

After I represented Billy, Woodrow Wilson and Lubertha Johnson worked up the idea for me to be the NAACP legal counsel and be a director.<sup>23</sup> Lubertha Johnson saw that here's a lawyer who is going to represent my people. I was the only white person a lot of times. I went to a couple of their conventions that they had.

When I was the director of NAACP and their legal counsel, and we had Duke Ellington here in town at the Last Frontier, the group wanted to go hear him play. They tried to get a reservation and they couldn't get one. So I called the owner, I've forgotten his name now. But when I told them I wanted to make a reservation, they told me "Sorry, we can't do it."

I said, "You've got to do it. If you don't, it's going to be real trouble." I had a hard time keeping these people from having an excuse to explode about hotels here. "If you want to avoid it, this is a good chance to avoid it."

So they slept on it and they slept on it, and they said yeah, they would let us have a table — one big table — but we had to come in through the side entrance. I said, "You mean to say, we can't come in through the front entrance?"

They said, "No, that wouldn't do."

So I submitted that to them. I said, "Look fellows, let's start it that way," because up to this point, they'd never put a foot in the place except as porters or scrub people or chambermaids. But never as guests. So I said, "Let's accept it on their terms and see what happens, and we'll take it from there." So we all got dressed up nice in cocktail things, and I think fourteen of us paraded in. We had a great big table. And we sat down for the performance, and not once did a waiter approach our table to take an order from us. And

we were all dying to have a drink to Duke Ellington.

I handled anything; it was a general practice.<sup>24</sup> But I had a lot of divorce cases.

There weren't many states where one could get a divorce at that time and do it

legitimately. So, attorneys in other states

### *Nevada's Divorce Industry*

Nevada led the nation in the twentieth century by offering liberal divorce laws

to unhappy spouses. As a result, a new industry rose up to provide the services necessary to fulfill the law.

In 1910, the state required divorce seekers to maintain a six-month residency before they could obtain a divorce. It was the shortest in the country and made Nevada a haven for divorce-seekers. In 1927, the residency was shortened to three-months and in 1931, the year that gambling was re-legalized, the residency requirement became only six weeks.

In the 1950s, Las Vegas took over the title of "divorce capital" from Reno.

recommended their clients to attorneys they knew in Nevada.

A number of cases involved young women who came to this country by marrying a G.I. and

then wanted a divorce. Her parents in the foreign

country would make a deal with the G.I. and pay

him a stipulated sum, in some cases \$1,000 or

more, to marry their daughter and bring her to this

country, and then consent to a divorce. Either the

prospective groom for this girl, they usually had a

groom in the background, or the parent, would pay

for their divorce and the six-week residence in Las

Vegas. The man they were divorcing, the

American citizen, would consent to the divorce. If he didn't consent and he went back on

his word, then we would have to apply to the court and get an order to publish. For six

weeks we would publish the summons for divorce, then wait 30 days, and then get a

default divorce. Those divorces were less desirable, particularly if they were going to

marry someone with a certain amount of financial backing.

One of my early clients was Jane Wyman, Ronald Reagan's first wife. She couldn't get a job here. She had been promised a job at the Flamingo, which had just opened, but they didn't hire her because she didn't have the talent that they wanted. So I lost on that. After I prepared the papers and everything for her, she didn't have enough money. She didn't get her divorce through my office because she never had the money to file the papers. We prepared the papers without getting paid. We thought that it would go through. So then they arranged a quick divorce in Santa Monica because that's when Nancy was pregnant and he had to get married quickly. I represented quite a few of these so-called "important" people. They weren't important then, but they became important later on. I handled the Harry Belafonte's wife's divorce. I had quite a few of the theatrical people. I had dancers and vocalists. I handled the divorce of Dorothy Ruth, daughter of the late George Herman (Babe) Ruth in 1947.

The six-week residency requirement created the whole divorce ranch industry. Sometimes a divorcee actually stayed six weeks and sometimes she didn't. I wouldn't handle a divorce unless I was pretty sure that the residence was bona fide. But some of the cases slipped through, and someone would testify. She would register and someone would testify at the trial. The questions were asked [of the resident witness]: "Your name, your address, where do you live?" And they would say, "How long have you lived in Las Vegas?"

"Oh, I've been here 15 years. My parents live here," and so forth.

"Are you engaged in business here?"

"No, I'm not engaged in business, I'm a housewife," or something like that.

"Do you know Jane Doe, the plaintiff in this action? What was the occasion of your knowing her?"

"Well, I got to meet her when she first came here."

"Have you seen her each and every day in Clark County, Nevada, since the time she arrived here at least for a period of six weeks?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, I've seen her."

"What was the occasion of your seeing her?"

"Well, we belong to the same club and we go to lunch."

Sometimes it was a lie and sometimes it was true. If it was a lie and you knew it and you had a suspicion, there was not enough money in the world to make you take the case.

If the defendant in the divorce action was not pleased with the marital dissolution, then he could appear and contest the residence, contest all the evidence that was given, contest the propriety of the parent who was seeking the divorce as a proper person to have the care and custody, control and education of the minor children. The court could look to the assets of one of the parents and make an order requiring the affluent parent to pay child support. There were not many cases where the wife paid child support.

I think there were more women because the men had to take care of the breadbasket. The women usually had an obligation for the care, custody and wanted the control of the minor children, because from that would come her bread and butter. Because if she got \$10,000 a month for the support of the child, you can be sure that the child didn't get \$10,000 worth of that allowance. There were also the ones that were \$100 a month or \$50 a month. It depends on facts.

But women didn't always get custody. They had to fight for it. There are certain

customs, certain people that were called into play. For example, I had an Indonesian lady who was trying to get a divorce, and who had a terrible struggle. The lawyer involved in that case was a very nice guy. I knew him socially — my boys and his children were friendly, and his wife and I were friendly. But he didn't pull any punches in the trial. And he brought into court evidence that this mother of the child engaged in sexual activities with the child that were not for his best health. And this also was said before Judge McNamee. (Judge Henderson was more sentimental about cases than Judge McNamee was.) There was nothing I could do. I wanted to bring in a witness in to testify that it was customary with people from that part of the world, when a baby was bathed, for them to powder him and smell him all over. But the defendant brought out the fact that the mother was engaging in sexual activity with the child, and she lost custody. I stood on my head, but I couldn't prove it; I couldn't get a witness to come in and say that it was the custom in the country, for them to bathe their children and then kiss them all over. And they didn't attach any particular importance to the fact that they were kissed around their sexual parts — either boy or girl. So this is one of the things that looks bad on paper. This attorney who was my opponent — and I see him on television a lot and he's an awfully nice guy. And every time I see him, I have this case brought to my memory, and it hurts.

I had very elegant clients from New York who were referred by New York lawyers. I was active in the American Bar Association, so a lot of them came to me from people that I knew from there. A couple of important people stayed at my house during that period. One stayed as my housekeeper because she wanted a nice place to stay, but would never have taken that kind of job otherwise. That was Elena Yussopov. I handled the Yussopov divorce. Her husband, Lionel Yussopov, was related to the rabbit-hole

Russian that shot the Czar. He and his brother eliminated the Czar. They came here in 1930-something. His wife came to me and I handled her divorce. And when I was preparing her decree, I said, "Do you want to have your maiden name restored?" She said, "Oh, no, Igor wouldn't like it." (Igor was Prince Yussopov; she was Princess Yussopov.)<sup>25</sup>

One client came to me via her brother who was high in the Iranian government. He had her come to Las Vegas to get a divorce because he wanted her to be safe from the things that would happen in Iran. She stayed at my house and she played my piano all the time. She took charge of my children. For example, if I had to go to California and the children had to go to school, I would fly down and she would drive them down and bring them on Friday for their weekend. I had beautiful parties at my home and she acted as hostess. We remained very dear friends for a long time afterwards.

But, I never, never paid under the table to anybody to send me a divorce. If it was legitimate, I would do it. When I first started practicing, cab drivers approached me about referring clients. People arriving in town for a divorce would ask the cab drivers, "Who's a good lawyer?" and they would send cases to the lawyers that would give them a kickback. And certain politicians, too, wanted to make deals. And I would never do it with them, because I didn't feel that – in the first place, you never know when someone was going to turn on you. You'd have to be a very courageous person to do it, indifferent to your decent responsibility. I never did that.

Several of the women who came for a divorce tried to get a job during their 6-week residency: housework, babysitting, working in the casinos, some of them, probably, less noble work. They'd try to get jobs in the clubs and there weren't so many places then.

Remember, the only two, when I came here in '46, the only two hotels were the Last Frontier and the El Rancho. And then the Bingo Club opened, and then the Flamingo, and then the Desert Inn.

David went to West Point in 1951. It was a terrible adjustment for him to be away from his two brothers and his mother and his father. He had nobody. When I went to visit David, he told me that he felt so lonesome. He said there was no one he could ever talk to or discuss things with. I asked him if he had a faculty advisor.

He said, "Yeah, there's Captain Lionel, but I never see him."

I said, "Well, I'm going to come up here in a couple of weeks, and you make an appointment to have him come to the Thayer Hotel (where I used to stay when I came up there) and I'll talk to him."

Sam Lionel was appointed as David's student counselor at West Point. He had practiced law in New York before the Army, and when he got out, they gave him a captaincy and had him lecturing on military law at West Point.

So when I met him, I said, "Well, how come you haven't been more attentive to David? You haven't discussed problems with him or made him feel at home or asked if you could help him in any way." He said, "Well, they gave me a name, David Wanderer, and I figured some yokel from Las Vegas, and I didn't bother." Those were his very words.

Just to make talk, I said to Sam, "Have you ever been out West?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Well, you should see that part of the country."

He said, "Yeah, but you know, on my captain's salary, I can't afford to travel." He told me that he had a pair of aged parents that he felt obligated for.

I said, "Well, I could use a lawyer in my office now. And if you feel like resigning from the army, why don't you come and look Las Vegas over? I could hire a lawyer at this time."

Well, I went back to Las Vegas and I wasn't back two weeks, and I got a call from Sam. He wanted to know if I really was sincere about the job. I said, "Sure, I'd give anybody a job if they've got a law degree and they can handle the work."

Anyway, in two weeks, Lionel came out to Las Vegas and I was living on the grounds of the Desert Inn Country Club. I had moved to the grounds of the Desert Inn Country Club around 1951 or '52. I was on the ninth hole of the golf course and Wilbur Clark was to my left and Anthony Canino was on my right, and the whole Desert Inn area, well, that was all substantial people.<sup>26</sup> And there were quite a few lawyers that had homes there. And they were very nice and they were very friendly. The boys had tennis instruction and I had the use of the golf course. Of course, I never had time to play golf. I had a beautiful place there with lots of space for all my things.

We had [what] we called the Desert Inn Home Association and we used to have social functions occasionally. And it so happened I was having a big cocktail party, and lo and behold, Sam called that he was in town. So I couldn't do anything but say, "Well, come over and you'll meet all these people." So he did and his eyes popped out. He couldn't imagine it being the kind of place it was. He expected to see a teepee or something like that. So he was quite taken by surprise. And he said, "Well, do you really

want to hire someone?" "Yes, I need somebody," I said.<sup>27</sup> So, it was very opportune for Sam to come on the scene.

Sam came to my office just as I was going in to try the Corn against French case (1955), which was very important. That was the first time that Judge McNamee was reversed. Dr. French, who was mayor of Henderson, had removed a lady's breast. There was no laboratory to do a biopsy here. He had sent a specimen of her breast to Los Angeles for a biopsy, and when it came back he said that it was necessary to remove her breast immediately. She was a nice-looking 45-year-old woman. In fact, she was the postmistress in Whitney, a division here. Dr. French removed her breast. She was in his office for a postoperative examination, and he was called to the telephone. So he left her sitting in the office, and she glanced at papers on his desk and she sees a report from a laboratory for Mrs. Corn. So she read it, and it said analysis of the breast showed it to be a [benign] biopsy -- it was not a malignancy. And he had lopped her breast off.<sup>28</sup>

So Ted Dotson filed an action against and it came up for trial before Judge Frank McNamee, and a motion was made to dismiss by the defendant's insurance carrier. And Frank McNamee granted it. He said, "If I permit this case to go to the jury, no surgeon will ever be safe in performing a surgical procedure in Nevada." Mrs. Corn piddled around and she couldn't find anybody who would undertake the appeal of the decision. I felt that because of the fact that she had seen the report that said 'no malignancy,' and he had lopped off her breast and thought it was a big joke, that it [the case] was clear cut. She was a young woman in her early 40s. Then she was referred to me and told, "this woman came from New York and she knows a lot about these things."

When she came to me, I said, "Certainly, you're entitled to have the jury

determine whether or not it was a malignancy.”

She said, “Well, I don’t have any money. That’s the story.”

I said, “Well, I’ll take it on a contingency.” I said, “I’ve never taken a case against a doctor in all the years I have been practicing law”; 15 years when I came here. But I wouldn’t take a case against a doctor because of my association with the medical profession. You see, in those days, doctors didn’t charge doctors’ families for anything. You and your family and your in-laws could go to a doctor’s office and they would treat you beautifully. They’d never bill you. There was no Medicare, and they were very kind, and they had been kind to me, and the doctors back home and my husband was an important doctor, he was a surgeon and very well connected. So I had been imbued with that ideology. So I said I would take it, even though a doctor was involved. And I went to the Supreme Court here and I had it reversed, and they sent it back. And they wouldn’t make an offer to her.

So anyhow, how things happen inopportunely. We went through all the procedures for a trial. I did a lot of research and I knew just where to go in the medical facilities. They had a medical library here and they permitted me the courtesy of using their books. I had a very good case. In fact, this case was written up all over the country because it was the first time that a case against a doctor that had been dismissed was reversed on appeal. And they were betting that I was going to recover.

So luck would have it, the Sunday before trial, I had a bad fall and I was walking with a crutch when I came into court on Monday. I was sedated because I had fractured my ankle. I asked the court’s permission to associate this lawyer with me. I’m telling you this because it shows the thinking — the way courts were — in this jurisdiction at that

time. I was merely asking that he sit beside me to make notes for me. No, he couldn't participate at all. And so I was up there on my crutch; I could barely get up and I was in extreme pain and heavily sedated. And Morse and Graves and Compton — that's the three of them — were lined up. And it was like three pistons going up: one would get up and that's not the way a case is tried. Certain lawyers take certain part in a trial, and they stick to that. But one of them would have some point that they were bringing up, and they didn't make the point, so another one corrected it.

I pleaded with the court. I said, "Your Honor, please, I have had a difficulty. And I didn't ask for an adjournment, but I asked for the courtesy of having this visiting attorney, who is proficient in negligence matters, to help me a little bit, and you deny it. And here you permit three lawyers, like pistons, to appear without regard to the courtesies of the courtroom." And they bawled me out. I did it in a nice way. But anyhow, they were miserable to me. And the jury was out a long, long time.

Now, the judge was Judge S---, who was a known inebriate — a horrid person. And he was part of the drinking group. This group used to drink a lot together. I know, because I was friendly with Judge S---'s wife, and she told me about it. She told me that I had a disadvantage before I started with her husband and this group. But there were only two other judges at the time — there was McNamee and Henderson. And Henderson was like a great big teddy bear. He was a doll. Everybody loved him and his wife; they were real, real people. He was one of the first lawyers here and he had been appointed a judge. The judges were appointed in those days; I don't think they were elected. I wasn't here during any judicial election at that time.

The case was decided for the defendant and I was heartsick. Later, I met the man

who was chairman of the jury. He had been my client and he had been the office's client so I didn't object to him, because I thought he was a nice guy. He was some officer in the Bank of Nevada and he knew me from the time that I objected to their hesitation to list the house in my name alone. I was no stranger to him. So when I met him afterwards, I told him I was so disappointed. I said, "I couldn't understand how you jurors could say that the doctor wasn't to blame, when we had the evidence and we had the report of the laboratory that there was not a malignancy, and how could you permit a thing like that?"

He said, "Well, she's only in her 40s, and she had nothing to worry about in the future."

I said, "Well, suppose somebody breaks a leg. Shall we take their leg off so they won't have to worry about treatment of a fractured leg?" I said, "I sprained my ankle when I went to court. Should I have had an amputation because of that?"

And he said, "Oh, Emilie, you're too serious."

So we went to trial. And meanwhile, the courts move so slowly that by this time, I had moved to Chicago. But I handled the appeal from Chicago; I had a secretary there to type up the papers for me. And I came back to Nevada for that case. What you had to do was fly into Reno and then take an automobile and drive to Carson City. There was no plane going into Carson City. Bill Morse met me the night before the trial. Harold Morse, his son Bill, and his grandson, Harold Morse, have all practiced in Las Vegas. So he said, "I'll make a deal with you." He said, "You dismiss this case and we won't enter any charges, any costs against you."

I said, "Do you think I'd agree to that?" I said, "I can't be bought and I wouldn't think of it."

So we went to trial and we argued it with the Supreme Court. This is how closely bound up that three-body Supreme Court was. The first day I went to the Supreme Court I had to take the three kids with me and they were seated in the back ... in the back of the courtroom. And when I came into the courtroom, the judges looked at them and they said, "What is this? What kind of a case is this?"

I said, "Well, your Honor, this is what happens when a lawyer needs a wife." [Laughs] To put it in a light vein.

But in that case I was successful with the Supreme Court. They were kind of amused by me. But I was squared off against three strongly rooted people in the political arena here. And poor Ruth, Ruth Corn, she lost her case. I never billed her for my actual expenses, my plane fare flying in for the appeal. I made a motion to reargue it, and I did all this while I was in Chicago. But that was one of the weaknesses in our judicial system at that time. We had very few lawyers, there was no other woman practicing at that time. You've looked at the list, and you see that a few years elapsed before there was a woman that started to practice here.

I also opposed Morse and Graves when I filed an action against A[lonzo] C. Delkin for 1.5 million dollars in 1948. That was the largest case that had been filed in the state of Nevada alleging improper conveyance of real estate. James Ladd had been an early pioneer who acquired title to a lot of real estate downtown. He named his grandnephews and grandniece heirs. Hattie Mae Delkin lived in Westchester, New York and knew me. She was close to where I lived. She came to Las Vegas and looked for me.<sup>29</sup>

## Contributions to Legal Reforms

Well, I was involved in the Fifties in getting the rules of procedure of the Nevada court to take pretrial depositions of witnesses, which was specifically a New York and California practice. In '51, I had a conference in Coronado and Judge Chandler and Judge Udall and the present chief justice held a panel discussion on the value of pretrial practices. That was the first time that they started using that procedure in the courts.

Also in the 1950s, the state bar association appointed me to a committee with two lawyers from Carson City to rewrite the controlling probate law. We worked in conjunction with the three members of the Supreme Court. It wasn't a large number to get together. Over quite a few months, we analyzed the existing chapters of the statute and we decided that in many instances they were either inadequate, redundant, or unnecessary. Changes would be for the greater administration of justice in accordance with the intent of the probate law, which is to distribute properly the property of the decedent.

Of course, the probate law also had a great deal to do with the distribution of the benefits for children, because that entered into it. If a parent did not make an adequate provision for the child in the will, no one can go beyond their wishes in the written instrument. And if the instrument that disposes of their material is silent with reference to the division of the property, or the rights, it's too bad. Of course, that's been changed a lot by statute nowadays, because by present statute there are benefits to children that by statute didn't exist at that time. It was in rough draft at the time that I went to Chicago. I stayed there for 10 years and it went through without my participating in the further promotion of any changes that we felt were necessary.<sup>30</sup>

There was such a change in the laws generally, that when I came back to Las Vegas and after my various surgeries, my son felt that there was too much for me to bring myself up to date and study extensively. So I am ignorant as to the details of the result.

The only thing I can say is that it was an accepted fact up to the time I left that changes

*He felt that I was very knowledgeable for a female. They take it for granted, you know, that*

*a male would be knowledgeable, but for a mere female to know what you're talking about impressed him.*

had to take place. And the revised statutes which is a compilation of the governing laws for the state of Nevada, have been revised and re-revised, have been continually revised and policed and revised — both civil and criminal.

But the thing that was difficult was that it took all this time for them to realize that a woman could have input for them in anything as important as the modification of the controlling law that she found when she undertook to practice here. I was not the only attorney to raise issues about the probate law.

When it got to the Supreme Court, they recognized that there were things that had to be changed. Some of those changes were merely procedural, and not necessarily substantive. I mean, it didn't change the rights of the beneficiaries, but it certainly changed the procedures that were followed to assure those rights be made part of our controlling law..

I went to Chicago in 1957. I was looking for a lawyer who would keep my Las Vegas practice going so I didn't give it up. Jack Perry was the lawyer that was with me. He was a lovely guy; a Harvard man with a very nice wife. The lettering on the window and door was Wanderer and Perry. Jack Perry still consulted with me over the telephone, and I would get a check each month for whatever money the office had earned.

In Chicago, Fred Hertz, who worked for Clarence Darrow and inherited all of Darrow's practice and obligations, needed someone to work in his Chicago office and offered me the job. He had his office in the Rookery, an interesting building in itself. Well, I got to know people in various cities — I had cases forwarded to me and there was always a certain amount of camaraderie.

I had a very active practice in the short time I was there [Chicago]. I didn't even have to go through the formality that I would have had to in Phoenix, because the chief judge of the appellate court met me and he felt that I was very knowledgeable for a female. They take it for granted, you know, that a male would be knowledgeable, but for a mere female to know what you're talking about impressed him. And he said, "I'm going to admit you to the bar of Illinois." I didn't have to apply or give him the details or anything. And he said, "But I'm going to ask you to do something for me."<sup>31</sup>

He wanted someone to take over an appeal in a murder case immediately. It was sort of a bargain. He said, "Well, I have this murder case and I need someone right away." He said, "If I admit you to practice here, will you handle it for me?" [Chuckles] I said, "I'd love to." So I didn't have to take the bar in [Illinois]. I got a reversal on that — I represented the boy and got him off on a simple assault. I never saw a nickel out of it.

And I was the first lawyer in [Chicago] who worked in the court — the juvenile

court — who promoted the minor defendants' to have representation at trial, to have the court made a court of record, and [to provide] a jury trial if he wanted it. All of that, they didn't hear of back there. And that was the chief thing that I did in Chicago.

When I came back from Chicago in 1968, I moved in back of the Four Queens. We had a very cute development there. It was like a little artistic place, like a courtyard. And there was an entrance with palm trees and on each side were law offices. So I had an office there and then another lawyer joined me in that office.

My involvement with child welfare came primarily through divorce or probate cases and an occasional criminal case. I had a case involving two children whose mother had murdered their father. She had been convicted of murder and sentenced to death. And it was quite a fight to get the court to permit an adoption that would keep them together as one family. It so happened that the foster parents, who had been selected to take over the care of these children after the death of their father and the conviction of their mother, the family loved them dearly and wanted to adopt them. But they found it impossible to affect this. They retained me and we had quite a battle over that, but I succeeded. At the time, one of the regulations made foster parents waive their right to adopt children who had been placed with them. In this specific case, I terminated the mother's rights, so she no longer had a voice in court and I prevailed upon the court to authorize their adoption by the parents. I had many adoption cases.

## *Origins of the Family Court in Las Vegas*

The Council of Social Agencies worked to reorganize services for juveniles in 1948 and they endorsed a new Nevada Juvenile Code in January 1949 that would replace the original code of 1909. According to Deputy District Attorney, Rodger Foley, Jr., the new code would set qualifications for probation officers and would raise the age at which a child could be tried as an adult to age 16 from age 12. It also made a provision for a state-wide youth council that would collect much needed data and make recommendations to the state legislature.

The 1970 legislature created four seats in the District Court -- the highest court in the county the authority of which is surpassed only by the state Supreme Court. Three of those seats were filled July 1, 1971 and the fourth in July 1972. The Supreme Court created the Family Court in July 1972 to deal with domestic relations including divorce and custody cases and, unlike the other seats, allowed the judge to be appointed. In Department 8, Michael Wendell received the post of the state's first Family Court judge in Clark County in July 1972 when Governor Michael O'Callaghan appointed him. He worked previously as the Las Vegas assistant city attorney, state deputy attorney general and counsel to the Gambling Commission and Control Board. Wanderer unsuccessfully challenged Wendell in the Family Court election in 1972. Nevada had never had a woman judge.

For in-state divorces, community property had to be considered. If it was earned in Nevada during the marriage it was subject to community property laws. If anything happened to one of the spouses, the property had to be equitably distributed according to the needs of the parties and their living requirements. However, they weren't always distributed equitably. The rights of children were frequently ignored and the rights of the wives were frequently ignored. The opposing party might lie 'till they were blue in the face.

One of the things that the American Bar Association and the National Association of Women Lawyers appointed me to do when I came here was to determine the lay of the land for family courts.<sup>32</sup> I was on my way to Arizona, but they wanted me to straighten this out from the Nevada point of view before I went on to Arizona. After I passed the Nevada bar, I spoke throughout the county from the Indian reservation to Boulder City down to the local forums and urged them to sponsor a family court, pointing out to them that Nevada was the only state in the United

States that did not have a family court. When I returned from Chicago, I started up

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**WANDERER**  
**DISTRICT JUDGE**  
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**Elect**  
**EMILIE N.**  
**WANDERER**  
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*Courtesy of John Wanderer*

again.<sup>33</sup>

So I had to start working to build some kind of support here. I tried through the political area to find out people that would be interested in a family court. And where I found real cooperation and kindness was the people in Boulder City. They were really, really cooperative, and they had me as a frequent speaker telling them about family court. I spoke throughout Clark County for a family court, until finally in '71 or '72, I think, when I first came back after my stint in Chicago, the people in Boulder City urged me to file for family court.

They organized a family court, and I ran for judge. That is when I met Jean Ford as a co-candidate. She was very kind and courteous. She told me when there was going to be an occasion where it would be advantageous to put in an appearance. I appreciated it because nobody else did it. I had given this guy \$1,000 as a retainer to handle my campaign. But, when there were functions where he could bring somebody, he would take another candidate instead of me.

Michael Wendell defeated me for the election by less than 1,000 votes.<sup>34</sup> He had never tried a case and had worked in an administrative position in the public defender's office. He won by a very small margin and I was told later on that he was ready to concede the election because he thought he was beaten because he found there was such response to the people that had heard me and met me. [A short time after this election, there was a move to eliminate the family court]. And when Michael Wendell was questioned about it – "How come you fought hammer and tong against Emilie Wanderer for family court, and now you've got it, you don't want it," he said, "Well, I didn't want it then, either." He said, "I didn't know anything about the family court. But I wanted to be

district court judge, and that was the only judgeship that I could run for." So he was very happy that it was eliminated. I never ran again, because I had spent my last money on that campaign. And I didn't have a husband to finance another campaign.

The theory underlying the juvenile law was the best interests for the child, but that theory could be stretched from here around the world, or it could be ignored and swept under the carpet. Unfortunately, in the latter cases, especially those cases where jurisdiction had been based upon non-residence of one of the parties, there was never a full hearing on that. The family court was all that the name describes: whatever is germane to the functioning of the family.

The tendency of the law has always been to try to treat juveniles favorably, depending upon their age, and when they didn't have a family court and they didn't have a juvenile court, they couldn't do very much with juveniles except treat them according to whatever offense they had been charged. That's been changed by the present family court, and I really don't know the functioning of the family court now, because I have been away from it for sometime. When I ran for the judgeship, one thing we wanted was a closer supervision of matters that would be beneficial for the children: any phase of the law that affected the lives of the children and their relationships in the community. For example, in their educational opportunities, I felt very strongly that they should be given certain advantages that they were not getting under the statutes as they existed. Also, juveniles who have committed crimes of violence, the courts tend to treat them like children and to help them pursue their lives so that they will not be repetitive criminals. My concern was mostly with relationships with their adult parents and securing services that could be spelled out for the benefit of these kids.

A very outstanding case was sent to me by Rosalind Goodrich Bates, a very popular woman lawyer in Los Angeles. She was one of the leading women lawyers in Los Angeles, in California, when I came out West.<sup>35</sup> And she knew me from my activity in New York in NAWL. So when I came west, they opened their arms to me and when they had complicated things, they used to refer them to me. Rosalind was representing a woman in a paternity case with the inventor of the flowers by telegraph. He had fathered a child with his secretary. He denied paternity and then he fired her afterward. She was not what he wanted in a wife because she was not attractive and young. She was a serious-type woman who took this incident in her life, especially at her age, very seriously. The man who started this business didn't want to have anything to do with her. Rosalind had not filed an appearance on her behalf, but she told her that if she was served with any papers, not to appear. See, they had her served here. When she got the complaint, instead of going to her lawyer, who would have sent her to a local lawyer, she put in an appearance herself and she tried to get the judgment set aside on her own. So there was a great deal of fuss about it. She thought that she was a paralegal and she knew all the tricks because she had worked for this guy. I didn't come in on the case until after she had been heard by either Judge McNamee or Judge Henderson, one of those two heard it. They wouldn't set the judgment aside and they were trying to work through Rosalind when she was shot and murdered. This happened just when I was leaving Las Vegas. I represented her until I couldn't do it anymore. I suggested a couple of attorneys, but I don't know what happened eventually. And, Rosalind was a good girl, very conscientious, very much interested in the advancement of women. I know that she was wonderful to me as far as I'm concerned, because she sent a lot of difficult cases to me; cases that I would have had

no means of getting because people in California hadn't heard about me.

Because the case was opened here, it was our courts that had to protect the rights of the children. But this child, evidently the father provided for him financially, but wouldn't let anything pass through his mother's supervision. He didn't consider the mother of the child worth anything after she had served as a breeding source for him to get an heir.

My professional female community was national and in Los Angeles. For example, Rosalind Bates and Dolly Lee Butler. There were quite a few of them. My standing with them was understood when I came West because I was the representative of the NAWL. Many of them came to New York at that meeting that I had Eleanor Roosevelt as the speaker. They were the ones that gave her the humorous introduction.

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### Views on Equality

Emilie Wanderer's commitment to justice can be found in her community service as well as her legal work. During the 1950s, sex equality was being pursued as well as race equality under the law. The passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a priority for the NAWL in 1953 and 1959 according to an organizational history and Wanderer spoke about the ERA to the Boulder City Soroptimists in November 1951.<sup>36</sup> In addition, she encouraged young women to think about combining a family with a career. Using her own experience and that of her colleagues, she told the 1950 senior class at Basic high school that, "*Women can choose a career and still maintain a home and family and do just as good a job.*" Women needed to "*get over the feeling of inferiority,*" she continued, yet avoid "*over-confidence [that] may be disastrous.*" The balance would be learned through experience, she said. "*Know what it is you want to do and do not let anyone talk you out of it.*"<sup>37</sup>

On the occasion of the bicentennial, Wanderer told the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, "*I decry the absence of women from our judicial system and the failure of officials to appoint qualified women to judicial vacancies in a community which thus far, has not been enlightened enough to fill these positions at the polls.*" Referring to her work with the NAACP, she told the reporter, "*I still continue to seek recognition of Negroes as people entitled to full civil liberties. I am against discrimination, whether it is for race, color, creed, or sex.*"<sup>38</sup>

Wanderer's concern for justice also extended to delinquent and abused young women. In 1972, she worked with Nike House.

I served on the board of Nike House. It was established for the benefit of unfortunate girls who had a problem at home or didn't have proper supervision or had been deprived of parental benefits. Some of them got into trouble. It was organized primarily by a group of women from the Business and Professional Women's Club and is now a state activity. At that time, Dorothy D. Brimacombe was the president I was on the board of directors and the counsel for Nike House. They acquired a very nice home in the western side of town and it was largely contributed to by women who were in a financial position to contribute. We worked very closely with these girls, and helped them get out of the position they were in. I understand from the business and professional women that this was taken over by the state, and the Business and Professional Women's Club is still an active organization and participates largely in this venture.<sup>39</sup>

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My children kept me from being bored. And my work was my second life. In fact, I was criticized for being too much involved in my work. I had my sights set straight ahead, you know. And I was at a stage in my life where I could have had probably more of a personal outlet for attractive associations, but I couldn't see it; my children were very important and my profession was very important. And I wasn't out to get involved with anybody. It worked out all right.

Well, after I'd had the mastectomy in '85, I didn't make a quick recovery. Well, I'm still a member of the bar here. I still have standing if I want to go into court. But I'm

not able to. [Chuckles] I don't even go to the market. But John continues.

Well, I'm not going to run for office, I'm not looking for support from anybody. It's up to the historians to decide what has community value. Frankly, I don't know whether I contributed anything or not, but at least these women that have followed me professionally have had something that they can pin their hat on as an inspiration to have become attorneys.

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## APPENDIX

### Admitted to Practice

New York State Bar, 1931  
U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, 1935  
Supreme Court of the United States, 1941  
Nevada State Bar, 1947  
U.S. District Court, District of Nevada, 1947  
Illinois State Bar, 1958

### Professional Memberships (Selected, dates included when available)

#### *Legal*

American Bar Association, 1936  
    Court Modernization Committee, 1972  
American Judicature Society, 1971  
American Trial Lawyers Association, Parliamentarian  
Clark County (NV) Bar Association, 1946  
Commercial Law League of America, 1957; associate editor of the Journal.  
Federal Bar Association, Nevada Chapter, founder and past president (1970-71)  
Iota Tau Tau, International Legal Sorority, 1948  
National Association of Defense Lawyers in Criminal Cases, 1965  
National Association of Women Lawyers,  
    Family Court, Legislation, and Administrative Law Committees, 1936  
    Regional Director for New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania  
    Probate and Trust Law, chair, 1948; International Law Committee, 1972  
Nevada State Bar Association, 1947  
New York Society of Medical Jurisprudence  
New York State Bar Association  
New York Women's Bar Association, 1934-1946  
New York County Lawyers' Association  
Westchester County (NY) Women's Bar Association, 1934-1946  
Yonkers Lawyers Association, 1937-1955

#### *Community*

Business and Professional Women's Club, Yonkers (NY)  
Business and Professional Women's Club, Las Vegas, International Relations Committee, 1951  
Chicago Women's Aid, Public Affairs Department  
Children's Aid of La Rabida, Chicago  
Clark County (NV) Mental Health Association Board of Directors.  
Combined Jewish Appeal Campaign, Speakers Committee  
League of Women Voters  
Mt. Sinai Hospital Service Club, Chicago  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Las Vegas chapter, legal counsel  
    and director  
Nike House (Clark County)  
Red Cross (wartime solicitations)  
Sisterhood of Temple Sholom (Chicago), Board of Directors  
War Bonds Sales Citation  
Zone chair for community chest

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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The local paper ran an announcement for the opening of her “office for the general practice of Law” at 114 No 3<sup>rd</sup> St, Suite 201. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, November 29, 1947, p6. The first woman attorney in the state of Nevada, Laura Tilden, passed the bar in 1893. Fifty-four years later when Wanderer passed the bar, fewer than 25 women had done so. According to Wayne Blevins, executive director of the Nevada Bar Association in 1999, it wasn’t clear how many of those 25 actually practiced the law.

<sup>2</sup> “Emilie Wanderer, pioneering attorney,” and “Young Lawyers organization to honor first 100 women attorneys in state,” *Las Vegas Sun*, September 25, 1999, [n.p]. The Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association had to search from 1893 to 1979 to find 100 women.

<sup>3</sup> *Las Vegas Review Journal*, December 30, 1955, 22:8

<sup>4</sup> *Las Vegas Sun*, October 27, 1974, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to John Wanderer for assistance with family names and dates. Letter dated December 3, 2003 in the author’s possession. See also, *Las Vegas Review Journal*, March 4, 2005, 6B.

<sup>6</sup> John Wanderer has a copy of the original birth certificate that documents Emilie Norma Cohen was born in Providence, Rhode Island on April 8, 1902. Emilie Wanderer said she never had a copy of her birth certificate.

<sup>7</sup> She attended Centre Elementary School, Walnut Elementary School, Perkins Grammar School, and Brockton High School all at Brockton, Massachusetts. At the age of 57 years, Emilie Wanderer recorded these and other details about her early life on her application

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for admission to the state bar of Illinois. I am grateful to John Wanderer for making these materials available to me.

<sup>8</sup> Founded in 1908 as Portia Law School, the only law school established exclusively for the education of women, New England School of Law has been coeducational since 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Wanderer's application for admission to the bar in Illinois details her work experience from her high school days. From entry level clerical jobs, she continued to advance taking on increased responsibility. After graduation from high school, she worked with the U.S. Veterans Administration in Boston holding a position with responsibility for travel budgets. Apparently, when the family moved to New York City, she began her employment with the U.S. Attorney's office starting "in a secretarial capacity and [I] gradually assumed duties of legal aid such as interviewing witnesses, preparing pleadings, [and] doing research." *Application for Admission to the Bar*, State Board of Law Examiners, State of Illinois, in the author's possession. Dates during this period vary by a few years in different sources. They are included here for reference and should not be understood as explicitly precise.

<sup>10</sup> Wanderer left law school at Fordham University some time between 1930 and 1931. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, April 29, 1949, 6:5-6. Various sources date her admission to the New York State Bar between 1930 and 1933 [The 100 Lawyers celebration booklet notes the year as 1932 while her materials for admission to the bar in Nevada say 1930, and her Illinois Bar application states two years attendance at law school and 2 years of study in the U.S. Attorney's Office]. She applied to the New York State Bar in 1930 and was admitted in October 1931. She became active in the National Women's Bar

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Association, eventually leading a four-state branch that included New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Moscovitz Kross was born in Russia in 1891 and immigrated with her parents to the United States at two years of age. She studied at Columbia, received a scholarship to law school, and studied law at the New York University. She received her L.L.B. in 1910 and her L.L.M. in 1911. She served on the Family Court in New York City during the 1920s. She received her appointment to the magistrate's court in 1933 and served in that position for twenty years. Her papers are at the American Jewish Archives located in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The campaign material for Wanderer's Municipal Court Judge race in 1949 noted that Kross's work led to the development of the Social Service Bureau and Wayward Minor Court in New York City. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, April 29, 1949, 6:5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Wanderer's applications for admission to the Illinois Bar detail her work history in New York. When asked the reason for leaving some of the law offices in Manhattan where she worked, she mentioned the difficulties of finding adequate care for her children, especially during the years 1940 to 1942.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Wanderer's birth certificate documents his birth in New York City on July 7, 1893. The certificate is in the possession of John Wanderer.

<sup>14</sup> Wanderer had several responsible positions with the NAWL in New York. According to her campaign material for Municipal Court Judge in Las Vegas, she was a National Legislative Chairman, National Administrative Law Chairman, and Chairman of the Probate and Trust Committee. She continued to work on the latter committee, which

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worked toward uniform inheritance laws, while in Las Vegas. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, April 29, 1949, 6:5-6. See also *LVRJ*, February 3, 1948, 5. She represented women lawyers in Nevada at the national conference of NAWL held in Seattle in 1948. *LVRJ*, September 1, 1948, 10.

<sup>15</sup> John Wanderer clarified that Temple Beth Shalom and the Sunday School was a conservative congregation. In New York, the Wanderer family attended a reformed congregation. Correspondence from John Wanderer dated March 29, 2004 in the author's possession.

<sup>16</sup> Wanderer filed for divorce from Henry Wanderer in Lincoln County, then transferred the case to Clark County July 23, 1952. Acting as her own attorney, Wanderer cited three years separation as the argument for her divorce. Judge A.S. Henderson sealed the testimony and records of the case after granting the divorce. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, July 24, 1952, p 3, c 7-8.

John Wanderer provided this correct information about the sons' grades in school. Personal correspondence dated March 29, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Those 26 included, John Bonner, Harry E. Claiborne, William Paul Compton, Thomas Foley, Madison Graves, Artemus Ham, Sr., A.C. Henderson, J.K. Houssels, Clifford Jones, Herbert Jones, Frank McNamee, Harold Morse, Nelle Price, Paul Ralli, George Rudiack, Louis Wiener, Roland Wiley, and David Zenoff.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Cooper Fitch followed his wife and her lover to Las Vegas and shot and killed the other man.

<sup>19</sup> An announcement for the course notes that B.E. Witkin, author of *Summary of*

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California Laws, gave the course.

<sup>20</sup> Announcement opening her “office for the general practice of Law” at 114 No 3<sup>rd</sup> St, Suite 201. *Las Vegas Review Journal* November 29, 1947, p6; an announcement that her office moved to 118 No 3<sup>rd</sup> St. in *Las Vegas Review Journal*, February 10, 1954, 19:2-3; and an announcement of her law partnership, Wanderer and [Jack G.] Perry, located at 118 N 3<sup>rd</sup> in *Las Vegas Review Journal*, April 8, 1957, 14:7-8.

<sup>21</sup> An article and an ad for the campaign for Municipal Court may be found in the local press. Her opponent was Walter Richards. The paper noted that she was the only woman practicing in Las Vegas. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, March 24, 1949, 3:1-3; and [ad] April 29, 1949, 6:5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Memory brought these events closer together than occurred in real time. As John Wanderer pointed out in correspondence dated March 29, 2004, “Emilie N. Wanderer was admitted to practice law in October of 1947. Billy Moses shot and killed Maggie Sweet, his sister-in-law on December 5, 1948.” I am grateful to him for clarifying numerous points about this case. According to the *Review-Journal*, Moses prayed for guidance upon his defense and told the District Attorney, Robert E. Jones, that “the Lord, he says I should have a lady lawyer.” As the only practicing female attorney in town, Emilie Wanderer was appointed by District Court Judge A.S. Henderson to represent him on the charge of killing his sister-in-law. “Billie’s Prayer to Have Woman Lawyer Answered,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 13, 1948 and *Boulder City Journal*, December 10, 1948, 1:5-6. In February of 1949, she challenged the list of 500 potential jurors for the trial

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on the basis of “systemic exclusion” of African Americans. When that motion was denied, she asked for a change of venue. That motion also failed. Nevertheless, she referred to the strategy in her campaign for municipal court. A story written on the campaign ended with a reference to the case “in which she challenged the jury panel because of racial discrimination in the selection of the jurors.” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, March 24, 1949, 3:1-3.

In 1952, the local NAACP and the Westside Minister’s Alliance hired Wanderer to defend Gus Tolbert, described by the *Review Journal* as a “22-year-old Negro ex-convict,” against charges in the rape-murder of Dixie Dean. Although not yet accused, Tolbert had been held by the Sheriff on \$25,000 bail on a concealed weapons charge. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Oct 24, 1952, 3:1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Working for equal justice for African Americans during the decade led others to brand her a communist, but Wanderer spoke of her interest as only “justice.” Emilie Wanderer defended African American clients and worked with the NAACP during years of de facto segregation and racial separatism. Bills to end racial discrimination in housing and miscegenation laws were introduced, but failed to pass the state legislature through the 1940s and 1950s. A few national organizations boycotted Las Vegas for their conferences because of the segregation practices, but the city council saw no reason to intervene in business practices. On the movement for civil rights in Nevada and various legislation efforts, see Elmer Rusco, “The Civil Rights Movement in Nevada,” *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, no. 2 (1987), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Wanderer referred to her “bread and butter” cases as those involving divorce or those

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she called "creditor rights" cases.

<sup>25</sup> Czar Nicholas II and his family were assassinated after their defeat during the Russian Revolution. Prince Felix Yussopov (also spelled Yussupov) and others poisoned and killed Rasputin who they believed to have powers over the royal family. Felix was married to the Czar's niece, Irina Romanov Mijhailovitch. Or Wanderer may be referring to another relative of this family because Felix had two brothers, Lionel and George. I could not find information about their wives.

<sup>26</sup> "Between my house and the actual Desert Inn Hotel and Casino, Moe Dalitz had a home. It was not on the golf course, but between the golf course and my house, and I had to walk by there. And Moe Dalitz was amused by me. You know, he couldn't imagine me being a lawyer, because he was used to women who were more sophisticated and probably much more attractive than I could have been. Well, Canino, who lived next to me, was kind of thrilled about a woman practicing. And when they started working on the Desert Inn, it was an Italian who was the head of it (I've forgotten his name now; it'll come to me eventually), Canino tried to get him to have me represent them, and he shook his hands — put his hands up in the air and said, "A skoit? Nevah!"

<sup>27</sup> "I had a boy that I got through the bar association in New York. This boy was from Buffalo. And he worked for me a week and I asked him to give me the authorities on a question of law that I needed the citations for. And he looked at me and he wanted to know what I meant by that. It was a question of community property law — he knew nothing about it. So he was very downcast. The next day he came to me and he said, "I don't think this job is for me." So I said, "Well, if you feel that way, it probably would be

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unfair to yourself to stay.” And then I had another guy who had come from New York and [was] recommended by some friends there, and he had come because he had had a mental breakdown, and they thought that I would be a good influence on him and give him a new outlook on life.”

<sup>28</sup> *Corn v. French*, October 27, 1955, *Reports of Cases Determined by the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, 1955*. Reported by Ned A. Turner, Clerk of Supreme Court and Anna Legarza, Official Reporter. Vol LXXI (Carson City, Nevada: State Printing Office, 1956), 280-297; and *Corn v. French*, November 17, 1958, *Reports of Cases Determined by the Supreme Court of the State of Nevada, 1958*. Reported by Ned A. Turner, Clerk of Supreme Court and Anna Rebol, Official Reporter. Vol LXXIV, (Carson City, Nevada: State Printing Office, 1959), 329-334.

<sup>29</sup> In 1948, Wanderer represented three heirs of James Ladd, described by the *Las Vegas Review Journal* as an early pioneer of Las Vegas who owned significant real estate in Las Vegas east of 10<sup>th</sup> St from Charleston to Fremont as well as acreage north of Fremont. The complaint charged their brother and estate administrator, A.C. Delkin, with misrepresentation of information on the estate in order to take possession of their inheritance through dummy sales; selling property without providing information about the sales to heirs; and using misinformation to acquire their holdings in the Delkin Building located at 223 Fremont St. The client referred to by Wanderer was reported variously as Hattie May Delkin Pavlo or Heddy May Pavlow. *Las Vegas Review Journal*, September 2, 1948, 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Statutes of Nevada, 1954-1955*, Chap. 117, p. 161.

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<sup>31</sup> She did apply to the Illinois Bar. Thank you to John Wanderer for supplying me a copy of the application and related materials.

<sup>32</sup> Emilie Wanderer held two committee posts related to family courts. She held the vice-chair of the family law section with the Western States, American Bar Association; and the chair of the family life committee for the NAWL.

<sup>33</sup> For more information on the family court's origins, see *LVRJ*, February 3, 1948, 5; January 18, 1949, p.3.

<sup>34</sup> For an announcement of her filing for District Judge Dept. 8, see *North Las Vegas Valley Times*, June 22, 1972. Had she been elected, she would have been another first – the first woman to sit on the Nevada bench. The positions came up for renewal in 1974 and after that judges served four-year terms. For more on Wendell's first four months in the position, see *Las Vegas Sun*, October 29, 1972, 13. He resigned from Department VIII District Court in 1991. While the newspaper coverage notes that Wanderer was “the first woman ever to file for a District Court judgeship in Nevada,” a second woman, Audrey-Deane Sullivan, also ran and challenged Leonard Gang in Department 9. Sullivan graduated from Duke University and Fordham University Law. A Las Vegas resident since 1955, she worked as a deputy city attorney. *LVRJ*, September 3, 1972, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Wanderer brought Dr. Rosalind Goodrich Bates to Las Vegas at least twice to speak to professional organizations. At the beginning of 1950, Bates who held the presidency of the International Federation of Women Lawyers spoke to an audience of the Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW), Mesquite Club, and the American Association of University Women on the subject “Women's Opportunities, Progress and Advantages in

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the United States and Europe.” *LVRJ*, January 8, 1950, 6, c 4-5. Dr. Bates returned the following year to discuss the contrast between the courts of the U.S. with those of Europe and the Middle East. At that time, Wanderer held the state chair of the International Relations Committee for the BPW. Guests included members of the state bar and members of the Las Vegas Valley’s Business and Professional Women’s Clubs. *LVRJ*, March 4, 1951, sec 3B, 6-7. They never found Dr. Bate’s murderer; nor could they link it to one of her cases.

<sup>36</sup> *LVRJ*, November 14, 1951, 11:5

<sup>37</sup> *LVRJ*, April 28, 1950, 9:2-3.

<sup>38</sup> *LVRJ*, February 29, 1976, Sec A.

<sup>39</sup> *LVRJ* covered women’s contributions to the community in a bicentennial series. They described Nike House as a halfway house for young girls with drug problems. Dorothy Brimacombe played an important role in civic and business activity in Las Vegas as a Business and Professional Women’s Club member. The *Las Vegas Review Journal* recognized her as the founder of the Highway Safety Association and Nike House. It described Emilie Wanderer as a member of the board of Nike House and concluded “Mrs. Wanderer feels she is equally qualified in her roles as mother and lawyer.” *LVRJ*, February 29, 1976, sec A, 5-6. According to the organizational history, Nike House was founded in 1972 “to house abused girls.” Brimacombe served the Nevada Federation of Republican Women as president from 1952-1954. For more information, see <http://www.reviewjournal.com/communitylink/nikehouse> as of November 13, 2003.