

A life well lived

MEMORIAL CELEBRATION FOR

Professor Emeritus
Edward J. Littlejohn

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023

Spencer M. Partrich Auditorium
Wayne State University Law School



Event Program

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Richard Bierschbach

*Dean and John W. Reed Professor of Law
Wayne State University Law School*

REMARKS

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Omega Service

The Honorable Dennis W. Archer

Former Mayor of The City of Detroit

Fred Harring

Wayne Law Alumni, General Counsel, Fisher Investments

Peter Hammer

*Director, Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights and A. Alfred Taubman Professor of Law
Wayne State University Law School*

Alice Jennings

Wayne Law Alumni, Edward & Jennings, P.C.

Linda Greene

Dean and MSU Foundation Professor of Law, Michigan State University College of Law

Gale Ross

Fine Artist, and mentee of art collector Edward J. Littlejohn

Brandon Littlejohn

Grandson of Edward J. Littlejohn

Victor Littlejohn

Son of Edward J. Littlejohn

CLOSING REMARKS

Richard Bierschbach

Reception to Follow

EDWARD J. LITTLEJOHN 1935 - 2023



Edward James Littlejohn of Sarasota, Florida, passed away unexpectedly June 7, 2023. He made his transition peacefully, sitting poolside surrounded by art and nature viewing his preserve.

Edward's loving parents, Chester W. Littlejohn, and Crystal (Hudson) Littlejohn, as well as his siblings, Chester W. Littlejohn Jr., and Elizabeth (Littlejohn) Parker, all preceded him in death. He is survived by children, Martin P. Littlejohn and Victor E. Littlejohn, his grandson, Brandon E. Littlejohn and niece, Crystal (Littlejohn) Harvey, as well as an array of cousins.

Edward, who most simply called Ed, was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1935, before his family moved to Hamtramck, Michigan. He graduated from Hamtramck High School, doing well academically, while playing football and serving as captain of the swim team. A promising white scholar-athlete might have been recruited to local colleges, not so a Black student from Hamtramck.

Unable to afford college and without the support of his family, Ed struck out, unsuccessfully, on his own. In the face of difficult times, he tried his hand in the auto factories, the Post Office, the library and even as a drug store clerk. In 1957, at the age of 21, in selecting between homelessness and the military, he chose the Army. Ed became an excellent marksman, distinguishing himself as a sharpshooter on both the carbine and M-1 rifles, before being honorably discharged.

Academic degrees would follow, but Ed was largely a self-taught man, reading widely, developing his writing skills, and learning how to play chess. In 1963, Ed was one of Michigan's 51 strongest chess players to take on the twenty-year-old champion Bobby Fischer in a simultaneous exhibition at the Chess Mate Gallery in Detroit. Fighting through forty-eight moves against the champion, Ed was one of the last five challengers standing.

The intelligence, strategy and patience reflected in chess would help guide the rest of his career. But Ed had a lot of academic catching up to do, all while beginning to raise a family. Returning from the army, he found employment with the City of Detroit. Starting as a caseworker for the Department of Public Welfare, he took on positions of increasing responsibility, ending as the Head Technical Assistant to the Citizens Governing Board of the Detroit Model Neighborhood Program.

Working full-time, he made room for family and school. He received his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) from Wayne State University (1965). Next came law school at the Detroit College of Law (now Michigan State University Law School), graduating in 1970 alongside fellow classmate Denise Archer, who became a lifelong friend.

Ed graduated at the top of his law school class and (unusually) was hired to join the law faculty upon graduation, beginning his academic career. He taught at Detroit College of Law (1970-72) and then Wayne State University Law School (1972-1996), being conferred the status of Emeritus Professor of Law (1996-2023). Along the way, he received a Masters of Laws (LL.M., 1974) and a Doctors in Laws (S.J.D., 1982) from Columbia University Law School.

The 1970s marked a decade of battles for equal access to higher education for Black students. Ed fought this battle on the Law School front, striving to make "a way" out of the historic "no way" he and countless other Black

EDWARD J. LITTLEJOHN 1935 - 2023

students had to fight to obtain a law degree. Ed was given substantial administrative responsibilities at Wayne Law, in addition to his teaching and research obligations, serving as Assistant Dean and then Associate Dean. He used this position to fight racism in student admissions and racism on the faculty. Law school is never easy, but he fought to make it more fair for students of color. Generations of Black law students pay tribute the role Ed played as a mentor and institutional guardian, making their careers possible. His work helped change the fundamental composition of the Detroit and State bar.

Ed also made his mark as a scholar and policy advocate. His writings detailed the ongoing crisis of police brutality in Detroit and across the nation, and the absence of any meaningful oversight and accountability, a crisis Ed lamented up till the end of his life as an ongoing national shame. His scholarship advocated reforms to make police officers and police departments more accountable, calling for greater civilian oversight. His advocacy succeeded in Detroit, with the formation of the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners. Ed served as an inaugural member of the Board.

Ed engaged in decades of public service in numerous capacities, often at the request of Mayors Young or Archer. He chaired the Board of Ethics for City of Detroit (1994), was a Trustee reviewing the “Red Squad” political surveillance files of the Detroit Police Department (1990), was a member of the Crime Task Force of the Detroit Strategic Planning Project (1987), and was a Reporter for the American Bar Association’s Task Force on Minorities in the Legal Profession (1985-86), to name a few. He also served as an expert witness, hearing referee, trustee, lecturer, and editor in many different capacities.

Ed’s life-long personal and scholarly passion, however, was African American Legal History. He wrote, collected, and archived materials, and advocated for the importance of the entire field of research. Most notably, he authored *Black Lawyers, Law Practice, and Bar Associations – 1844-1970: A Michigan History*, popularly known as the “Red Book.” Published by the Wolverine Bar Association, it is the only book to date that chronicles the struggles of Black lawyers in Michigan.

Ed knew that writing was not enough. As a visionary, he understood that new institutions also had to be created to support the work. Ed was the founder and inaugural Director of the Damon J. Keith Collection of African American Legal History at Wayne State University Law School, in partnership with the Walter P. Reuther Library. The work of the Keith Collection was an essential catalyst to the future formation of the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne Law. Equally significant, Ed donated his own papers to the Reuther Library, forming the Edward J. Littlejohn Collection.

You cannot be a great historian without also being a great storyteller. The story Ed most wanted to tell in the last decades of his life was of the person he unabashedly called the greatest man he had ever met – Judge George W. Crockett, Jr. Starting in the 1990s, Ed engaged in extensive interviews with Judge Crockett and Ernie Goodman. Crockett left Ed many of his personal papers, which are now part of the Littlejohn Collection. Demonstrating the drive and intellect that was active over his whole life, Ed published *No Equal Justice: The Legacy of Civil Rights Icon George W. Crockett Jr.* in February 2022, in time for Black History Month. He was able to enjoy the many well-deserved accolades and various awards the book received, as testimony to the culmination of his life’s work.

History was not his only passion. He had an equal passion for African American Art and developed an amazing collection of works. While loving the hunt, it was never just about art as objects. He was equally interested in investing in the artists, cultivated numerous long-term relationships.

Philanthropy assumed a greater role as he aged. Ed believed in giving back to institutions that helped make you who you are. He gave generously to his alma mater Michigan State University Law School and his former employer Wayne State University Law School. Perhaps most fittingly, there is now a faculty chair at Wayne Law named in his honor.

Despite all of his accomplishments, Ed lived a humble life. While, like most academics, he could sometimes be a recluse, he always valued his family and friends. He could be very opinionated, but seldom shared critical views publicly. He expected much of his friends but gave even more. His generosity was frequent, but also quiet and unassuming.

Ed was enamored with a 1974 poem written by legal giant Judge Wade H. McCree Jr. in tribute to another legal giant, attorney Harold E. Bledsoe. Ed selected this poem to conclude the book *No Equal Justice*, as a tribute to George W. Crockett, Jr. As Ed's life merges into the African American legal history he so well loved, it is only fitting to acknowledge him as yet another tall tree.

*When a tall tree falls, it makes a thund'rous sound
To tell the forest that a giant is dead,
And now there seems an empty spot of ground
Where once a stalwart presence raised its head.*

*But if we look, the ground on which it stood
Brings forth green seedlings, reaching for the sun
To find their place as stalwarts in the wood
Beginning as their parent had begun.*

*And so, the great soul whom we mourn
Has not left us without a legacy.
A host of fledglings studied 'neath his sway,
Each one may someday be a mighty tree.
Thus God, his will inexorable ordains
To make us mortals know that he still reigns.*

The many seedlings – his family, his ideas, the histories he documented and preserved, and the students he made “a way” for – will be his most lasting legacies.

TRIBUTES TO EDWARD J. LITTLEJOHN

Richard Bierschbach

Dean and John W. Reed Professor of Law, Wayne State University Law School

I first heard Ed's name from Wayne Law Professor Peter Hammer shortly after becoming dean of the Law School in August 2017. Ed had been considering establishing an endowed chair at the Law School's Damon J. Keith Center. I, as dean, was pulled in to help steward and finalize Ed's gift. Little did I know then how Ed's presence in my life would grow to become so much more. What started out as a relationship between a dean and a donor became, to me, a cherished friendship. I always looked forward to my talks with Ed. In every conversation he invariably both would say something that would make me smile and would recount some fascinating chapter or story from his life that, although it would seem like a small anecdote to him, would richly impress upon me just how wide-ranging his interests, impact, and career had been (and still were—he never slowed down). I learned so much from him both substantively and from how he approached life—with generosity, kindness, perspective, and strength. For generations of Wayne Law students, he personified our school's ideals and, from his spot at the podium, in his office, and through his teaching, writing, doing, and mentoring, embodied everything we want Wayne Law graduates to be.

Margaret Leary

Librarian Emerita, University of Michigan Law Library

I met Ed about ten years ago when I sought a photo or image of Gabriel Hargo, the first African American to graduate from the U of Michigan Law School, in 1870. I thought there might be such an image in the State Bar Journal issue in which one of his articles about Black Michigan lawyers appeared. He couldn't help with that, but over the rest of his life he provided enormous support.

I was, and am, doing research as a volunteer with U of M's Bentley Historical Library's project to identify all the African American students who ever attended the U of M (all schools and colleges, not just law). Ed helped me understand not just the general challenges facing Blacks, here, over the centuries, but also the amazing story of his own success. He would call me when our emails revealed I didn't know some basic facts; he would tell me some of the story of his own life, overcoming poverty and homelessness to earn an S.J.D. at Columbia Law School.

What he did most for me, though, was to illustrate by example that the most effective response to being treated unfairly is to be as fair as possible oneself; and more generally to respond to mean, ugly, nasty, or worse, treatment; with the opposite: be kind, thoughtful, generous, and gentle, no matter what. He never said that, of course--he lived it!

Victoria Roberts

U.S. District Court Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, Northeastern University School of Law Alumna

Prof. Littlejohn published the "Red Book" in 1987. He allowed the Wolverine Bar Association to host a book party for him and he donated all proceeds to scholarships. That was one of our more successful events that year when I was President of the WBA. He was a scholar. He was an educator. He was a dear friend. He also introduced me to the wonderful world of art collecting and shared this passion generously. Let's not forget his love for bicycling which could take him on 50 mile jaunts back in the day. A true Renaissance Man from humble beginnings who became a legal giant. What a lesson his life was!

Louis Jones

Field Archivist, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

Professor Littlejohn was always a strong advocate for the study of African Americans in the law, historically considered. His writings, including his article, "Black Lawyers, Law Practice and Bar Associations - 1844 to 1970: A Michigan History" and the biography of George Crockett, Jr., which he wrote with Peter Hammer, stand out as monuments in the literature on the subject. His founding of the Damon J. Keith Collection of African American Legal History housed at Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther Library and then the donation of his own papers to the Reuther Library, also highlight his interest in this history while laying the groundwork for future research. On a more personal note, Professor Littlejohn always encouraged and supported me in my work as an archivist. Having a prominent African American Law Professor provide an African American archivist like myself encouragement buoyed my spirits during critical moments during my tenure at Wayne State. I'll forever be grateful to him for these roles that he played in my life.

TRIBUTES TO EDWARD J. LITTLEJOHN

Alan S. Schenk

Distinguished Professor of Law, Wayne State University

Edward Littlejohn was a dear friend, colleague, and neighbor. On a visit to his Florida home, I saw his amazing collection of African-American art.

Ed graduated fifth in his Hamtramck high school class. When he decided to quit his auto factory job to start college and not contribute financially to the household, his step-father threw him out of their "shotgun" apartment. While enrolled at Wayne, Ed had trouble paying tuition and also financing room and board. Ed relied on the complementary meals that he received from some of his African-American classmates who were preparing meals in one of their culinary classes. Eventually, however, his lack of resources led to becoming homeless. He joined the military and upon completion of his tour of duty, with the G.I. bill, he finished his bachelor's degree. While working full-time, he enrolled in law school and graduated at the top of his class.

In his quarter-century on the Wayne Law faculty, Professor Littlejohn made an impact. Dean Charles Joiner recruited Ed to join the Wayne Law faculty and administration in 1972. Charlie wanted Ed to focus on recruiting, retaining, and graduating diverse law school classes. The law school had sponsored one of the national Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) programs to increase the enrollment and graduation of people of color and the diversity of the legal profession.

Students of color not admitted to their law school of choice under their existing admission standards were given the opportunity to enroll in one of the CLEO summer programs and, if they succeeded in that program, a participating law school would admit them. Ed disagreed with that approach. He encouraged the law school Admission Committee to admit students of color with credentials below the level of "automatic admission" if they had credentials that suggested that they were likely to succeed in their first year at Wayne Law. Professor Littlejohn strongly encourage those students to enroll and compete in the newly-structured summer program open to all admitted first-year students. Successful summer program students continued with their first-year law studies. With Professor Littlejohn's summer program, Wayne Law was able to recruit, retain and graduate a more diverse student body.

Law students who had to overcome financial and other obstacles to reach the law school seemed to naturally gravitate to him. Professor Littlejohn's office was always open to all students for assistance with academic and personal issues. He taught the Wayne Law students both in and outside class. In fact, when a group of law students, applying what they learned in their law classes, sued the law school for its violation of the Michigan Open Meetings Act, students asked for and received Professor Littlejohn's guidance.

Ed left an enduring legacy to the law school. He single-handedly created the Keith Collection of African-American Legal History. Without the existence of this Collection, the Damon J. Keith Law Collection may not exist today.

I learned a lot about ethics and integrity from my friend Ed and I miss him.





WAYNE STATE
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