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# The Newly Organized National Conference of Bar Examiners

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*Conference of Bar Examiners*

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## THE NEWLY ORGANIZED NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BAR EXAMINERS

A new organization called the Conference of Bar Examiners was formed at the time of the recent meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlantic City, and as it will doubtless have some significance in the future course of legal education, an account of its actions seems worth while. This conference met at the call of an organization committee appointed by the Chairman of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association. Various attempts in the past to form an organization of this kind have met with only temporary success. In 1898, when only 12 states had Boards of Bar Examiners, delegates from 11 of them met at the time of the American Bar Association meeting, and an organization which they formed was kept alive during the next two meetings but then died out. A subsequent attempt in 1904 met a similar fate. Meetings in 1914 and 1916, under the auspices of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, were not of sufficient vitality to perpetuate themselves.

In spite of this somewhat discouraging history, the Conference which met at Atlantic City has gone ahead to organize on a permanent basis, and expects not only to have a yearly meeting but also to function during the entire year as an aid to Boards of Bar Examiners and as a clearing house to assist them in solving particular questions.

The objects of the Conference may be briefly set out as follows:

(1) To improve the standards of general education and legal training of candidates for admission to the bar.

(2) To bring about a more thorough investigation of the character of the applicant as regards his fitness to practice law.

(3) To bring about better methods of ascertaining the knowledge and fitness of candidates who have already been admitted to the bar of some other state.

(4) To improve the quality of bar examinations as a whole and their reliability as a test of the legal knowledge of the candidate.

Under the organization which was adopted by the Conference, the membership will consist of delegates from State Boards of Law Examiners and from character committees. The officers provided for are a chairman and a secretary-treasurer, to be elected at the annual meeting which will be held at the time of the American Bar Association meeting. The executive commit-

tee which will govern the affairs of the Conference is appointed by the chairman to serve for one year, and consists of five members including the chairman's predecessor in office. The chairman and secretary-treasurer are ex-officio members of this committee.

The matter of raising funds for the carrying on of a permanent organization is placed in the hands of the executive committee with permission to solicit financial support from the states. It will thus be seen that the Conference is a separate organization from the Bar Association, formed somewhat along the same lines as the Association of Attorneys General, who also meet with the American Bar Association.

The Conference meeting was presided over by Mr. Philip J. Wickser of New York, chairman of the organization committee, and the attendance of about sixty represented more than half the states of the Union. Mr. Wickser's paper on "Ideals and Problems for a National Conference of Bar Examiners" surveyed the field of the work of the conference as well as the task of individual bar examiners. His opinion of the part which such an organization can take in the general field of legal education is worth quoting:

"An active and industrious National Association of Bar Examiners has a distinguished role to play. Indeed, without the benefit of its experience and its findings no advancement in the whole field of legal education can take place entirely free from guess work. The law schools through their association or through a general questionnaire, could do the same. The Section (of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar) could insure publicity and debate, and, through the Assembly, the local councils and the Conference of Bar Association Delegates of the American Bar Association, could develop a thorough cross-section of professional opinion, within a comparatively short time. 'Would not a recommendation,' says Mr. Alfred Z. Reed of the Carnegie Foundation, 'which might thus emerge in its final form, be more likely to be approved by state and local associations, and to result in action by legislatures and courts, than the impatient efforts of unrelated agencies, each trying to short-cut everything because each is so perfectly sure it is right?' It does not seem hard to agree with him.

"To be sure, such an idea implies a degree of professional integration beyond anything we now have, an idea indeed, itself not everywhere welcome. Integration, however, is not quite so far away as some may think. We are rapidly being

compelled to integrate by outside forces, most of which are ultimately economic, and, correspondingly powerful. We live in an age in which groups compete and individuals fall into line. The unit of thought is now some multiple of the individual; the unit of action, some consolidation of individual energies. The logic of events, in this new and crescent day, compels it. From this logic we shall not escape.

"Do we want to escape it? I do not think we do. As we do our part we shall see other agencies, each with its special contribution to make, doing theirs. Nodding acquaintance will ripen into friendly partnership. New patterns of thought, and, then, of action, will emerge, overmastering old difficulties. And if we build well, our reward shall be a sense of achievement, and of satisfaction, beyond that which any of us, individually, can possibly hope to attain."

Dean Herbert F. Goodrich of the University of Pennsylvania, President of the American Association of Law Schools, read a very interesting paper entitled "Bar Examinations and Legal Education," and Mr. Stanley T. Wallbank of the Colorado Board of Examiners discussed "The Function of Bar Examiners."

A resolution, introduced by Mr. A. G. C. Bierer of Oklahoma, to the effect that it was the sense of the meeting that an examination in or separate questions on professional ethics should be included in every bar examination, was referred to the Executive Committee.

Very interesting round table discussions among the Examiners were held the same evening on subjects of particular interest to them, such as "Character Examination for Admission to the Bar," "The Overcrowding of the Bar," and "Types of Bar Examination Questions."

The officers of the Conference are: Chairman, Mr. James C. Collins, Chairman of the Board of Law Examiners of Rhode Island; and Secretary-treasurer, Mr. Will Shaforth, Adviser of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The Executive Committee consists of Mr. A. G. C. Bierer, Jr., of Oklahoma; Mr. Stuart Campbell, of Virginia; Mr. Philip J. Wickser, of New York, and Mr. Stanley T. Wallbank, of Colorado.

From the enthusiasm which was generated at this meeting, it is apparent that this Conference is going to continue to function and to play an important part in the development of increased efficiency among the individual State Boards of Examiners.

WILL SHAFORTH.\*

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