

In Celebration.

By LINA LEE

This year we honor a milestone—the Connecticut Bar Association's 150th Anniversary. For a century and a half, the CBA has served as the unified voice of Connecticut's legal profession—steadfast through eras of change, committed through times of challenges, and instrumental in moments of progress. It is an achievement few institutions reach, and one that speaks not just to longevity, but to enduring purpose and relevance.

As we prepare to celebrate this historic moment, we invite our members to do more than reflect—we invite you to reconnect and recommit. Revisit the legacy that was built together and recommit to the shared values and to the role we each play in shaping the next chapter of our profession.

However, before we look ahead, let us take a moment to honor how it all began.

A Bold and Radical Beginning in Uncertain Times

"While there is clear historic evidence that Connecticut was not the first state to establish a statewide bar association, there is also ample evidence to indicate that Connecticut established the taproot source for the modern bar association of today."

The year was 1875. Connecticut, like much of the nation, was in transition—economically, socially, and politically. The textile industry was reshaping towns, political power was shifting, and legal systems were struggling to keep pace. Court schedules were inconsistent. Jurisdictional boundaries overlapped. Standards for legal practice varied widely. The legal profession needed order, structure, and a shared sense of purpose.

That June, Hartford's State's Attorney William Hamersley gathered a group

of prominent attorneys to address these issues. On a warm evening, they met in his office to discuss the creation of a statewide bar association—an idea that, at the time, was still new and somewhat radical.

A Century of Evolution, A Mission That Endures

One hundred years later, in 1975, the *Connecticut Bar Journal* offered a powerful reflection on the CBA's first century—one that continues to ring true:

"Most bar associations have three general levels of motivating interests: the promotion of social intercourse among members of the bar and protection of the individual and group interests of lawyers; the maintenance of the dignity of the legal system by continuous upgrading of the judicial system; and the rendering of public services which only lawyers as a group can provide. Whenever a bar association passes a motion, assumes a position, or institutes a program, the underlying motives which brought on the action can be traced back to one or more of these

root concerns. These motivating levels, personal, professional or public, are interconnected and dependent on one another and comprise a recurrent theme in this history.

The functioning process of a bar association that implements these concerns may be roughly divided into a series of four steps. First a felt need of society, the legal profession or its members is brought to the attention of the association. Second, the association grapples with the problem internally, usually by appointing a committee to study the situation and make recommendations. Third, a policy which responds to the program is forged by debate and vote of the association as



They ended the meeting with a resolution: to form a State Bar Association "to maintain the honor and dignity of the profession of law, to cultivate social intercourse among its members, and to promote the due administration of justice."

What they established that night was not simply an organization. It was the beginning of a shared professional identity—an enduring commitment to advocacy, reform, and service that would come to define the Connecticut Bar Association for generations to come.

a whole. And fourth, the association takes tangible action as required by the policy agreed upon.

This process is often cumbersome, but is certainly the most appropriate for a voluntary association. The growth and development of this functioning process in the Connecticut Bar Association is the central focus of this story of its first hundred years. Over and over again, in various disguises, the process of implementing association concerns shaped the development of the group as a spokesman for the legal profession in Connecticut.

Lawyers are and always have been an integral force in the ongoing process of governmental and social development in this country and the association manifested their conscientious efforts to carry out their responsibilities."

- Connecticut Bar Journal, 1975

Honoring Legacy, Empowering the Path Forward

As we commemorate 150 years of the Connecticut Bar Association, we are reminded that legacy is not something we simply inherit—it is something we live into.

The Founders believed that the legal pro-

fession had a duty to rise above individual interests and stand as a collective force for justice, professionalism, and progress. That belief still guides us today. And in this anniversary year, we are channeling that spirit into a series of initiatives that are not just symbolic—they are deeply intentional.

We begin with service. This fall, members across the state will come together for 150 Minutes Community Service Day, a single day of unified action where we give back—each in our own way, but together in purpose. Whether it is volunteering at a legal clinic, mentoring a student, or helping a local nonprofit, the impact of our collective time will speak volumes about what this profession stands for.

The celebration begins at the Connecticut Legal Conference (CLC) Anniversary Kickoff on June 13, 2025, which will serve as the formal launch of our 150th year. With a goal of welcoming over 750 attendees—the event will feature a historical retrospective, distinguished speakers, and special reception and anniversary gift to commemorate the occasion.

Our commitment to the future extends beyond celebration. Through the relaunch of the 1875 Society, we are investing in

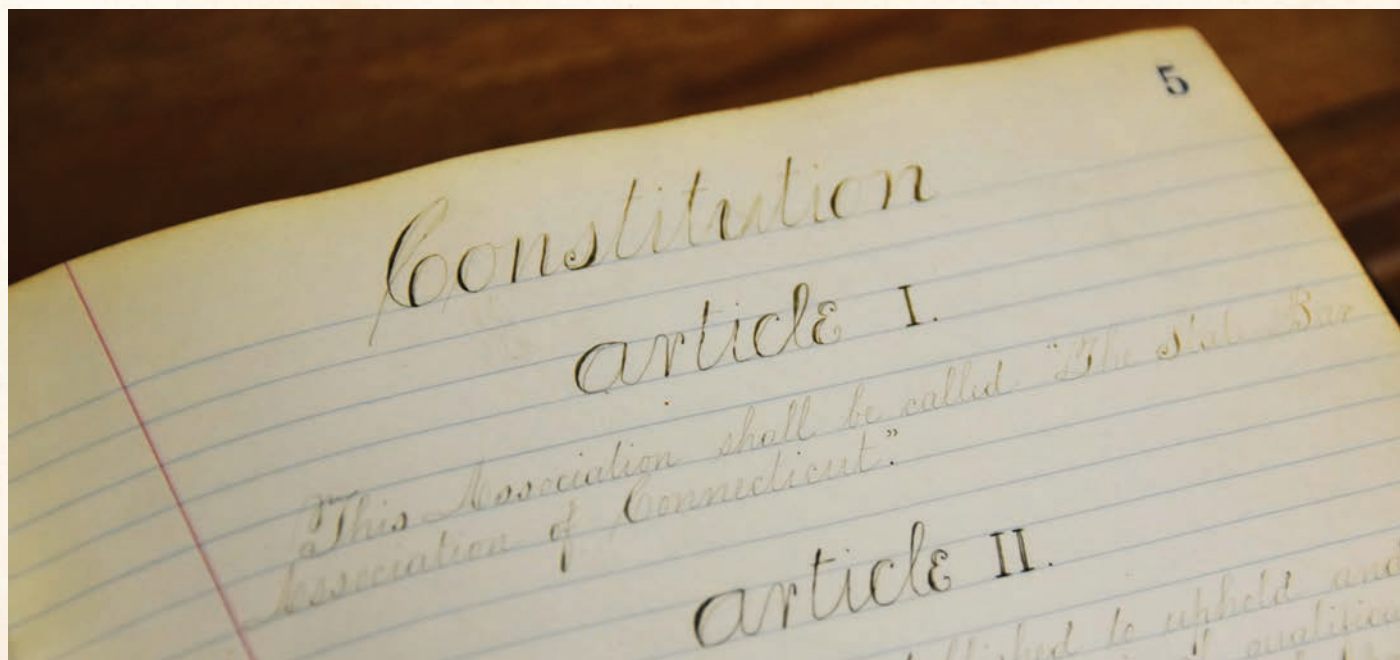
what's next—supporting scholarships, equity initiatives, and access to justice programs that will ensure the CBA remains a resource and a refuge for generations to come.

On October 16, we'll gather for the 150th Anniversary Gala—an evening of celebration, recognition, and recommitment to the ideals that have carried us this far. Proceeds from the gala will directly support legal aid, ensuring that our legacy includes real impact in the lives of those we serve.

Together, these efforts form the heart of this anniversary year. They are not separate programs—they are expressions of our legacy in motion. We are not just celebrating the past. We are building on it. We are carrying forward the work that began in 1875—rooted in shared values, shaped by our collective voice, and driven by a commitment to justice that remains relevant today as it did on June 2, 1875. You can learn more about our 150th Anniversary Celebration at ctbar.org/150Years. ■



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The Connecticut Bar Association's recorded minutes from its preliminary meeting in 1875 included the establishment of the association's constitutional articles and bylaws