

McNutt, Hurt & Blue

Founded: 1882

Location: First National Bank of Martinsville Building (1882?–1953); 239 North Jefferson Street (1953– )

In 1882 Charles G. Renner founded a law firm that boasted of the inclusion of appellate court judges, prosecuting attorneys, and an Indiana governor. Renner was a lawyer and business entrepreneur who not only practiced in a courtroom, but also owned a livery and hotel business. In 1899 Renner formed a partnership with John Crittenden McNutt, an arrangement that lasted until Renner's death in 1910. A year later McNutt joined with Alfred M. Bain, but the partnership dissolved in January 1913. A year later he started a practice with his son, Paul V. McNutt, which lasted until the latter's election to the governor's office.

John C. McNutt was an Indiana native who began teaching school at age eighteen and switched to the practice of law three years later. In 1884 McNutt was admitted to the Indiana bar and after a two-year apprenticeship began practicing on his own. In 1888 McNutt was elected prosecuting attorney for Johnson and Shelby Counties on the Democratic ticket and was reelected two years later. After his term of office expired in the two counties, he won the post of librarian of the Indiana State Law Library, remaining in that position until joining with Renner. In 1916 he was appointed judge of the Indiana Appellate Court to finish out the term of Joseph H. Shea.

While McNutt was the senior attorney, the offices of McNutt & Bain, and later McNutt & McNutt, were located in the First National Bank of Martinsville building. McNutt acted as the attorney for the bank and was also a stockholder. The law firm proved to be very successful, attracting many important clients, including the Big Four,

Pennsylvania, Monon, and Illinois Central Railroads, as well as the Home Building Association and two sanitariums in the county. Before the 1930s McNutt served as the Morgan County attorney, continuing to practice into the 1940s. While his interest in politics never ebbed, his defeats in the 1918 election for the Indiana Supreme Court and the 1924 ballot contest for the Indiana Appellate Court ended his formal political aspirations.

Paul V. McNutt, governor of Indiana from 1933 to 1936, was admitted to the bar after graduating from Indiana University in 1913. He joined his father in the law practice in 1914, while at the same time completing the requirements for a law degree from Harvard University, which he received in 1916. When the United States entered World War I, Paul took a leave of absence from the law office and joined the United States Army. After the war Paul remained active in the reserves and in the American Legion, where he was elected commander of the Indiana Department in 1927, followed a year later by his election as the national commander. In 1917 he was made an assistant professor of law at Indiana University, rising to full professor a few years later, and to dean of the law school in 1925. He continued the association with his father until 1932. In 1947, after serving a second term as the United States Commissioner to the Philippines, he practiced law in New York and Washington D.C., but continued to serve as a counselor to the Martinsville firm until his death in 1955.

After six years of practicing alone, John McNutt took John E. Hurt as a partner in 1938. The name of the firm changed to McNutt & Hurt, remaining so until 1948 when Samuel Blue became a partner. The 1950s were a busy time for the partners, and it proved a good time for business. The firm expanded by opening a branch office in

Indianapolis in 1950, which remained open until 1985. Hurt was also very active in the Democratic party, serving as secretary of the state committee in 1948, and was appointed Judge of the Morgan County Circuit Court in 1952, serving for just under a year. Blue also participated in politics, serving as county prosecutor from 1950 to 1953. Beyond politics, the firm's partners were highly esteemed in the legal community as can be seen in the selection of Blue to the post of secretary to the Morgan County Bar Association in 1958, a position he held for eight years.

In the 1960s H. Richard Miles and John H. Caress joined the firm as associates. Both men had been born in Indiana and were graduates of the Indiana University Law School in the early part of the decade. Along with his post in the Morgan County Bar Association, Sam Blue remained busy, becoming the Martinsville City Attorney in 1962 and the attorney for the Morgan County Plan Commission in 1960. Another new face became an associate in the late 1960s, James Bruce Dodd, also a graduate of the Indiana University Law School, and he remained with the firm until after the mid-1970s.

By 1975 the Martinsville practice had established offices in the Merchants National Bank Building in Indianapolis. Miles and Caress had left the firm by the mid-1970s, but the practice added Robert E. Lybrook, a Deputy Attorney General for the state of Indiana in 1973–74. Lybrook was a 1972 graduate of the Indiana University Law School. The firm served a diverse clientele including numerous insurance companies, such as Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company, the Public Service Company of Indiana, and the Metropolitan School District of Martinsville, along with several title companies.

Several changes took place at the firm by the mid-1980s. The Indianapolis office was closed and the firm welcomed William Van Der Pol, Jr., as an associate. Similar to the other lawyers in the practice, Van Der Pol was a native Hoosier who had received his diploma from the Indiana University Law School. He later left the firm to start his own practice in Martinsville. Blue and Hurt remained active in the practice, with Blue continuing his presence in the legal community, becoming an Administrative Law Judge in 1985. The attorneys continued to counsel the Public Service Company of Indiana, the Martinsville School System, and several title companies, as well as being retained by a number of railroads, including the Illinois Central Gulf, Conrail, and Amtrak.

In 1987 McNutt, Hurt & Blue hired Michael C. Ice as an associate. Ice fit the profile of the other associates and partners in the firm—he was born in Indiana and received his graduate degree at Bloomington. Before coming to the Martinsville firm, he had sat as a member of the Indiana Law Review and had been a special assistant to the U. S. Attorney in the Virgin Islands. The firm remained the representative of Public Service Company of Indiana and the Commonwealth Land Title Insurance Company, adding the Indiana National Bank as its client in the late 1980s.

In 1999 McNutt, Hurt & Blue was the oldest continuously practicing law firm in Morgan County. The group engages in general civil, criminal trial, administrative, personal injury, and probate law. Representative clients for the practice in the 1990s included Public Service Company of Indiana, South Central REMC, Kendrick Memorial Hospital, and the Morgan County Department of Family and Children. Hurt and Blue continue to work at the practice located on North Jefferson Street. Associate attorneys include Dale S. Coffey, a 1995 graduate of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School and a

Martinsville native, who was hired in 1995, and Ice. Ice became a Morgan County public defender in 1987 and a Morgan County welfare attorney in 1990, posts he continued to hold in the late 1990s.