

William J. Jameson: A Lawyer of Distinction

Attorney, judge and leader of his profession, William J. Jameson's colleagues in the Yellowstone County Bar Association praised him as a man with "devotion to public duty, adherence to principle and insistence on justice."

Born in 1898, Jameson spent his early childhood in Butte. His father had started as a miner, and studied and saved for his education, working hard to improve himself. He became an attorney, and practiced in Butte before opening his own practice in Roundup in 1908, and becoming deeply involved in his new community.

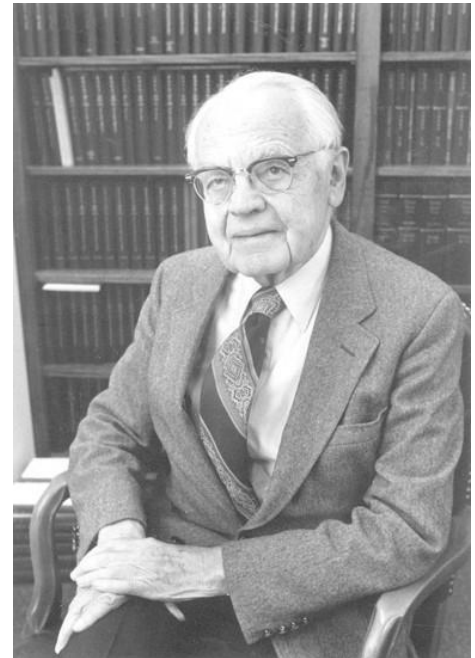
Jameson had decided as a boy of six to follow his father into the law profession, and often attended court sessions, even when his father was not involved in the case. He believed there would always be a demand for "attorneys who know the law, respect it, and obey it." He graduated high school in Roundup as valedictorian and class president in 1915, before heading to Missoula for college and law school, where he also met his future wife Mildred Lore, from Billings.

Jameson was offered a job at Billings law firm by former mayor William M. Johnston. He liked his work, and he liked the city, getting involved with fraternal organizations and setting down roots. He and Mildred married in 1923. Jameson began building a reputation as someone who was easy-going, but thorough, and who studied his cases down to the last detail.

He was associated with Coleman and Johnston until 1929, when it became Johnston, Coleman and Jameson and later evolved to Coleman, Jameson and Lamey in 1940. His involvement with the wider legal community began in 1924, when the Montana Bar Association elected him secretary. He would become its president in 1936.

His firm encouraged him to run for the state Legislature in 1926, and he won his race, becoming the youngest legislator in the 1927 session. The Billings community was pushing hard to get the Eastern Montana Normal School – now MSU-Billings, and Jameson was instrumental in achieving it. He remained a legislator through 1935.

In 1937, Jameson became a member of the American Bar Association's national House of Delegates. He served on the association's Board of Governors from 1943-1946, and was elected President of the ABA for the 1953-54 term. Jameson was the first Montanan to serve as President of the ABA, and until 2018, the only one. During his



Judge William J. Jameson in 1982

tenure, the ABA opened an expansive new headquarters building in Chicago, and conducted a monumental survey of the legal profession.

Jameson remained devoted to the Billings and wider Montana community. He served as President of the Billings Chamber of Commerce, and served on the Board of Trustees of School District 2. He also chaired the local Red Cross, served on the boards of the Deaconess hospital, Montana Power, the Billings YMCA, and MSU's foundation, as well as a district governor for the Lions Club and a past Master of the local Masonic lodge.

In 1957, Jameson was nominated by President Eisenhower to become a federal district judge for Montana, and that nomination was confirmed by the Senate. He served in that capacity until 1969. One of his clerks who had once seen him toting a number of bulging briefcases when packing for a weekend at the family cabin had expressed his hope that he wouldn't be working the whole time. Jameson smiled. "I enjoy my work; I love the law." Jameson was indeed devoted to that work. He typically arrived in the office early, took short lunches, and often worked on Saturdays and federal holidays.

When Jameson turned 70 in 1969, he had two options: to resign his office entirely, or to retire from active service as a Senior Judge. He chose to retire, which allowed him to accept temporary assignments. He then served stints in San Francisco, New York, Washington, Chicago and many other locations, as well as within Montana. Jameson remained as a serving judge until a few years before his death in October 1990 at the age of 92.

In 1973, Jameson had received the American Bar Association Medal, the ABA's highest award. Previous recipients included such illustrious names as Elihu Root, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Felix Frankfurter. In the accompanying citation, it was said that Jameson "brought honor to the profession." Likewise, his legacy in Montana is that the State Bar of Montana's highest award bears Judge Jameson's name, as does the Law Library at the University of Montana. The Yellowstone County Bar Association's memorial tribute said that "no Montana lawyer was every more highly esteemed, none more widely admired. None has ever attained such a high pinnacle....Yet none was ever more kind and gentle, none less pretentious. No lawyer in Montana or elsewhere ever was more diligent, more dedicated to the law."

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Larry Mayer photo, *Billings Gazette*, 1982.

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