

History Comes *Alive!*

~ Tales From the City Archives ~



by Michael E. Holland
City Archivist

To Our Readers:

Please welcome a guest columnist this month, Jacqueline R. Braitman, an expert on LA history, especially this month's subject, Stanley Mosk. Welcome, Jacqueline!
— Michael

by Jacqueline R. Braitman

Hundreds of mourners filed into rows beneath the cavernous dome of the majestic Wilshire Boulevard temple in June 2001. They came to honor California Supreme Court Justice Stanley Mosk (1912 – 2001), who, during his unprecedented 37-year tenure, was known as the iconic protector of civil rights and civil liberties.

State Attorney General Bill Lockyer and Senate President Pro Tem John Burton were there, along with former Councilwoman Rosalind "Roz" Wyman. The list went on and on. On stage, Gov. Gray Davis sat with Mosk's family along with Santa Clara law professor Gerald "Jerry" Uelmen; former justice and Reagan Cabinet member William Clark; and the state's Chief Justice Ronald M. George. As I looked around, I saw that two seats separated me from former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and down a few more rows were the former and current governor of California, then-Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown and L.A.'s mayor-elect James K. Hahn, son of long-time County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn.

I suddenly realized I was sitting amidst two generations of movers and shakers of post-World War II California.

I was somewhat familiar with Mosk's reputation, but after hearing the esteemed speakers' testimony, it was clear there were few who could rival Stanley Mosk's influence on the state's politics, law and administration of justice. I began to wonder just who the heck Stanley Mosk really was. Little did I know that such pondering would send me on a decade-long, breath-

wrote, "Mosk is California history with a heartbeat." Without a doubt, looking at the way Stanley Mosk's life circulated, it also uniquely captures the historic pulse of Los Angeles.

During the tumultuous years of the Great Depression, the young, handsome attorney (Morey) Stanley Mosk set up a small, downtown office. He thought it was a good day when he could report to his new wife, Edna, that he had a big case, "a \$25 case, and a couple of little ones." Hardly waiting for clients to walk through the door, he immersed himself in the cause of labor and good government. Wearing many hats, he rose within the network of reformers and protesters fighting political corruption and the alleged abusive tactics of the LAPD. Mosk investigated and publicized police brutality on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Municipal League. Eventually, he worked alongside colorful cafeteria owner

He found time to write a widely read, weekly syndicated column called "Judging the News." As his popularity spread, he won leadership posts in dozens of the Southland's secular and Jewish organizations. When he returned to the bench after a brief stint as a buck private, he spoke widely about veterans' problems, and he took on the cause against housing discrimination faced by minorities, most urgently affecting the

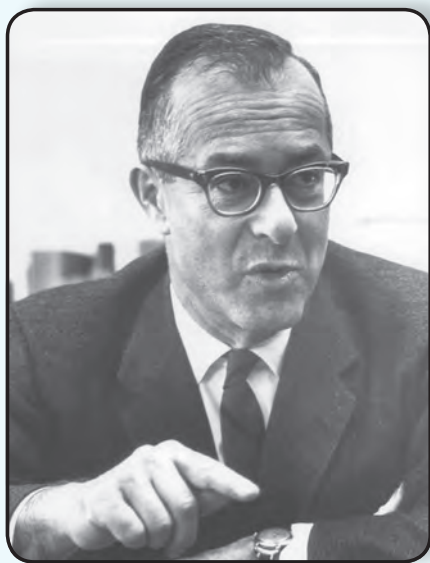
mail arrived in Sacramento. At the helm of a dynamic team, Mosk's office tackled an often-controversial agenda to expand the protection, enforcement and advocacy of citizens' rights and civil liberties. Sometimes issues crossed state lines, such as water rights and narcotic trafficking. Perhaps most visibly, when he learned that the PGA had denied access to African-American golfers, his intervention forced the national organization to



A large party of seated guests in LA. Judge Stanley Mosk of the California Supreme Court addresses the group. Photo courtesy the LA Public Library photo collection, made possible through the support of the Security Pacific Bank, Sunlaw Cogeneration Partners, Photo Friends, California Council of the Humanities, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, and the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation.

The Judge Behind the Name

Many LA venues are named for Judge Stanley Mosk. Here's why.



Judge Stanley Mosk. Photo courtesy Argenta Images. Used with permission.

taking journey of discovery about the man, the City, and the Golden State.

I soon learned that outside of the legal profession, and even among the most astute observers of the Court and local or state history, the breadth of Stanley Mosk's entire legacy was largely unknown. That is, except for *Jewish Journal* writer Marlene Adler Marks, who in 1997 aptly summed it up when she

Clifford Clinton (Clifton's) and future L.A. Mayor Sam Yorty, to galvanize the nation's first successful mayoral recall-election in 1938 that ousted Frank Shaw and replaced him with four-term Fletcher Bowron.

That same year, Mosk was part of the growing army of New Deal Democrats who elected local party chairman Culbert Olson as governor. Recognizing Mosk's many talents, Olson appointed him as an Executive Secretary. Unfortunately, controversy plagued the one-term Olson administration. Representing the governor's office, banner headlines quoted Mosk about one scandal or another, and an occasional execution. Upon leaving office, Olson appointed Mosk inadvertently to the Los Angeles Superior Court instead of the lower-level municipal bench, making him the youngest jurist ever seated. Over the next 16 years, Mosk regularly grabbed headlines when he either married or divorced or ruled in a variety of tame or controversial cases involving Hollywood's biggest stars including Judy Garland, Lana Turner and Charlie Chaplin, to name just a few.

City's new African-American residents. A year before a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, Judge Mosk decided that racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable under the U.S. Constitution. This secured his place among the vanguard of the historic political alliance between Jewish liberals and African Americans.

In 1958, Mosk's rising stature combined with an invigorated Democratic Party to elect him as the state's Attorney General. He tallied the widest margin of victory in the nation, including the popular new governor, Pat Brown. What's more, he demonstrated then, and four years later, that being Jewish was no longer a political liability, except for the enmity of crackpots whose viscous hate

amend its constitution. Mosk earned accolades nationwide. Some speculated he might have a shot at a vice presidential nomination. In October 1963, a *San Francisco Examiner* banner headline announced President Jack Kennedy's endorsement of Mosk, and statewide polls indicated Mosk the likely winner if he ran in the next year's U.S. Senate race. His devoted followers stood ready for him to throw his hat in the ring. Instead, Mosk unexpectedly announced he would not run, and no one at the time could have realized this augured a new course in American politics.

Gov. Pat Brown handed Mosk a consolation prize with a seat on the state Supreme Court. He joined his brethren in the fall of 1964, during another era of social unrest and rebellion against America's traditions and leadership, initially inspired by the Vietnam War. Justice Mosk weathered this and many other storms and he established a judicial legacy that lasted through the dawn of the new millennium, which found Californians revisiting many of the same controversies facing Justice Mosk and seemingly settled so long ago.

About the Author

Jacqueline R. Braitman is the co-author (with Gerald F. Uelmen) of *Justice Stanley Mosk: A Life at the Center of California Politics and Justice* (McFarland Pub. 2012). Dr. Braitman is currently preparing a manuscript about the extraordinary life and "invisible power" of the executive secretary to MGM movie mogul Louis B. Mayer, Ida R. Koverman, who was "the real political boss of Los Angeles."



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