

ABA-IPL at 125 years: Celebrating exhilarating accomplishments in IP

April 2020 | **George W. Jordan III**

This year, the ABA Section of Intellectual Property Law (ABA-IPL) is proud to commemorate 125 years—marking a momentous time in its history and that of intellectual property (IP) law itself.

Created in August 1894 at the 17th ABA Annual Meeting in Saratoga Springs, New York, our Section, then called the Section of Patent Law, became the first substantive section of the American Bar Association. The Section gained an early start in forging its individual identity within the ABA. By the 1920s, we were addressing trademark and copyright as the Section of Patent, Trademark and Copyright Law, and we became the Section of Intellectual Property Law in 1993. Back in the beginning—just like we hear today—patent law was considered a “difficult but fascinating” area.¹

Our first Section chair was Edmund Wetmore, who was considered “one of the ablest and most efficient of patent lawyers.”² Wetmore is known for representing Westinghouse Electric in its incandescent lamp litigation, Henry Ford in automobile litigation, and the Wright brothers in litigation over the Wright flying machine.³ His professional association standing was undeniable: he later served as president of the American Bar Association (1900-1901) and as president of the New York City Bar Association (1908-1909).⁴

We can truly marvel at the extraordinary achievements, steadfast contributions, and exemplary moments in the history of IP law that also built our own Section’s foundation and its continuing

strength. Over these 125 years, the Section and the profession have faced anti-patent and other times of IP law disarray as we also addressed a wide range of other matters. We have been at

the profession’s forefront in advocating and advancing IP matters of vital interest, including the Lanham Act, Patent Act of 1952, Copyright Act of 1976, Federal Circuit creation, America Invents Act, and Defend Trade Secrets Act of 2016—just to name a few.

Beyond advancing new IP laws through adoption, we engaged in multiyear efforts to modernize those laws. Working within the strength of the ABA we assumed a major active role in the development of a fair and balanced system for IP law protection. Our work in developing ABA policy at the ABA House of Delegates on highly important IP issues was often instrumental. Time and again we made an impactful difference in advancing the standards of the IP profession and in the diligent service of its community.

More than 100 Section chairs have led generations of ABA-IPL members in addressing matters of great interest and concern in IP law. Legendary predecessors have paved the way for our work today, and young bright stars are already in place to work on uncharted territory and future challenges. The Section continues to be home to the best and brightest—both the vanguards of the profession and its future titans. Patent eligibility, copyright modernization, trademark reform, privacy, and artificial intelligence are only some of the areas we will work on together.

We are grateful to our community of members and to all our constituents. Your devotion of time and talent has established a lasting legacy and a great promise for the future.

Endnotes

1. 43 REPORT OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION 380 (1918).
2. *Id.* at 381.
3. *Id.*
4. *Id.* at 382.

Authors

George W. Jordan III

George W. Jordan III is chair of the ABA Section of Intellectual Property Law. As senior counsel at Norton Rose Fulbright in Houston, Texas, he specializes in patent litigation and investigations with an emphasis on wireless, mobile, and e-commerce technologies, as well as licensing and due diligence in all areas of intellectual property law.



Norton Rose Fulbright is a global law firm. We provide the world's preeminent corporations and financial institutions with a full business law service. We have more than 4000 lawyers and other legal staff based in more than 50 cities across Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, Asia, Australia, the Middle East and Africa.

Law around the world

nortonrosefulbright.com

Norton Rose Fulbright Verein, a Swiss verein, helps coordinate the activities of Norton Rose Fulbright members but does not itself provide legal services to clients. Norton Rose Fulbright has offices in more than 50 cities worldwide, including London, Houston, New York, Toronto, Mexico City, Hong Kong, Sydney and Johannesburg. For more information, see nortonrosefulbright.com/legal-notices. The purpose of this communication is to provide information as to developments in the law. It does not contain a full analysis of the law nor does it constitute an opinion of any Norton Rose Fulbright entity on the points of law discussed. You must take specific legal advice on any particular matter which concerns you. If you require any advice or further information, please speak to your usual contact at Norton Rose Fulbright.

© Norton Rose Fulbright US LLP. Extracts may be copied provided their source is acknowledged.
23595_US – 04/20