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THE DENVER LAWYERS REFERRAL SERVICE

NORMA L. COMSTOCK

of the Denver Bar and Chairman, Legal Service Committee

During the Denver Bar Association presidency of Edward G. Knowles, a committee consisting of H. Shields Mason, Donald C. McKinlay, Ira C. Rothgerber, Jr., Roscoe Walker, Jr., and the chairman, was appointed to study and attempt to establish a legal reference plan. This subject had previously been under discussion by a similar committee of the Colorado Bar Association of which Milton Blake was and is chairman. It had been preceded by a previous Denver committee which had occupied itself principally with studies of the plans in operation in other large cities in the United States, notably New York and Chicago.

After several meetings recommendations were made to the trustees of the Denver Bar Association in February of 1949, and, pursuant to such recommendations, a plan of reference was set-up to operate through the existing joint office of the Denver and Colorado bar associations in charge of the secretary. Members of the bar association who regularly read their copies of *Dicta* and other material released by their secretary are familiar with the cards of registration furnished to the members of the bar and the invitation to participate in the plan which was sent out to all members on April 13, 1949. With the invitation were enclosed the rules of the reference service which are reproduced below.

Almost 200 lawyers registered for the panel then, and since that time additions have been made so that the panel now exceeds that number. The rules provide that an annual invitation be issued to bar association members, and the invitation was repeated at the recent bar luncheon at which a committee report was made. New association members are automatically sent application cards and copies of the rules.

During the one year of operation of the service, without any attempt being made to publicize it, referrals were made through the secretary in about 60 cases. Some business resulted, and the situation seemed to indicate that the plan was ready for general publication.

On May 10th of this year a letter describing the service and inviting persons to utilize it was mailed to a large number of organizations and people in Denver, including the judges and clerks of all the courts, the District Attorney's office, Police Department, various personnel departments in large businesses, realtors, and other who the committee believed might be requested to supply information on attorneys to inquiring parties. Insufficient time has elapsed to demonstrate whether this publicity will cause so many public contacts with the bar association office as to require extended facilities in that office. Generally, however, the service seems to meet the approval of the bar and public alike as a work-

able arrangement whereby persons who do not know attorneys may be put in touch with reputable and capable counsel.

It is anticipated that the experience of the Denver Bar Association in the matter will serve as a guide to the establishment of similar services in other Colorado cities. Colorado Bar Association president, James K. Groves, has expressed his belief that such a plan would be of great value even in the smaller towns throughout Colorado, and it is hoped that the activities of the Denver committee will have served some good purpose in establishing a precedent for other cities to follow.

The "Rules of the Lawyers Referral Service" are as follows:

1. Any member of the Denver Bar Association in good standing who agrees to comply, and does comply, with the following rules, shall be eligible for service on the reference list, except the secretary and the members of the Legal Service Committee.

2. Any member willing to serve as a reference lawyer shall register with the secretary. A lawyer may designate up to three types of cases which he prefers not to handle, and he may designate any field or fields of law in which he is a specialist.

3. The committee shall have the authority to classify attorneys for service on one or more panels, to add names and, for cause, remove names from the list, or accept resignations at any time. At least once each year the committee shall, by letter or through *Dicta*, extend an invitation to the full membership of the Denver Bar Association to register on the list.

4. All cases will be assigned by the secretary to the lawyers on the reference list in rotation so far as practicable, giving due consideration to requests for specialists and to the designated fields not handled by individual lawyers. When possible, the secretary will make a definite appointment for each applicant with the selected lawyer, who shall report back within three days if the appointment is not kept or reset. No assignment shall be considered complete until the lawyer has had one interview with the client. If the assignment does not materialize, the lawyer may notify the secretary and request a subsequent assignment. If, after the preliminary conference, a lawyer for any reason does not wish to proceed in a case requiring further action, he will ask the client to return to the association's office for re-referral.

5. Reference lawyers shall accept the assignments graciously and handle the work promptly and on the highest professional standard, keeping in mind that this is a public service sponsored by the Denver Bar Association and part of a plan for improved public relations.

6. Upon request of the secretary, the reference lawyer shall make a report on the current status of any case referred to him.

7. No referral shall be made if the client has previously consulted counsel and there is an existing lawyer-client relationship.

8. All questions or suggestions as to the manner in which referred cases are handled or as to the functioning of the referral

service shall be submitted to the secretary for appropriate action by the Legal Service Committee.

9. The standard fee for all referral cases shall be \$5 for a consultation not to exceed one hour. Thereafter, the client and the lawyer shall make their own arrangements for further services, the lawyer using the Recommended Minimum Fee Standard as a *guide*.

10. Any dispute arising between a referred client and a referral attorney over the matter of fees shall be submitted to the secretary for reference to the Legal Service Committee, whose decision shall be controlling and final.

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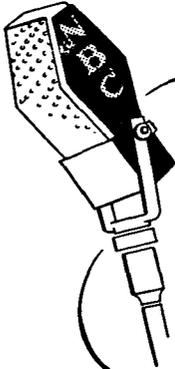
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