LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Four Score Years Ago ...

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FLORIAN.ARND AT THE GERMAN LANGUAGE WIKIPEDIA

On the morning of September 30, 1935, a motorcade of stately black automobiles made its way over the desolate roadways near Boulder City, Nevada. Within one of the vehicles sat the President of the United States. He and his entourage had travelled to this rural outpost to confer national recognition on a nearby engineering milestone, one which would change the face of the American West forever.

On that day, speaking to a crowd of 15,000 onlookers and enduring 102 degree heat, Franklin Delano Roosevelt commissioned the Hoover Dam.

Built on the backs of 21,000 laborers over a five-year period, the Dam spanned the Colorado River at Black Canyon, between Arizona and Nevada. There, the rock walls dropped sharply to the waters far below, forming an optimal site for construction, but making for treacherous lobor. Nearly 100 workers died during the project. On completion the Dam would tower some 726 feet above the riverbed, making it the tallest such structure in the world at the time. Power from the Dam would soon begin to energize towns and cities in a vast arc across the Southwest, and the Colorado's waters would be harnessed and routed across thousands of miles of viaducts and canals, sustaining agriculture on millions of parched acres. Behind the Hoover Dam's massive curvature, Lake Mead would become the nation's largest reservoir, a status it maintains to this day.

The municipality which housed the Dam's workers was an anomaly. Boulder City, located six miles from the Dam, had been hastily established by the Federal government to provide better housing and services for the thousands of Depression-era workers and their families drawn to the desolate environment to earn a living working on the Colorado River project. Modest dwellings were rapidly erected, replacing the squatters' tents which dotted the landscape. The town had no elected officials. Situated on Federal property, it was administered by the Bureau of Reclamation. Alcohol and gambling were prohibited, and miscreants faced eviction from the jurisdiction.

Boulder City would not be incorporated until 1960.

Twenty-six miles to the Northwest of Boulder City, another town was taking shape. For eons, an abundance of water from artesian wells had created a verdant oasis at that spot in the Mojave desert, drawing native peoples including the Paiute. They were followed by Mexican settlers who also prized the aquifers and gave the area its name – "The Meadows" in their parlance. During the Civil War came Nevada's statehood, and ranchers and railroaders began to occupy the region.

This town would have a far different character and trajectory than Boulder City's—although the latter would play a major role in its early growth. Nevada had banned gambling for several decades (which merely spurred the growth of illegal gaming) but reversed that prohibition in 1931. Young men from the Dam project flooded into the region, with paychecks in their pockets and no place to spend them. The same year Hoover Dam construction commenced, the Pair-O-Dice Club opened its doors on a portion of the Los Angeles Highway less than one hour's drive from Boulder City. Nearby, the Northern Club obtained Nevada's first gaming license.The casino town soon became an early recipient of the Hoover Dam's gift of unlimited electricity.

Las Vegas would never be the same. In 1935, its population was still less than 5,000--but its future was bright.

The same year Franklin Roosevelt travelled west to commission the Hoover Dam, an accomplished and visionary attorney inaugurated his own legacy. In late 1935, Charles Rhyne met with Fiorella La Guardia of New York City, Richard Daley of Chicago, and other large city mayors, many of whom were themselves lawyers. The concept of national cooperation among municipalities on legal matters was discussed, and shortly after, the National Institute of Municipal Law Officers (NIMLO) took flight. Rhyne and NIMLO went on to file numerous amicus briefs on topics from antitrust to zoning ~ labor relations, federal tax liens, rent control, employment, natural gas rates, criminal law, Indian rights under federal law, energy law, aviation, annexations, and others. And he successfully argued the groundbreaking case in *Baker v. Carr*, which would forever change judicial oversight of electoral districting in the United States, moving the country towards a more equitable "one person, one vote" process. A series of NIMLO publications and meetings would serve to bring like-minded lawyers together, creating a network of professionals dedicated to furthering excellence in municipal law across the country.

Charles Rhyne would become the youngest President of the American Bar Association and the personal lawyer to Richard Nixon, and would be twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. NIMLO would become the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA), which would carry Rhyne's vision forward.

It is somehow fitting that we celebrate IMLA's 80th anniversary with our Annual Conference in Las Vegas. In many ways, it exemplifies the American saga—new, brash, and unconventional, a 24-hour a day phenomenon known the world over, and still evolving. Today, there are over 625,000 residents in Las Vegas. It has literally grown 125 times in 80 years. And more than 2.1 million people now call the Las Vegas metropolitan area home.

There can be no doubt that the glimmering lights of greater Las Vegas, stretching ever-further across the desert, were made possible by that seminal accomplishment of engineering on the Colorado River commissioned by an American president four score years ago. There is also little question that beneath the whirring metropolis, often unseen and unsung, the rubric of municipal law—and the lawyers who help derive, interpret and enforce it—have played a significant role in that remarkable prosperity.

We are proud to have chosen Las Vegas as the site for IMLA's 80th anniversary celebration--and join you in our mutual efforts to promote excellence in our chosen field. ML