

FIRM HISTORY

The Founding Fathers

Musick Peeler traces its origins to the 1920s when its three founders, Elvon Musick, Joseph Peeler, and Leroy Garrett, organized individual firms in Los Angeles. Musick Peeler's namesakes brought diverse areas of legal expertise to their respective partnerships. Elvon Musick's firm specialized in real estate and land use. Joseph Peeler's focused on tax and estate law. Leroy Garrett's delved into corporate antitrust law and academic institutions. In the 1950s these three exceptional men saw the advantage of merging their honed intellects, different fields of legal knowledge, and professional contacts. Their fusion forged the formidable firm of Musick, Peeler & Garrett.

In the 1920s Elvon Musick founded the law firm, Musick & Burrell, with about twenty attorneys practicing real estate law. During the post-Depression and post-War years as California's population grew, Musick & Burrell focused on real estate development, representing owners and developers in such well-known projects as Tejon Ranch, Westchester, and the infamous Hollywoodland Development, which would lend its name to the world's entertainment capital.

As counsel to the Vanderlip family, which owned the Palos Verdes Peninsula, Musick & Burrell was involved in developing the peninsula into a Southern California "Riviera". Musick's contributions in the areas of zoning, planning, and uniform building restrictions were innovative and influential. They would become a model for planned communities throughout the state. Musick's emphasis on a uniform style for the Palos Verdes Peninsula resulted in a federal law which permitted the alteration of the peninsula's lighthouse to harmonize with the development's Spanish architecture.

In the 1930s and 1940s Hawaii's royal family retained Musick to revitalize Hawaii's failing pineapple industry. After the islands' incorporation into the United States, Musick won exemption for the pineapple industry under the Capper-Volstead Act.

Leroy Garrett began his practice with Wright & Garrett, an antitrust firm, famous for its hand in the break-up of the Twentieth Century Fox monopoly. Wright & Garrett also represented the Mudd family's interests and in later years, the University of Southern California. As legal counsel to that University, Garrett worked closely with its board of directors where he met board member, Elvon Musick.

Joseph Peeler began practicing law with the firm of Peeler & Wilson, one of the first Los Angeles firms to specialize in tax law. As personal counsel to J. Paul Getty, Peeler oversaw Getty's vast holdings and designed the current structure of the Getty Estate and the Getty Trust. As a member of the Getty Museum's Board of Trustees and numerous other philanthropic organizations, Peeler helped found the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera. He also served as counsel and board member for the Music Center.

Since none of the established downtown firms had their own tax departments at that time, many of Los Angeles' oldest and most prestigious partnerships like O'Melveny & Meyers, and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher frequently retained Peeler for his tax law expertise. In 1950 when Musick & Burrell faced a transaction with significant tax consequences, the firm called upon Peeler's services. This interaction led to the founding of Musick, Peeler & Garrett.

Musick, Peeler & Garrett's Origins

In 1950 one of Garrett's largest clients, Great Lakes Carbon Corporation of Pittsburgh, wanted to purchase the north side of a Palos Verdes hill for mining. Garrett, general counsel to the University of Southern California, approached fellow board member, Musick, about Great Lakes' interest in Palos Verdes. Peeler was hired to delve into the tax consequences of Great Lakes' purchase. The work of both Musick and Garrett impressed Peeler, as did the exceptional quality of their practices. Talks of a three-way merger began.

On July 1, 1952 Peeler & Wilson merged with Wright & Garrett to form the law firm, Wright, Peeler & Garrett. During the following year both Wright and Burrell passed away, and the Great Lakes / Palos Verdes transaction was completed. On February 1, 1954 Wright, Peeler & Garrett merged with Musick & Burrell, founding the law firm Musick, Peeler & Garrett.

Musick, Peeler & Garrett initially had twenty-four attorneys, all engaged primarily in transactional work. During its first year, the firm was involved in the incorporation of Harvey Mudd College. As time passed, Peeler expanded his practice establishing the firm's reputation for expertise in taxation and representation of non-profit entities. His work with the Getty Estate launched the firm as a leading estate planning and trusts practice.

Growth and Adaptation

In the 1960s and 1970s Musick, Peeler & Garrett experienced a growth spurt. A Labor and Employment practice, focusing on labor relations, collective bargaining, and contract administration, was formed. As employment-related litigation increased, the firm established a national reputation for representing clients in employment discrimination actions, wrongful termination, occupational safety, as well as issues relating to wage and hour compliance, and employee benefits. The firm also excelled in the more "traditional" labor area of management/union disputes before the NLRB.

In the mid 1970s the firm's Litigation Department began to expand. Primarily servicing transactional clients, litigation attorneys developed expertise in business litigation, antitrust matters, and commercial disputes. In 1979 R. Joseph DeBriyn joined the firm as a litigation associate. DeBriyn, who has led the firm as Managing Partner since 1985, developed the Litigation Department by expanding its client base throughout the 1980s until it became the firm's largest practice. Focusing on general business and civil litigation, Musick, Peeler & Garrett gained a reputation for expertise in defending clients in professional liability cases involving healthcare providers, accountants, architects, engineers, lawyers, agents, brokers, officers, directors, and trustees. In addition, the firm developed an extensive practice in all aspects of domestic and international insurance representation, specializing in the direct representation of insurers and reinsurers with a full regulatory practice to support these clients.

Musick Peeler Today

Since its inception, Musick Peeler has maintained its reputation for excellence, comprehensive legal services, and commitment to its clients. The firm has grown with the state of California. As clients' businesses expanded, Musick Peeler opened offices in San Francisco, San Diego, Westlake Village, Santa Barbara, and Costa Mesa to serve their geographic needs. The firm has adapted to emerging areas of the law. Musick Peeler currently has over 100 attorneys practicing in 16 disciplines: Academic Institutions, Appellate, Construction, Corporate & Securities, Environmental & Public Law, Financial Institutions, Healthcare, Insurance, Intellectual Property, International, Labor & Employment, Litigation, Oil & Gas Energy, Real Estate, Tax & Employee Benefits and Trusts & Estates. In the twenty-first century Musick Peeler offers outstanding legal services to a large and diverse clientele.