

*Clerk Biographies
of the
Municipal Court of Cleveland
1912 to Present*

Peter J. Henry

Peter J. Henry was born on the east side of Cleveland of German parentage. In his neighborhood at that time, he was one of the few in the Willson /St. Clair (E. 55th & St. Clair) industrial area who could speak English. As a boy he did clean up around his uncle's barber shop, and eventually became a barber himself. His shop on St. Clair Avenue would be his headquarters as he became an important political influence in his ward.



Henry entered politics in the Johnson era – the Mayor Tom L. Johnson era. The mayor was known to call Henry to perform his craft at city hall; shaves and haircuts when they were said to be too busy to come to his shop. It was common knowledge that he was happy to oblige, *“Some of the men who came into the shop knew I went to city hall, and they’d ask me to intercede for them whenever they got into minor scrapes.”*

He was so effective at those intercessions that a group of his friends urged him to run for city council. Mayor Johnson approved and endorsed his candidacy. In 1903, his first race was a success, and he was a councilman at the age of 32.

He would remain a councilman until his run for the municipal clerk of courts position in late 1911. Once again successful, he became the first clerk of the fledgling court, and would remain in that position until he stepped down due to ill health in 1947.

In all, Pete Henry ran for office 13 times without defeat in his 45 year political career; city council four times, clerk nine. When he opted not to run in 1947 for re-election, his son stepped in as a candidate but the election magic failed, and lost the election.

The ill health that convinced him not to run in 1947 took his life in 1948 at the age of 77.

Peter J. Henry served as the Clerk of the Municipal Court of Cleveland from its inception on January 1, 1912 to December 31, 1947.

William J. Reichle

William J. Reichle was born in Kansas City, and came to the Cleveland area when he was 7 years old. The family settled in Newburgh. He graduated from Holy Name High School and Spencerian Business College. He later studied the law at Lake Erie Law School.

Prior to his election to the Municipal Court Clerk's office in 1947, he had served as a bailiff to Judges David J. Moylan, John P. Dempsey and Alva R. Corlett in both Municipal and Common Pleas Court. Throughout his court career, he remained a tireless worker for the Republican Party.

As a clerk, Reichle was credited with a number of reforms, most importantly reducing the number of professional bondsmen. He developed the plan that allowed salaried workers to file lists of their debt with municipal courts, and pay through the court a share of their debts for distribution to creditors.

Reichle was a veteran of the U.S. Army, serving in World War I. A former sandlotter, he was a long time member of the Old Timers Baseball Club.

In the last year of his term as Clerk of Court, Reichle suffered the first of a series of strokes that would leave him confined to a wheelchair. His last years were spent as a resident of the Ohio Soldiers and Sailors Home in Sandusky.

He passed away on March 15, 1960 at the age of 66.

William J. Reichle served as Clerk of the Municipal Court of Cleveland from January 1, 1948 to December 31, 1951.



Johnny Kilbane

John Patrick Kilbane was a champion in the boxing ring and in the political arena as well. His life reads like a novel, which he lived to the fullest. His was a life he attributed to what he called "Irish luck". It was luck that he met and married Irene McDonald, luck that he won those fights, luck that made him a successful politician.



A product of the "Old Angle" on the near west side, he was born in 1889. His mother passed away when he was 3 and his father became blind when he was 6, so he had to assume some of the responsibilities at home. His childhood sweetheart, Irene, was a guiding influence on him.

He went to work on the ore docks and began boxing to supplement his income. His first fight was in 1907 when he knocked out Kid Campbell in 6 rounds. That win earned him \$25. Kilbane liked to tell the story about a fight he had against Tommy Kilbane, (no relation) at Watson's Road House on Pearl Road. It was to be a 25 round winner take all, and the police were persuaded to stay away. *"It was a terrific battle. At the end of the 19th, I couldn't breathe from all the smoke in the room. We kicked out a window and I recovered some strength. I knocked Tommy down, the only knockdown in the match. It won for me. During the fight I dropped from 119 to 112 pounds. I got paid \$401 from admission but by the time I paid all my handlers, I had \$68 left."*

He won the World Featherweight Championship, his first, in 1912 when he beat Abe Attel for the world title in a 20 round bout in California. Coming home on St. Patrick's Day, Kilbane was greeted by a crowd estimated at over 200,000. He would dominate the weight class from 1912 to 1923. He finally lost the title in 1923 when he was beaten by Frenchman Eugene Criqui in New York at the Polo Grounds. His career total would be 142 fights; 51 wins, 25 knockouts, 4 losses, 7 draws, 2 no contests. *(In his day, the boxing rules of many states dictated that if you didn't win a fight by a knockout, it was recorded as ND-No Decision.)* In his day, Kilbane was so well known as a prizefighter, that his name was used in the New York Times to describe an incident that occurred in Yankee Stadium. In May of 1912, Ty Cobb the baseball star of the Detroit Tigers, grew tired of being heckled by a New York fan. Cobb chased the fan into the stands and, as an unknown writer from the Times described, *"Johnny Kilbaned him right where he stood."*

In 1917, he became a lieutenant in the U.S. Army, stationed near Chillicothe, Ohio at Camp Sherman, where he trained soldiers in self-defense.

After his boxing career, Kilbane became a boxing referee in Ohio, operated a gym, engaged in real estate investments, and was a special instructor in physical education in the Cleveland public schools. But he found his second calling when he entered the political ring. He was elected a state senator in 1941. Later he served in the state House of Representatives. He resigned his house seat when he was elected as Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court. He defeated William J. Reichle 83,678 to 75,617.

All his life, Johnny Kilbane said it was luck, Irish luck which guided his life. Once when he and Jack Dempsey were touring Europe, being wined and dined by royalty, Kilbane told Dempsey *"We're just lucky. You ought to be back digging in the mines and I ought to be handling ore on the docks back in Cleveland."* Although he claimed luck was what kept his face

Kilbane continued

from being marked during his years in the ring, Branch Rickey, the baseball executive, told him “*No one got to be champ of anything by being lucky.*”

Although Johnny came from “the angle”, he never moved too far away, staying on the west side all his life.

He died on May 31, 1957 at the age of 68.

Johnny Kilbane served as the Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from January 1, 1952 until May 31, 1957.

Helen J. Lyons

Clerk Johnny Kilbane described Helen Lyons as “*too darned efficient. I don’t know what I can do about it, but her only trouble is that she doesn’t take enough time off. She’s always consulting me about something or talking about budgets with the city lawyers.*” Kilbane admitted that his Chief of Staff was “*the brains of this whole outfit.*” She had known Kilbane since she was 12 years old, he was a featherweight boxing champion and her father was a fight fan.



Helen Lyons was born on St. Patrick’s Day in 1900 and reared on the east side. She was schooled at St. Bridget’s Catholic School and Central High School and took business courses at Wilcox Commercial School. She worked for Halle’s Department Store in sale and purchasing and the University Book Store. In 1932, she left a buyer’s job at Burrows Book Store to work on County Treasurer John J. Boyle’s election campaign. She later would become his campaign manager. Boyle hired her as a payroll auditor and she rose through the ranks to become the acting chief deputy when Boyle passed away following World War II. She stayed on as private secretary to Boyle’s successor, Leslie R. Monroe until 1950.

For the next 2 years, Lyons was in and out of hospitals, surviving 6 major operations. When Kilbane was elected to the Clerk position, she joined his office as a secretary and through promotion became Chief of Staff. When Kilbane passed away suddenly she was the unanimous choice of the judges to assume the job. She was sworn in as Clerk on June 2, 1957.

In her succeeding years, she was elected to 3 terms. Striving to avoid controversy, she was once publicly criticized for hiring relatives. She responded with “*I believe in nepotism because if you can’t trust your relatives, who can you trust?*” During her last 2 years in office, she was plagued by recurring bronchitis which ultimately influenced her decision not to run for re-election in 1975. Her career as the Clerk of Courts was an important example for women who were interested or involved in politics.

She passed away in February of 1976 at the age of 76.

Helen J. Lyons served as the Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from June 2, 1957 to December 31, 1975.

Dennis J. Kucinich

Dennis J. Kucinich broke onto the Cleveland political scene in 1967 when he, at the tender age of 20, was a sophomore at Cleveland State University. Depositing his nominating petition with sufficient signatures of residents of Ward 7 and his filing fee, he mounted his challenge in the primary election to incumbent Councilman John T. Bilinski. A graduate of St. John Cantius High School, he was working his way through college as an editorial clerk at *The Plain Dealer*. This contest was his first election loss, but demonstrating the political tenacity which became his trademark, he returned in 1969 to again challenge Bilinski for the Ward 7 council seat. In the November election, Kucinich would prevail, elected to city council with a 16 vote margin. That inauspicious start gave Cleveland a voice that would serve to polarize Cleveland politics for the next 5 decades.



Throughout his career Kucinich has proven to be an exceptional vote getter but has often had to wear the mantle of being less than a “doer”. His observers have often accused him of having the unapologetic habit of looking forward to his next elected office without proving himself in his present office. His critics point to his election history for proof. The Kucinich election list reads thus:

Lost for City Council	1967
Elected to City Council	1969
Lost for U. S. House of Representatives	1972 & 1974
Won for Clerk of Municipal Court	1975
Won as 53 rd Mayor of Cleveland	1977
Lost Mayoral re-election	1979
Lost for Ohio Secretary of State	1982
Won special election for City Council	1983
Ran but withdrew for Ohio Governor	1985
Won for Ohio Senate	1994
Candidate for President – United States	2004 & 2008
Won for U.S. House of Representatives	1997

To whatever office he was elected, Kucinich courted controversy as a matter of routine business with a “*my way or the highway*” arrogance. As the Clerk of Court, he fired the non-civil service employees and replaced them with his appointees who were characterized as ill-trained lackeys. In 1976, Kucinich attempted to influence the entire political scene in Cleveland by running closely aligned associates for major offices. His candidates were overwhelmingly rejected by voters, losing all but one office. While predictions of his political demise were premature, his attempt to become the major political powerbroker in his hometown was effectively over.

Derisively known as the “Boy Mayor of Cleveland,” the 31 year old politician tangled with City Council and corporate Cleveland. The disputes were numerous, the most significant

Kucinich continued

being the proposed sale of the Municipal Light System. The culmination to this constant bickering was a recall election which Kucinich survived by 236 votes, and the calling of city bank loans which led to financial default. Less than a year later, Kucinich was swept out of office.

Each time he lost an election, Kucinich's detractors predicted his political demise and he continually proved them wrong. His latest defeat, while a U.S. Representative, was as a victim of Republican led redistricting in 2013. After a nearly 5 decade public service career, it remains to be seen if his name will reappear on a ballot again.

Dennis J. Kucinich served as Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from January 1, 1976 to November 13, 1977

Jerome F. Krakowski

Jerome F. Krakowski was a lifelong resident of Cleveland, who graduated from Benedictine High School, and went on to major in economics at Kent State University.

Returning to Cleveland, he partnered with his father in private enterprise, and served as editor of the *Perry News*, a neighborhood newspaper. In 1972, he became the Personal Bailiff to Judge Edward F. Katalinas.

When the position of Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court became vacant in 1977, Mr. Krakowski was the unanimous choice of the judges to assume this office. He would remain clerk until his untimely death.

Jerome F. Krakowski served as Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from November 14, 1977 to April 10, 1986.



Cleoford Forbes

Born to a Memphis sharecropper and his wife, 1 of 9 children, Cleoford “Zeke” Forbes came to Cleveland from Memphis, Tennessee in 1942. He found work as a maintenance man and owned a bar until he began his Cleveland political career in 1959 under William F. Sweeney, then Councilman of Ward 27. It was here he served as Democratic Ward Leader for 10 years.

Known as an astute and streetwise political insider, it was Zeke that convinced his brother George to run for city council in 1963. *“My brother was the Forbes everyone liked,”* said George. *“He had a way of making people feel better. And he had great political instinct.”*

In 1974, Judge Clarence L. Gaines brought Forbes to municipal court when he appointed him as his Personal Bailiff. In 1977, it fell to the judges to appoint a new Clerk of Courts. Their choice, Jerome F. Krakowski appointed Forbes as his Administrative Assistant. In 1986, the judges were called upon once again to appoint a clerk when Krakowski passed away. Their choice was to appoint Forbes to the position, taking the office on April 11th. Unfortunately, Forbes was unsuccessful in seeking election to the unexpired term.

He passed away on May 24, 2014 at the age of 89.

Cleoford Forbes served as the Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from April 11, 1986 to December 31, 1987.



Benny Bonanno

Benny Bonanno was a sociable, decent guy, a charismatic overachiever from the Murray Hill neighborhood, born to two deaf parents. He was another of his generation who came to city politics early in life, but one who ruined his reputation and torpedoed his career in his quest to become Cleveland's political kingmaker.

An early disciple of the methods of Dennis J. Kucinich, the brash young Bonanno over the years developed a devoted following, especially on the West Side. Just like Kucinich, his mentor, Bonanno was accused by his detractors of caring more about winning elections than serving in their offices. His record demonstrates the accuracy of those allegations:



Won for City council	1/1976 - resigned 12/31/1978
Won for Ohio House of Representatives	1/3/1979 - resigned 11/18/1982
Won for County recorder	12/3/1982 - 1/3/1985
(He did not seek re-election but ran for and lost for county commissioner)	
Won for School board member	1/1/1986 – resigned 12/31/1987
Won for Clerk of Court	11/1987 assumed office 1/1/1988 resigned 12/14/95
Lost for mayor	1989
Entered and withdrew from race for U.S. House in 1992, citing problems raising campaign cash	

Bonanno was a member of the 1985 search committee to select a new school superintendent. He was named to this committee after he pledged he would not later seek a school board seat. When he announced his candidacy for a board position in August 1985, he was branded an alleged hypocrite and liar. He flatly denied ever making such a pledge. When he won the election for clerk, Bonanno intended to hold the school and clerk positions simultaneously but a ruling by Common Pleas Court Judge Richard J. McMonagle prevented him. McMonagle said that although nothing in the law prevented Bonanno from holding both offices, “a perception of a conflict of interest” was unavoidable, therefore, “the court finds you cannot hold these 2 offices.” Bonanno resigned the board seat, preferring to eschew a legal battle. He was sworn into his Clerk position on January 1, 1988.

When an opening appeared for the mayor's office, there was no shortage of rumored candidates, prompting one insider to predict, “As sure as night follows day, Benny Bonanno is going to run for mayor.” Bonanno, again displaying his characteristic restlessness in office, announced his candidacy for mayor in August 1989. One political wag asked, “The question is not whether school board member Bonanno will run for another office but whether he will announce before he's sworn in as clerk in January.” He ultimately finished a disappointing third in the primary, never making it into the final race.

It was as court clerk that Bonanno's career in public service self-destructed. Accusations of improprieties surfaced. First came allegations that he compelled employees to contribute to his campaigns, as well as to buy or sell tickets to fundraisers. An investigation into the laundering of campaign contributions became public knowledge in a newspaper expose.

Bonanno continued

Thousands in donations to Bonanno campaign accounts were attributed to employees in an attempt to disguise identities of actual donors. In some cases, the names of employees' family members who consented to their names being used, appeared on donors lists. Thousands were attributed to 10 year old boys. Some supposed donors, listed from other states, were contacted by investigators and the press. They denied knowing or knowing of Bonanno.

It was in sniffing around the financing story that got *The Plain Dealer* interested in Bonanno's computer records involving not just his campaigns, but other politician's as well, running election campaigns for other candidates out of the clerk's office, which was turned into a political "war room," where strategies were planned, envelopes stuffed, and money raised. Reporters were also investigating his habit of investing in real estate that was rescued from the foreclosure process. His office was responsible for preparing and serving legal documents involved in foreclosures.

Conducting the investigation for the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, Assistant County Prosecutor Michael Butler announced the finding of "multiple instances of disguised contributions" to Bonanno's campaigns. He added it was "apparent that there is strong reason to believe that there have been repeated instances of serious misconduct." A grand jury inquest was initiated to examine Bonanno's activities.

In the end, Bonanno and 13 of his employees were charged with various crimes discovered in this investigation. For his part, Bonanno was charged with Theft in Office, a 3rd degree felony, and misdemeanor charges of Falsification, Receiving Improper Compensation and Engaging in Prohibited Election Activities. Bonanno resigned his position as Clerk of Municipal Court, preferring to save further embarrassment to the Democratic Party. Upon accepting his resignation, the Municipal Court judges appointed Court Magistrate Gregory Clifford to assume the clerk position until they had sufficient time to examine a permanent candidate. The judges also took control of the clerk's computer operations to centralize data processing under the management of the court.

Bonanno pled guilty to all charges, admitting to using his office, its equipment and employees for political purposes in fund raising and political campaigns. Due to his conviction to a felony, he is barred from holding public office again. Bonanno was the only defendant to go to prison. The rest were placed on probation or fined. Common Pleas Judge Michael J. Corrigan sentenced Bonanno to 1 year at the Lorain Correctional Institution and ordered to pay \$35,000 in restitution. During the sentencing he was quizzed, some might say interrogated, by Corrigan, in an effort to identify other politicians who may have been involved in the scheme. Corrigan made reference on the record of numerous prominent Democrats but to his dismay, Bonanno fell on his sword, refusing to divulge the names of anyone who may have known of his operations.

Judge Corrigan authorized Bonanno to be freed from prison after serving 55 days of the year sentence. He was placed on two years' probation, and ordered to perform 200 hours of community service. Upon his release, Bonanno was able to assume his old job in the private sector and in due time he was able to get his record expunged. However, he was unable to obtain a pardon despite twice gaining a unanimous parole board recommendation. Governors Bob Taft and Ted Strickland both ignored Bonanno's applications.

Benny Bonanno served as Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court from January 1, 1988 to December 14, 1995.

Earle B. Turner

Earle B. Turner was born and raised in Cleveland, attended public schools, and is a graduate of Central State University with a B.A. in Political Science and Business Administration.

In 1975, he was elected to city council to represent Ward 29, becoming the city's youngest public official. He would hold that office for over 21 years, until his appointment as clerk.

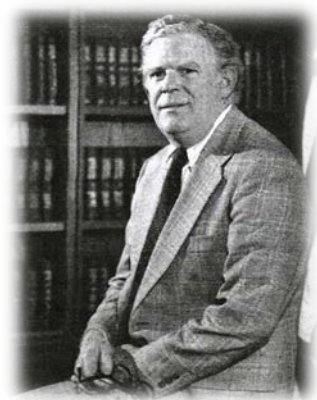
Earle B. Turner has served as Clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court since January 1, 1996.



*Court Administrator
Biographies
of the
Municipal Court of Cleveland
1973 to Present*

John O'Toole

John O'Toole was born in Cleveland after his parents emigrated from Ireland in the mid-1920s, settling in West Park. The family grew to four children with O'Toole's birth in 1934. His father was unable to find steady work to support the family. His mother was forced to return to Ireland because of financial and health problems and the children were placed in foster homes. He graduated from St. Edward High School and served two years in the Army Signal Corps.



O'Toole joined the municipal court staff in 1958, serving the court as a Deputy Bailiff, Chief Deputy Bailiff and as an Administrative Assistant. He was appointed to the newly created position of Court Administrator in 1973. Under his guidance, the Office of Court Administration coordinated all the non-judicial activities of the court, supervising the court's personnel, managing the budgetary accounting and procurement procedures and preparing the court's annual report for the chief justice. As the Court Administrator, he continued his education at Dyke College, receiving a degree in Public Administration. Later, he participated in the Executive Development Program with the Institute for Court Management. O'Toole was a charter member of the Ohio Court Administrators Association and past president of the organization. He was a treasurer and board member of the Civil Service Employees Credit Union. While he retired as court administrator in 1998, he returned briefly as a special consultant.

Witnessing the devastating effects of alcohol on his family and friends, O'Toole was deeply committed to the recovery of alcoholic men and women. Quitting drinking himself, he served as a board member and president of the Matt Talbot Inn in Cleveland, a halfway house for recovering alcoholic men. He was also a co-founder of the Scarborough Hall in Cleveland, a facility for recovering chemically dependent women.

He reunited with his mother in Ireland and was so taken by her troubled life, he wrote a booklet which told her story and the family's history.

He passed away in 2007, succumbing to lung cancer at the age of 72.

John O'Toole served Cleveland Municipal Court in various positions, eventually as the first Court Administrator, for 40 years, from 1958 to 1998.

Linda M. DeLillo

Linda DeLillo was born and raised in the Greater Cleveland area and has given the Cleveland Municipal Court nearly 30 years of service. She began her court career in 1971 as a Probation Officer. In 1983 she was promoted to Probation Supervisor, having direct oversight of a unit of probation officers and responsibility for training new probation officers. In 1995, she became Deputy Chief Probation Officer and served in this capacity until she was appointed Court Administrator in 1998. She served as Co-Director of the Greater Cleveland Drug Court since its inception in 1998.



A licensed social worker, she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Ursuline College and her Master of Public Administration degree from Cleveland State University. She was elected to Pi Alpha Alpha, the National Honor Society for public affairs and administration.

Linda DeLillo served Cleveland Municipal Court from 1971 until her retirement in 2001.

Michael E. Flanagan

Michael E. Flanagan joined Cleveland Municipal Court in 1971 as a Deputy Bailiff. He has since served in a number of key positions, including Criminal Assignment Commissioner, Special Projects Officer, Chief Bailiff and Deputy Court Administrator. In October 2001, he became Court Administrator.



A graduate of St. Edward High School, Michael attended Cleveland State University and Notre Dame College. He has been a member, as well as a past president of the Ohio Association of Court Administrators. He is a member of the National Association for Court Management, and a contributor to several local and state wide committees, including the Supreme Court of Ohio's Technology Advisory Committee, and their Personnel Education and Training Committee.

Retiring from the Court Administrators position, he continued to serve the court as Personal Bailiff to Judge Joseph Zone until July, 2016.

Russell Brown III

Russell Brown III is a native Clevelander, who graduated from John F. Kennedy and Aviation High Schools. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, logging over 1,000 flight hours and been all over the world as crew chief on our largest transport aircraft, the C-5A Galaxy.

His military service completed, he graduated from the Kent State University School of Business and the Case Western Reserve University School of Law. He has served the city of Cleveland as an Assistant City Prosecutor, and Assistant Director of Law.

He came to the court as a Magistrate and Mediation Coordinator and has held the position of Court Administrator since August 1, 2006.



