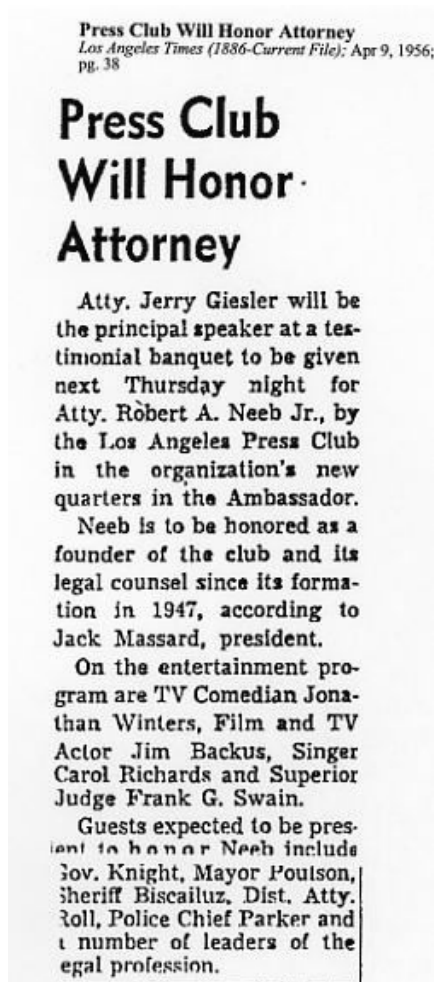


FAQ 55
(Sept. 2, 2007)

55.1

Q: Whatever happened to defense attorney Robert A. Neeb, who with Jerry Giesler represented your father, Dr. Hodel, at his 1949 incest trial?

Robert Neeb was one of L.A.'s most respected "old school" criminal lawyers. Here is a 1956 article announcing a banquet where he is being honored by the **L.A. Press Club**. (Neeb was one of its original founders.) Distinguished guests in attendance included: His partner, Jerry Giesler, Chief William Parker, Sheriff Biscailuz, Governor Knight, mayor Poulson, D.A. Roll and many Hollywood celebrities.



Dr. R. Bernard Finch Murder Case

In 1970, Neeb represented defendant, Carole Tregoff, in the high profile murder case in which she, along with Dr. R. Bernard Finch were tried for the murder of Dr. Finch's wife. After a number of "hung jury decisions" both Tregoff and Finch would be convicted and sent to prison.

Dr. Finch, Carole Tregoff & Neeb



Tregoff Lawyers Call Off Meeting With DA
Los Angeles Times (1886 Current File); Jun 16, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1960)
 PG. 18

Tregoff Lawyers Call Off Meeting With DA

Neeb Cancels Session After Reading Reports Charges Wouldn't Be Dropped

Carole Tregoff's attorneys yesterday called off a meeting with Dist. Atty. McKesson after learning there was no hope for dismissal of murder - conspiracy charges against her, even though she would be available as a prosecution witness against Dr. R. Bernard Finch.

Atty. Robert A. Neeb Jr. said he canceled the scheduled meeting after reading newspaper reports which indicated that the district attorney's office had "pre-judged" the discussion.

Chief Dep. Dist. Atty. Manley J. Bowler disclosed that when Neeb proposed the meeting a few days ago, he said he wanted to talk about the possibility of using Miss Tregoff as a prosecution witness.

Bowler said that Neeb of-

fered nothing of any value. Bowler said he assured Neeb that trial of both defendants will proceed Monday, if permitted by the courts. A State Supreme Court ruling on Miss Tregoff's petition to disqualify Superior Judge LeRoy Dawson is still pending. If that ruling goes against her, Neeb promised, it will be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Room Use Denied

Private conference room facilities for Dr. Finch and his co-defendant at their forthcoming trial will not be available, the District Court of Appeals meanwhile ruled yesterday.

Finch's attorney, Grant Cooper, had sought a writ of mandate from the Appellate Court to compel the provision of such facilities;

1983 -- "Press Found a Friend in Robert Neeb" --NEEB RETIRES

Press Found a Friend in Robert Neeb
 BY JOY HOBOWITZ
 Los Angeles Times (1983 Career File); Nov 7, 1983; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1981 - 1986)
 pg. 11



JACK GAUNT / Los Angeles Times
 Robert A. Neeb Jr., above, as he is today, and right, with client Carol Tregoff in 1959.

Press Found a Friend in Robert Neeb

By JOY HOBOWITZ,
 Times Staff Writer

They were the good ol' days, a la "The Front Page."

The days when headlines screamed, city editors chomped on cigars and female reporters were "screams." The days when scandal-hungry newsmen measured success by the size of their hangovers. The days when there were four competing newspapers in town and the call of the wild was "Get me rewrite!" Even lawyers were likable then.

They said things like, "Freedom of the press is not just freedom for the working press but for every American citizen." And they acted on that belief—by founding and becoming counsel for something that would be named the Greater Los Angeles Press Club.

Never Charged a Penny

Or at least one tall trial attorney with wavy hair and a promontory of a nose did. And he never charged a penny for it. No, Robert A. Neeb Jr. had more class than that. It was reward enough, he would say later, that the club's notorious, early-morning bar was dubbed "the earliest bar in the West."

Self-deprecating but no less proud of his work with the press for the past 40 years, Neeb took center stage the other night at his old haunt, the Press Club, as he was honored by hundreds of his old cronies. "So many old faces, so many new teeth," one of them would observe of the crowd.

But the 74-year-old man of the hour preferred to remember the past, when he tried more than 2,000 cases and was involved with such headline-grabbing trials as the Charlie Chaplin federal morals trial and the Errol Flynn rape case. Neeb's clients were acquitted in both cases.

Two Personalities

On Errol Flynn: "He had two personalities. Either he liked you or he hated you, mostly the latter."

On Charlie Chaplin (who was tried for transporting a minor across state lines for immoral purposes): "He was the best damn witness I've ever seen in a courtroom—a consummate actor. Absolutely terrific."

On the good ol' days: "In the old days, you knew every city editor in

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PRESS: They Found a Friend in Robert Neeb

Continued from Page 1

town. When the jury would stay out all night, which they don't do now, reporters would go to sleep. So, I'd call up the rewrite men and give them the story. It was fun. . . . Today, you can't do that. It's too impersonal, too big."

Equally nostalgic was 90-year-old Agnes Underwood, one of the grande dames of Los Angeles newspapering. Underwood, who was the scrappy city editor of the Los Angeles Herald-Express (later the Herald Examiner) for 17 years, remembered the "damn good stories" that Neeb used to feed her when she was a reporter.

"There was a terrible yacht tragedy involving cannibalism," she recalled of the first time she met Neeb. "There were two couples on the boat and three people had died. One woman, tied to the mast, was alive. Bob went down to the boat with the U.S. marshal and he took me and a photographer with him. He gave us a hell of a good story. We got her first words when she stepped off the boat."

While many of Neeb's admirers were unable to pay tribute to him in person, they nonetheless made a point of expressing their feelings about him in print. "He is a big man and his heart is just as big as his body," wrote former Gov. Edmund G. Brown Sr. "Gentle but forceful."

From conservative Gov. George Deukmejian, there was this: "Throughout your 46-year career, you have been a leader and respected member of the legal profession. You have contributed a great deal of time and effort to both professional associations and the community. . . ."

Neeb, the son of a hardware store-owner-turned-film-distributor, grew up in Corcoran, a Central California town of about 1,000 people. To get through Loyola Law School here, he worked at Bullock's, selling pants.

In 1937, he entered the practice of law and within three years had become associated with noted trial attorney Jerry Giesler.

One of his biggest cases was the Carole Tregoff murder case in the late '50s, in which he argued that his client was "guilty only of being in love with Dr. R. Bernard Finch." Tregoff, who participated in killing her lover's wife, was convicted after three trials. But if she were tried today, she couldn't be convicted, Neeb says.

His legal reasoning—based on a constitutional prohibition against self-incrimination—was rejected at the time. But eight years later, it was embraced by the U.S. Supreme Court. "I guess I was just ahead of my time," Neeb says.

(Sentenced to life in prison, Tregoff was paroled in 1969 after serving eight years. At that time, she changed her name and was working as a medical records clerk.)

Beyond his two years as a California deputy attorney

general and his work with the Los Angeles County Citizens Committee on Juvenile Delinquency as well as the attorney general's Advisory Committee on Crime Control, it was Neeb's devotion to a free and open press that distinguished his career.

"Freedom of the press is not just the freedom of the working press," he is fond of saying. "It's the freedom of every American citizen. It's the greatest guarantee of a democratic society there is."

Based on that belief, he fought tirelessly for an open courtroom for both the print and electronic media. He also hooked up with eight newsmen in the '40s—in the elevator of the old Plaza Hotel in Hollywood—and wound up creating a new organization in Los Angeles.

"By the time we staggered out of the hotel," he says, "the Greater Los Angeles Press Club was born."

One of Neeb's favorite recollections of the Press Club, though, centers on a former U.S. President—Harry S. Truman. To celebrate the club's first anniversary in 1948, the founding members decided to throw a birthday party and send a telegram to the President, inviting him to attend.

"We left the telegram out on a desk and went into the bar," Neeb recalls. "I don't think we would have thought about that telegram again, except we got an answer. And the answer scared the hell out of us."

It said: "The President of the United States is pleased to accept your kind invitation to a luncheon on the date to be selected."

The Press Club jokesters began to panic. Without enough money to buy hot dogs for the President, Neeb says, they couldn't figure out what to do. Joseph (Sparky) Saldana, assistant city editor of the Daily News, offered a suggestion, thinking of his family in Mexico.

"He said, 'Why don't we all fly down there until the whole thing blows over?'" Neeb says. "We didn't. . . . but we did have a parade down Broadway with 1 million people. And the 33rd President of the U.S. who was then campaigning for the presidency, later said this press club changed his life because it turned his campaign around. We were very proud our little club had a little part in history."

"Of course," he adds, "we didn't know who sent that telegram. But we later discovered it was the nighttime janitor."

Neeb says he is especially proud of the club's welfare

foundation, which distributed money to out-of-work newspaper people in the '50s when the Daily News failed and in the '60s when the Los Angeles Mirror and Examiner folded.

Now retired and living with his wife in Rancho Santa Fe, Neeb says he is glad to be out of the business of lawyering. "I spent almost everyday of my life in a courtroom."

Does he miss it?

"No. The pressure is tremendous. If you stay too long, it'll kill you. The strain is too much."

Besides, he adds, with more than a trace of nostalgia in his voice, "it is not quite as much of a profession as it used to be," likening lawyers who advertise to little more than "used-car salesmen."

Neeb, on the other hand, says he is not completely retired. "Of course," he explains, "I do have one client—the Press Club."