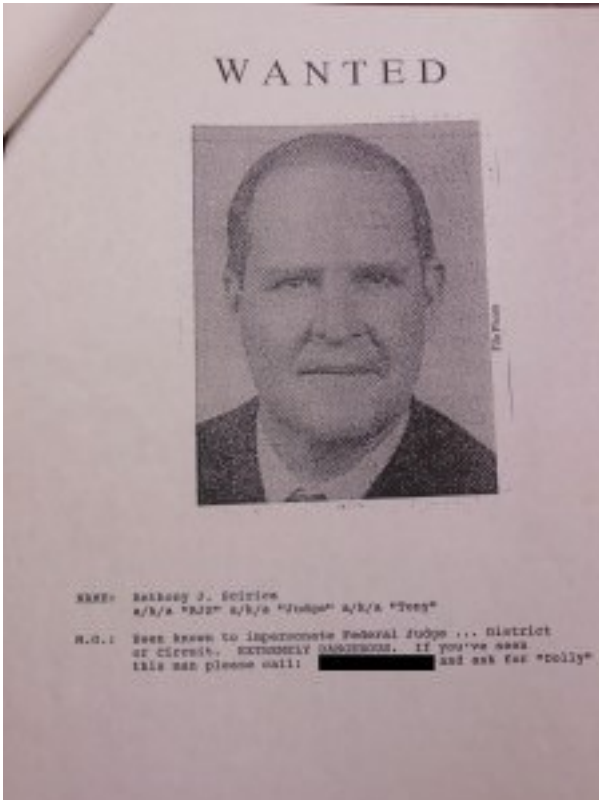


Humor in the Court: The Edward R. Becker Papers



Recently in Manuscripts and Archives, work was completed on the Edward R. Becker Papers (MS 1929). Judge Becker was a Yale Law School alumnus who served in two federal courts, the District Court of Eastern Pennsylvania and Court of Appeals, Third Circuit. He was renowned for his due diligence on cases and his voluminous opinions that could range up to hundreds of pages. He was referred to as the “101st senator” by friend Arlen Specter for the amount of influence he had on legislation, especially with his work on compensating victims of asbestos. He was also devoted to many civic causes, especially those involving the preservation of Philadelphia’s history and making it accessible to all. While all of this is apparent in his papers, I couldn’t help but notice something else engaging: Becker and his colleagues’ sense of humor.

For instance, *Matsushita v. Zenith Radio Corp* was one of Judge Becker’s cases when he was with the District Court of Eastern Pennsylvania, and the one that made his reputation as an expert in antitrust law. It was a very lengthy case for the court, starting in 1974 and finally reaching a judgment in 1981. After working with it for so long, I’m sure Becker and the other judges were getting rather tired with it. That might explain how a court order was written for “a period of relaxation” in the form of a softball game between the plaintiffs and the defendants, with the only instances of inclement weather allowed to stop the game being “blizzard, volcanic eruption, small pox epidemic, or invasion of the body snatchers.”

[1]

First page of the "Softball Order" memorandum. (MS 1929, Box 9, Folder 6)

[2]

Second page of the "Softball Order" memorandum. (MS 1929, Box 9, Folder 6)

Humor was not only reserved for court business. The judges delighted in making digs at each other as can be seen in their memorandums and related documents. In this October 20, 1995 memo, Judge Becker had sent out a memo with a wanted poster attached picturing a fellow judge, Anthony J. Scirica, saying he had seen him in the lobby and how "this guy worries me."

[3]
Judge Becker expressing his “worries” about “this guy Tony.” (MS 1929, Box 16, Folder 1)

[4]
The “dangers” of Judge Scirica. (MS 1929, Box 16, Folder 1)

Judge Becker was not the only one with a sense of humor. Another correspondent known only as “Bernice” from Washington D.C. told him about her frustration with her day being lifted by his jokes. She was no slouch at cracking jokes either as demonstrated by the puns that keep the note going.

[5]
Not only full of puns, but an excellent primer in political figures. (MS 1929, Box 2, Folder 6)

The Edward R. Becker Papers is now available for research and the finding aid can be viewed [here](#) [6]. You can also visit our [website](#) [7] to learn more about our collections and services, including how to request materials located in our finding aids.

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- [2] <http://campuspress.yale.edu/mssa/files/2015/04/9-6b.jpg>
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