

Alma Soller McLay (1919-2017), Nuremberger

*John Q. Barrett**

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I am very sorry to report that Alma Soller McLay died on April 4, 2017, in California.

Alma McLay was the last surviving member of Justice Robert H. Jackson's original team on what became the United States and the international prosecution at Nuremberg of Nazi war criminals following World War II.

In June 1945, Miss Alma Soller became a member of the Jackson team quite suddenly and unexpectedly. She was a War Department secretary, just back in Washington after two years of service in Alaska. At the Pentagon, she was assigned to be one of Secretary of War Henry Stimson's stenographers.

Then a personnel supervisor asked Alma if she was willing to accept an overseas assignment. She said yes, and soon she was assigned to the War Crimes Branch, and to the Jackson project—the Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality.

Less than two weeks later, on June 18, 1945, Alma Soller flew from Washington to London with Justice Jackson and others who became his core team at the London Conference—the U.S., U.K., U.S.S.R., and French conference that, after weeks of negotiation, reached agreement that August and created the International Military Tribunal. They were:

Justice Robert H. Jackson, U.S. Chief of Counsel;

Sidney S. Alderman, attorney;

Francis M. Shea, attorney;

* Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). I emailed an earlier version of this essay to The Jackson List on April 6, 2017.

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William D. Whitney, attorney;
Colonel Murray C. Bernays;
Major Lawrence A. Coleman;
Captain Ralph L. Morgan;
Lieutenant James B. Donovan;
Lieutenant Gordon E. Dean;
Ensign William E. Jackson, executive assistant to
Justice Jackson (his father);
Mrs. Elsie L. Douglas, Justice Jackson's secretary;
Miss Ruth M. Sternberg, Justice Jackson's secretary;
Mrs. Helen G. Scott, secretary;
Mrs. Jean Torgerson, secretary;
Miss Elizabeth Leonard, secretary;
Miss Jean MacFetridge, secretary;
Mrs. Eleanor Waldo, secretary; and
Miss Alma Soller, secretary.

Alma Soller was, in London, and then in Nuremberg, and then back in Washington, a talented, very hard working, kind, and very well-liked member of the Jackson team.

In London, she was Col. Bernays's principal secretary, and she also worked very closely with Gordon Dean, the attorney who was perhaps Jackson's most trusted adviser.

In Nuremberg from September 1945 through the start of the trial in November, and then through the completion of the U.S. case in January 1946, Alma worked in the Documents Room. She worked closely with Lieutenant Roger W. Barrett, Jackson's lead attorney with responsibility for the documentary evidence that was the backbone of the Allies' prosecution case against the defendants.

ALMA SOLLER McLAY (1919-2017), NUREMBERGER



December 19, 1945: Alma Soller, at Justice Jackson's house outside Nuremberg.



December 19, 1945: Justice Jackson and Office of Chief of Counsel colleagues celebrate Christmas at "his" house outside Nuremberg.

In January 1946, Jackson sent Roger Barrett and Alma Soller back to Washington to work at the Pentagon. Over the next four years, Alma worked hard and meticulously, and fulltime, with Roger, Bill Jackson, and others, to assemble, to edit, and ultimately to publish ten U.S. Government Printing Office volumes of documentary evidence, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*. The world, which has learned from these vital books about the Third Reich, the War, and the Holocaust ever since, knows them as the Nuremberg "Red Set" or "Red Series."

Beginning in 1948, Justice Jackson also arranged for the War Department to permit Alma to work in his Supreme Court chambers. She was not a Court employee or working on Court business. She was a War Department "Editor," working to transcribe Elsie Douglas's many notebooks, filled with shorthand notes, of the 1945 London Conference. Alma completed this huge task, making possible the 1949 U.S. Department of State publication of the historic London Conference sessions.

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For a fuller understanding of Alma Soller McLay and her "Nuremberg" work, and for direct exposure to her smarts and charm, [click here](#) to watch excerpts from a 2004 interview.

Alma also published that year, in the *Albany Law Review*, a tribute to Justice Jackson, "That Twinkle in His Eyes"—[click here](#) to read it.

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In the late 1940s, as Alma worked in Justice Jackson's chambers, transcribing from many, many notebooks filled with shorthand notes the extensive London Conference sessions, she got to know, a little bit, Jackson's colleague and friend Justice Felix Frankfurter.

About one time every week, Frankfurter would come to talk with Jackson in his chambers. On his way out of Jackson's office, Frankfurter, always smiling, would stop at Alma's desk to talk briefly. Every time, he would look into the box of notebooks next to her and ask, "And *now* how much do you have to do?" It became their little joke.

And Justice Frankfurter also said something serious to Alma: “Bob told me what you are doing. I just can’t imagine. You are doing such a service for our country. The whole world should be thankful for you.”

Indeed it should be. And I think that it is. I know that I, like many of you, am thankful that I get to study and learn from Alma’s, and from every Nuremberger’s, work.

I was very lucky to know Alma Soller McLay in recent years, and to benefit from her great kindness.