

Admission to Practice Law in New York's Courts (1913)

*John Q. Barrett**

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Robert H. Jackson, born in 1892, graduated from high school in Frewsburg, New York, in 1909. He spent the following year as a post-graduate student at Jamestown High School in Jamestown, New York.

Beginning in fall 1910, eighteen-year-old Jackson, eschewing college, began studies to prepare to become a lawyer. He went to work as an apprentice in the offices of Jamestown attorneys Frank H. Mott and Benjamin S. Dean. Mott, age thirty-seven, was a dynamic courtroom lawyer, a notable local and statewide Democratic Party political figure, and a step-cousin of Jackson's mother. Dean, age fifty, was a former newspaperman, Jamestown's former city attorney, a scholarly man of literature, a constitutional law expert, an early liberal who some believed grew more conservative with age, a person not inclined to compromise, and a brief-writer, often sarcastic, who rarely went to court.

After one year with Mott and Dean, Jackson moved across New York State to Albany Law School, then a two-year school. It accepted Jackson as a transfer student into its senior class, giving him credit for his apprenticeship year. He completed the School's academic program near the top of his class.

In June 1912, Jackson, age twenty, returned to Jamestown and resumed his apprenticeship with Mott and Dean.

By fall 1913, Jackson had turned age twenty-one, taken and passed the New York State bar examination, and completed the three total years of law study, in a school or an office or a combination of each, that the New York courts then required for admission to practice.

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For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which have document images attached, visit www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.sju.

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In October 1913, New York's Board of Law Examiners, sitting in Albany, certified to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, sitting in Rochester, that Jackson had passed the bar examination.

In November 1913, Jackson submitted to the Court his required good character statement and supporting affidavits (from Mott and Dean).

On November 24, 1913, the Court ordered Jackson's admission to practice and he signed its Roll of Attorneys.

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In the 2013 centennial anniversary year of Jackson's admission to law practice, New York's Appellate Division, Fourth Department, granted the Robert H. Jackson Center's petition to release publicly the Court's records regarding Jackson's application and admission.

These documents, posted on the Jackson Center's website ([click here](#)), are:

- the New York State Board of Law Examiners' certification that Jackson had passed its bar examination (Oct. 15, 1913);
- Jackson's character statement (Nov. 13, 1913);
- Ben Dean's affidavit regarding Jackson's character and fitness to practice (Nov. 13, 1913);
- Frank Mott's affidavit regarding Jackson's character and fitness to practice (Nov. 14, 1913);
- the Appellate Division's order admitting Jackson to practice (Nov. 24, 1913); and
- Jackson's signature on the Court's Roll of Attorneys (Nov. 24, 1913).

I encourage you to click into the documents and explore them—they are interesting as historical records, and of course as Jackson artifacts. They include many nuggets of interesting information, including:

- Jackson’s flat answer regarding his college studies: “No college”;
- Jackson’s forgiving account of Albany Law School’s treatment of him in spring 1912: “Received no degree but received School diploma. One year of attendance being insufficient to obtain a degree”. In fact, the School chose, shortly before graduation day, not to award degrees to Jackson and at least two other classmates, very much to their surprise, because they were not yet twenty-one years of age, the age required for admission to law practice in New York State;
- Jackson listing his apprenticeship years as solely with Frank Mott; although Mott and Dean very much practiced law together when they were Jackson’s mentors, they apparently did so as two solo practitioners, not in formal partnership;
- Jackson’s list of personal references, including his family doctor in Frewsburg, his Jamestown high school principal, and his Albany Law School dean;
- Dean’s statement that Mott’s office, in which Jackson “studied[,] adjoins my own....”;
- Mott’s statement that he had known Jackson “practically his entire life.... I have known him and of him since [his] childhood....”; and
- Dean’s and Mott’s substantive endorsements of young Jackson’s talents and character.

Thank you to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, for its disclosure order, and to many New York law and history leaders and teachers who assisted in locating and liberating these documents.