

"As Time Goes By - Play it Again Sam"

by Dale Carlson

Did you ever wonder what it might be like if a patent lawyer were to live forever? A colleague of ours named Charles Yardley Chittick recently gave it a run, and in the process established a record of 107.67, not counting leap-year extensions. Born in Newark, New Jersey on October 22, 1900, he became a registered patent attorney on February 1, 1934.

"C. Yardley", as he was called, was befriended in the winter of his years by one of our own Association's members, Joe Catanzaro. In addition to a shared interest in all things patent, they were fellow MIT alums, albeit having graduation years that spanned a generational gap.

From time-to-time, Joe visited C. Yardley at his home in New Hampshire, including on the occasion of the centenarian's hundredth birthday. Joe recalled that visit in the July 20, 2008 issue of the Concord Monitor thusly: "He was hanging balloons....He always wore his red MIT jacket. Joe said, 'Maybe you should check your jacket and get more comfortable.' And he said, 'You take care of your business and I'll take care of mine.' He was a very determined individual who called them like he saw them."

Apparently he called it like he saw it when he had a run-in with a classmate living across the hall while at Phillips Academy. The classmate was Humphrey Bogart. Their distaste for each other is memorialized in Darwin Porter's book entitled *The Secret Life of Humphrey Bogart: The Early Years (1899-1931)*. One passage notes that "The only boy on the floor who Hump disliked intensely was a nerd who wore thick wire-rimmed glasses,

Charles Yardley Chittick....Whenev-
er they would meet in the hallway, nei-
ther spoke to each other."

When words
came to fisticuffs,

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Bogie threw the first punch. Later, he was expelled from the prep school, or was "fired" as C. Yardley liked to say, for bad grades. Meanwhile, C. Yardley graduated from Phillips in 1918, went on to MIT to study mechanical engineering and run track, and then went through law school in Washington, D.C.

The June 8, 2008 issue of the Eagle-Tribune notes that C. Yardley was offered a job by Thomas Edison. As a prelude to that offer, Edison "sat him down in his office with a punishing 150-question test. Applicants had to answer questions like: 'What language is generally spoken in Brazil?' 'What did Lewis and Clark do?' 'What is black ink made of?' and 'What three letters occur most frequently in the English language?'"

Although he turned down Edison's job offer, C. Yardley maintained an avid interest in technology. After becoming a patent attorney, he spent his career assisting about a hundred inventors, including himself, obtain patents on their inventions. Patents identifying him as the inventor include U.S. Patents 2,236,894 entitled "Means For Determining Miniature Railroad Track Layout" (issued April 1, 1941); 2,450,716 entitled "Kitchen Utensil" (issued October 5, 1948); and 2,642,372 entitled "Flexible Corrugated Sheet Material and Method of Fabricating Same" (issued June 16, 1953).

By all accounts, C. Yardley lived a full and happy life. He loved to tell stories, had a great sense of humor, and enjoyed the celebrity associated with being our country's longest living patent lawyer. Among other things, he was awarded an honorary degree in 2005 by Franklin Pierce Law Center, which is nationally recognized for its strong patent program.

Coincidentally, Franklin Pierce Law Center will honor Karl Jorda, Past President of our Association, at a May 1, 2009 gala reception upon Karl's retirement as The David Rines Professor of Intellectual Property at that school. The reception will also mark the launching of a campaign to establish The Karl F. Jorda Professorship in Patent Law at the school. If C. Yardley's life is any measure, the reception will also mark the launching of a happy and productive next phase in Karl's life.