



CLASSROOM LAW PROJECT COURTHOUSE EXPERIENCE TOUR GUIDE HANDBOOK

The Multnomah County Courthouse



The Multnomah County Courthouse is where all criminal and civil trials take place that are filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court. The Multnomah County Court is divided into four divisions: criminal, civil, family, and probate. Each of these divisions hears cases of a specific nature that depends on the subject matter of the case. The Family Court Division hears cases that specifically involve family law. Family law is an area of law and includes cases involving: custody, dissolution, support, juvenile dependency, misdemeanor domestic violence, and termination of parental rights. The Probate Division handles cases involving wills and property transfers.

More cases are filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court than any other judicial district in the state of Oregon. Approximately one third of all circuit court cases filed in Oregon were filed in Multnomah County. In 2016, 716,712 cases were filed.

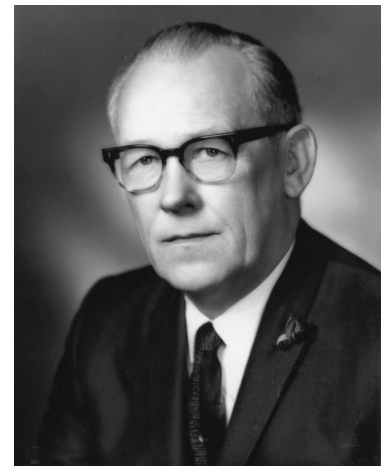
Famous Case from the Multnomah County Courthouse: *State of Oregon v. Terry Schruck*

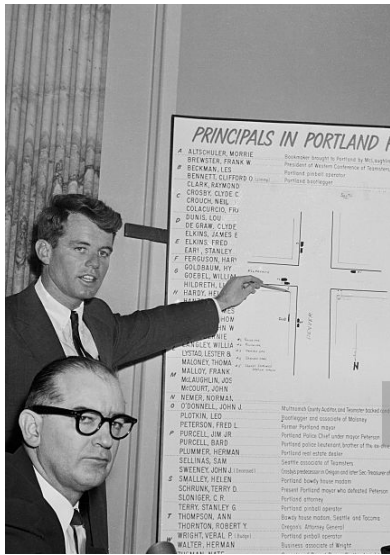
The Multnomah County Courthouse has played host to a variety of cases that highlight the drama that takes place during a court trial as well as the effect these trials have on the local community. One series of related trials involving city officials highlights the effect the media can have on criminal prosecution, and highlights why the justice system is necessary to resolve disputes.

State of Oregon v. Terry Schruck – In the 1950's, *The Oregonian* published a series of articles about the connections between local gambling entrepreneurs and city officials including the district attorney and the mayor. The articles alleged that one gambling figure in particular, "Big Jim" Elkins, had arranged an agreement with city leaders to keep Portland open for gambling. As a result of substantial media attention, 114 grand jury indictments were issued against 41 defendants.

The most significant allegations were against the mayor of Portland, Terry Schruck. A grand jury charged Schruck with accepting a \$500 bribe from Elkins while he was serving as Multnomah County Sheriff prior to becoming mayor. He was also charged with perjury for lying about this incident before the grand jury. The trial against Schruck lasted two weeks and is remembered as one of the greatest courtroom dramas to ever take place in Multnomah County.

Schruck's attorneys contended that Elkins was attempting to frame Schruck in order to get him removed from office. His defense hinged upon his attorney's ability to make a compelling case that he had no relationship to Clifford Bennett, the individual who reportedly gave Schruck the bribe. They also had to rebut eyewitness testimony from a police officer who stated he saw Schruck accept the bribe.





The trial piqued when the young Robert F. Kennedy was called as rebuttal witness by the prosecution. Kennedy was chief counsel for the United States Senate committee charged with investigating racketeering. Kennedy met Schrunk when he testified in front of the committee on matters relating to Bennett's connection to gambling operations. While giving testimony at a committee hearing chaired by Kennedy, Schrunk had accused the committee of intimidating Bennett to hide the truth.

In the end, Kennedy's appearance was not remembered for its content, but for the handshake he gave Bennett at the close of his testimony as he rose to leave the witness stand. Schrunk's attorneys met with the judge and demanded a mistrial because of this unusual act. While a mistrial was not granted, the judge did issue special instructions to the jurors stating that the handshake was out of instinct and professional courtesy, and does not represent any sort of approval or disapproval of the witness. During closing arguments, Schrunk's attorneys draped the entire courtroom in large sheets of paper and outlined 23 questions for the jurors to consider all of which suggested that it would not make sense for Schrunk to accept the bribe. This tactic was successful and the jury issued a verdict of not guilty.

Kennedy & Senator Joseph McCarthy in a Senate Hearing on Portland Corruption

In the end, after all of the initial media attention about gambling that led to the indictments of 41 defendant's, only one conviction was entered. The rest of the cases fell by the wayside as it was slowly discovered that many of the concerns raised by the articles were not true. Had it not been for the court systems method for resolving disputes, justice would not have been served and the truth might not have ever been discovered. In light of the effect the media has on shaping public opinion, the defendant's needed their day in court to get to truth behind the public accusations against them.