



## GUEST EDITORIAL

Randy Moore

### Clarence Darrow Finally Returns to Dayton

When Clarence Darrow came to Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925 to help defend John Scopes in the famous “Monkey Trial,” he was greeted by religious signs, a religious town, religious prosecutors, and a religious judge. Darrow lost the case. In 1927, Scopes’ conviction was overturned, but his trial in Dayton became legendary.

When Darrow and his family returned to Dayton in 1928, their visit made few headlines. Unlike what happened three years earlier, there were no shouting protesters, street-corner evangelists, or crowds of gawkers in the streets. Instead, Darrow was warmly received by several of his friends, who honored him at a dinner at the Aqua Hotel. After that visit, Darrow never again returned to Dayton—until now.

In ensuing years, the spectacle of the Scopes Trial faded from the public’s conscience. Despite revivals of interest produced by *Inherit the Wind* and flare-ups of the evolution-creationism controversy, many of Dayton’s residents tired of hearing about the famous trial; as Rhea County Historian Pat Guffey told me, “Although much has been written about the Scopes Trial, many natives of Dayton, Tennessee—myself included—are weary of reading the same stories, and seeing the same images, associated with the trial.”

Although most of Dayton’s residents remain ambivalent about the trial, they commemorated Darrow’s foe, William Jennings Bryan, with a college, street names, and a statue installed in 2005 on the courthouse lawn. For decades, Darrow was not commemorated by anything in Dayton.

That changed on Friday, July 14, 2017, when a statue of Clarence Darrow joined the one of Bryan on the Rhea County Courthouse lawn. The \$150,000 bronze statue, which was created by Philadelphia sculptor Zenos Frudakis, shows Darrow with his right hand pointing in Bryan’s direction, and his left hand tugging on his suspenders. One side of the base of Darrow’s statue identifies Darrow simply as the “Attorney for the Defense,” and the other side features a bronze relief of Darrow and Bryan at a table, with Darrow asking, “Do you think the earth was made in six days?” and Bryan answering, “Not six days of twenty-four hours.”

The statue of Bryan, which was created by Cessna Decosmino, depicts Bryan in 1891 when he began his four-year congressional career. In contrast, Darrow is depicted as he was during the Scopes Trial in 1925. The statue of Bryan was given to Rhea County by Bryan College, and the statue of Darrow was paid for with private donations from individuals and organizations, primarily the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Darrow’s statue and its placement were approved by the Rhea County Historical and Genealogical Association, whose president Ralph Green noted that his organization’s approval of the statue

was not “promoting [Darrow’s] ideas or anything of that nature ... it’s just a recognition of the man and his historical significance. These two men were giants in their profession and the part that they contributed [made] the Scopes trial what it was. It would not have been the same thing without either of them.” Guffey was also supportive, noting that something commemorating a major event in history “should stay, or should be put up, no matter what. I don’t think we should try to change history.”

Some people in the community opposed Darrow’s statue. For example, Rhea County Commissioner Bill Hollin opposed a statue “to celebrate the man who lost the trial.” Political activist and Christian preacher June Griffin, who organized a three-hour “God, Family, and Country” rally at the courthouse two weeks before Darrow’s statue was unveiled, urged her fellow citizens to “rise up.” She then ridiculed the statue as “a hideous monstrosity” before condemning evolution as “a joke for any thinking person. This is a very serious matter, the courthouse is a sacred place; you don’t turn it into a theater ... An atheist is not on equal footing with the Christian ... God is not pleased.” Griffin then remarked, “I’ve heard talk of ‘well there’s always spray paint.’”

Before the hour-long unveiling ceremony began, the Freedom From Religion Foundation demanded that local officials take down or cover a “Read Your Bible” sign that had been posted on the courthouse (such signs were common throughout Dayton during Scopes’ trial, and this one had been posted earlier in the week as Dayton prepared to celebrate the Scopes Trial Play and Festival). The sign was covered, after which speakers included Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor (co-presidents and co-founders of the Freedom From Religion Foundation), Darrow historian Andrew Kersten, actor John de Lancie, and Frudakis. There was a strong police presence at the ceremony, but there were no protests. Approximately 200 people attended, but Griffin was absent. As Gaylor said at the unveiling, “What Clarence Darrow stood for at the Scopes trial is as timely and imperative today as in 1925.”

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