



Michael McCollum

The six partners of the law firm known simply as 'Wyckoff' are planning to go their separate ways, bringing an end to a firm that had been part of Watsonville since 1899. Gathered Tuesday at their Carr Street office were (standing, from left) office manager Debra Kerr, paralegal Claire Swetland, law partners Stephen Weldon, William Locke-Paddon and Ralph Sanson, bookkeeper Connie Troisi and Richard Allen, another law partner. Seated are receptionist June Maitoza (left) and paralegal Debra Cirina. Not pictured are Bruce Richardson and Robert Johnson.

97-year law firm dissolving

By LANE WALLACE

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — After 97 years in Watsonville, the partnership of attorneys commonly called the Wyckoff firm will disband at the end of June.

The six partners — Bruce Richardson, Ralph Sanson, Richard Allen, William Locke-Paddon, Stephen Weldon and Robert Johnson — all plan to continue practicing law in Santa Cruz County.

Formed in 1899 by H.C. "Bert"

Wyckoff, the firm now known as Wyckoff Richardson Sanson Allen Locke-Paddon Weldon & Johnson is the oldest law firm in the Central Coast. And it ranks as one of the oldest in the state, Locke-Paddon said.

No Wyckoffs have been with the firm for more than 20 years, but the Wyckoff name "means a lot to us," said Locke-Paddon in an interview at the firm's office on Carr Street Tuesday.

Allen will keep the Wyckoff name alive, opening a practice in

Watsonville to be known as Wyckoff and Allen.

The attorneys said they are dissolving the partnership because legal services needed today favor more specialized, smaller practices rather than group practices.

"In today's legal world, offices of five to 10 attorneys are anachronisms," Richardson said. "You either shrink or grow."

The partners' ages range from late 40s to early 60s, and they decided they didn't want to expand.

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They joined the firm in the 1960s or 1970s.

"We've had good times, and we have memories of the senior attorneys" who were the partners in the '60s, Locke-Paddon said.

Those attorneys served as mentors to the younger ones, said Locke-Paddon, who joined the firm in 1967. Today, the practice of law "is much more mobile," Locke-Paddon said.

Richardson will join another Watsonville law firm. Sanson, Locke-Paddon and Johnson will relocate their practices to Aptos, and Weldon will use his legal background in business and education matters. All the attorneys are in civil practice.

The firm's building is in escrow to be used for offices; the deal is not final.

The firm's founder, Bert Wyckoff, was the son of an early Pajaro Valley settler, Stephen Wyckoff, a descendent of Dutch immigrants who came to the Pajaro Valley from New York through Panama in 1868.

John Gardner joined Bert Wyckoff in law practice in 1901; they were among the first tenants of the Lettunich Building on Main Street in 1912.

All three of Bert Wyckoff's sons, Hubert Jr., James "Bud" and Stephen, practiced law in Santa Cruz County. Hubert Jr. and Bud joined their father's firm in the 1930s, following Harry Parker.

Phillip Boyle and Lee Pope joined the firm in the 1940s, expanding the name to Wyckoff Parker Boyle & Pope, a name

'We've had good times, and we have memories of the senior attorneys' who were the partners in the '60s. — William Locke-Paddon

that was unchanged until 1980.

Bud Wyckoff was the managing partner for nearly 30 years, building the firm to 15 attorneys. At one time, the company had offices in Monterey and Hollister.

Parker and Bud Wyckoff served on the Board of Governors of the State Bar of California, as had Bert Wyckoff.

Two attorneys who started with the Wyckoff firm later became judges. Harry Brauer joined the firm in the 1950s. He served in the Municipal and Superior Court in Santa Cruz County and the state appellate court. He is now retired.

Richard Kessell, of Corralitos, joined the firm in 1960. He later served in Municipal and Superior Court in Santa Cruz County and is now retired.

One of the current partners, Sanson, was a county supervisor from 1969-'73. Weldon and Locke-Paddon are past presidents of the Santa Cruz County Bar Association.

The Santa Cruz firm of Wyckoff Ritchey and Shanle is unaffected by the dissolution of the Watsonville firm. Stephen N. Wyckoff, grandson of Bert Wyckoff, is a partner in that firm.