

# Daily Journal

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## An old 'bill' for one bankruptcy firm

By Susan McRae  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

What does one bankruptcy firm give to another on its 60th anniversary?

Lawyers at Los Angeles bankruptcy boutique Bayer, Wishman & Leotta presented 19-lawyer SulmeyerKupetz PC with a rare 1883 handbill printed in London advertising the availability of preprinted legal forms designed for use by bankruptcy trustees.

Bayer Wishman cofounder Leon Bayer, a self-described collector of artifacts, from rare coins to legal curiosities, said he ran across the item at an auction about five years ago and snapped it up.

When SulmeyerKupetz announced its upcoming celebration marking 60 years of practice, he said he knew the document would be the "absolutely perfect" gift.

Lawyers at SulmeyerKupetz thought so, too.

'It was a thrill to receive something not only that old but that connected to our firm, in that for all its history, it's had bankruptcy trustees.'

— Howard Ehrenberg

"It was a thrill to receive something not only that old but that connected to our firm, in that for all its history, it's had bankruptcy trustees," said SulmeyerKupetz co-managing partner Howard Ehrenberg, who's a trustee himself.

He said Bayer presented the document to the firm during a Feb. 1 reception at SulmeyerKupetz's downtown Los Angeles office, attended by 300 friends and colleagues in the bankruptcy community.

The handbill, which Ehrenberg said his firm plans to display prominently in its entryway, lists prices for various bankruptcy law forms pursuant to the English Bankruptcy Act of 1883. Created 15 years before Congress enacted the first permanent U.S. bankruptcy law, the original English document included a replica of an envelope in which the form was mailed. It's addressed to an English lawyer and fixed with a British adhesive postage stamp of the kind introduced only four decades earlier than the document's origin.

Thus not only is the document of special importance to legal historians because the legal forms it advertises are strikingly similar to many forms in use today, Bayer said, but the handbill also represents an early form of direct mail advertising — today's junk mail.

Bayer, who's as passionate about bankruptcy law as he is about collecting historic curiosities, founded his firm in 1989 with Jeffrey Wishman and Peter J. Leotta, the latter of whom died in 1999. The firm, which is devoted solely to consumer bankruptcy of individuals and small, mom-and-pop businesses, remains at three lawyers with the addition of Marcus J. Tiggs, who joined the practice in 2001.

While Bayer said he practiced some commercial bankruptcy early in his career, he said he chose to focus on consumer work which, while not as profitable, gives him the greatest joy by helping people achieve a financial fresh start.

He said he keeps a box of tissues on his desk for people who break down when describing their problems and for those who are overcome with gratitude when they learn something can be done to help them. "They can't believe there's a remedy," he said.

At the other end of the spectrum, SulmeyerKupetz is a full-service bankruptcy firm serving debtors in commercial bankruptcies involving corporations and high net-worth individuals. The lawyers also represent creditors, creditor committees,

**THE BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1883.**

**Blackfriars Printing & Publishing Co., Limited,**  
8, SALISBURY COURT,  
FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

SIR,

We beg to inform you that we have made arrangements for the supply of BANKRUPTCY FORMS, to enable Trustees to render the prescribed accounts to the Board of Trade and for other purposes, and are prepared to supply the following forms at the prices specified, viz.,

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Form of [do.] without analysis (accounts 2 B) ... ..	2d.
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The Forms can be supplied with name of Debtor and other particulars inserted, at short notice and moderate terms, as our engagements necessitate our keeping them always in type.

Trusting to be favoured with your commands,  
I am, Sir,  
Yours respectfully,  
W. B. GARRETT,  
Manager.

Courtesy of SulmeyerKupetz

The 1883 handbill given as a gift to SulmeyerKupetz

landlords and buyers of assets.

Formed in 1952 by Irving Sulmeyer, who died in 2009, the firm grew from a tiny office on the second floor of an aging building on South Spring Street in the heart of downtown Los Angeles — where Sulmeyer helped a friend of his father's save a strug-

gling zipper business — to the thriving commercial practice it is today, with headquarters in the Bank of America building in downtown Los Angeles and branches in Orange County and Reno, Nev.

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