

My Summer Vacation, 800 Years in the Making

By Steven C. Laird – (July 6, 2015) – The Magna Carta is one of the most influential and important documents in the history of the written word. Latin for “The Great Charter,” the Magna Carta was signed in 1215 by King John of England in hopes of brokering peace with a group of 25 rebel barons who sought protection against religious persecution, illegal imprisonment, and delays in justice, among other assurances.

The Magna Carta also established a way of administering justice that we in the United States hold most sacred – the right to trial by jury.



Steven C. Laird

The significance of this document and the storied history behind its signing are why I recently traveled with my family to Runnymede, England, to celebrate its 800th anniversary at the very place where the Magna Carta was signed.

Celebrating one of the world’s oldest legal documents may seem a bit odd for a Fort Worth personal injury attorney who typically represents injured plaintiffs in tractor-trailer crashes and other serious injury claims, but I have been fan of legal history since prior to law school, and this opportunity was simply too good to pass up.

Prior to leaving the U.S., like the other attendees, I had to undergo an extensive background security check based on the high-profile guest list, which included U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Queen Elizabeth, Queen Anne, Prince Phillip and Prince William, among others.

Although the anniversary of the Magna Carta received mostly muted coverage in the U.S., it has been greatly anticipated and celebrated throughout England since last year and continuing through this year. From citizenship ceremonies to scholarly lectures to professional actors reenacting the events that led up to the Magna Carta’s signing, the entire country of England devoted more time and manpower to recognizing the 800th anniversary than we have seen in the past 10 Super Bowls.

I was one of the few Texas lawyers fortunate enough to be able to attend the anniversary celebration in Runnymede, which included a stunning performance by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It is hard to describe the pride I felt as a representative of our country at this historic event. It was also extremely gratifying to be able to meet with and learn from other legal professionals from around the world who attended.



Together with Tom Harkness of Austin’s Whitehurst, Harkness, Brees, Cheng, Alsaffar & Higginbotham LLC, we attended the event as representatives of the Texas chapters of the American Board of Trial Advocates (TEX-ABOTA). Mr. Harkness currently serves >

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as President of the national ABOTA Foundation and I previously served as President of TEX-ABOTA and the Fort Worth ABOTA chapter. The primary purpose of ABOTA and its various chapters is to protect the Constitutional right to trial by jury under the 7th Amendment that is enjoyed by all U.S. citizens.

Following the anniversary celebration, which we watched alongside fellow attorneys representing the American Bar Association, I attended a private dinner party at Great Fosters Hotel in Egham, England, honoring the Lord Mayor of Runnymede and several members of the Runnymede Council. One of the biggest highlights came when I was invited to join a private tour to view the original Magna Carta that was on display at Salisbury Cathedral, which opened in 1320 after 100 years of construction.

In the days after the anniversary proceedings, my family and I continued our travels to Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. I was among a small group to attend a breakfast meeting in Prague with the U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic Andrew Shapiro, who shared his extensive knowledge of that country's culture



and politics. The son of a Czech immigrant, Mr. Shapiro is one of the rare attorneys to hold degrees from Yale College, Oxford University and Harvard Law School.

On the plane ride back to Texas, I had plenty of time to reflect on the people, sights and sounds we encountered during our whirlwind visit to the home of the Magna Carta and the countries nearby. Despite all I encountered and learned,

I realized that traveling 9 hours overnight to celebrate a legal document that was signed 800 years ago might not be everyone's idea of a perfect vacation. That said, I can tell you from

experience that there is no place I would rather have been. It was a once-in-a-lifetime honor that my family and I will never forget.

Steve Laird is the founder of Fort Worth's Law Offices of Steven C. Laird, P.C. Mr. Laird and

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