



PENNSYLVANIA CENTENNIAL SPECIAL

PROFESSOR FRANCIS H. BOHLEN: FATHER OF PENNSYLVANIA WORKERS' COMPENSATION?

by Dave Torrey, Workers' Compensation Judge

Is there a father of Pennsylvania workers' compensation? If so, a leading candidate is surely University of Pennsylvania Professor Francis H. Bohlen (1868-1942). Bohlen was one of the great tort experts of his time, but in the second decade of the 20th century he was also one of the champions of a workers' compensation law in Pennsylvania. Then, when the law was enacted, he became the first counsel to the Board, an entity which then had broad administrative and quasi-judicial powers. (It both established policy and was the final fact-finder, upon appeal of decisions rendered by its referees.)

A long and colorful memorial to Bohlen, in the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, that references this service, was published upon his death in 1942. See William D. Lewis, *Francis Hermann Bohlen*, 91 U. PENN. L. REV. 377 (1943).

Bohlen wrote law review articles about workers' compensation, but one of the most interesting documents is in fact found in the papers of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. For many decades, PBA published the collected papers of its annual meeting and published them in beautiful hardboard volumes. (Unfortunately, these books have never been digitized, but a complete set is found on the shelves of the University of Pittsburgh law school library.)

At the June 1916 meeting at Bedford Springs, PA, one of the principal papers delivered was by Bohlen, "Six Months Experience under the Workmen's Compensation System of Pennsylvania." A beautifully written and seemingly candid account, the paper explains the background of the law, recounts proudly the Board's initial performance, and laments shortcomings of the system. See 22 PBA ANNUAL MEETING REPORT, pp. 240-262 (1916).

