

Clement Lincoln Bouvé, Register 1936-1943

Clement Lincoln Bouvé, the third Register of Copyrights, was born in 1878 in Hingham, Mass., attended private schools in Germany and Switzerland, as well as the Roxbury Massachusetts Latin School, and was graduated from Harvard College and the Harvard Law School. During his distinguished legal career he was Assistant United States District Attorney for Manila, a member of the Panamanian Commission to adjust claims arising out of the Canal Zone purchase, and an agent of the United States before the General and Special Claims Commission during boundary discussions with Mexico. He served in the Field Artillery in France during World War I and in the Army of Occupation in Germany, and retired from the Army with the rank of lieutenant colonel. For a number of years, he practiced international and federal law in Washington, D.C. He was the author, in 1912, of an authoritative 915-page book entitled "A Treatise on the Laws Governing the Exclusion and Expulsion of Aliens in the United States" and also wrote numerous articles on international and aviation law.

Colonel Bouvé was appointed Register of Copyrights on Aug. 1, 1936, the first lawyer to serve as Register. He was a firm believer in the registration system, and his administration of the Copyright Office was notable both for the improvements he made in the organization of the Office and for his constant and energetic endeavor to obtain strict compliance with the conditions and formalities fixed by the statute for securing and maintaining copyright, especially the deposit provisions that enrich the collections of the Library of Congress. This effort included the creation of a legal staff, the establishment of an Examining Section to pass in the first instance on all applications, and the formation of a Revisory Board composed of attorneys and other experienced employees to act on applications initially rejected or those presenting unusual problems. An accomplished musician, he was particularly interested in the copyright law as it related to musical works. During his incumbency, the Copyright Office moved, in 1939, from the south side of the ground floor of the Jefferson Building to the newly built Adams Building, where it originally occupied the entire first floor, the entrance facing Independence Avenue having been designed as the entrance to the Copyright Office. One of the enduring monuments to Colonel Bouvé's administration is the Copyright Card Catalog, 1938-1945, the first Copyright Office catalog to combine into one alphabet all the entries representing all authors, claimants, and titles for all classes of registered works.

He wrote, in 1938, the so-called "Bouvé Letter," a 72-page document bearing the formal title "Letter to the Librarian of Congress concerning Certain Aspects of the Copyright Act of March 4, 1909, in their Relation to the Public Interest and Existing Problems of Copyright Office Administration, with Proposed Amendments." Although this publication did not directly result in any major amendment to the law, it was a model of clarity and served as an example to those who later succeeded in having the statute revised.

Colonel Bouvé had been in ill health when he retired on Dec. 31, 1943, and died two weeks later, on Jan. 14, 1944. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery.

