The Court Archive:
Significant Cases

John A. Lupton
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The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission needs your help. In 1939, Ralph Snyder published an article in the *John Marshall Law Quarterly* (5 *John Marshall L.Q.* 438, 1939-1940) that listed the ten most significant decisions by the Illinois Supreme Court. The cases chosen by attorneys across the state were:

1. *August Spies v. People*, 122 Ill. 1 (1888): Upheld Haymarket rioters sentence of death.
2. *People v. Bruner*, 343 Ill. 146 (1931): In criminal cases, juries as judges of law as well as fact is unconstitutional.
3. *People v. Fisher*, 340 Ill. 350 (1930): Defendant may waive right to jury trial in felony case.
4. *Munn v. People*, 69 Ill. 80 (1873): Legislature has the power to regulate public interest businesses.
5. *In re Day*, 181 Ill. 73 (1899): ILSC has sole power to prescribe qualifications for admission to the bar.
6. *Blake v. People*, 109 Ill. 504 (1884): Organization of sanitary districts constitutional.
7. *Ruggles v. People*, 91 Ill. 256 (1878): Legislature may revise charges for utility when the legislature had previously fixed the charges.
8. *People v. Reynolds*, 10 Ill. 1 (1848): Upheld delegation of legislative powers to administrative officers.
9. *People v. Stevenson*, 281 Ill. 1 (1917): Amendments to constitution must receive majority of all votes cast for the general assembly (thereby making amendments virtually impossible).
10. *Illinois Central RR v. City of Decatur*, 126 Ill. 92 (1889): Railroads with tax exempt status are liable for special assessments.

To commemorate the Illinois bicentennial, the Commission wishes to create a new list of the ten (or more) most significant decisions by the Illinois Supreme Court from 1818 to 2017.

Are Snyder's cases still "significant?" In addition to cases prior to 1939, a newly updated list will include cases from the last eighty years. However, some cases in Snyder's list may no longer be "significant" since several of the cases reflect deficiencies of the 1870 Illinois Constitution, which no longer applies.

A “significant” case will certainly mean different things to different people. In the article, Snyder asked for cases of significance from “an historical, political, economic, or social point of view rather than from a purely legal standpoint.” That guidance still applies in the Commission’s request.

If you have a list of cases that you feel should be included in the Illinois Supreme Court’s top-ten list, please send them to john.lupton@illinoiscourthistory.org. I will compile the results and report the findings in the upcoming bicentennial year.