

Theo Hamilton

(1905-1961)



*Inducted into the Labor and Employment Law Section Hall of Fame
June 2014*

Theo Hamilton was one of Florida's true "labor lawyers." A native of Fernandina Beach, Hamilton attended the Atlanta School of Law, returning to Florida after World War II to work in the mechanical department of The Florida Times-Union. Hamilton was fortunate to soon land a job with John W. Donahoo, one of Jacksonville's most prominent attorneys who represented such clients as Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc., Gibbs Shipyards, Coca-Cola Bottlers, and Jacksonville Paper Company. These employers and others turned to the Donahoo firm when union organizing activity arose, but Mr. Donahoo, being mainly a general business and tax attorney, assigned Hamilton to represent all of these clients before the NLRB. Unlike today, the corporate Donahoo law firm thought "labor and union" cases did not complement their business/tax/estate practice, leading to Mr. Hamilton being invited to leave the firm with all of the open labor files. Being overwhelmed with work and a growing reputation as the "go to" management lawyer, Hamilton offered ex-FBI agent and unsuccessful candidate for mayor Otto Bowden a job.

Hamilton was therefore the founding partner of the firm Hamilton and Bowden in Jacksonville, Fla., with Otto Bowden, another Hall of Fame member, and a contemporary of Granville Alley, another Hall of Fame member and well known labor relations attorney in the south. Hamilton litigated numerous traditional labor cases during his career, including many for large employers like Coca Cola and Minute Maid. Hamilton's practice went beyond mere agency litigation as he was a frequent participant in Board appeals before his death in 1961. It is believed that Hamilton and Bowden was Florida's first boutique management labor law firm, having been formed in the late 1940s.

Among Hamilton's many cases were National Labor Relations Board v. Calcasieu Paper Co., 203 F.2d 12 (5th Cir. 1953), Winn & Lovett Grocery Company v. National Labor Relations Board, 210 F.2d 652 (5th Cir. 1954), Stewart-Jordan Distributing Co. v. Tobin, 210 F.2d 427 (5th Cir. 1954), National Labor Rel. Bd. v. Miami Coca-Cola Bottling Co., 222 F.2d 341 (5th Cir. 1955), White Construction & Engineering Company, Inc. v. National Labor Relations Board, 260 F.2d 507 (5th Cir. 1958), NLRB v. COSCO Products Co., 280 F.2d 905 (5th Cir. 1960), NLRB v. Hudson Pulp & Paper Company, 273 F.2d 660 (5th Cir. 1960), NLRB v. Minute Maid Corporation, 283 F.2d 705 (5th Cir. 1960), and, of course, a trip to the Supreme court in NLRB v. Duval Jewelry Co., 357 U.S. 1 (1958).

Hamilton ranked among one of the earliest Florida labor lawyers, and took part in many major union campaigns throughout his career.