History

Clark Hill PLC has a rich history dating back to 1890. Over the last 100+ years, our firm has been shaped by an ever-changing environment, and driven by a constant desire to evolve and stretch to meet the shifting needs of our clients. This entrepreneurial drive was apparent in 1996, when Clark, Klein and Beaumont merged with Hill Lewis to form Clark Hill PLC. At the time, it was the largest merger of law firms in the history of Michigan.

Since that time, Clark Hill has continued to hone its service offering, always focused on providing relevant solutions that add value to our clients. Today, Clark Hill is a full service law firm that is deep enough to handle the most complex matters, specialized enough to give you the right tool for the right job, and small enough to care about client service.

From our oldest client, the Michigan Manufacturers Association, which has been on board since 1902, to our current array of local, national and international clients, Clark Hill builds loyalty with a unique formula: keeping a firm grasp on the historical beginnings of the transportation, automotive, maritime, rail, aviation and trucking industries, while effectively navigating the new fields of the 21st century.

Understanding that where you come from has an undeniable impact on where you’re going, we invite you to learn more about the history of our firm:

Attorney George Klein had become part of a practice formed by Joseph Clark and Levi Griffin in 1895. He joined them in 1908 when he returned to Detroit after the earthquake in San Francisco had destroyed his offices. During these roll-out days of the automobile, Detroit became a legal hot spot. Clark, Griffin and Klein practiced in a time when many of the ultimately 3,500-plus automotive companies existed and their “Boom-Town” exploded, with the population tripling between 1910 and 1930. This historical element strongly affected the growth of the firm.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of workers migrated to Detroit for the high paying jobs—like Ford’s $5-per-day positions—and created an incredible growth spurt for the city. Clark’s firm locked into this solid industrial base, becoming strong in automotive and transportation law—so strong that this firm would continue in Detroit as one of the best for over one hundred years.

Another centennial Detroit firm that paced alongside Clark’s, Shaw and Cady, opened in 1890. A young go-getter, Sherwin Hill, who was an assistant in the admiralty practice, came on board in 1907. He quickly earned his degree and became a partner in the firm in only a few years.

Shortly afterward, Hill applied his business acumen to switch gears when he noticed navigation aids improving and maritime insurance being introduced. He saw that maritime law was on the decline and refocused the firm on becoming top in business law. Hill established himself as one of the leading business lawyers in Detroit—he served on the boards of leading banks and trade associations and became an active member in the community.

Both Clark’s and Hill’s firms had the ability to handle Detroit’s incredible growth, but more importantly were able to survive the 20th century roller coaster ride: the stock market crash, two World Wars, the introduction of immigration laws, race riots, unions, the onset of the information age and the explosion of technology.

Each firm’s strong professional history, combined with exacting business sense, led them to be two of the top firms in the state of Michigan. In 1996, Clark Hill PLC made history as the largest merger ever of Michigan law firms. The firm’s next merger was in 2013 with Thorp Reed & Armstrong which also had a historic background in the Pennsylvania market and made Clark Hill into a truly national firm. Then in 2017, Clark Hill expanded its footprint to the West Coast by joining forces with Morris Polich & Purdy LLP (MPP), a firm with nearly 100 lawyers in California and Nevada. In 2018, the firm combined with Texas-based Strasburger & Price. These successful mergers have allowed Clark Hill to stay true to its values and service, strengthen its practices, and expand its services for a diverse client base.

Now with over 600 attorneys and professionals based in 23 offices across the United States, as well as offices in Dublin and Mexico City, the firm stands on solid ground from its rich history yet forges ahead with incredible innovation.