

# Arthur Mag

Lawyer

1896-1981

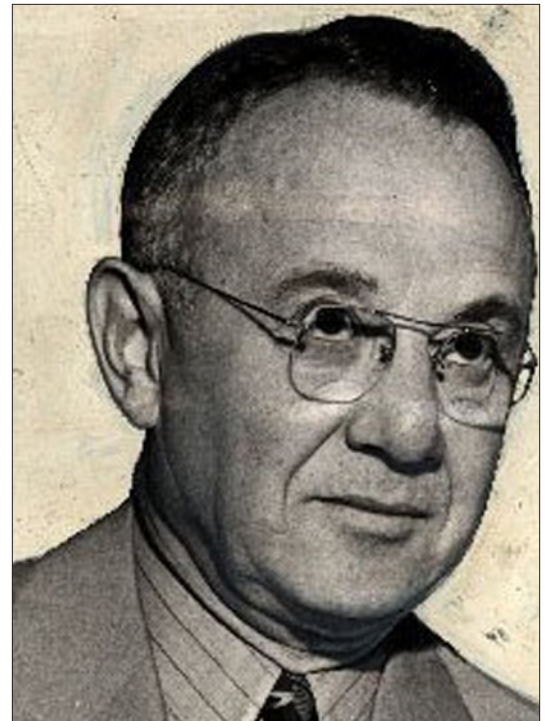
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by Daniel Coleman

Arthur Mag, who at age 78 was serving as a director on the boards of 29 corporations, was once described as “one of the best arguments in town against early retirement.” Mag’s energy and thoughtfulness, however, surfaced early in his career, when he courageously put into action a groundbreaking legal idea that led to many of his life’s greatest accomplishments: a belief that people who had been entrusted to make investment decisions with the estates of deceased individuals should also be allowed to make choices about its charitable uses.

Arthur Mag was born October 11, 1896, in New Britain, Connecticut, to clothier Nathan E. Mag and his wife Rebecca. A son of Jewish immigrants from Poland, Arthur showed his family’s devotion to their new country by joining the U.S. Navy during World War I. He completed his undergraduate studies at Yale University in 1918 and received a law degree there in 1920. Although most of his classmates planned to begin their legal careers in New York City, “Tim” (as Mag was known to his college buddies) found little attraction to big city life. Instead, Mag accompanied Louis Rothschild, a good friend and fellow clothier’s son, back to Rothschild’s hometown of Kansas City and soon found a position at Rozzell, Vineyard, Thatcher & Boys a highly respected firm with a number of clients in the banking industry.

The firm soon faced catastrophe, however. Shortly after senior partner John Thatcher’s retirement, two more partners—J. J. Vineyard and Rank Rozzell—died suddenly within the same month, while fourth partner Frank Boys lay gravely ill. The 5’4” rookie lawyer Mag rose to the occasion. He personally visited and reassured the firm’s clients and recruited a widely respected Kansas City trial lawyer, Paul Stinson, to join the firm as a senior partner. Mag’s leadership in the crisis resulted in his elevation to full partner in 1924. He was 28, and the firm he rallied to save still operates nearly a century later as Stinson, Morrison, Hecker.



During his extensive work in the field of estate planning, Mag encountered numerous trusts in which millions of dollars sat untouched due to restrictions intended to enhance the money's charitable uses. For instance, one trust with which he worked had been designed strictly to aid those suffering from a disease for which medical science had found a cure; another, established in the early 1850s to assist settlers in the West had been rendered largely untouchable simply due to changing immigration patterns. Mag believed in modernizing the law to allow arrangements in which trustees, who already were permitted to manage and invest trust funds, would also be empowered to make decisions as to how they could be used. This was a new idea in the 1920s, and Mag carefully constructed a will for one of his clients that became a pilot case. His work was challenged and upheld in the circuit and appellate courts, and when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear another appeal on the case in 1931, Mag had established a new precedent.

Mag's second great breakthrough in the area of philanthropy came when he conceived of a way in which trusts could be combined in the interest of helping more people. The resulting Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations was the first organization of its kind nationwide, and in addition to his having been its legal architect, many attribute the organization's creation to Mag's genius for bringing people and groups together. We know it today as the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and Affiliated Trusts.

Mag's tireless work as a steward of public institutions is also reflected in his long list of board memberships. He was a founding board member of Menorah Medical Center, the Midwest Research Institute, the Starlight Theater Association, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and the Greater Kansas City Mental Health Foundation. When he died at age 83 on October 23, 1981, he was survived by his wife Charline and their two daughters.

### Sources

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