Ward Stephenson was born in Nacogdoches, Texas. He graduated from Southern Methodist University Law School and was admitted to the bar in 1947. Stephenson was the son of trial lawyer K. W. Stephenson who always encouraged his son to seek the answers to his legal questions in the law library. Following in his father’s footsteps, he built a successful practice in Orange litigating a number of railroad crossing cases and one of the first silicosis cases.

In 1966 Stephenson litigated the first asbestos case and is credited with inventing asbestos litigation. Losing that case on appeal, he was undeterred in bringing a second asbestos case for Clarence Borel, an asbestos insulation installer who had been diagnosed with mesothelioma. Stephenson set out to prove fraud and conspiracy by 11 companies who hid the dangers associated with working with asbestos from their employees.

The Borel v. Fibreboard case was one of the 10 most significant legal decisions of the millennium. He won the initial case, but the companies appealed the decision to the fifth circuit Court of Appeals. The decision was upheld by the court in 1973. The Borel case opened a floodgate of litigation because it allowed employees to sue their employers for product liability.

“Ward was a superb trial lawyer, he was very innovative, very creative and wasn’t afraid to try something new. He was ahead of his time.”

- Jack Smith
Former Partner in Stephenson’s Law Firm