

# The Early Years

of the

## School of Law

### Reminiscences of the Dean



My recollections of the School of Law go back many years. From 1929 to 1946, when I married, I lived on McFarlin Boulevard, just a short distance from the University. At that time, many of the University faculty lived on University Boulevard, McFarlin Boulevard and Haynie Avenue. These were members of the original faculty or those who came shortly after the University was founded and purchased property around the University even before the city of University Park was incorporated. Dean Potts, who was Dean of the School of Law from 1927 to 1947, lived on Haynie and Professor William Alexander Rhea lived on McFarlin. I knew the Potts family well and spoke to Dean Potts when I was in high school about the SMU School of Law.

I came to know Judge William Alexander Rhea who joined Dean Potts when the School of Law was just starting. Indeed, it was largely because of the intense respect for scholarship and research on the part of both Dean Potts and Judge Rhea that the SMU Law Library is as good a library as it is today. They believed in a good library and good facilities and urged lawyers in the community to support the law library from the very beginning.

When the School of Law first opened in 1925, a dean was not appointed. Instead, Mr. Joseph E. Cockrell was designated as the Chairman of the Faculty. The

school was located in the east wing of the third floor of Dallas Hall and from 1925 until the late 1930's, the entire library, all offices and classroom facilities were accommodated in that area. One of the legends is that law students would stand around the balcony of the rotunda on the third floor of Dallas Hall and heat coins with a match, throwing them down on the floor to watch unsuspecting victims pick up hot coins from the floor.

When Fondren Library was completed in the late 1930's the School of Law was moved and the east wing of the basement of Dallas Hall became the library with faculty offices at the extreme east end of the library in the small semicircular area. The main floor of the east wing of Dallas Hall was divided by a corridor. The School of Business Administration offices were on the north side while the classroom facilities on the south side were shared by the School of Law and the School of Business Administration.

The School of Business Administration had been for many years housed in a shack (quite literally a shack) which had been built during World War I and remained just north of Dallas Hall to accommodate what was then called the School of Commerce. Another shack accommodated the Art Department. During the 1920's and 1930's these were affectionately referred to as the "Art Shack" and the "Commerce Shack."

In going over some old papers of Dean Potts of the middle 1930's, it was interesting to read his letters to then SMU President Selecman urging an increase in support for the School of Law. The total student body, of course, was considerably less than 100, including the day and evening divisions. Dean Potts was proposing a budget of approximately \$25,000 to support full-time professors, library, the dean, the dean's office and incidental expenses necessary for the operation of the school. Today, the direct expenses are approximately \$2 million.

I graduated from SMU with a Bachelor of Science in Commerce degree in 1940 and was awarded a fellowship to Northwestern University to obtain a Master of Business Administration degree, which I accomplished by the spring of 1941. Because of the imminence of being drafted, I returned to Dallas and began law school in the fall of 1941 with professors whose names are still familiar around the school—Professors Clyde Emery and Roy R. Ray.

With the declaration of war in December of 1941, people began to withdraw from the school for various training programs so that when the war was fully underway the total number of law students was probably well under fifty. During this time professors left for various government agency appointments leaving

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## Memorial Fund Established

With the death of Joseph T. Nance on January 9, 1977, the Dallas Bar lost one of its distinguished members. Mr. Nance had been actively engaged in the practice of law since his graduation from the SMU School of Law in 1953. He was associated with a Dallas law firm from 1953 to 1967, served for several years as Vice-President and General Counsel in Europe for Holiday Inns International, and from 1973 to 1977 was an attorney for First International Bancshares, Inc. of Dallas.

Mr. Nance was a member of the State Bar of Texas, Dallas and American Bar Associations, American Judicature Society, American Society of International Law, Texas Association of Bank Counsel and the Southwestern Legal Foundation. In 1975-76, he was President of the Dallas International Law Association.

In honor of Mr. Nance, the Dallas International Law Association has established the Joseph T. Nance Memorial Fund. Contributions to the Fund will be used to purchase books on international and com-

parative law for the SMU Underwood Law Library. Organizers of the Fund hope that \$20,000 can be raised. For those interested in contributing please write or call Frank Norton, Hillcrest Bank Building, Dallas, Texas 75205. (214) 750-9400.

### Alumnus to Author New Treatise

The importance of municipal problems is underscored by the availability of several multi-volume treatises on local government law. However, there is no single volume work available on local government law but this situation will soon be remedied by Professor Osborne M. Reynolds, Jr. '68.

Professor Reynolds, a member of the faculty of the University of Oklahoma Law School, is working on a local government law handbook to be published by West Publishing Company. This text, which will include approximately thirty-three chapters and cover a myriad of fundamental principles of local government law, is intended to provide law students and attorneys with a convenient overview of the extensive body of law existing in this area.

**DEAN** (continued from page 3)  
only the Dean and Professor Emery and some part-time faculty to carry on the educational program. These were tough years for the University as a whole. The women students and a Navy V-5 program operating at the University kept it going during those difficult times.

In my own case, I enlisted in the Navy, went to Officers' Training School and served four years. Following discharge, I obtained my Juris Doctor degree from Northwestern University.

Following World War II, Mr. Robert G. Storey, a distinguished Dallas lawyer, was appointed to succeed Dean Potts. He undertook a major building campaign and what is now the Storey Administration Building and Lawyers' Inn were built and Kirby Hall was remodeled into what is now Florence Hall.

In 1968 I was successful in obtaining a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to renovate Florence Hall and to build Underwood Library. Matching private funds, and in particular a \$1 million gift from Mr. and Mrs. George M. Underwood, Jr., made possible the completion of the Law Quadrangle as we know it today.

Total tuition at the SMU School of Law in the period before World War II and immediately following was about \$125 a semester. This was not too different from the tuition at the University of Texas Law School which was perhaps \$50 to \$75 a semester. Therefore, at that time, the differential in cost to attend the SMU School of Law or the state supported law school was not too great in terms of dollar values. Of course, as educational costs have increased the tuition at SMU now runs far in excess of that at any of the state schools.

I hope you have enjoyed some of my reminiscences about the early years of the School of Law. Moreover, I urge all those who attended the School of Law at earlier times to make available to *The Brief* your own reminiscences of incidents and people recalled from an earlier day. Also, recollections of some of the problems encountered when entering into law practice in earlier days as well as the level of compensation for a beginning attorney may be of interest to our more recent graduates.

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SCHOOL OF LAW**

**SUMMER, 1978**

Cover: The Class of 1928



*Pictured left to right—*

*top row: Paul L. Williams, James F. Gray, Edgar H. Seaman, and John W. Randall;*

*middle row: Hubert D. Wills, DeWitt Harry, Erin Bain Jones, Harry S. Pollard, and J. Harold Goode;*

*bottom row: Ellis P. House, Euell Moseley, W. Autry Norton, and Ely Straus*

*(photo courtesy of J. Harold Goode)*

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