Katz Cites Changes in Law School Ideas

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By Wilber G. Katz

(Wilber G. Katz, Dean of the Law School, received his LL.B. at Harvard in 1926, after which he practiced law for several years. He returned to Harvard in 1936 for his J.D. and entered the University of Chicago that same year as an assistant professor of law. He became Dean of the Law School in 1939. A member of the Chicago, Illinois, and Illinois Bar Associations, Dean Katz has written and edited several legal works.)

The Law School is an organic part of the University. It reflects the spirit and purpose of the University and it seeks to contribute to that spirit and purpose. The School dates from 1857. Actually the establishment of a school of law was part of the original plans that were drafted at the time that the University was founded. It was not until 1903, however, that the creation of the School was approved. In October of that year, sixty-one students assembled in what is now the Law School Building for their first classes in law at the University of Chicago. They met in their first faculty, examined their first cases, and prepared their first assignments on long, paper-covered books that had been cut across saw handles in the new temporary quarters. The following spring, work was completed for the Law School Building and construction began with brief ceremonies on April 2, 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone with a silver trowel that remains in the School archives.

Since the establishment of the Law School, four Deans have served as its administrative heads. The first Dean, Joseph Henry Beale, was granted leave of absence from the Harvard Law School to direct the activities of the new institution. In 1904, Mr. Beale was succeeded by James Parker Hall, who continued to fill that responsibility until his death in 1929. In 1929, Harry A. Brubaker, a member of the Faculty since 1904, was appointed Dean and served until his retirement in 1939.

When the Law School was established, two views were expressed with regard to its curricular requirements. Some members of the Faculty urged that the School's emphasis should be on legal practice. They declared that the proper curriculum was the one that furnished the best possible professional training for such practice. Others maintained that the Law School should offer more than technical training. They affirmed that besides giving training in law students as future advocates and counselors it should contribute to the solution of legal and social problems and earn its right to be called one of the learned professions. The first curriculum of the Law School largely reflected the views of the former members of the Faculty. The present curriculum, adopted in 1937, reflected the latter policy.

An important part of the new curriculum is the intensive trial training and the oral and written examination which is given to every student throughout his first year. By working on a series of individual projects under the supervision of Professors Hall and Brubaker, the student has the opportunity to understand in form and in detail the problems, the procedures and the basic Bramble, was granted leave of absence from the Harvard Law School to direct the activities of the new institution. In 1904, Mr. Beale was succeeded by James Parker Hall, who continued to fill that responsibility until his death in 1929. In 1929, Harry A. Brubaker, a member of the Faculty since 1904, was appointed Dean and served until his retirement in 1939.

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