

A school of law and jurisprudence was contemplated in the original plan for The University of Chicago. The school should, according to William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University, be more than a training institution for admission to the bar. An education in law, President Harper said, “implies a scientific knowledge of law and of legal and juristic methods. These are the crystallization of ages of human progress. They cannot be understood in their entirety without a clear comprehension of the historic forces of which they are the product, and of the social environment with which they are in living contact. A scientific study of law involves the related sciences of history, economics, philosophy—the whole field of man as a social being.” Consequently, the law school was not to be an institution which had a merely nominal connection with the University, and it was not to be separated either by location or spirit from the University at large. It should be, the President felt, an organic part of the University, in close touch with the other divisions, embodying the spirit and purpose of University life and, in turn, contributing to that life.

In 1902 President Harper’s plan was approved by the Trustees, and the Law School was opened in October of that year.* The goal of the School as stated in the first *Announcements* was “to afford adequate preparation for the practice of law as a profession in any jurisdiction in which the common law prevails, and to cultivate and encourage the scientific study of systematic and comparative jurisprudence, legal history, and principles of legislation.”

The first Dean was Joseph Henry Beale. In 1904, Mr. Beale was succeeded by James Parker Hall, who continued as Dean until his death in 1928. In 1929, Harry Augustus Bigelow, a member of the Faculty since 1904, was appointed Dean and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1939. Since 1939, Wilber Griffith Katz has been the Dean of the School.