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John J. Murphy

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ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW: A PROFILE

JOHN J. MURPHY*

SOME years ago *The Catholic Lawyer* engaged in a program of publishing descriptive articles about the nation's Catholic Law Schools. One notable absence from the series was the home school of *The Catholic Lawyer*, St. John's University School of Law. The exclusion occurred because at the time a new Law School building was in remote contemplation and it was decided to defer the article until the new building became a reality. That event has now occurred. The entire operation of the Law School was transferred into its magnificent new home, Fromkes Hall, for the beginning of the Summer Session 1972 and the building was formally dedicated on October 20, 1972. From the vantage point of a new perspective it is now most appropriate to present this profile of St. John's University School of Law.

History

Until the opening of another law school on Long Island three years ago, St. John's was the youngest of ten Law Schools existing in New York State. From its inception, the Law School has been a part of St. John's University, a Catholic higher educational institution conducted by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, more popularly known as the Vincentian Fathers, after their founder, St. Vincent de Paul. The first Law School classes began in September of 1925 and graduated in June of 1928. From that time to the present the Law School has known three homes. It started in a non-university owned building in Brooklyn. Within a very short time plans were formulated by the Board of Trustees of the University to move the school from its temporary location into a newly-constructed University-owned building

* A.B. St. Joseph's Seminary and College (1951); J.D. St. John's University (1956); Dean and Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law.

on Schermerhorn Street in Brooklyn. Up to the time of the move to Fromkes Hall in June of this year, all activities of the Law School were conducted in the Schermerhorn Street building.

It was in its Brooklyn home that the Law School attained its present stature. Under the outstanding leadership of its three former Deans, George Matheson, Rev. Joseph T. Tinnelly, C.M., and Harold F. McNiece, coupled with the wisdom of its dedicated faculty and the understanding cooperation of the University administration, the Law School rose rapidly to its current position of respect and prominence.

The efforts of those individuals and groups in the areas of curriculum, programs, library, personnel, facilities and all other facets of law school operation led, in 1937, to the granting of full accreditation by the American Bar Association and, in 1946, to election to membership in the Association of American Law Schools.

Their recognition of the need for training law students in scholarly research activity led to the foundation one year after the opening of the school, in 1926, of the *St. John's Law Review*. Throughout its existence the *Law Review* has contributed significantly towards expanding the learning of the profession by the publication of a long procession of scholarly articles, symposia and other research materials. To cite but one instance, a special issue appeared in Spring 1970 entitled *Conglomerate Mergers and Acquisitions: Opinion and Analysis*. Containing, as it does, contributions by many of the world's foremost authorities on the conglomerate phenomenon; proceeding along interdisci-

plinary lines to examine not only the legal but the economic, accounting, business and financial aspects of the subject; and running to almost 1200 pages, the Symposium has been hailed by an AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION JOURNAL review as "... without doubt, one of the most comprehensive scholarly symposiums on conglomerate mergers ever published."

Their wisdom and high principles established as an objective of the school not only the training of students in the basic skills and techniques of the legal profession, but also the fostering of high ethical and moral standards. That goal appears as a stated objective of the School of Law in the current bulletin:

As the School of Law of a Catholic university, St. John's strives to integrate a sound legal education with a love of God, a respect for His laws and a zeal for equitable administration of justice. . . . The chief differences are the conscious creation of an environment for all students Catholic and non-Catholic alike which is favorable to the development of high ethical standards and of a sound and mature philosophy of law compatible with Catholic philosophy and with the principles upon which our American government is founded.

The Law School has acted in pursuit of its stated objective, in particular, through the establishment in 1954 of the St. Thomas More Institute for Legal Research. In addition to assuming responsibility for producing the *Law Review*, the Institute embarked on the publication of an entirely new scholarly journal, *The Catholic Lawyer*. Appearing on a quarterly basis, *The Catholic Lawyer* is devoted to providing the legal profession with greater knowledge of legal matters affecting the

Church and Catholic institutions and to publishing articles of particular philosophical, ethical and moral significance and of special interest to Catholic lawyers, theologians and philosophers. Over the years since its inception, *The Catholic Lawyer* has received awards for general excellence among professional magazines from the Catholic Press Association and has been commended by that group for its high intellectual caliber. To cite a single example of the nature and quality of its product, the Spring 1968 issue was devoted exclusively to a symposium on the O.E.O. Legal Services program of the War on Poverty. Articles by the nation's most renowned authorities were presented and the issue is for practical purposes a hornbook on legal services in the war on poverty.

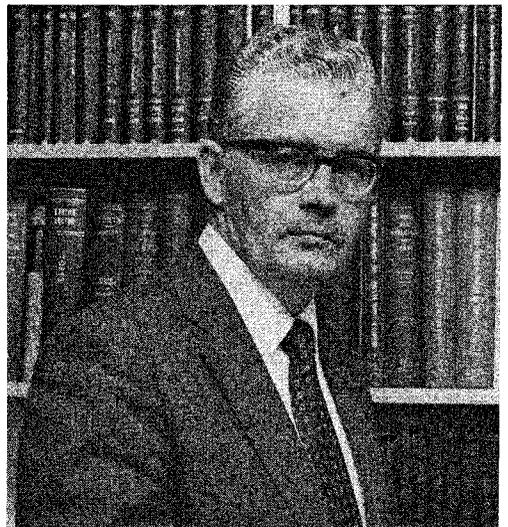
Not only did expansion occur in the publication field, but growth also took place in all other facets of the Law School's activities. Many new student organizations and programs came into being, an alumni association was founded to serve the growing body of graduates and a number of programs, particularly of a continuing legal education nature, were presented. There was evidence of an embryonic partnership among bench, bar and law school—in short there was growth on all fronts.

The New Building

By the early 1960's it was very clear that if the Law School were to meet all the legitimate demands made upon it by the expanded concept of legal education, it was vital that new physical facilities be made available. In all discussions of new

facilities a preliminary question was whether to rebuild in the Brooklyn area or to transfer to the main campus of the University in Jamaica, Queens. Studies conducted at both the Law School and the University level, led ultimately to the decision by the University Trustees that the Law School be integrated with the main campus of the University in Jamaica. After much planning and consultation among University officials, architects and representatives of the Law School, the final design for the new Law School building was established.

The building, named in honor of its major benefactor, Colonel Saul Fromkes, a member of the first graduating class of 1928, incorporates all of the recognized needs of a most current legal education. Situated on a pleasing slope on the Jamaica campus, it rises on one side to four levels and on the other, through a ground level and two mezzanines, to a total of seven levels. Erected at a cost in excess of



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\$7,000,000, it is fully air-conditioned and features large amphitheater classrooms, equipped for various types of audio-visual presentations, a showcase Moot Court Room and many smaller classrooms and seminar rooms. There is a very comfortable student lounge and food service area on the ground level fronting on an attractive patio. All the student activities are provided with ample office space and equipment. One of the main features of the new building is the library, occupying portions of five floors, with a total capacity of 250,000 volumes. At present the collection contains approximately 130,000 volumes, practically all of which are available on open shelves to the entire student, faculty and alumni population. All administrative and faculty offices are located on the top floor of the building which also houses the placement complex, additional seminar rooms and a separate faculty library and lounge. One of the very attractive features of the building is the inclusion of some uncommitted space which can in future be devoted to additional lounge, classroom, activity, institute or office space as needs are identified.

Curriculum

Prior to the move to the new building, the Faculty undertook a complete review of the existing curriculum. The review led ultimately to the adoption of a revised curriculum which became effective simultaneously with the move to the new building. In recognition of the need for greater student selectivity, one major outcome of the revision was a substantial enlargement of the total number of elective credits in student programs. In addition, a number

of new electives relating to currently prominent areas were introduced. Consumer Protection, Poverty Law, Environmental Law, Drugs and the Law and Criminal Trial Techniques, are but a few.

Although students for years have engaged in a variety of types of clinical programs with, for instance, the United States Attorney's offices, various District Attorney's offices, The Corporation Counsel, various Federal Agencies and the Legal Aid Society, such programs were not normally under faculty supervision, did not have any academic component and therefore did not qualify for academic credit. That has now been altered. One part of the overall curriculum revision was the adoption of a clinical program in which students work a fixed time period in either a Legal Aid or O.E.O. Legal Clinic under the direction of a member of the full-time faculty. Additionally, all students involved meet with the faculty member as a group, on alternate weeks, to discuss the matters on which they are engaged. Students are now given a limited amount of academic credit for this type of clinical activity.

Student Activities

Student interest in participation in the projects of the existing student organizations and in the establishment of new student groups in areas of specialized interest has been in evidence in recent years.

The St. Thomas More Institute for Legal Research continues to offer to honor students in-depth training in research and writing through its quarterly publication of both the *St. John's Law Review* and *The Catholic Lawyer*.

The Student Bar Association, of which all students are members, has served as an effective vehicle for training students in future participation in bar association activities and also as an excellent channel for reasoned resolution of student problems. The Law Students Wives Association functions as an adjunct to the Student Bar Association.

The Moot Court program is both required and voluntary: required in that all students in the freshman course in Legal Research and Writing must prepare and argue an appellate brief; voluntary in that interested students may participate in a Moot Court elimination program which ultimately leads to the selection of the Moot Court team representing the School in the National Moot Court Competition. This year, the team selected through the intramural elimination process reached the National Finals.

The Criminal Law Institute, open to all students with an interest in the field of criminal law and procedure, conducts mock criminal trials, sponsors guest speakers and open public meetings on matters currently of interest in the criminal law field. As a unique feature of its program, the Institute contacts all the District Attorneys and Public Defenders in the State of New York offering to furnish research memoranda in connection with matters which are actually in litigation by those offices.

Similar to the Criminal Law Institute are three other organizations interested in specialized areas of substantive law: the Tax Club, the Labor Relations Institute, and the Real Property Club. Each invites speakers and conducts special programs in its field of substantive interest.

There are two groups concerned specifically with the interests of special groups of students: the Advocates of the Advancement of Women in the Law and the Black American Law Students Association.

There are two other publications emanating from Law School students, an annual yearbook called *Res Gestae*, and a monthly newspaper called the *Forum*.

Finally, there are several legal fraternities which operate on both a professional and a social plane.

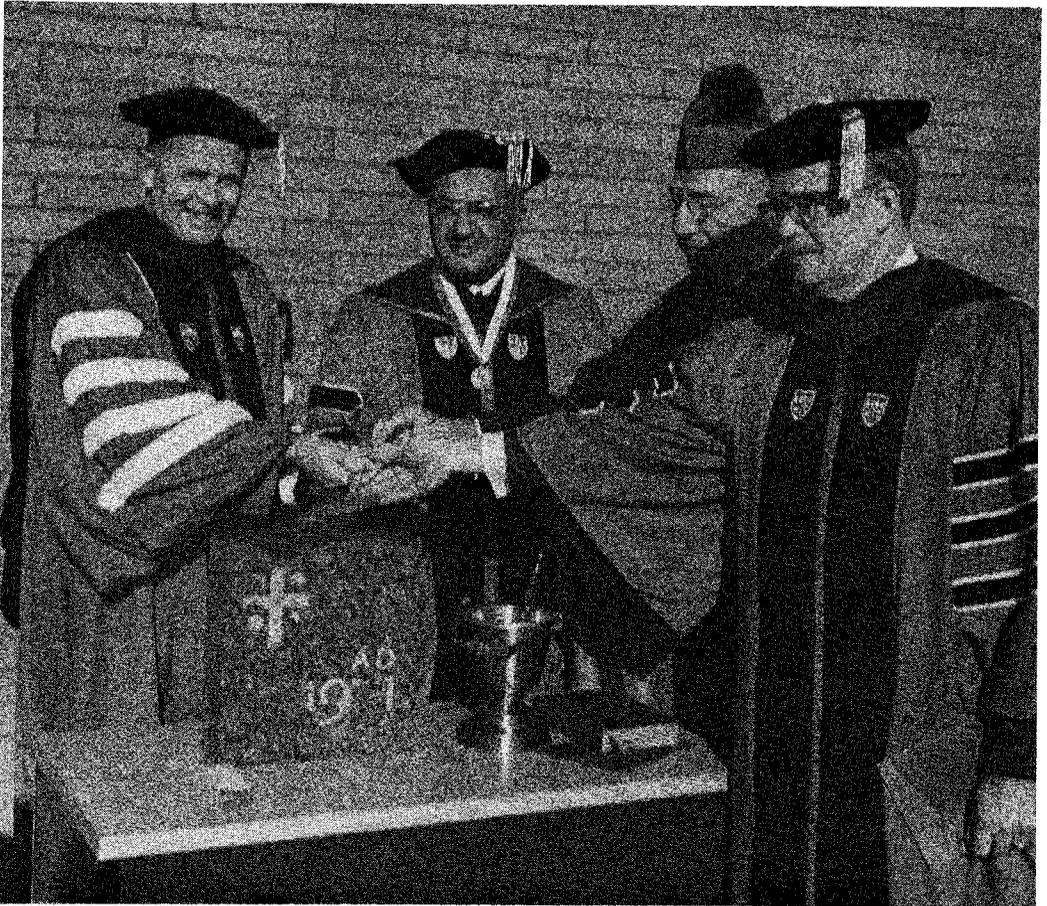
Alumni

Among her more than 7,500 alumni and alumnae the Law School presently counts numerous members of the judicial, legislative and executive branches of both the Federal and various State governments as well as large numbers in civic, business and professional pursuits. The Law School maintains an active relationship with its alumni through such programs as: its full-day Homecoming, a combination of continuing legal education seminars and social functions; its annual luncheon held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the New York State Bar Association; its monthly luncheons held at the Lawyers Club in New York, each of which offers a speaker on a topic of professional interest; and through the establishment and participation in the activities of geographical chapters of the Alumni Association. In addition, when major statutory changes have been enacted or when broad areas of the law have undergone substantial change, the School has conducted programs of as long as eight weeks duration for the purpose of assisting the alumni to be current in new and changing fields.

Conclusion

The alumni, students, faculty and administration, past and present, of St. John's University School of Law look with great pride to the achievements of their Law

School in the comparatively brief span of her existence. They confidently hope that in her beautiful new home, Fromkes Hall, the School will continue to serve the profession and society with distinction.



Very Rev. Joseph T. Cahill, Col. Saul Fromkes, Bishop Francis J. Mugavero and Dean John J. Murphy Join in the Laying of the Cornerstone