1990

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Recommended Citation
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WILLIAM MITCHELL COLLEGE OF LAW

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September 16th will be a great day in the history of my alma mater. The recently completed beautiful library will be dedicated and named in honor of our most distinguished guest, the Honorable Warren E. Burger. Great plans are being made to make that weekend a glorious and memorable occasion, long to be remembered by those who will be fortunate enough to be in attendance. That weekend also reminds us that our law school is ninety years old (young).

As I make my notes for these few words, which when liberally appraised will be called an essay, I am parked on Summit Avenue, opposite the campus. It's an evening hour and the lights are all ablaze in all the rooms of the new library and main buildings. Seven acres, a solid city block, equipped with fixtures and furnishings and a large attractively landscaped parking lot meets my eye. I can't believe what I see. A physical plant, worth millions of dollars, in all its awesome beauty is all ours—all paid for. I can't believe that day has arrived.

Over 1100 dedicated students are studying and attending classes, eager to do well and become members of a great profession. I admire those who do so well under the most trying circumstances. It takes all of their energy, resources, and in many instances borrowed money to get to graduation day. Women comprise over forty percent of the student body and over a third of the full time faculty. In all, there are thirty-one full-time faculty, highly trained and skilled in the various fields of legal education. They not only teach, but devote much time to writing and publishing. Many have received national recognition. Most, if not all, are well known for their contributions to the communities and the affairs of the Bench and Bar. In addition, over one hundred adjunct faculty assist in teaching assignments, giving the students the benefit of everyday experi-

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iences of the Bench, trial bar, business, finance, and management. The curriculum is one of the best in the field of legal education.

Approximately two-thirds of the students are enrolled part-time and the remaining one-third are full-time. Those students who work a full week to pay for their keep and meet school expenses, as well as attend a full week of class work are called “part-time students.” In my day, and until 1978 all students came under that classification. The student body has included students from twenty-seven states and four foreign countries. As each first year student is admitted, three applicants for that same seat are turned away. When I think of where we were—fifty—sixty—ninety years ago, compared to where we are today, it can almost bring tears to my eyes.

In 1900, the University of Minnesota had a night law school, but there were rumors that it might close in the not too distant future. Students who lived in St. Paul had transportation problems, particularly during winter months. The time had arrived when a night law school in St. Paul was a must. There were bright young people who wanted to become lawyers and should be given a chance. Dedicated members of the Bar and Bench, with some assistance from the business community put a program together, purchased books and equipment and rented space in downtown St. Paul. William Mitchell of Winona, who had completed a brilliant career on the Supreme Court of Minnesota, was selected to be the first dean. The new law school was to be known as “The St. Paul College of Law.”

Shortly before school opened, Justice Mitchell suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage and lived only a short time. Hiram Stevens was then selected to be the first dean, and the first class began in 1900, on the evening of the day following Labor Day. The entrance requirement was a high school diploma and forty dollars for the first semester’s tuition. The law courses took two years to complete. The first graduation took place in June 1902.

In 1911 the University of Minnesota Law School discontinued its night law school program. As was the situation in St. Paul, there was an urgent need of such facilities in Minneapolis. Almost over night the Bench and Bar responded. The Minneapolis College of Law opened in 1912, followed by Northwestern College of Law in 1913. Those three law schools operated in downtown rented locations for many
In 1920 the YMCA opened a night law school in its own building. During the early twenties there were five night law schools in the Twin Cities. World War I reduced enrollment, but it was of short duration and class sizes remained fairly consistent.

In April 1921, the trustees of St. Paul College of Law took a bold step in purchasing the Berkey residence, located at 6th and College Streets. Four large classrooms (large in those days, accommodating fifty to sixty students), were allotted, one to each class. An addition was added to the building to provide library space. It consumed an area which would comfortably fit inside the present Oppenheimer Court room with a generous amount of space left over. It was an exciting day when classes opened in the new building.

By the mid-1920s it became apparent that there were too many law schools in Minneapolis. In 1927 there were two mergers. The YMCA Law School closed and merged with the Minneapolis College of Law. Northwestern College of Law merged with the Minnesota College of Law. These mergers left two schools in operation—Minneapolis College of Law and Minnesota College of Law. They continued their independent operations until they merged to form the Minneapolis-Minnesota College of Law in 1940.

The years of the great depression had an adverse effect on student enrollment, but dedicated trustees and faculties kept the schools in operation. There were several lean years. At one time the only library space and classroom accommodations were provided by the late Andy Johnson in his private suites. I wish time and space would permit me to tell of the great dedication and contributions that were given by so many wonderful people in order that the schools could continue. It was the same story on both sides of the river.

A bold step was taken in the mid-1950s. Trustees, faculty and administrations in both Minneapolis and St. Paul recognized that one law school would better serve both cities if a suitable physical plant could be provided at a site convenient

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1. The purchase was financed by issuing bonds in the sum of $18,300.00, secured by a mortgage. The bonds were retired in three years. The building had been a stately mansion in its day and retained much of the architectural features of the late nineteenth century. Steam radiators had been installed throughout the building and electricity made available. Fireplaces were retained.
to both cities. The College of St. Thomas provided the answer. It donated some land on Summit Avenue, across the street from the main campus, and prevailed upon an owner of an adjacent lot to sell it to the law schools at a price that they could afford to pay. The St. Paul College of Law sold its building at 6th and College Streets. With the funds from that sale, together with all other assets of both schools, and a mortgage of $185,000, the plunge was taken. The two schools merged in 1956 to form William Mitchell College of Law and construction at 2100 Summit Avenue was under way. The doors opened for classes in September 1958.  

The building at 2100 Summit was planned to accommodate approximately 200 students, possibly 250, plus space for five or six full time faculty, administrative personnel and a library. Soon after opening two court rooms were finished. By 1974 enrollment had soared to over 1000 students, all part-time. Fortunately, the College of St. Thomas had space to rent and William Mitchell Law School had daytime space to accommodate some of the needs of St. Thomas College. This arrangement worked to the advantage of both colleges until 1974 when St. Thomas College decided to go into MBA and adult education, both programs to be offered at night. St. Thomas needed all the space that had been leased to William Mitchell Law School. Departure day was a year and a half away. Trustees, faculty and administration searched and searched. They agonized. Money, significant money would be needed, and the school had never gone public. Some trustees favored a merger with St. Thomas College. The majority, however, wanted our law school to remain free standing and entirely independent.

A second bold plunge was taken. Our law school made a commitment to purchase a recently closed parochial high school, Our Lady of Peace—our present home. Our first public appeal would be made with a goal of nearly four million dollars. For a second time a mortgage would be necessary, plus a contract for deed for a few years. Those of us who signed those instruments did so with some trepidation. The

2. Mortgage payments were made from tuition income, the only positive income at that time. It wasn't long before the American Bar Association Legal Education Committee advised that the mortgage debt could not be entirely paid from only tuition income. There were no alternatives. A capital fund drive had never been attempted in the school's history. Through the efforts of twelve dedicated members of the alumni, the debt was retired.
response was tremendous. Law firms, foundations, financial institutions, corporate entities, trustees, faculty and many individual friends gave beyond belief. In a very few years the obligations were retired and the beautiful campus was ours and ready for classes in September 1976.

Much history can be written covering both sides of the river as we review our exciting ninety years. All was not peaches and cream. There were good years and there were bad ones. Several times the schools could have closed, and would have but for the dedication, loyalty and support of so many trustees, members of corporations, faculty and alumni/alumnae. They gave so much of themselves. They were perfect examples of people who were not only desirous of taking from the law, but were willing to give something back to the law. Because they were here yesterday, Billy Mitchell is still here today.

One of the hard years was 1942. My class (third year) was practically decimated by draft boards and enlistments. We started in 1939 with fifty-five students, and by June 1942, were down to seventeen. Six were to be called to duty any day. The Supreme Court of Minnesota promulgated a rule which provided that any law student who had completed his or her first half of the senior or final year, could be sworn in as a member of the Bar on motion. This would leave a half year of college to be completed and tested after return from military service. Where could those six draftees get that half year? Summer school could handle it, but where in Minnesota? Dean Severson, Professor Shockley and the trustees saved those careers. A summer session was put into effect. From June 6th to Labor Day, classes were held five evenings each week, all Saturdays and four Sundays. Exams were held Labor Day weekend and off went the six to their military assignments. All seventeen students participated. Those of us in the remaining ten then completed the first semester's regular class assignments and graduated in January 1943.

Seventeen students, paying tuition of $100 each, was the only positive income the school had that summer. I personally know that Dean Severson and Professor Shockley carried brown paper lunch bags to school and could have earned twice their salaries at other employment. The adjuncts taught that summer without recompense. The ten of us who graduated in January were treated to a steak dinner at the Athletic Club. I dare say that as we were handed our diplomas one might have
detected a few misty eyes. I, for one, shall never forget what those dedicated people did for me and my classmates. I was so proud.

My thoughts are again back on campus on Summit Avenue. I look with great pride at the recently completed Warren E. Burger Library. To me it is the realization of the dream of dreams, another bold step in undertaking a capital drive of nearly seven million dollars. Again it could bring tears to the eyes of many. During this campaign the efforts and dedication of so many are beyond description. Again, law firms, corporations, local and national, foundations, local and national, trustees, faculty, staff, alumni/alumnae, members of law schools and many more gave and gave of their time and money. It is the crowning achievement in our history.

You have come a long way, Billy Mitchell. Never part with the traditions and principles that have made you great. Out there in various corners of the state are young men and women who want to be lawyers, should be lawyers, and can be if given that chance that I, and many others were given. Continue to make that possible. They will bring you fame, and honor to their profession.

I can hear a bell which means a class will be starting in ten minutes. I can visualize a library scene. A young lady rises from a study table, slings her tote bag over her shoulder and starts for class. She looks up on the wall and can see a beautiful portrait of our distinguished alumnus. She reads the Chief Justice's charge to each student: "Remember you can get there from here."

Happy birthday, William Mitchell. I am so very proud of you. I salute your brilliant past. I command you to a noble future.