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PHILIP HALPERN, TEACHER OF LAW AND ADMINISTRATOR

PHILIP HALPERN entered the Buffalo Law School as a student in 1920. He was associated with it, either as student, teacher, acting dean or dean, for most of the following thirty-three years.

The school of 1920 bore little resemblance to the school he left in 1953 when he went on to the Appellate Division. In 1920 Dr. Carlos C. Alden was the only salaried member of the faculty. He was dean and was called a full-time teacher. That meant that, although he practised law, he taught twice as many hours as is now considered a full teaching load for one who does not practise but gives his full time to teaching. Dr. Alden taught 35 percent of the hours taught in the school. The other hours were divided among twenty unpaid teachers. The courses covered a wide range of law, but twenty of them were only one-hour courses.

In 1925 the university administration allowed Dr. Alden to appoint a salaried teacher to carry a full teaching load. Philip Halpern had finished his law school course with a remarkable record in 1923 and had been in practice for two years. Dr. Alden chose Philip Halpern.

In September 1925 Halpern began teaching Torts and Criminal Law. To these he added Junior Real Property the next year, Senior Real Property in 1929 and Mortgages and Liens in 1933.

Francis M. Shea became dean in 1936 and soon made many changes. Halpern continued to teach Torts but dropped his other courses and assumed Trusts and Future Interests.

Halpern's joining the faculty improved the law school immeasurably. He kept pace, for instance, with the rapid development of the law of Torts. His mind could see the way through the law of Future Interests where most students, without such guidance, could see nothing but nonsensical confusion. If sometimes his quick mind went a little too fast for the students at one class, he would go over the same material at the next class and would leave no excuse for anyone being left behind. The students were willing to learn from him, for they felt sure that he knew what he was talking about.

That period was both good in itself and a preparation for what was to come. The many hours Halpern spent at the law school and with the students taught him to understand the condition and problems of the school as no man could understand them who taught only one hour for one term a year. He had continued to practise and knew the older members of the bar. As teacher he came to know even better the young men entering the bar. Whenever it became necessary for the faculty to choose a teacher for a particular field, they sought his advice with confidence in his judgment. It was fortunate that students and bar alike had confidence in him, for there were times coming when their confidence in the law school itself was at a low ebb.

There were times of confusion. Deans came and took leaves of absence

and resigned. The rate of turnover of the faculty was high. Meanwhile the war came and students vanished. Through all such exasperating changes, Dr. Alden and Philip Halpern remained to furnish continuity and strength.

A dean took a leave of absence in 1943 and Halpern for the first time became acting dean. The position of acting dean is not easy or enviable. Sometimes someone else is dean and may return. Sometimes there is no dean. The acting dean is not the pilot. He is the steersman who must steer as well as he can after the old pilot has been washed overboard and the new one has not come aboard and will not come until the storm is over. The steersman can not set new courses. His duty is to keep the ship off the rocks until the storm has blown itself out. It is a difficult task, but important in the extreme. When Halpern became acting dean in 1943, his acquaintance with the bar and his long connection with the school were valuable assets. He kept the ship afloat during the war. When the dean resigned in 1946, Halpern became dean for a few months, but he resigned when he began his first term upon the supreme court.

After Halpern had ceased to teach his former courses, he resumed teaching in the early 1950's to offer a course in Public Utilities for a few years. But even that did not end his official connection with the law school.

George N. Stevens was dean during the school year of 1951-52. At the end of that year, being disturbed by the attitude of the university administration toward the law school and convinced that the administration had deceived him about its intentions toward the budget he had submitted, Stevens resigned. Again Halpern became acting dean, serving through the following year and gaining the credit for soothing some of the irritation between the administration and the law school. His formal connection with the school then ended, but his interest in it and his activity on its behalf continued.

Philip Halpern had a brilliant mind, superior knowledge of the law, sound judgment and the ability to inspire confidence. He had the confidence of students, faculty, deans, university officials and the members of the bar. It was his having the confidence of those diverse and sometimes antagonistic groups which enabled him to be the stabilizer of the law school through years of change and innovation.

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