Golden Gate Law School - Travail to Triumph

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- Stirring Issues Dominate Annual ABA Sessions
- Courts of Conciliation—They Work
- Justice Bray—A Biblical Prophecy Fulfilled
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Highest Award Bestowed Upon Justice Tom Clark

Members of the California Supreme Court (including its Chief Justice), and the District Courts of Appeal (with their presiding justices), and the Mayor, gathered at a luncheon, June 7th, Sheraton-Palace, under the joint auspices of the S.F. Bar Association and the University of San Francisco, to confer on US Supreme Court Justice, Thomas C. Clark, the USF’s St. Thomas More Award for distinction in the “Fields of Law—Government and Public Service”—its highest annual prize to the person exemplifying the ideals of St. Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England.


Back Row, L. to R.: Hon. Murray Draper, Presiding Justice, District Court of Appeal; Hon. Matthew O. Tobriner, Justice, Supreme Court of California; Hon. Louis H. Burke, Justice, Supreme Court of California; Hon. Marshall F. McComb, Justice, Supreme Court of California; Hon. John F. Shelley, Mayor, City and County of San Francisco. (More on event, page 24.)
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Golden Gate Law School—Travail to Triumph

I am going to tell you a story about a law school. We will call it the “Golden Gate Story” for my tale is about Golden Gate College School of Law. I think it is one worth telling; and I hope you will too.

Around the turn of the century, the year 1901 to be exact, the then guiding fathers of the San Francisco Young Men’s Christian Association conceived the idea that a part-time evening law school should be established to serve the educational needs of aspiring law students in the Bay Area who, because of the unhappy necessity of working during day time hours for a living, were unable to matriculate at one of the full-time day law schools then functioning in the area. Through this idea the new law school was born. Originally known as the YMCA Law School, its name was later changed to Golden Gate College School of Law in 1923 when Golden Gate College was incorporated as a non-profit educational institution.

The School’s beginning was inauspicious to put it mildly. Classroom quarters were provided in the old YMCA building and were furnished with some battered old desks and chairs provided by a now long-forgotten donor. A part-time faculty of three or four practicing lawyers, including James A. Ballantine, who later taught at Hastings, was mustered together, and with a law library consisting of less than 1000 moth-eaten volumes donated by considerate San Francisco lawyers, classes of the first evening law school west of the Rockies got underway. That was just 65 years ago.

When the earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed the YMCA building, classes met for a time in a tent on Van Ness Avenue, and were then transferred to temporary quarters in an old residence near Broadway and Van Ness. After the “Y” was rebuilt at 220 Golden Gate Avenue, the school relocated there until February 1905.

The Law School proved to be such a success in meeting the crying demand for part-time legal education in the community that the YMCA, as a part of its own educational programs, decided to expand into fields other than the law. Schools of Accountancy, Traffic, Insurance, Advertising, and later Business Administration, were added, thereby creating the educational institution today known as Golden Gate College.

I first became connected with Golden Gate College in 1933 as a part-time instructor in Equity, Domestic Relations and Community Property, and thereafter taught continuously until the end of 1959. From 1944 to 1959, it was my privilege to serve as Dean of the Law School. My initial impressions of the School were mixed. Classroom facilities serving less than 100 students were poor, and the law library was woefully inadequate. Golden Gate has never been touched with ivy. Never endowed either privately or with public funds, the School has always been a self-supported institution dependent upon the tuition fees of its students. Plant facilities therefore had to be on the austere side; usable, but never entirely adequate.

On the other hand I found the students themselves sincere, dedicated men and women determined to get their legal educations. They had to be dedicated to hold down full-time day jobs, support themselves and growing families, attend classes three hours a night for three nights a week over a four year period, and to put in the considerable preparation necessary to class attendance. These were people who found in Golden Gate a “second chance” and in many cases the “only chance” to achieve their ambitions to become lawyers. Some made it; others didn’t. For all of them, I shall always have the greatest respect and admiration.

In 1937, the State Bar adopted accreditation standards and Golden Gate was accredited in 1939. In the late 1940’s the State Bar began to take a hard and somewhat critical look at the law school situation in this state. A survey was conducted with the result that the State Bar proposed an ABA-like Accreditation Rule. Golden Gate immediately gave notice of its intention to comply with the proposed new rule, marking the beginning of a new era for the school.

Prior to receiving State accreditation, the faculty of the school had always been composed entirely of part-time instructors, all practicing lawyers dedicated to the teaching of law. A nominal compensation and personal satisfaction were really their only rewards. Included among those who have at some time past served on the faculty are such well-known lawyers as Donald A. Pearce, Herbert Pother, John Ward, Caspar Weinberger, George T. Davis, Cecil Poole, now United States Attorney for the Northern District of California.

* Former Dean, Golden Gate Law School, Past President, Bar Association of San Francisco.

(Continued on page 33)
GOLDEN GATE LAW SCHOOL

(Continued from page 11)

Professor Richard W. Jennings, now on the faculty of the University of California School of Law (Boalt Hall) at Berkeley, the Hon. Gerald S. Levin, now presiding judge of the San Francisco Superior Court, Maurice Harband and the late Warren Pillsbury. I could name many others, but space will not permit. Old perennials still serving on the part-time faculty include Varnum Paul, Allan Moltzen and Willis Hannawalt.

With State accreditation an accomplished fact, the next goal on which the College set its sights was American Bar Association approval. To accomplish this, three full-time instructors had to be added. Higher admission standards were required as well as a larger law library. A big milestone in the School's history was passed when John A. Gorfinkei, present Dean of the School; James B. Smith, now professor of Law; and Jay Shavelson, now a Deputy Attorney General of California, were appointed as the first full-time instructors.

This change in the faculty set-up having been achieved, Golden Gate filed an application for ABA approval. Following a rigid inspection by John Hervey, representative of the ABA Committee on Legal Education, provisional approval was given in 1956. Golden Gate thus became the first exclusively part-time evening law school west of Minneapolis and St. Paul to receive ABA approval.

One of the School's principal problems through the years was, as already mentioned, the lack of adequate plant facilities. In the spring of 1964 a long-cherished dream came true. With the help and guidance of a realistically farsighted Board of Trustees, a building at 536 Mission Street, only a stone's throw from the San Francisco business and financial district, was acquired by the College. At long last the College had a home of its own.

The first two floors were available and after extensive remodeling, the Law School moved from its old home of over 50 years at 220 Golden Gate Avenue into these new quarters in January 1965. Now Golden Gate has plant facilities which compare favorably to those of other law schools in the Bay Area.

Another forward step was taken in 1961 when a part-time morning program was added to the part-time evening curriculum. Attending classes during the morning hours better suited the convenience of many aspiring lawyers whose work schedules made attendance at evening classes impossible. Initiation of the morning program resulted in an immediate increase in the School's overall enrollment. Nevertheless, the new program was still a part-time one requiring four years of study to qualify for the LL.B. degree.

My story is not yet ended for I must now record another milestone in the annals of Golden Gate College Law School. Since the School has been transplanted and provided with excellent facilities, the Trustees filed an application for approval of a full-time, three year program. Full approval was granted by the American Bar Association at its mid-winter meeting in Chicago last February. At the opening of the 1966 fall semester, Golden Gate will, for the first time, have a full-time day division. This is something of an historical event, for the last full-time law school established in the Bay Area was at the University of San Francisco in 1931, 35 years ago. When the new semester opens, there will be six full-time and fourteen part-time instructors headed by Dean Gorfinkei.

During the 65 years of its existence, Golden Gate College has made it possible for innumerable working students to study law and eventually join the ranks of the legal profession. Like other law schools, it is proud of its alumni, many of whom have had outstanding careers at the Bar and on the Bench.

It is appropriate that I mention some of those who have rendered distinguished service on the Bench of California: the late Hon. Jesse W. Carter, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of California; the Hon. C. J. Goodell, a long-time Judge of the San Francisco Superior Court and later an Associate Justice of the California District Court of Appeals, now retired; the Hon. George W. Schonfeld, a San Francisco Superior Court Judge, now retired; the Hon. Lyle T. Jacks and the Hon. George J. Steiger, both Judges of the San Francisco Superior Court, now deceased; Judges Carl H. Allen and Clayton W. Horn, both currently serving on the San Francisco Superior Court Bench; and Judge William H. Hoffman, an Alameda County Municipal Judge, now retired.

Yes, Golden Gate has come a long way during its 65 years of existence. While I may be understandably prejudiced, I can say the Golden Gate College School of Law has joined the big leagues and is there to stay. Golden Gate has built a distinguished record of past service to the legal profession and to the community. A future as bright as its name lies ahead.

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