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Remembering Paul Jordan: Law School Dean 1943-1961

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Remembering Paul Jordan
Law School Dean 1943 to 1961
by Dean Peter G. Keane

In his self-published auto-biography, *Recollections of an Old Lawyer*, Paul Jordan wrote, “I first saw the light of day in a farmhouse close to the village of Severy, Kansas, at 11:30 a.m. on March 31, 1903.” Paul died on January 6 of this year, just several weeks before his 98th birthday.

As I write about Paul, I realize it is fitting that 2001 is the 100th anniversary of Golden Gate University School of Law. He was a big part of that first century. Just about all of the Law School’s attributes can be traced, in one way or another, to Paul Jordan. While teaching and serving as dean of the Law School, he also kept up a full-time law practice and developed one of the most respected law firms in San Francisco. He was a practicing lawyer in this town for 66 years, and he stands out as a landmark of the city’s legal history.

I first met Paul shortly after I became dean in January 1999. He was living in a retirement home on Sutter Street where I went to visit him (together with former deans Judy Mc Kelvey, Lani Bader, and Tony Pagano). I had heard quite a bit about Paul long before I became dean. Actually, Paul, Judy, and I share something else in addition to our great pride in being law school deans at Golden Gate University. The three of us are also former presidents of the Bar Association of San Francisco. When I was president in 1988-89, the accounts of Paul’s presidency in 1960 were legendary. So my first visit with Paul, for a lunch of Rueben sandwiches in the dining hall of his residency, was a great treat. I went to see Paul several times during my first two years as dean. Each time, he regaled me with stories of the school and of his long legal career.

Paul started practicing law in 1927, the year that the State Bar of California began operating. Today, someone admitted to practice law in California receives a State Bar card with a number up around 190,000. Paul’s number was 981. During the very depths of the Great Depression, he rented an office on the tenth floor of the Russ Building. Times were so tough that many of the premier downtown office buildings stood vacant, or almost vacant, and Paul was the only tenant on his floor. But he turned out to be a landlord’s dream tenant, since he practiced law from that same suite of offices for 62 years, until his retirement in 1993.

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In the late 1930s, two enterprising young characters from down the Peninsula named Bill Hewlett and David Packard came to see Paul. . . . they wanted to incorporate. Paul incorporated Hewlett-Packard but . . . he insisted that he get $50 in greenbacks, rather than take several hundred shares of stock from these two kids from the sticks.

He started teaching at night, along with all of the other faculty members who were themselves full-time practicing lawyers. Classes were held in the San Francisco YMCA, just underneath the gymnasium. The students got their ration of torts, contracts, and remedies to the cadence of dribbling basketballs, rat-a-tats of punching bags, and teeth-jarring clangs of dropped weights on the floor above.

I asked Paul what he got paid to teach at Golden Gate, and he told me it was $5 per night. He added that in Depression-era 1933, $5 was pretty good money at the time. “There were a lot of days I didn’t make five bucks practicing law,” he explained.

Paul Jordan served as dean of Golden Gate University School of Law from 1944 to 1960. He shepherded the school from a tiny night law school, through its expansion with returning World War II veterans who came flooding in under the G.I. Bill, right up through provisional accreditation by the ABA.

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After Paul stepped down as dean in 1961, he continued his association by
becoming a trustee of the university. He
worked hard to advance the school
throughout the 40 years after he left
teaching and administration. He became
a life trustee of the university and gave
generously of his time and finances to
help it thrive. In 1993, Golden Gate
University gave Paul Jordan The Amicus
Award for his contributions to the
school, and the Paul S. Jordan Endowed
Scholarship was founded.

During my visits with Paul over the
two years before his death, he always
grilled me thoroughly on numbers of
students, bar-pass rates, new LL.M.
offerings, and more. Each time I left,
Paul shook my hand and then handed
me a check made out in a good amount
to the Law School. In his will, he left
the school a substantial sum to be used
for scholarships.

All of us owe so much to Paul. He
represented all that is best about a
lawyer and a person. I will never forget
him and I know that there are several
generations of lawyers in San Francisco,
around the state, and throughout the
country who think fondly of him.

If you would like to do something
that would please Paul, celebrate his
memory with a donation to the Paul S.
Jordan Scholarship Fund. ☑

The Law School faculty in 1941.
Paul Jordan is seated on the far
right of the photo. (His white
handkerchief is in his jacket
pocket.)