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John Rogers

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JOHN ROGERS

It is appropriate that this issue of the Journal be dedicated to John Rogers as the founder and prime reason for the present eminence of the College of Law of the University of Tulsa.

It is also appropriate to write of John Rogers as the single most important advocate of excellency in legal education of all Oklahoma. This is the aspect of John Rogers' life that I know best and I am gratified that the editors of the Journal permit me to record some very personal remembrances of my association with John Rogers during my tenure as a law teacher and law dean of John's alma mater. To put these remembrances in perspective, it is easy to recall, that John Rogers was a very big man, big in heart, big in mind, big in spirit and enthusiasm. Consequently, it was not at all difficult for John Rogers to love his alma mater, work for it, give to it, cherish it, while at the same time creating, nurturing and bringing to respectability a similar institution in another part of the State.

John's education and a great measure of his enormous and unparalleled public service centered in and around the University of Oklahoma. He completed his high school education at the University preparatory school in order that he might enter the fledgling O.U. Law School. He had no money and the President of the University appointed him stenographer to Dean Julien C. Monnet of the Law School.¹ After displaying the leadership, scholarship and versatility that was to mark his life, John Rogers received his Bachelor of Laws degree in June of 1914.² Ten years after John received his law degree, Governor Jack Walton fired the Regents of the University, was impeached, and the successor governor, Martin E. Trapp, appointed John to the Regents of the University. John served seven years, from 1924 to 1931, times of great expansion and progress for the University.³

While John was a member of the O.U. Regents, he also served

1. C. MORRIS, *THE CUTTING EDGE, THE LIFE OF JOHN ROGERS* 10 (1976) [hereinafter cited as *THE CUTTING EDGE*].

2. Sixty years later, the John Rogers Hall for the College of Law at the University of Tulsa was dedicated.

3. *THE CUTTING EDGE*, *supra* note 1, at 51.

as trustee of the University of Tulsa. The editor of the student newspaper, the Oklahoma Daily, questioned John's ability to maintain allegiance to both Universities, since one was public and one was private.⁴ John answered that it was not difficult to serve two institutions of higher education. Years later it was my privilege to observe first hand that it was no problem for a totally selfless man to serve two and more law schools with complete dedication and effectiveness.

John's service to his alma mater did not cease when his term as regent ended in 1931. Nine years later, in 1940, his law classmate, Governor Leon C. Phillips, reappointed him a Regent. A year later, a constitutional amendment was adopted creating the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Governor Phillips asked his long-time friend to resign from the O.U. Regents and accept a post on the newly instituted Higher Regents. Thus began an unprecedented term of eighteen years as a member of the State Regents for Higher Education.

Simultaneously with this service to the University of Oklahoma and the succeeding service to all of higher education in our State, John Rogers was giving of his time, talent and wisdom to the University of Tulsa. He became a Trustee in 1926, served some 40 years as Trustee, convinced the Trustees to create the College of Law in 1943, and served without pay as law dean from 1949 to 1957.

So this was the John Rogers who counseled with me in October 1945 when I told him that I had been offered a visiting associate professorship of law at Norman. I had known John since childhood. My father and John attended the University at the same time, they were fraternity brothers, both had come to Tulsa as young lawyers and John's beloved Hazel (Mrs. Rogers) and my mother were close personal friends. So I had no hesitancy in asking John about the future in teaching law.

I do not remember his exact words, but the gist of his response was that working with the young was exceptionally rewarding, that teaching was hard work, and that the great disadvantage was that the pay was meager, especially in Oklahoma. I took John's advice and for me there followed twenty stimulating and memorable years as a teacher of the law.

But it was when I became Acting Dean that John Rogers became my bulwark of strength and wisdom. It was 1949 and while John was on the Higher Regents, he was as always, extremely interested in, and

4. *Id.* at 53.

extremely knowledgeable about, the O.U. Law School. Now an Acting Dean is the lowest nodule on the academic totem pole—all the responsibility but no power. It was John who advised me of ways and means of securing much needed salary increases for the law faculty and funds for the law library. It was John who counseled me about the handling and care of the heirarchy of a large University. And while he never said so, I have always believed that John spoke on my behalf to the administration and to the Regents. In any event, the “Acting” was removed from my title and John was the first to send congratulations.

So I cannot be completely objective when I state that John Rogers was the most effective and consistent advocate of quality legal education Oklahoma has ever had. The affection I had for the man and the great debt I owe him undoubtedly influence my thinking.

Still, the records show at least two instances in which John Rogers sought to elevate the whole fabric of legal education in Oklahoma. During the 1930's, both Tulsa and Oklahoma City had unaccredited night law schools, proprietary in nature, and unaffiliated with any institution of higher learning. While these schools produced many graduates who became leading members of the profession, most legal educators believed then, as now, that law schools should not result in private gain, but should be a part of a not-for-profit college or university.

In the 1930's, John Rogers tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Regents of the University of Oklahoma to move the School of Law to Oklahoma City. The move would have centralized the school and made it more accessible to the students from Tulsa. The proposal was refused, and the Tulsa Law School was supported by local lawyers as an accommodation to regional students. Logsdon, in his history of the University of Tulsa, concludes that “the Tulsa school doubtless would have failed had the Regents followed Roger's advice.”⁵ It is also probable that the Oklahoma City School would likewise have failed had John Rogers prevailed.

John continued his efforts to upgrade legal education in Oklahoma, as is evidenced by the fact that he persuaded the owners of the Tulsa Law School to turn over their program and assets to the University of Tulsa in 1943, after having convinced the Trustees of the University of Tulsa that the University should have a law school.⁶ Then

5. G. LOGSDON, *THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA* 210 (1977).

6. “The College of Law was the result almost entirely of John Rogers.” *Id.* at 217.

John proceeded post-haste to secure full accreditation for the new College of Law. John was to live to see all law colleges in Oklahoma accredited and functioning as integral parts of institutions of higher learning.

This ends my tribute to John Rogers. I am grateful that he was my personal friend. I am grateful that he was present here to exemplify the selfless, talented, and tireless individual who can do so many things so well. I am grateful that John Rogers showed us the way to better legal education in Oklahoma.

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