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Vincent J. McDevitt

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In Memoriam

VINCENT P. McDEVITT

1901-1978

To

VINCENT J. McDEVITT

The Board of Editors of

THE VILLANOVA LAW REVIEW

humbly dedicate this volume.

VINCENT P. McDEVITT—1901-1978

Vincent P. McDevitt, a life member of the Board of Consultors of the Villanova Law School, was justifiably proud of his profession and of his part in it. Whatever he did, whether in his highly successful private practice, as an Assistant District Attorney of Philadelphia, or as general counsel for the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, he did well.

In the District Attorney's office, Vince's trial abilities were promptly recognized. He was assigned the prosecutions for murder and other major crimes, and soon established a high percentage of convictions against the city's ablest trial lawyers. During the now legendary electrical equipment antitrust cases in the early 1960's, McDevitt was a tower of strength for the plaintiffs and the public interest. The successful outcome of that litigation led to the adoption of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23 and the procedures now used by the Multidistrict Panel. Vince was among the first general counsel for a major corporation to be represented in court by a woman lawyer. He and his corporation were pioneers in retaining lawyers from different minority groups.

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Vince was always active in business, community and church affairs. He was a director of two Philadelphia banks and served on the boards of other corporations. He was Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar, a member of the Board of Governors of the American Bar, and a member of the Philadelphia Fairmount Park Commission. Vince also served in many Catholic charities drives.

There seems to be two schools of thought as to the relative abilities of the lawyers of today and those of yesteryear. One view suggests that a race of giants existed in the past, with whom present lawyers cannot compare. The other position claims that the past generation could not even obtain admission to law school today. When thinking of Vince, I am inclined to believe that the former view is correct. I know very few lawyers today who could move from one kind of practice to another so successfully and so quickly.

He was innovative, adaptable, and imaginative, no matter what situation presented itself. He had an innate sense of what the law ought to be or must be, but stressed adequate preparation. He knew the supreme importance of the facts, how to develop them, and how to present them without computers, Lexis or paralegals. He was famous for his fund of highly appropriate and always humorous reminiscences, which are worth more in persuading a court or adversary than reams of citations and quotations.

One was always impressed with his maturity, his common sense, and the feeling that his judgment was reliable. Clients and lawyers alike felt reassured in their contacts with him. One knew that he was dealing with someone who was more than merely a technician. He was one of the last of the "generalists," a survivor of the days of men like Owen Roberts, Morris Wolf, George Wharton Pepper and William Schnader.

Vince McDevitt embodied many traditional virtues. He was devotedly loyal to his church, his political party, his family, his friends and, of course, to his profession and its ideals. He finished life with the same high principles and good habits with which he started. To be sure, he had his faults, but he does not suffer by being painted complete. Vince could be imperious; he had a quick temper, perhaps because of his delusion that he should expect the same energy and intelligence in others as he was accustomed to in himself.

Villanova Law School owes Vincent McDevitt a particular debt of gratitude. In his usual effective way, he was responsible for the expedited accreditation of the school a quarter of a century ago, and thereafter served faithfully and well on its Board of Consultants. Few knew of the continuing encouragement he gave to young people entering the legal profession, both at Villanova and elsewhere.