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WESTERN NEW ENGLAND LAW REVIEW

A TRIBUTE TO DEAN CHARLES CLASON: AN INNOVATOR IN LEGAL EDUCATION*



When Dean Charles Clason assumed the helm of Western New England College School of Law in 1954, the school was granting degrees upon completion of five years of part-time evening studies. Sensitive to the shortcomings of the American legal system's pedagogical approach to education, Dean Clason piloted a maverick course of training future lawyers as competent practitioners rather than legal scholars.

Dean Clason kept Western New England thriving in its heyday as a night law school. At a time when nearly half of all practicing attorneys in the city of Springfield were graduates of Western New England, he attracted attorneys from every firm in the city to teach at their alma mater. Clason impressed upon these local practitioners that the best way to serve their community was to train new lawyers during the evening hours. Clason's keen ability to attract faculty created a waiting list for the opportunity to earn fourteen dollars a night for teaching a three-hour class.

Maintaining a vision of Western New England was challenging. The traditional legal system's partiality to a scholarly rather than a practical legal education proved most discouraging. Nonetheless, Clason remained devoted to his mission of turning out competent practicing lawyers.

* We are grateful to Dr. Beaumont Herman for sharing with us his reflections on Dean Clason's career.

Dean Clason's life and accomplishments are well beyond lofty accolades. His deeds speak for themselves. As a Rhodes Scholar, United States Congressman, attorney, athlete, and educator, Charles Clason left an indelible impression on us all.

Upon his passing, his labors of fifteen years past at Western New England are evident in the present strength of the evening division. Dean Clason gave much to Western New England College School of Law. We remain thankful and forever in his debt.

Jeffrey E. Levine

CHARLES RUSSELL CLASON

September 3, 1890-July 7, 1985

Dr. Charles Russell Clason, scholar, educator, lawyer, statesman, and benefactor, passed away on July 7, 1985. Born in Gardiner, Maine, on September 3, 1890, he had an impressive scholastic career, graduating from Bates College in 1911, from the Law School of Georgetown University in 1914, and from Oxford University in England as a Rhodes Scholar in 1917.

He served in the military in World War I and received the Medaille due Roi Albert from the government of Belgium for his services as a member of the Hoover Committee for relief in Belgium and France.

A member of the Maine, District of Columbia, and Massachusetts Bars, he was a leader in the legal fraternity from 1919 until his retirement in 1980, establishing an enviable record as an outstanding lawyer.

A dedicated public servant, he served the counties of Hampden and Berkshire as an assistant district attorney from 1922 to 1926 and as district attorney from 1926 to 1930. He served his country and the Second Congressional District of Massachusetts as its congressman from 1937 to 1949.

Although his activities were widespread, his first love was the academic and the teaching of others. He was an instructor in law in the Springfield Division of Northeastern University from 1920 to 1936 and was among the public-spirited citizens who incorporated the Law School Division into Western New England College in 1937. He was an instructor until 1952 when he became dean of the Law School, a position he held until 1970. He was honored by the Law School and elected to membership in a Law School class. He became an alumnus of the Law School, which conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Dr. Clason served for many years as a trustee of Bates College and was Trustee Emeritus at the time of his death.

Doctor Clason's accomplishments have been legion, but his greatest reward was the sharing of his enormous knowledge and talents with the young through academia. His devotion to Western New England College and its Law School has been tremendous, and his contri-

bution of time, talent, and leadership has been inspirational. The college has lost a true and faithful benefactor.