
Volume 58
Issue 2 *Dickinson Law Review - Volume 58,*
1953-1954

1-1-1954

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Recommended Citation

Walter H. Hitchler, 58 DICK. L. REV. 149 (1954).

Available at: <https://ideas.dickinsonlaw.psu.edu/dlra/vol58/iss2/8>

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WALTER H. HITCHLER*

In the forty-seven years since Walter Harrison Hitchler joined the faculty of the Dickinson School of Law, the last twenty-three of which have been spent as dean of that august institution, he has seen innumerable young men go forth to make their marks in the legal world.

Some have indeed made their marks, have made names for themselves in the Commonwealth and elsewhere of which Dean Hitchler and their alma mater have been proud. Others, many of whom showed great promise in their scholastic life, failed to fulfill that promise.

But over the years Dean Hitchler has reached the conclusion that by and large success at the bar is made chiefly by those men whose work in law school was of top quality.

That is not a hard and fast rule. The dean admits that he can recall many a mediocre student who has been a success in the legal profession merely by being smart enough to take advantage of circumstances.

Dean Hitchler is an advocate of smaller institutions of learning. The enrollment of some 220 students at Dickinson School of Law he considers just about ideal. It is small enough to permit of individual attention to the students and it makes for a closer understanding between the student body and the faculty, in his opinion

"The smaller the student body the more possible it is to understand characteristics of individual students," declares Dr. Hitchler. "It enables a professor to know if a member of class is the kind that needs threatening, coaxing or praising to get him to do his best."

"There is no doubt but that in a small school the faculty gets to know much about the students individually. Some of them think we know too much about them," the dean added.

Dean Hitchler is in full accord with the trend away from a young lawyer gaining his admittance to the bar through reading law in the office of a judge or an attorney. This custom, he thinks, was alright a half or even a quarter of a century ago when college educations were more difficult to obtain.

"It takes an extraordinary student to successfully read for the law. In the first place it is very discouraging to read law alone and furthermore modern law offices are much too busy places for an aspiring student attorney to get proper instruction."

Dean Hitchler has observed with approbation the broadening of legal education to include more than the time-honored prescribed orthodox legal courses. Emphasis today is on the study of tax and labor law and estate planning. He thinks,

* [Editor's note: This column recently appeared in the Sunday Patriot-News, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was written by Gordon Jost of their staff and is reprinted through the courtesy of the Sunday Patriot-News.]

too, that there is a lessening of interest in the study of criminal law and a decided trend toward the study of preventive law. This specializes in acquainting young aspirants to the bar with the efficacy of making legal adjustments without court trials.

The dean is gratified, too, to see so many young men today studying law, not primarily with the intention of practicing before the bar, but as an important adjunct to success in many fields of business.

"Law, unlike medical education, is useful in many professions," Dean Hitchler points out. "Young men with legal training are in great demand in insurance, banking, government service and by many corporations, most of which today have their own legal staffs."

With these wider fields of endeavor beckoning the young law graduate and offering more in the very beginning of a career than the hard pull of establishing a private practice, Dean Hitchler is not surprised that more young men, and women, too, are crowding classrooms to learn the art of torts and briefs.

In Hitchler's opinion Pennsylvania's greatest legal scholar was the late Dr. William Trickett. Dr. Trickett was Hitchler's immediate predecessor as dean, serving from 1890 to 1928, and took a prominent part in the reorganization of the law school when it became a separate institution from Dickinson College in 1890, with its own campus and buildings.

His candidate for the state's greatest legal practitioner is the late John G. Johnson of Philadelphia. Dr. Trickett and Johnson were classmates at Philadelphia's Central High School.

Aside from his unflagging interest in his job of presiding over the destinies of the student body, Dr. Hitchler's most interesting service was his chairmanship of the Alien Enemy Hearing Board for Central Pennsylvania to which he was appointed in 1941.

The function of the board consisted in determining the fates of enemy aliens in the area. It held hearings in the 54 counties in its jurisdiction and determined whether aliens who appeared before it should be interned, placed on probation or were sufficiently loyal Americans to be permitted to conduct their affairs without restrictions.

Dr. Hitchler also served as chairman of the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board in 1939-40.

Dr. Hitchler was born in Plymouth, Pa., Feb. 20, 1883. He was graduated from the University of Virginia with a bachelor of law degree in 1905. In 1906 he joined the faculty of the Dickinson School of Law and taught, with exception of time out for military service in World War I, until 1930 when he was appointed dean. From 1919 to 1922 he served as editor of "Statutory Law of Pennsylvania".

In 1917 he attended officers' training camp at Plattsburg, N. Y., emerging with the commission of second lieutenant. Instead of the combat assignment he wanted Dr. Hitchler, by some strange coincidence, found himself back on the Dickinson campus in charge of the Student Army Training Corps. At the end of the war and the S.A.T.C. program Hitchler simply donned a suit of civilian clothes and resumed his place on the faculty.

The dean has been a resident of Carlisle since he came there as a young professor. He is a bachelor and as such was a challenge for years to many determined matchmakers in town, and ultimately their despair.

He devoted much of his free time to athletics. He was an excellent tennis player and coached the Dickinson College tennis team. He is an ardent basketball and football fan and for many years was in demand as referee for football games in this area.

His honorary degrees include a D.C.L. from Dickinson College in 1932; L.L.D., St. Francis College, Loretta, Pa., 1932; L.L.D., Muhlenberg College, 1939, and L.L.D., Albright College, 1943.

The dean is a member of St. John's Lodge, F. and A. M.; St. John's Chapter; St. John's Episcopal Church of Carlisle, and the Rotary Club.