

## Cornell Law Review

---

Volume 73  
Issue 1 November 1987

Article 7

---

# Gray Thoron Dean and Colleague

Faust F. Rossi

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr>

 Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Faust F. Rossi, *Gray Thoron Dean and Colleague*, 73 Cornell L. Rev. 13 (1987)  
Available at: <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr/vol73/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarship@Cornell Law: A Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Cornell Law Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Cornell Law: A Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [jmp8@cornell.edu](mailto:jmp8@cornell.edu).

## GRAY THORON, DEAN AND COLLEAGUE

*Faust F. Rossi*†

It has been my privilege to know Gray Thoron for over thirty years. During this period, I observed him from three very different points of vantage. From 1957 to 1960, he was my dean and I was his student. For six years thereafter, I was a lawyer alumnus who kept in touch with Gray and continued to seek his wise counsel. Since 1966, he has been my colleague and fellow law teacher at Cornell.

The perception of a man often changes as he is viewed from different perspectives. A student's respect and affection for a professor may wane when their relationship changes. When the student graduates, becomes a lawyer, and then a co-worker in the same academic institution, he may see his former law teacher in a less heroic light. It was not so with me.

The Gray Thoron I knew as a student, as a graduate professional and as a colleague, is very much the same person. In my learning years, Dean Thoron was always accessible to me in his office or home for intellectual discourse, for discussion on the future of the Law School and for personal advice. When I left Cornell, he did not forget me or any of his former students. His guidance helped launch my academic career. And, throughout my life work, Gray has continued to provide generous advice and support. It is from him, most of all, that I learned the duties and responsibilities of law teaching.

Gray has been constant and unchanging in his selfless devotion to his students, to the profession, and to the Cornell Law School.

Before assuming the deanship in 1956, Gray stated his belief that "The primary obligation of every law school is to its student body." When he left the deanship in 1963, his success was chronicled by a student editorial in the *Cornell Law Forum*. "He was," it said, "in the final analysis, a student's dean." This tribute is certainly accurate. It is also incomplete. He was surely "a student's dean," just as the years following his deanship established him as a "student's professor." But it would be a mistake to construe this tribute narrowly. Gray was always available to counsel students. He was acutely sensitive to their needs and desires. However, more is involved than wisdom, patience and generosity in his contacts with

---

† Sameul S. Leibowitz Professor of Trial Techniques, Cornell Law School. B.A. 1953, University of Toronto; LL.B. 1960, Cornell University.

students. His commitment to their welfare led him to accomplishments which are major highlights in the history of the Law School.

As Dean, Gray planned and oversaw the construction of Hughes Hall, a major addition which has provided housing and dining facilities for a generation of law students. He successfully recruited stimulating, effective, and dynamic teachers, many of whom are today recognized as eminent scholars in their respective fields. He upgraded the quality of the Law Library and its staff; expanded the International Legal Studies Program; and created the Advisory Council, which continues to this day to provide valuable assistance to the Law School.

Gray's administrative contributions are many. But they do not outshine his accomplishments as an innovative and imaginative law teacher. He had a prophetic sense of what future lawyers would need to know. Instruction in professional responsibility is now required in American law schools. Gray pioneered in this field. He stressed its importance by teaching and by example, decades before professional ethics achieved curricular respectability. Almost all law schools now offer advocacy courses. Gray was again ahead of his time. He taught and encouraged others to teach trial and appellate advocacy courses since his first years at Cornell. Similarly, his support for clinical instruction preceded its national acceptance in legal education. Gray sponsored creation of a new Cornell Legal Aid Clinic in 1958. He later procured funding for a legal assistance project for prison inmates which he directed. It was an early model of effective client-centered small group instruction.

Gray's retirement brings a touch of sadness. Not for him. We who know him are certain that he will make more contributions in the years ahead. The sadness is for us who remain in the vineyard. Who will replace this classroom teacher who, for so many years, gave so much to his students, the profession and the Law School? He has always placed institutional loyalty and service ahead of personal ambition. He has devoted his life to promoting the honor and the highest ideals of lawyering. He has always been honest, open, kind, and helpful to everyone. There are not enough Gray Thorons to go around. The law teaching profession needs many more like him.