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Dean Christie Looks Back

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Dean Christie Looks Back



My last six years, as dean of Dalhousie Law School, have been wonderful ones for me. They have been at times draining and occasionally exhilarating, always demanding, sometimes disappointing but often quite satisfying. Certainly, through those six years I have never doubted that the faculty, staff, students and alumni of Dalhousie Law School have a great law school.

As I write, a few aches and pains remind me that just last night Jeanne and I danced and partied well past the witching hour with the sixth class of celebrating graduates, their spouses, friends and parents, that I have seen since becoming dean. Their good feelings about Dalhousie Law School, their successes and the contributions they will make over a wide range of activities are, of course, what it is all about. None of that is an accident. It happens because excellent students are chosen to come to Dalhousie Law School and find here dedicated staff and a faculty, both full-time and part-time, who are serious about their teaching and make excellent role models. The full-time faculty are committed legal scholars. The downtowners are excellent practitioners.

Not surprisingly, as I look back over the last six years, the fire of August 16, 1985, which destroyed the fifth floor of

the law building and nearly half of the library holdings, looms large. From then to the official opening of the new Sir James Dunn Law Library and the renovated Weldon Law Building in October of 1989, life at Dalhousie Law School was, to a considerable degree, driven by dislocation, planning for the new building and the woes and joys of construction. We all, and I in particular, owe a very great deal to the building committee, Professor Steve Mills, its first chair, and especially to Professor Dick Evans who took over when Steve left at the end of 1985-86. Dick saw the project through in every detail.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed, as well, to the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, the law foundations in the other Atlantic provinces and in Alberta and Ontario, to Lady Beaverbrook, and to hundreds and hundreds of individual alumni who contributed time and money, some very generously, to the building fund. Frank Borowicz, Bill Rand, Deke Jones, Alan Macleod, Alex MacIntosh, Mr. Justice George Yates, Madame Justice Bertha Wilson, A. William Cox, Brian Flemming, Leonard Kitz, Hector McInnes, J. W. Mingo, Clyde Wells and, on the faculty, Ed Harris and, again, Dick Evans, are some of the names that come quickly to mind. Many members of faculty showed

extraordinary dedication in the aftermath of the fire. Tom Cromwell, for example, took the library gifts-in-kind programme in hand in extraordinary fashion. The brass plaque at the entrance to the new Sir James Dunn Library and the book of donors on the reserve shelf are important records. That outpouring of help, both financial and hands-on immediately after the fire stands out as the high point of my time in the dean's office.

In many ways chief law librarian, Professor Christian Wiktor, and his staff, are the real heroes of the whole ordeal. Not only do we now have a splendid law library, with the collection rebuilt better than ever, every detail of the new Sir James Dunn Law Library has been planned with loving care. Students and faculty were well served throughout the period of construction and we opened, with a library of sorts, less than three weeks after the fire.

Bricks and mortar have been far from the whole story over the past six years. There have been exciting academic innovations: the summer term at the Clinic, a Business Law Immersion Term, a Part-time Programme, the Indigenous Black and Micmac Programme and now, with Dr. Robert Elgie's arrival in May of 1991, the advent of the Health Law Institute. The IBM Programme now has solid three-year funding from the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, the federal Secretary of State and the provincial Department of the Attorney General. Despite some difficulties, the programme appears to be off to a good start, thanks to the acting chairmanship of Professor Wayne MacKay, both in its initial year and since January of this year when Wayne and Dianne Pothier, who made it possible by taking over his Constitutional Law class, pitched in to avert a crisis. The Health Law Institute, funded mainly by the Donner Canadian Foundation, is also very substantially supported by the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia.

This is, perhaps, as good a place as any to say loud and clear how much Dalhousie Law School owes to the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, first under the chairmanship of Leroy Taylor and then under the chairmanship of A. William Cox, and always with the guiding hand of executive director Mary Helleiner behind the scenes. The foundation has made possible most of the important new projects at Dalhousie Law School as well as supporting the Dalhousie Legal Aid Clinic throughout, making possible our wonderfully successful external competitive moot involvement and, this year, through the dean's discretionary fund, supporting faculty research to an unprecedented level.

Good, conscientious teaching has always been a point of pride at Dalhousie Law School and many have combined it with outstanding legal scholarship. Sadly, over the last six years some of the best exemplars of this tradition have been lost to us. There are exciting new people at Dalhousie Law School, to be sure, but it is hard to imagine that the students will ever have a better friend than Arthur Foote, who died in January, 1987. His contribution is commemorated in Foote's Corner, right where he always sat talking to students. The corner is furnished by a gift of the class of 1988 and embellished by a photograph of Art and a plaque.

Ian Townsend Gault, the energetic, frenetic "ITG" beloved by the students, has been lost to UBC and Alastair Bissett-Johnson, who they knew cared equally deeply for them, was this year forced by family illness to move back to Scotland, where he is holding a prestigious chair at the University of Dundee.

More happily for them, if not for Dalhousie Law School, Professors Lorraine Clark and Wade MacLauchlan are leaving at the end of this academic year to take exciting new positions; Professor Clark as deputy minister of justice for the Yukon and Professor MacLauchlan as dean at the University of New Brunswick Law School. They have been intellectually stimulating colleagues who have contributed greatly to the life of the law school. We must be confident that others will fill their places but the coming and the going of such people as these, and former dean Ronald St. John Macdonald and Professor Douglas M. Johnston, are important milestones in the life of Dalhousie Law School which were passed while I was dean.

Professor Christine Boyle is now in the second year of a leave of absence and visiting professorship at the University of British Columbia. From 1981, when she joined this Faculty, Professor Boyle has given strong leadership toward recognition of not only the importance of law in moving society towards sexual equality, but also of the more fundamental feminist critique of law, legal education and legal research. For a student body nearly half female and a law school grappling with highly significant social change, this has been a thrust of great significance; one which I trust we will not lose in Professor Boyle's absence and with Professor Clark's departure.

Also going on a leave of absence, to take a two-year visiting professorship at the University of Alberta Faculty of Law, is Professor Brent Cotter, who was acting dean during the last months of Bill Charles' deanship, when Bill had serious health problems, and during the first month of mine, when I had a

vacation "problem." Brent stayed on as associate dean for the first three years of my deanship, through the fire and the most difficult stage of the rebuilding. If any member of faculty has contributed more than Dick Evans to make the period of my deanship whatever success it has been it is Brent Cotter. Not only did I thoroughly enjoy working with him as associate dean, as I have with his successors, Bruce Wildsmith and Susan Ashley, none of us who have been associate deans has held the post in such "interesting" times.

After leaving the associate deanship Brent ran the Legal Aid Clinic for a year, while chairing the admissions committee, certainly the most demanding of all our administrative committee tasks, and at the same time he pioneered the new compulsory third year course in Legal Profession and Professional Responsibility. This year Brent has taken the chair of the admissions committee once again, while Vaughan Black, who so ably took over from him, is on sabbatical leave in New Zealand.

Full-time faculty members, even the most dedicated of them, are far from the whole story at Dalhousie Law School. We all know, but far too often forget to give credit for, the important role played by our downtown faculty. Over my time as dean not only have the students been continuously well served by these virtual volunteers, several have stepped forward in emergency staffing situations and given unbelievably generous service. I think particularly of Judge Jim Williams, John Merrick and Bob Barnes. The difficulty, of course, with singling out names like this is that a long list of faithful downtowners is omitted, and where would Dalhousie Law School have been over these many years without Joel Pink and his cohorts, Adrian Reid and (now Chief Judge) Elmer MacDonald in Criminal Procedure, Dave Bryson in Property, or without Wylie Spicer in Admiralty or the Rozovskys in Law and Medicine, and all of the others.

Moreover, from the perspective of the dean's office, it is easy to think that the most conscientious carriers of the Weldon tradition of concern for students are the non-academic staff. Two years ago we celebrated Mildred MacDonald's thirtieth year of service as administrative officer in the dean's office, and it seems to me that her dedication to the ideals of the law school has influenced the whole staff of the dean's office. Certainly, no one is more deeply concerned with students than Susan Ashley. As associate dean and before that, as administrative officer, she set the same tone. Now, and during Professor Ashley's leave of absence to serve as executive director of the Marshall Inquiry, Candace Malcolm has

continued to exemplify the Weldon tradition's open-door policy in its best modern manifestation.

Among the Law School's administrators, the readers of this letter will, in a sense, know best the editor of *Hearsay*, who is also our alumni director and placement officer. Like Patti Allen, who held the post when I became dean and has since been lost to the University of Ottawa, the current incumbent, Jill Shlossberg, has been tireless, not only in making *Hearsay* and the Dalhousie Law Alumni Association into strong ties that bind us all together but also in ensuring that Dalhousie Law School does its very best to assist our students to find fulfilling future careers. The Law Alumni Association itself has been a pleasure of the deanship. During my time Ron Pugsley, Ron Downie and Graydon Lally have served as presidents, with executives too long to list but great to meet and work with. The annual Weldon Award has become well established, with eight fine and quite varied recipients displayed on the wall of the hall outside the dean's office.

During my deanship extraordinary staff people like Mary Bartlett and Mary Moriarty have retired, but we seem to be able to continue to find, and keep, such people at Dalhousie Law School. I cannot count the students who have remarked on how pleasant Rose Godfrey's voice sounded when she gave them the good news that they had been admitted nor those who have paid me the back-handed compliment of saying how good (even) I am made to look by having such a terrific person as Heather Brenton as my secretary.

These are the people: faculty, staff, alumni and students, especially students, who made my years often satisfying and sometimes even exhilarating, and who have left me convinced that at times we have been, in some ways are, and can be, a great law school in the Weldon tradition of high academic standards, public service and concern for our students.

I am looking forward without reservation to a sabbatical year in the Netherlands, France and (best of all?) Cumberland County, knowing the acting dean Phil Girard (bless him!) will have all the support he needs in continuing to strive for these goals.

Innis Christie

Dean Christie completed his term as dean of Dalhousie Law School at the end of June, 1991. He received a Queen's Counsel appointment. The Class of '91 made him a recipient of the class ring and a law school dinner in his honour is planned for 6 September, 1991.