

Summer 2014

## Celebration of the 20th Anniversary: Looking Back: Biographies of Influential Law School Founders

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### Recommended Citation

Healey, Joseph T. and Noska, Adam M. (2014) "Celebration of the 20th Anniversary: Looking Back: Biographies of Influential Law School Founders," *Roger Williams University Law Review*: Vol. 19: Iss. 3, Article 2.

Available at: [http://docs.rwu.edu/rwu\\_LR/vol19/iss3/2](http://docs.rwu.edu/rwu_LR/vol19/iss3/2)

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## Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### Looking Back: Biographies of Influential Law School Founders

The following biographies were written by Joseph T. Healey, Esq.,<sup>1</sup> and Adam M. Noska, Esq.,<sup>2</sup> two Roger Williams University School of Law alumni.<sup>3</sup> The information in the biographies was gathered from interviews conducted by the writers or other attributed sources.

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1. Joseph T. Healey, Esq. is a partner with the Scranton, Pennsylvania law firm of O'Malley, Harris, Durkin & Perry, P.C. Mr. Healey practices primarily in the field of medical malpractice defense and has been recognized as a Super Lawyer by Philadelphia Magazine in that field. He is a 1996 graduate of Roger Williams University School of Law where he served as the survey editor for the *Roger Williams University Law Review*.

2. Adam M. Noska, Esq. lives in Boston with his wife Kelly and their several pets. He received his J.D. from Roger Williams University School of Law in 2005, and before that, he received his Bachelor of Science from Roger Williams University. Today, he is a compliance officer with RBS/Citizens Bank, and is admitted to the Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut bars. Adam and his family continue to have an unwavering affinity for Bristol, Rhode Island, and they look forward to spending the summer eating oysters at DeWolf Tavern.

3. Samantha Clarke, an Assistant Editor of the *Roger Williams University Law Review*, also provided editorial assistance.

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**THE HONORABLE ANTHONY A. GIANNINI**

Judge Anthony A. Giannini was a respected Superior Court Judge for twenty-two years, and in 1991, he retired from his role as the Superior Court's Chief Judge and policymaker. Soon after, Judge Giannini became involved with the development of Rhode Island's first law school. He joined an advisory committee tasked with assessing an appropriate location, and his input resulted in the school's current Bristol location along with the establishment of a law clinic in Providence.

Sadly, in June 2003, only ten years after Roger Williams University School of Law opened, Judge Giannini passed away at the age of eighty. He was described by other lawyers and judges as "quiet, soft-spoken, and shy," as well as "a fine legal scholar." Perhaps his greatest trait, and why he was considered instrumental in the founding of the law school, was his patience, particularly with new attorneys. As a judge, he never hesitated to help error-prone young lawyers. It is fitting, then, that Judge Giannini helped choose the site for legal education that takes place in a classroom, after all the years he helped budding lawyers in the courtroom.

**THE HONORABLE VICTORIA LEDERBERG**

Rhode Island Supreme Court Justice Victoria Lederberg dedicated almost all of her life to improving Rhode Island. She was born and raised in Providence, attended Brown University, and belonged to the faculty of Rhode Island College.<sup>4</sup> In 1974, while she was attending law school part-time at Suffolk University, Justice Lederberg was elected to the Rhode Island House of Representatives.<sup>5</sup> She still received her law degree in 1976, completing the program a year early.<sup>6</sup> Shortly thereafter, she joined Licht and Semonoff, a Providence law firm.<sup>7</sup>

Justice Lederberg served in the House from 1975 to 1983, and she was later elected to the state Senate, where she served from 1985 to 1991.<sup>8</sup> Later, Justice Lederberg became a Providence Municipal Court judge, but after just two years in the position, she was appointed to the Rhode Island Supreme Court.<sup>9</sup> Many considered her appointment to be the result of political cronyism, because despite nearly twenty years with a law degree, Justice Lederberg had never tried a case before a judge.<sup>10</sup> Yet over the course of her judicial career, her brilliance and dedication won over even her most staunch opponents.

During the founding of Roger Williams University School of Law, Lederberg served as Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees Law School Committee.<sup>11</sup> Her commitment to the school was closely tied to her deep affinity for her home state. Justice Lederberg's words reflect this passion for both Rhode Island and legal education:

We are confident that the intellectual, ethical, and

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4. Emily Gold Boutilier, *A Class Act*, BROWN ALUMNI MAG. (March/April 2003), <http://www.brownalumnimagazine.com/content/view/1015/40/>.

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

7. *Id.*

8. Elizabeth Zuckerman, *R.I. Justice Dies After Heart Attack*, S. COAST TODAY (Dec. 30, 2002), <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20021230/NEWS/312309966&cid=sitesearch>.

9. Susanne Payne, *Remembering Associate Justice Victoria Lederberg*, AMICUS, Spring 2003, at 16.

10. Boutilier, *supra* note 4.

11. *College Forms Law School Committee*, THE ABRIDGED C. BULL., Winter 1990, at 5, available at [http://docs.rwu.edu/law\\_archives\\_founding/13](http://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_founding/13).

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scholarly activities of the Roger Williams University School of Law will transform our state. We are committed to nurturing high quality, ethical and scholarly standards in our students and faculty with the expectation that these expert resources in the interpretation, application and practice of law will enrich the lives of all Rhode Islanders.<sup>12</sup>

As former law clerk Susanne Payne wrote, “Rhode Islanders and the School of Law were fortunate to have in Victoria Lederberg someone so devoted to education, public service, and the pursuit of fairness and justice.”<sup>13</sup>

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12. Betty M. Van Iersel, *Accreditation is Top Priority*, THE BRIDGE, Spring 1994, at 4, 6 (quoting Justice Lederberg).

13. Payne, *supra* note 9.

**ANTHONY J. SANTORO**

Following the initial study and recommendations of Justice Joseph Weisberger's Law School Advisory Committee, Dr. Malcolm Forbes, the Chief Academic Officer of Roger Williams College, contacted Anthony Santoro to inquire whether he would help guide Roger Williams College as it embarked upon its second feasibility study. Santoro was the ideal candidate to assist in the development of the new law school. He had been instrumental in the establishment of two other law schools: the University of Bridgeport School of Law and the Western New England College School of Law. In addition, Santoro was responsible for the expansion of Widener University School of Law from Delaware to Pennsylvania. It did not hurt that Santoro had married a Rhode Island native as well, and lived for a time in Fall River, Massachusetts, a city close to the state's border of Rhode Island.

One of Santoro's primary concerns was the need for a facility designed specifically for a law school. Santoro made the point that it is rarely possible to create an efficient law school facility by rehabilitating a building designed originally for other purposes. He stated that the most difficult task in establishing a law school was attracting qualified faculty and students; the best way to do so, was to demonstrate unequivocally the college's commitment to obtaining approval from the ABA. Building a new facility, rather than renting or renovating an old one, would do exactly that.

Though he suggested building a new facility would help attract a strong faculty, it was Santoro himself who was largely and singlehandedly responsible for the recruitment and hiring of the founding faculty at Roger Williams University School of Law. Each member came to the law school with prior full-time teaching experience at ABA accredited schools, and the number of years of full-time teaching ranged from a low of three years to a high of forty-five years.

Of course, while ostensibly the law school advertised a search for a Dean in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and sent requests for nominations to the Dean of every ABA-accredited law school, a clear choice was already in mind. Anthony Santoro was offered, and enthusiastically accepted, the position as the first Dean of the Roger Williams University School of Law.

Some twenty years later, Anthony Santoro remains a

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Professor of Law at the School of Law and a President Emeritus of Roger Williams University. His long tenure here suggests that the last law school established by Dean Santoro was arguably his finest, and the state of the art facility he envisioned some twenty years ago stands as a testament to his efforts.

**THE HONORABLE DONALD SHEA**

Justice Donald Shea has lived his life as the commensurate public servant, contributing to the development of Rhode Island in a multitude of capacities. He holds the distinction of having served in all three branches of the state government, occupying positions as the governor's Chief of Staff, an elected state representative, and finally as a state supreme court justice.<sup>14</sup>

Born in 1925, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Justice Shea served in the United States Navy during World War II.<sup>15</sup> Upon his return to civilian life, he attended Providence College, where he graduated in 1950.<sup>16</sup> He attended law school at Georgetown University Law Center and graduated in 1954.<sup>17</sup> After obtaining his law degree, Justice Shea entered private practice and was elected to the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1960, where he would serve for eight years.<sup>18</sup> He later became involved in Frank Licht's gubernatorial campaign and after Licht's election, served as executive assistant through 1972.<sup>19</sup> Justice Shea was offered an appointment to the Rhode Island Superior Court during his tenure as executive assistant, and though he declined, he was appointed again in 1972 and jumped at the opportunity the second time around. Lawyers who tried cases before Justice Shea during his time in Superior Court have called him thoughtful, reserved, and the commensurate trial judge.

Justice Shea was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1981.<sup>20</sup> He and Justice Weisberger both lived on the East Side of Providence and would carpool to work. It was during these trips that Justice Weisberger convinced Justice Shea to join in the development of the law school and join the law school's advisory board. Justice Shea anticipated that "[t]he interaction among the law faculty, the student body, and the judiciary and bar [would]

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14. ADMIN. OFFICE OF STATE COURTS, STATE OF R.I., 1995 REPORT ON THE JUDICIARY 64 (1995).

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.*

produce tremendous benefits for all of Rhode Island.”<sup>21</sup>

Justice Shea retired on June 30, 1995. In retirement, he continued to assist the Rhode Island Supreme Court, helping to ease a backlog of the Court’s cases while there was a vacancy.<sup>22</sup> Justice Shea commented that his post-retirement work makes him appreciate his retirement more, because it has allowed him to contribute to numerous causes, including volunteering as a judicial member of the State Council on Substance Abuse and chairing the committee of judges that drafted a new Code of Judicial Conduct for Rhode Island. Justice Shea also donates his time to developing grade-school peer mediators<sup>23</sup> and officiating wedding ceremonies, including one for an 84-year old couple at a retirement home.<sup>24</sup> Justice Shea continues to have a deep affection for his wife Ursula and his eleven grandchildren.

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21. Van Iersel, *supra* note 12 at 4, 6 (quoting Justice Shea).

22. Richard W. MacAdams, Esq., *President’s Message*, 45 RI B.J. 3 (June 1997).

23. *Training a Generation of Peacemakers*, THE FUND FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS (Spring 2002), <http://00aace7.netsolhost.com/newsletters/20021/index.htm>.

24. Katie Mulvaney, *Love at Laurelmead*, PROVIDENCE J. (July 15, 2012), <http://news.providencejournal.com/breaking-news/2012/07/love-at-laurelm.html>.

**THE HONORABLE MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN**

Judge Michael Silverstein's illustrious career has had him at the forefront of some of the most prominent Rhode Island cases over the last 50 years. Judge Silverstein is a life-long Rhode Islander, growing up in Providence and attending Brown University for political science. To obtain his law degree, Judge Silverstein travelled north to Boston University School of Law. He graduated in 1959 and co-founded the firm of Tobin Silverstein in Woonsocket, RI. In 1984, his firm merged with a Providence firm, forming Hinckley, Allen, Tobin & Silverstein.<sup>25</sup> Judge Silverstein specialized in corporate insolvency, representing banks and other financial institutions. He became managing partner of the firm in 1989.<sup>26</sup>

On January 1, 1991, approximately 250,000 accounts totaling approximately \$1.7 billion were frozen after the collapse of the Rhode Island Depositors Economic Protection Corporation (DEPCO).<sup>27</sup> Newly elected governor Bruce Sundlun was inaugurated the same day and enlisted Judge Silverstein as a special advisor to address the DEPCO crisis. Judge Silverstein helped create the Depositors Economic Protection Corporation. In addition, he helped write insolvency legislation for financial institutions, which did not exist up until that time.

Judge Silverstein had been a member of the Roger Williams College Board of Trustees for many years, including during the time the founding of the School of Law was being explored. Judge Silverstein recalls that he and the other managing partners from the large Providence firms regarded the absence of an in-state law school as an embarrassment. He is liberal with his praise of the other committee members and recalls the exploratory committee conducting research for approximately a year before issuing a formal conclusion. As a member of both the initial exploratory committee and the Board of Trustees's exploratory committee, Judge Silverstein was in a unique position to help promote the

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25. *Firm History*, HINCKLEY ALLEN, available at [www.hinckleyallen.com/our-firm/firm-history/](http://www.hinckleyallen.com/our-firm/firm-history/) (last visited Jan. 8, 2014).

26. *Id.*

27. Michael Quint, *Rhode Island Plans Payout in Deposit Insurance Crisis*, N.Y. TIMES (May 28, 1992), <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/28/business/rhode-island-plans-payout-in-deposit-insurance-crisis.html>.

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advent of the school across the approval process.

In 1994, he was appointed to the Superior Court and, in 2001, to head of the Superior Court's new business calendar. He presently remains as head of the business calendar, though he took a brief hiatus while hearing the landmark Rhode Island lead paint case (*State v. Lead Industries, Ass'n, Inc.*) full time. That "monumental lawsuit" encompassed two trials, the second of which was the longest civil jury trial in the state's history and included nineteen written rulings and thousands of transcript pages of hearings and testimony. It is because of cases like this that Judge Silverstein says he loves his job. He could cite innumerable high-profile cases that he has heard throughout his time on the bench, including the separation of powers case (*Almond v. R.I. Lottery Commission*) and more recently the Curt Schilling/38 Studios case (*R.I. Economic Development Corp. v. Wells Fargo, et. al.*). The 80-year-old attributes his youthful energy to the business calendar, which he regards as his occupation, his favorite hobby and indeed, his life.

When he is not busy with the duties of his position, Silverstein enjoys spending time with wife Phyllis, especially at the family home in Kennebunkport, ME, where one can sometimes find him indulging in the various frozen treats offered at Ben and Jerry's.

While he understands law school enrollment is down and that the current job market is difficult to navigate, he maintains that if prospective lawyers put in hard work, they will ultimately be successful.

**GARY ST. PETER**

Gary St. Peter attended Johns Hopkins University, and during his first year there he met Jan, the woman whom he would later marry. St. Peter chose Johns Hopkins for its pre-med program, and at the time he had plans of becoming a flight surgeon. It was St. Peter's involvement with the Baltimore Police Department that brought him to reconsider his career decision. St. Peter had two brushes with death in just his first semester during a police ride-along. Given these experiences, St. Peter's exposure to social activism on the Johns Hopkins campus, and discussions with Jan, he decided to seek an alternate career path.

St. Peter's first step down this new path began when he attended law school at the University of Virginia. After graduation, St. Peter worked at the Rhode Island firm of Adler Pollock. St. Peter was a dedicated attorney, devoting the bulk of his practice to labor law. Although he most often represented management interests, he attributes his professional success to his ability to connect with workers, thanks in large part to his upbringing. Growing up the son of working-class parents in Springfield, MA, St. Peter credits family dinners with his father, a card-carrying member of the draftsman union, as being a central contribution to his ability to effectively negotiate labor deals.

Eventually, St. Peter was promoted to managing partner at Adler Pollock. It was in this capacity that he was recruited by Justice Joseph Weisberger to join the law school exploratory committee and advisory board. He remembers that the group was aware of an undercurrent of opposition from those in the community who did not want an infusion of additional lawyers in the state, but noted this resistance was overcome by the majority of board members who lamented the absence of an in-state law school. St. Peter credits the strong leadership of Justice Weisberger in both assisting the exploratory committee and acting decisively once the exploratory committee made its decision.

Five years ago, St. Peter faced a personal health crisis that almost killed him. When he starts to talk about himself, it is the first thing that he mentions, preemptively excusing himself in case his speech or memory begins to suffer. In 2008, St. Peter was brought to the hospital suffering from pneumonia, which caused a severe complication: he experienced an infection resulting in

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cardiac arrest for several minutes and a loss of oxygen to his brain. St. Peter spent three weeks in a coma, and after completing extensive rehabilitation, he still experiences numbness in his tongue and has difficulty remembering numbers, dates, and the like. He laughs about it now, describing the tongue numbness as feeling like he burnt himself on a grilled cheese and recounting the embarrassment of having to retake driver education classes as a 58-year-old.

St. Peter recalls his doctors telling him that his career as an attorney was likely over due to the neurological damage, but he was unwilling to accept such a premature end to his career, especially since it was not on his terms. He had always loved being a labor lawyer and negotiating on behalf of his clients, and happily, St. Peter was able to recover from his disability and return to practice. However, he found that he had lost the passion and decided to “hang up his spikes,” as he described the decision to retire.

St. Peter is proud of his personal and professional accomplishments, including advocating for the rights of the developmentally disabled and contributing to the dissolution of the Ladd School. Today, he is enjoying retirement in Palm Beach, focusing his attention on programs to organize constituents in various electoral districts, analyzing votes and mobilizing voters. He has fond affections for Roger Williams University School of Law and regards its establishment as a point of pride for not only himself, but for all of Rhode Island.

**THE HONORABLE JOSEPH R. WEISBERGER**

“There is almost a universal belief that Rhode Island is badly served by the lack of a law school. In addition to educating aspiring lawyers, the Roger Williams College School of Law will enhance the delivery of legal services in the State by becoming the focal point for law reform, legal research and continuing legal education of the bar.”<sup>28</sup>

With this backdrop in mind, in 1989, Roger Williams College formed a blue ribbon committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing a law school. In addition to members of the College’s Board of Trustees, faculty, students and staff, the committee included leading members of the Rhode Island bench, bar, and general public. Chief Justice Weisberger, then an Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, chaired this committee. Prior to the formation of this committee, Justice Weisberger’s involvement in earlier efforts to establish a law school at Providence College and Brown University had proven unsuccessful.

The Roger Williams College committee met for the first time in January of 1990. Foremost on Justice Weisberger’s agenda was the need for accreditation from the American Bar Association since, without it, any graduate of the law school would be ineligible to practice law upon successful completion of the law school program because they would not be permitted to sit for the bar exam in any state. Weisberger and the committee recognized that the “decision to establish a law school was to a great extent an irreversible moral commitment” that “may only be discharged by the dedication of adequate resources to the establishment of the school in the first instance and the devotion of such additional resources as may be required in subsequent years.”<sup>29</sup> It was therefore the opinion of the committee that the students invited to attend the law school, and those who ultimately enrolled, had the

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28. “1990-1994,” 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Timelines, RWU LAW, <http://law.rwu.edu/20th-anniversary/timelines/1990-1994> (last visited Apr. 2, 2014).

29. Anthony J. Santoro, *Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary: Reflections on the Founding*, 9 *ROGER WILLIAMS U. L. REV.* 327, 330 (2004) (internal quotation marks omitted).

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right to expect that the law school would move expeditiously toward accreditation by the American Bar Association. Through the efforts of Justice Weisberger and the three committees established by him, in December 1991, the Board of Trustees unanimously approved the establishment of the Roger Williams University School of Law to be located in Bristol, Rhode Island.<sup>30</sup>

In August 1993, 185 students began their course of study at the law school. True to Justice Weisberger's word and foresight, in 1995, the Roger Williams School of Law received American Bar Association accreditation and each of the members of the first graduating class were eligible to sit for any bar exam in the United States.

The fact that Justice Weisberger was successful in this endeavor is not surprising. His son, J. Robert Weisberger, Jr., a partner at Edwards Wildman, described his father as a consummate educator. From 1966 through 2012, Justice Weisberger served as a faculty member at the National Judicial College and was a recipient of that institutes award for excellence in teaching. He held twelve honorary degrees and, in 2009, received the award for advancement of judicial education from the National Judicial College.

Were it not for the efforts of Justice Weisberger, whose fifty six years on the Rhode Island judiciary made him an internationally renowned jurist, the Roger Williams University School of Law, now in its 20th year, would not exist as we know it. Its success is a tribute to his legacy.

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30. *Id.* at 337.

**THOMAS “TUCKER” WRIGHT**

Thomas “Tucker” Wright is an East Bay institution unto himself. His office is a converted single family home on Main Street in downtown Warren, RI. Once past the front farmer’s porch, visitors enter the living space, complete with a full bathroom on the first floor. In place of the dining room and kitchen are a conference table and a desk stacked high with papers. The entire area is full of files, banker boxes, and manuscripts. Wright has been at this location for over 20 years. His community-based law practice sees him function as the commensurate small-town general practitioner, and he performs everything from estate planning to probate work to real estate closings. He works with Christine, his wife of 36 years, who oversees the real estate operation. Wright finds himself performing substantially more pro bono work than in years past. The pride that he takes in helping the older members of the community is evident in the way he discusses the challenges that they face—navigating the hurdles of Medicare and Medicaid, for example.

Wright has been able to continue to practice while teaching at Roger Williams University for over forty years. He graduated from the University of Rhode Island before attending the University of Tulsa Law School. Wright became involved at Roger Williams College teaching part-time and started the paralegal program. It was this familiarity with the legal accreditation process that would tie him inexorably to the School of Law. Wright seems to have had a back-room presence from just about the moment of the law school’s inception and recalls meeting with then-President Natale A. Sicuro. President Sicuro was proud that Wright had helped found a medical school when he had been Dean at Kent State University. Wright commented that as impressive as that accomplishment may have been, it would be even more impressive to establish the first and only law school in the state of Rhode Island. President Sicuro was receptive, and fully engaged from the moment Wright mentioned the idea. Wright, fresh off receiving ABA accreditation for the undergraduate paralegal program, was able to walk President Sicuro through the logistics of creating a legal education program. This included Wright’s recommendation that the school enlist the assistance of a

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prominent jurist and assemble an exploratory committee. The jurist enlisted was Chief Justice Weisberger, who by many accounts was the singular most compelling force to the establishment of the school.

Although Wright was named executive-secretary of the exploratory committee, his true contribution was behind the scenes. He recalls driving around scouting possible locations with Justice Weisberger. Wright went directly to the ABA case representative to see if the representative agreed with Wright's assessment that a law school would be best established on the considerable tract of land available in Bristol, with the benefit of the adjoining college. The ABA representative agreed with Wright, and the accrediting body's preference for a Bristol site was conveyed to the exploratory committee. The exploratory committee voted overwhelmingly to approve moving forward with a law school in Bristol.

Wright is able to offer firsthand accounts of many details surrounding the school's founding: presenting to the Rhode Island Supreme Court for support, the initial presence of a night school, and hiring Anthony Santoro as the first dean. It is evident how he helped usher the process along, and the pride he took in doing so.

Today, Wright remains in the undergraduate legal program, where he is the director of the Legal Studies study-abroad program. Wright has run the program for the past thirty years, and it affords him the ability to take large groups of students to Europe, visiting London, the Hague, and Paris. Still, Wright maintains a deep affinity for the law school that he helped build.