

The Ceremonial Opening of the George F. Curtis Building, Faculty of Law, University of British Columbia

An account, by Anthony F. Sheppard.

On the afternoon of Friday September 17, 1976, the University of British Columbia dedicated the Faculty of Law building in honour of the first Dean of the Faculty, George Frederick Curtis, Q.C. George Curtis served as Dean from 1945, when the Faculty was founded, to 1971 and since retiring as Dean continues to teach in the Faculty.

Starting from scratch in 1945, he has built the Faculty into one of the foremost in Canada. In recognition of his long and devoted service to the Faculty, the profession and to national and international affairs, the University, his friends, colleagues and students enthusiastically endorsed the naming of the building in his honour.

Construction began in the Summer of 1973. The building comprises a renovation and conversion of the original structure of 1951 and a new addition. The older part of the building retains its magnificent view and has been divided into lecture and seminar rooms, a moot court room and offices. The addition houses a self-contained three-storey library, an assembly room capable of seating three hundred persons, a lounge or interaction area and faculty and administrative offices. The offices are on two L-shaped floors. The first part of the new addition which was brought into use was the library. The library, which is available for use by the profession and the public, is designed to hold 160,000 volumes, one of Canada's finest collections. With the formal opening of this new building, the Faculty has finally, after many years, moved from such temporary accommodation as wooden army huts and former women's residences into a single structure specifically designed to provide legal education.

Preceding the opening ceremonies was an open-house: the public was invited to tour the building and to attend classes.

On the Friday, the formal dedication took place. The speakers were The Honourable Thomas A. Dohm, Q.C., Chairman of the Board of Governors, Dean Lysyk of the Faculty of Law, Mark Dwor, President of the Law Students Association, Douglas T. Kenny, Ph.D., President of the University, The Honourable Bora Laskin, P.C., Chief Justice of Canada, and Donovan F. Miller, Chancellor of the University. Chief Justice Laskin cut a ribbon to open the building. Several of the speakers acknowledged with

gratitude the legal profession's generous donations to the financing of the building.

All the addresses were felicitous, as the following excerpts show:

The remarks of Dean Lysyk:

Mr. Chancellor, Your Honour, My Lords Chief Justices, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

There are many reasons why it gives me great pleasure to participate in this afternoon's ceremony.

It allows me an opportunity, first of all, to acknowledge on behalf of the Faculty and the student body, our indebtedness to the man whose name this building will carry, and to recognize and express appreciation not only for past achievements but as well for his continuing contribution as a superb law teacher.

George Curtis knows a good deal about Law Buildings, and their acquisition. A piece in the Vancouver Bar Association's publication, *The Advocate*, records the original arrangements engineered with the collaboration of one Norman Mackenzie (and I am delighted that Dr. Mackenzie is able to be with us here this afternoon). Those arrangements were succinctly described by the author of the article in these two sentences:

"One late evening, during the dark of the moon, a number of men went to an empty army camp, sawed several of the huts in two, loaded them on log trucks and landed them on the campus. Permission to do this was said to be expected from Ottawa almost any time."

that, no doubt, is one form of academic innovation.

The admiring author of that account, writing in 1952, noted that the famous huts were still there, and stated: "I hereby start a movement to name them the Curtis huts."

While movements can take some time to gather momentum, one so solidly based was bound to be irresistible. And while the structure to be opened this afternoon may lack the colourful history of the army huts, the George F. Curtis Building will assuredly provide a more durable testimonial.

May I at the same time acknowledge the presence this afternoon of a friend and colleague, and my predecessor as Dean, Bertie McClean. It is our good fortune that he was willing and able to time an interruption in his sabbatical leave so as to be able to join us at these ceremonies.

No one who knows Bertie McClean needs to be reminded of his dedication, characteristic good humour and patience, all of which served so well in coping with the dislocation and the frustrations inevitable in carrying through a project of this nature.

On this theme, it is very difficult to resist the temptation to acknowledge by name the many other persons who gave so freely of their energies and talents in the planning of this building. Time will not permit that, but I must make two exceptions.

Our colleague, Professor Jerome Atrens, was Chairman of the Building Committee through the critical periods of planning and construction and he has, I understand, the scars to show for it. Having just rejoined us after a year with the Canada Law Reform Commission, he is able to testify that re-writing the country's criminal law is child's play compared with the

process of obtaining consensus on such weighty matters as, for example, the colour of the carpets. Having survived an experience like that, I am just concerned that he is a natural to be hired away for some comparatively simple task, such as staging an Olympic Games free of protest and, of course, within budget.

The other exception I must make is to recognize the extraordinary efforts, the extraordinarily effective efforts, of two members of the platform party in the role they played in arranging for a tangible expression of support from the Bar of British Columbia for this Law School. I refer to the campaign, jointly directed by Mr. Justice Brian Carrothers and Mr. Robert Bonner, for contributions from the profession toward the cost of this new building – a campaign which resulted in gifts totalling a half million dollars.

That kind and degree of support by a profession for its academic home, if not unprecedented, has not been a common occurrence in Canada.

The success of the campaign is testimony to the organizational skills and the personal attention devoted to this by the joint chairmen, to the generosity of the legal profession and, perhaps most importantly, to the concern with the future of this law school which it demonstrated.

On behalf of the Faculty of Law may I express our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. Justice Carrothers and Mr. Bonner, and through Mr. Legg, who is representing the Treasurer of the Law Society on the platform here today, may I record our gratitude to our colleagues at the Bar.

None of the persons I have mentioned so far will be speaking from the platform this afternoon. I hope, Mr. Chancellor, that you will not consider it a trespass upon your prerogatives as Chairman of these proceedings if I take note of one person who will be making some remarks.

There are many Law Deans from across Canada here this afternoon, and I am sure that they would join in a lament for the unhappy lot of a Dean who must try to dissuade law professors from succumbing to the blandishments of other employers. The competition of law practice has always been there, of course, but it is not confined to that. The ranks of the mandarins in British Columbia, for example, are thoroughly infiltrated by law professors (some of whom are with us here today).

And Canadians are by now accustomed, I suppose, to a Federal Government headed by Professor Trudeau, with additional legal academic representation in the cabinet and in the wings.

At the same time a number have been finding their way to the bench, and now a third of the membership of the highest court in the country is made up of former law professors including, of course, our most distinguished guest the Chief Justice of Canada.

Those who must worry about retaining academic staff in the Law Schools might well ask whether it isn't all getting a bit out of hand!

Happily, there is a compensating feature. On an occasion such as this, we can enjoy the privilege, the honour and the pleasure of having our building opened by a former colleague – one, it might be added, whose distinction as a scholar and law teacher made it entirely predictable that he would be an adornment to the highest court in the land.

Mr. Chief Justice, a special welcome to you from the Faculty of Law at the University of British Columbia.

A final observation, Mr. Chancellor.

We do not labour under the delusion that the excellence of the Law School is related in any direct way to the elegance, or lack of it, of the physical plant.

But with the growth of the Law School the lack of space had become relevant insofar as it constituted a distraction from the quest for excellence.

We are pleased to be freed from that distraction.

And we are mindful, as we pause to take stock on the occasion of this opening, of the challenge to us to do what we can to ensure that this Law School fully realizes its potential.

Mr. Chancellor, my colleagues and I welcome that challenge.

The remarks of Chief Justice Laskin:

Your Honour, Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, My Lords Chief Justices, Mr. Attorney, Mr. Dean, Professor Curtis, Other members of the Platform Party, Dr. MacKenzie, my former teacher, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me to participate in this dedication ceremony, the formal opening of the George F. Curtis Building of this University's Faculty of Law. As might be expected, the apt perception for an occasion like this comes from Winston Churchill. Back in 1943, he was speaking to a resolution for the appointment of a Select Committee to consider plans for rebuilding the House of Commons which had been destroyed by a bomb raid in 1941. In the course of his remarks that great man said "We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us". If anyone can be said to have given shape to this temple of learning, it is George Curtis, an admired friend of mine for more than thirty years. How fortunate is the University of British Columbia and its Law Faculty to have the Curtis imprint on its new law building. Scholar, teacher, administrator – and there is design in the order of these words – George Curtis has played a major role in legal education in this country, especially in interpreting its university and theoretical orientation to a legal profession which, caught up in busy practice, sometimes forgets how necessary it is to have free albeit disciplined inquiry into the foundations of our legal order and into the adequacy of its controlling principles. This is an occasion when it is permissible to salute all of those who have dedicated themselves to one of the noblest of endeavours, the teaching of our youth to understand and appreciate the democratic values which underpin our legal system and to prepare them to preserve and advance those values, and to adapt them to the needs of an ever changing society.

George Curtis is now the most senior of all active law teachers in Canada, still carrying a full teaching load after some forty years of continuous service to legal education. In the midst of the deserved adulation and appreciation that we today exhibit so tangibly for his immense contributions to his profession and to his craft, may I presume to speak for all who are here today and to salute his wife Doris whose more silent but yet effective contribution to George's career should not be ignored.

In a sense the dedication of this building marks the end of a beginning, a glorious beginning that saw George Curtis take over the leadership of a new law school in 1945 and nurture it into a mature and confident institution for more than a quarter of a century. His successor Professor McClean had the satisfaction of seeing the fruition of plans for this building, and newly appointed Dean Lysyk has this impressive platform from

which to carry on a now established tradition. I wish him and his faculty ceaseless intellectual struggle which this building cannot fail to make quite palatable to endure. And now to cut the umbilical cord ...

The remarks of President Kenny:

Mr. Chancellor, Your Honour, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to be here today. I am especially pleased in view of the distinguished company who have honoured us with their presence, particularly the many renowned and learned judges.

We are honoured that the judges have accepted an invitation to be with us today – and I hope the learned gentlemen (and Ladies?) of the bench have appreciated our tact in inviting them by mail, rather than simply phoning them and trying to influence their decision about how to spend the afternoon.

This is an unusual occasion. It is rare to be able to open a building named in honour of a man in the living presence of that man. Few people, of course, achieve the distinction of having a building named after them at all. There are always more buildings than there are people worth naming them after. To receive this honour in one's lifetime is especially rare. It requires more than just longevity – it requires remarkable accomplishments and character. These George Curtis has had, and continues to have.

I won't embarrass George with more praise. The name of this building is already an expression of the University's gratitude and praise. I hasten to add, incidentally, that George has never sought such an honour. Unlike some titans of the corporate world who build huge monuments bearing their name, George Curtis has never sought the honour of a building with his name. George Curtis – and I can testify to this as a psychologist – does not suffer from an edifice complex.

George Curtis would be the first to acknowledge that many others have contributed not only to this building but to the fact that we have a Faculty of Law worthy to occupy such elegant quarters. The members of the legal profession itself are most notable among those to whom we owe a debt – not only for their generous contribution of \$500,000 towards this building, but more important for their past and continuing service to the Faculty in terms of free – or virtually free – instruction to our students. (That contribution of time and effort, if translated into the equivalence in consultation fees, would, I'm sure, amount to a staggering sum.)

As many of you know, this is not the first time a new Law Building has been opened on this campus. In 1952, the then seven-year-old Faculty of Law opened a new building, with the right honourable Louis St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, present. Some of words spoken by M. St. Laurent on that occasion are worth recalling. Among other things, he said, "I have never been able to persuade myself that a knowledge of legal techniques is enough to make a good lawyer." He went on to add: "The Study of law, properly conceived, inevitably involves an attempt to understand the natures of men and the nature of the society in which men live. The lawyers regard, of course, the law as a profession, but before being a profession, it is one of the humanities . . ."

I agree wholeheartedly with this sentiment, as I know George Curtis always has and as I trust all of you do. The purpose of this building and

this Faculty, then, is the same as the purpose of this University: *not* simply to train people for a profession but to *educate* them in humane values. The University — and the Faculty of Law — are not merely concerned to teach people the tricks of any trade — but more important to help them to learn values.

This idea of a University is presently threatened from a number of directions. This is not surprising I suppose, since times of economic restraint have a way of affecting people's long-term vision. Even our own Minister of Education has recently been quoted as saying that there will be more emphasis on job training in the Universities of this Province and less on the arts and pure science.

I would hope that you of the Law Profession — students and professors, lawyers and judges alike — will see this kind of view as a threat — not perhaps to the success and material prospects of your profession, but to its integrity. So-called "pure" learning is essential to your profession. As U.S. Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "if your subject is law, the roads are plain to anthropology, political economy, ethics, and thus by several paths to your final view of life."

So it is my hope that this building and the students and faculty who learn and teach in it will be devoted to learning in the broad sense. I hope that those who use this building will view it as George Curtis has always viewed the Faculty, not as a trade school for success, but as a place to learn more than techniques. Surely a good lawyer, like a good judge, is distinguished not merely by his or her ability to write a brief, examine evidence, or outwit an opponent. The good lawyer, like the good judge is marked most of all by the ability to listen, and to care. To listen with care to other views, other perceptions, other human beings. May this building then be a place of learning, and listening.

Excerpt from the remarks of Mr. Dwor:

The continuity between the present law students and all those who have enrolled since 1945 is a combination of the students' interest in the law and the quality of legal education. Such teachers as Professor Bourne, Professor Herbert, Professor Todd and the late Professor MacIntyre, to name but a few, have had, through their lengthy dedication to legal education, a remarkable impact on legal thinking in this province. The lynchpin of this quality of education and its concomitant impact on the profession has been Dean Curtis, the founding Dean of this Faculty.

At the formal opening of the Faculty of Law in 1946, in various articles in the *Advocate* of the late forties, and at the opening of the new Law Building in 1951 a unanimous view was expressed — that the new Dean from Dalhousie would provide the best possible legal education for the province. History has proven this confidence well grounded; it has been the best possible legal training.

A great number of lawyers still remember the Dean's description of that rainy day in November 1858, when, by the banks of the Fraser, Judge Begbie and Governor Douglas swore each other into office. How many of his ex-students could ever forget the Dean's ability to enliven a class with historical tidbits about Eleanor of Aquitaine or Lord Mansfield; or with tantalizing legal gossip about Lord Justice Scrutton or the old chief, Sir Lyman Duff. Or who could possibly forget the Dean's story of how he, as a junior counsel, put together an argument based on Privy of Contract

that was successful in **Vanderpitt v. Preferred Accident Insurance**. The stories could go on, but it's obvious why the Dean is such an excellent and popular teacher.

The basis of his teaching has been scholarship but these extra touches have determined the true quality of the education here and it has given all who come in contact with the Dean an indefinable feel for the Law. All of his students know that they share some of his knowledge; some of his love of learning, some of his legal wisdom, some of his integrity, and a great amount of his conviction that it is a lawyer's duty to work as hard as possible in the service of a client.

Last year, a number of students were worried that somewhere along the line Dean Curtis's achievements might not be properly recognized and they decided to petition Faculty Council to name the library after Dean Curtis. Within a few days this petition got the signatures of the vast majority of the student body and staff.

One final anecdote about Dean Curtis. He was once asked by the Law Review to review a book by one of his former students. The Dean declined the request as he felt that by doing the review he might compromise himself. He couldn't write anything too critical about the book because as he put it, all of his students were swans.

I have the great honour and privilege of representing thousands of swans; Dean Curtis's past, present and future students. I have been in somewhat of a quandary as to how to represent these swans. I must thank the Dean himself for helping me out as I have carefully taken to heart the admonition to get your mind clear before stating your case. It would be ingenuous and a little gratuitous to thank the Dean for being himself. So acting for all of us swans, I will congratulate the Faculty of Law and University for their wisdom in giving this permanent home for the Faculty the most appropriate of all possible names — The George F. Curtis Building.

**CONSULTANT
LAW OFFICE ADMINISTRATION**

Office Systems: Filing, Duplicating, Accounting, Library, Mailing
Office Policies and Procedures
Personnel Hiring and Management

Contact: **JUNE I. TAYLOR**
5351 Colbeck Rd., Richmond, B.C. V7C 3E6, Phone 277-7586

LISSEN, McCONNAN, BION & O'CONNOR

Barristers and Solicitors

are pleased to announce that as of January 1, 1977

ALAN J. PETERSON

Barrister and Solicitor

will be associated with them in the practice of law

**837 Burdett Ave., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1B3
and 206 Valcourt Centre, Ganges, B.C. V0S 1E0**
