From Oxford to Williamsburg: The Evolution of Legal Education and Law Libraries Across the Pond

James S. Heller
William & Mary Law School, heller@wm.edu
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James S. Heller
The Wolf Law Library
The College of William & Mary in Virginia
Oxford & Williamsburg linked
Maps of Early Virginia
King William III & Queenent Mary II
William & Mary’s Presidential Students

1. George Washington 1789-1797
3. Thomas Jefferson 1801-1809
5. James Monroe 1817-1825
10. John Tyler 1841-1845
The Law Program at William & Mary

- Founding Stage (1779-1861)
- Stage of Decline (1861-1920’s)
- Struggling Revival Era (1920’s-1970’s)
- Modern Era (1980-present)
Inns of Court
George Wythe
1726-1806
George Wythe House
Williamsburg, Virginia
The Wren Building
College of William & Mary
Declaration of Independence
John Marshall
The court of appeals had jurisdiction in criminal cases adjourned thither from the general court.

The treason law of 1776 was constitutional; and the house of delegates could not, without the concurrence of the senate, pardon three persons condemned under it by the general court.

This case came before the court* by adjournment from the general court; and was as follows:

John Caton, Joshua Hopkins and John Lamb were condemned for treason, by the general court, under the act of assembly concerning that offense, passed in 1776, which takes from the executive, the power of granting pardon in such cases.† The house of delegates by resolution of the 18th of June, 1782, granted them a pardon, and sent it to the senate for concurrence; which they refused. The men, however, were not executed, but continued in jail under the sentence; and, in October 1782, the attorney general moved in the general court, that execution of the judgment might be awarded. The prisoners pleaded the pardon granted by the house of delegates: The attorney general denied the validity of the pardon, as the senate had not concurred in it: and the general court adjourned the case, for novelty and difficulty, to the court of appeals.

* Which at that time consisted of the judges of the high court of chancery; those of the general court; and those of the admiralty assembled together. Ch. Res. 102. And the sitting members, upon the present occasion, were Edward Pendleton, George Wythe and John Blair, judges of the high court of chancery: Paul Carrington, Bartholomew Dandridge, Peter Lynes and James Mercer, judges of the general court: and Richard Cary, one of the judges of the court of admiralty.

† The words of the act are, “The governor, or in case of his death, inability, or necessary absence, the councillor who acts as president, shall in no wise have or exercise a right of granting pardon to any person or persons convicted in manner aforesaid, but may suspend the execution until the meeting of the general assembly, who shall determine whether such person or persons are proper objects of mercy or not, and order accordingly.” Ch. Res. 40.
Pointing to the constitution, I will say to them, here is the limit of your authority; and hither shall you go, but no further.

Commonwealth v. Caton, 8 Va. 5 (1782)
Books Wythe Used in Teaching
The Colonial Capital
Books Tucker used in Teaching
William H. Cabell
Tucker’s Blackstone
Nathaniel Beverly Tucker
Wren Building during the American Civil War
Legal Education 1850 - 1921

• Many more law schools
  • 1850: 18
  • 1900: 96
  • 1920: 140

• Socratic Method of Teaching

• Accrediting Bodies
  • 1900: Association of American Law Schools
  • 1921: American Bar Association
Oscar Lane Shewmake
Law Degree Discontinued At W. & M.

WILLIAMSBURG board of visitors William and Mary Institution to end law, voted yestet and May 28, 1939. The board voted to end law after the 1939 annual meeting was adjourned.

The board, in a joint meeting with the School of Law, voted to end the law school. The vote was taken after a lengthy discussion about the future of the law school.

Law School At W. & M. To Be Kept, Developed

Judge Arthur reverses itself. Judge Arthur's decision to end the law school was reversed by the board of visitors. The board voted to keep the law school open.

Visitors Board Reverses Itsself Under Pressure

Campus leaders, including the college president, have been put under pressure to keep the law school open. The board of visitors has been under pressure to keep the law school open for the last few weeks.

Would Teach More

The board said it would consider teaching more jurisprudence and law courses in the future. The board has been considering this for several months.

Law School At W. & M.

Law School At W. & M. To Be Kept, Developed

Visitors Board Reverses Itsself Under Pressure

Would Teach More
Dudley Warner Woodbridge
Bryan Hall
Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

Proverbs 22:28
Marshall - Wythe Building
Law Library circa 1969
Reference Area (2004)
The Wolf Law Library: 2007 - date
Pool and Ping-Pong Lounge
Nicholas St. George Rare Book Room
William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository

Browse Research and Scholarship

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- Conferences, Events, and Lectures
- Faculty Scholarship
- Law School Journals and Publications
- The Wolf Law Library

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Scholarship Repository Reaches 1,000,000 downloads (May 9, 2012).
James S. Heller
Director of the Law Library
Professor of Law and Professor of Public Policy
College of William & Mary
heller@wm.edu

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