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Pamela G. Smith
Penn State Dickinson Law

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William Trickett: Dickinson Law's First Dean

AUGUST 2, 2018 BY PAMELA G SMITH

185
YEARS
1834 | 2019

This is the first in a series of articles about significant events and people in the history of The Dickinson School of Law of The Pennsylvania State University, in celebration of the Law School's 185th anniversary.

In the summer of 1833, Judge John Reed wrote to the Trustees of Dickinson College proposing the formation of a law school.

On April 1, 1834, classes began at the newly formed Dickinson

School of Law. Unfortunately, after Judge Reed's passing, operations at the Law School were suspended. Fast forward to 1890, when a group of gentlemen decided to resurrect the Law School. This led to the incorporation of The Dickinson School of Law¹ on February 19, 1890 and the appointment of William Trickett as Dean of the newly-reestablished Law School.

William Trickett was born in Leicester, England on June 9, 1840, and moved to Philadelphia with his family when he was a child. He graduated from Philadelphia Central High School in 1857. Upon graduation, he became a preacher, but he decided to return to school and graduated from Dickinson College in 1868. Trickett decided to study law after he was fired from a teaching post at Dickinson College. He was admitted to the Bar on August 26, 1875. As a lawyer, Trickett was not very good at trial work due to his demeanor and self-consciousness, but his sharp mind earned him a reputation as a scholar. During his lifetime, he wrote many books and treatises on a wide array of legal topics.



Trickett was appointed Dean of The Dickinson School of Law upon its incorporation in 1890. Trickett was known as a stern teacher, who had no tolerance for tardiness in students. Nonetheless, he became one of the most beloved deans and teachers of the Law School. His devotion to the Law School, in return, appears to be unquestionable. When the Law School reopened in 1890, Dean Trickett supplied the library with books from his own personal collection. He took pride in the Law School and in the students of the Law School, taking the time to personally know every student who entered the school.

Many letters and documents exist praising Dean Trickett, and many of the early Law School yearbooks contain dedications to him. The class of 1903 presented Dean Trickett with a



The Loving Cup that was presented to Dean Trickett

Loving Cup, which remains part of the Law School's Archives collection. Therefore, when the time came to dedicate the new Law School building, in 1918, there was no question that the building would be named Trickett Hall in Dean Trickett's honor. However, perhaps the highest honor for Dean Trickett occurred on his 85th birthday, when, after having served as Dean for thirty-five years, he received an honorary law degree from Dickinson Law.

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Dean Trickett remained Dean of the Law School until his death, at eighty-eight years old, on August 1, 1928. The 1929 edition of the Commentator, Dickinson Law's yearbook, includes the following tribute to Dean Trickett, which perhaps best sums up his life and the feelings of those who knew him:

Giving absolutely everything of his mind, of his time, and even of his possessions, he has cheerfully and faithfully served the institution...

He has known every man by name from the inception of the school to the present graduating class and considers every man who has been under him a personal friend....

His untiring and unselfish work has had its effect on the development of our legal system, and by his kindness, his friendship, his service and example has profoundly influenced many hundreds of lawyers now practicing, who were in earlier days his students, and indirectly the people with whom they have come in contact. William Trickett was not only a great teacher, but a great man.²

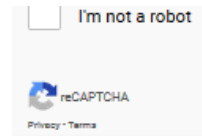
¹ True or False: The Dickinson School of Law was once part of Dickinson College. Answer: False. While there was an agreement between Founder Judge Reed, and the law school's subsequent incorporators, with Dickinson College for the use of its facilities, the law school was established, and operated, as an independent institution until its merger with Penn State in 1997.

² For more information about Dean Trickett, and the history of the law school, I recommend reading former Dean Burton R. Laub's book, *The Dickinson School of Law-Proud and Independent*. Much of the information in this post was derived from Dean Laub's book, as well as various resources found within the Law School Archives collection.

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