IX. HAROLD GILL REUSCHLEIN
Dean Through Two Decades: 1953-1972

[At this point, Dean Reuschlein must drop his pen temporarily and defer to Professor J. Edward Collins].

When Harold Gill Reuschlein agreed to the task of founding a law school at Villanova he was 49 years of age. He had spent most of his adult life in and around law schools. Educated at Iowa, Yale and Cornell, he had taught at Georgetown, Notre Dame, Syracuse and Pittsburgh. His Georgetown experience was interrupted by military service. Entering the Office of the Undersecretary of War in 1942, he rose to the rank of Colonel and served as Deputy Chief and finally as Chief of the Office of Legislative Services in Headquarters, Army Air Force. With the end of World War II, he resumed law teaching at Notre Dame, followed by service at Syracuse and Pittsburgh.

If he was at all observant, and no one who knew him could think otherwise, he had closely observed the functioning of eight deans and university administrations and evaluated their strengths and weaknesses as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions with which they were involved. While never a dean or a dean’s associate or assistant, he came to Villanova with eyes wide open and ears attuned and with a clear vision of what he intended to accomplish at the law school he was starting.

Blessed with vibrant health, a surplus of energy, a strong personality, charm, persuasiveness, a wide circle of professional friends and acquaintances whom he was not reluctant to tap and utilize (in a non-perjorative sense, of course), a strong religious faith, a not inconsiderable touch of guile and gall, and a more than fair amount of good fortune, he proved to be the ideal man for the task at hand — administrator, educator and politician.

He convinced a Harvard-Yale-Princeton trained serious Protestant scholar, John George Stephenson III, that he should further his teaching career after a year of graduate study at Yale, by leaving the non-sectarian University of Miami and join forces with a new law school organized under the auspices of a Roman Catholic religious order — a law school definitely intended to be Catholic in tone. His persuasive powers sold the distinguished retiring law librarian at Harvard, Arthur Clement Pulling, on turning his back on a prestigious position with the Library of Congress, to build a law library at Villanova when it had no adequate facilities in which to house a collection and had even less adequate funds with which to finance one. He sold an extremely ambitious, capable and idealistic young law teacher, Thomas J. O’Toole, on the proposition that he could advance his professional career by joining the faculty of a non-existent law school, growing with the school. He persuaded presidents of both Catholic and non-Catholic colleges and universities to send their top graduates to this untried and unaccredited professional school, the inducement to the prize students being a tuition scholarship and for some of them an opportunity to serve as proctors in the undergraduate residence halls for board and
room on campus. More significantly, perhaps, he persuaded Villanova’s administration to provide the scholarships and the perquisites when University funds, as always, were scarce.

Perhaps Dean Reuschlein’s guile was evident when he described the original law school facilities in the Falvey Library in the Law School Catalogue he put together singlehandedly as providing “a commodious and beautiful reading room,” “law library stacks equipped with individual study cubicles” and a “well appointed classroom and a student lounge” when the realities were such that the Dean’s puffing might understandably raise the eyebrows of later consumer protectionists. And early on the Dean made an unequivocal pledge to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and to the Board of Bar Examiners of Pennsylvania that the new Villanova Law School would not operate a part-time or night division but that the School would be a full-time operation of superior quality. To a question from the Board of Bar Examiners as to whether the new School would comply with the American Bar Association Standards for Accreditation of Law Schools, the Dean replied that he was paying no attention to the ABA Standards and said they were too minimal and since they were virtually all quantitative, Villanova would exceed all of ABA minima from the very beginning. Thus, an immediately favorable local climate was created. Professional organizations and influential lawyers and legal educators the Dean used as tools to secure what he believed necessary for his Law School, all to the glory of Villanova. As a result, the School of Law came to be highly regarded by objective observers as “the jewel in Villanova’s crown.”

In no small degree, the prompt accreditation of the School of Law, its early acceptance into membership in the Association of American Law Schools, its being the youngest and first church-related law school to be granted a chapter of the Order of the Coif, its being housed in short order in an attractive and functional new law building, and its remarkably early and steady acquisition of recognition in professional and community circles as a builder of quality lawyers was due to the presence, foresight and indomitable will of Dean Reuschlein. He never laid claim to being among the great teachers of the law, but few, if any students of his would deny his impact upon them and his great accomplishments for his and their School. He earned the respect and admiration of judges and prestigious practitioners who visited the School as lecturers, as participants in forums and seminars and as judges in the appellate court competitions.

His use of friendships with very important people is shown by the appearance of no fewer than eight members of the Supreme Court of the United States as sitting
judges in the Reimel Appellate Court final arguments or as dinner speakers, by Chief Justice Earl Warren and then Senator John F. Kennedy as recipients of honorary degrees at the dedication of Garey Hall and by the presence of Mr. Justice Clark as the principal guest at the later dedication of the addition to Garey Hall. Forum and dinner speakers over the years were significant persons from the Who’s Who of America’s Statesmen and of the American Bar. When something needed doing for the good of the School an influential voice always seemed to respond to the Dean’s persuasive call.

During the first ten years (1953-63), the School of Law was small and intimate, gradually building to a full-time faculty of ten (one of whom served as Assistant Dean), an adjunct faculty of nine, and a student body of 221. Of course, the Dean was the head of the family. While the faculty in meeting assembled played an important role in the formulation of policy decisions, on matters concerning which the Dean felt strongly, his voice came through loud and clear, not lightly to be ignored. When the student body became unduly exercised, a rare circumstance in those early days, the students were quickly brought into line by his compelling words. He never lost sight of his objectives, his orders always being “full speed ahead.” Philosophically, he believed that the faculty and Law School administration knew more about how to operate a law school than did the students. Further, he tended to believe that, in the main, the responsibility of those who came to learn to be lawyers was to respond to the challenges of the program as set before them. Professional dress, professional courtesy and respect, as well as professional responsibility were expected and demanded. Students were to be treated as the adults they were, with respect and with trust, despite his not infrequently stated observation that it is unbelievable the extremes to which law students would go to resist education. The same was expected of them in their relations with fellow students and with the faculty and administration.

The Dean’s principal concerns for the future of the School of Law seemed to be two. First, he was painfully conscious of the competition of schools subsidized by public funds with consequent lower tuition charges. To face this competition, tuition at the Law School was kept at the lowest possible figure with student money used as efficiently as possible. One consequence was that faculty salaries were significantly lower than justice might dictate. It is a tribute to the Dean and his educational philosophy that few, if any, faculty members were lured away to other schools solely for more attractive compensation.

His second great concern was to house law students on campus in a graduate residence where they could become “a community of legal scholars.” Because of the intervening need to enlarge Garey...
The Dean saw no inconsistency between the concept of a community of scholars living together in community and his pervasive aim to train lawyers capable of practicing with high professional skills and standards. He believed that such communal living would produce both highly skilled practitioners and legal scholars and educators. Consistently, in screening applicants for faculty positions emphasis was placed upon a desirable period of prior experience as a practitioner. It is not surprising that few graduates of the School became law teachers. Of the small group that did, most joined law school faculties after having spent a number of years in successful practice.

If the first ten years were years of satisfaction in that the Dean could see the Law School developing along the lines of his vision, there was a change of focus during the latter years of his administration. The world of university and professional education was in ferment. Nationwide, boards of trustees and university and college presidents found themselves more and more called upon to share with their constituencies control of the operations of their institutions. The voices of faculties and students became more audible and often strident while those of presidents and deans were significantly more muted.

Professional organizations of university and law school professors insisted that their members be granted wider participation in the management of the academic institutions with which they were affiliated. Professional accrediting agencies approved, indeed encouraged and adopted requirements for such participation in their standards. Philosophically, the position was taken that the faculty should have primary responsibility for the curriculum, methods of instruction and requirements for graduation and degrees, together with a significant voice in academic appointments, promotion, tenure and decanal selections.

In some institutions, faculties took the position that they were entitled to organize bargaining units and to affiliate with unions of educators. When Dean Reuschlein departed, it was without capitulating. In fact, a respected columnist in the Philadelphia Inquirer, commenting upon Dean Reuschlein’s leaving Villanova, put it that “Harold Gill Reuschlein may well be one of the last of the big-time deans.”

At the time, students were abandoning their quiescence. The military engagement in Vietnam with its conscription of youth, the development of nuclear energy for military purposes with its horrifying possibilities, the disillusionment of
the young with the societal judgments being made by their seniors (Can you really trust anyone over thirty?), the demonstrations by blacks in the south and in northern ghettos and finally the campus unrest leading to strong police action at Kent State, Columbia, California (Berkeley) and other colleges and universities made the task of educating the young more difficult and less pleasant. As the cost of tuition constantly rose, the frustration of students were matched by the frustrations of those endeavoring to govern the campuses. Ultimately, professional associations as well as associations of university administrators agreed that the governance of institutions of higher learning was the joint responsibility of the major elements of the academic community: governing boards, administrators, faculties and students.

While student demonstrations on the Villanova campus during this period were relatively peaceful and the School of Law experienced virtually none of the campus unrest, attitudes were nonetheless changing and long established relationships between the dean and the student body and between the dean and the faculty were affected. The Dean in his column in *The Docket* ("As I See It") in the Winter Issue (1970), addressed the question of student participation in governance: "Just how can student participation in governance improve the quality of law schools?,” to which he responded in part, "I think the whole business is a rather dismal business, absorbing a great deal of precious time, involving the exercise of the least praiseworthy talents of students and faculty carrying forward to a kind of intellectual suffocation." The Dean observed that "governance may be such a preoccupation of the many as to stifle the scholarly business of a law school." Having expressed such misgivings, he advised: "Let's all have fun as we experiment — but let's not kid ourselves."

During 1968, the Dean took a sabbatical semester and taught Corporations
and Jurisprudence at the Law School of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. On his return he concentrated his activities on the drive to enlarge Garey Hall. With faculty participation he worked out the design to complete the quadrangle, marshalled the necessary forces to secure the project's financial backing and drove to the completion of the construction so that, when dedicated in April, 1972, he could by September of that year retire from the deanship and proceed to Saint Mary’s University in San Antonio to become for the next 12 years the Katherine Ryan Distinguished Professor of Law. His last great design for the School of Law had been accomplished with the dedication of the new wing with the Cardinal Archbishop of Philadelphia blessing the structure, and the naming of the enlarged law library after his old friend and associate, Dr. Arthur Clement Pulling. The presence of Justice Tom C. Clark of the Supreme Court of the United States (ret.), and the presence of President Robert Meserve of the American Bar Association and of distinguished legal scholars again exemplified his touch, so evident during his regime, of bringing the noteworthy members of the legal establishment to the School.

Much of Dean Reuschlein’s contribution to legal education may be found in his 25 years' service in the educational surveillance activities of the American Bar Association. He served for 20 consecutive years in the work of the American Bar Association’s Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, variously as Chairman of the Section, as long time member of the Council of the Section, as member and for four years as Chairman of the Section’s Committee on Accreditation and Approval of Law Schools. His was largely the impetus leading to the promulgation of the present set of Standards for the Accreditation of Law Schools. He took great satisfaction in his role in founding in 1970 the now highly regarded Annual Workshop for Law School Deans and his long service in the work of inspecting and evaluating performance of scores of law schools.

At Villanova University, as an accomplished musician, he left a much appreciated legacy in the Villanova Singers, the University’s highly regarded male choral group which he founded in 1953. Testimony to his services to academia is witnessed by the six doctorates honoris causa conferred upon him.

For his services to his Church, two Popes have honored him with Knighthood in the Order of Saint Gregory the Great and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

In all the Dean’s efforts, Mrs. Reuschlein was a much-loved participant. The great and near great who visited the School of Law were invariably housed and dined by the Dean’s gracious lady and generations of students and alumni frequented the Reuschlein home on Spruce Lane in Villanova.

Dean Reuschlein’s portrait graces the wall of the main corridor of Garey Hall, opposite the Dean’s office, the gift of the Class of 1959. Of more importance, his powerful personality has been indelibly etched upon the minds of more than 1000 alumni who passed through the School while he served as Dean. To that group of alumni and to some 39 full-time faculty members with whom he had been associated, Harold Gill Reuschlein, teacher, administrator, promoter and academic politician will always be the Dean and the Villanova School of Law will always be his Law School.