

Drawing on—Even Dwelling in—the Past

I spend a good deal of my time, figuratively speaking, in Sensenbrenner Hall, the home of the Law School from 1924 until 2010. Sensenbrenner Hall was a modest place in most respects, yet solid in the way that old academic buildings often are, and I never have doubted its longtime suitability, its success, as a place for serious study. The reason for my own dwelling on it still is that, even from our impressive newer quarters, much of my work as dean involves engagement with Marquette lawyers who received their legal education in Sensenbrenner Hall.

So naturally I remember and reflect. For example, I was deeply impressed this past June when Dean H. Dietrich took the oath as president of the State Bar of Wisconsin. He noted in his inaugural address that he was the fourth member of Marquette Law School's Class of 1977 to do so, succeeding as state bar president his classmates John R. Decker, 1990–1991, Steven R. Sorenson, 1997–1998, and Patricia K. Ballman, 2002–2003. And when a nonlawyer friend in Florida recently left the Law School a seven-figure scholarship bequest, it was explicitly a tribute to her late father's estimation of his Marquette Law School education in the 1940s—and the opportunities that it provided for a successful career for him and, thus, particular educational opportunities for his daughter.

Those of us in the law regularly look to the past. I have come to tell our graduates in our commencement ceremony that “memory is especially important in our profession,” and I quite embrace the explication by Judge Gerard E. Lynch, in his deeply learned Hallows Lecture in this magazine issue, that in our legal system “[t]he past . . . is never entirely past.” Those largely are substantive observations about the law, not some mere atmospheric, and it is not a statement that all of our memories or legacies are happy ones.



Aerial view of 11th St. and Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, 1935, looking southwest (law school building, later named Sensenbrenner Hall, at corner).

In his Hallows Lecture, an annual event named after a Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice who served on our faculty (1930–1958) before taking the bench and becoming known for developments in the law, Judge Lynch was discussing legal doctrine. Similarly (in terms of the connection to doctrine), the docket for our first-year students once again, as in every fall since 1892, has included Torts and Contracts, albeit with rather evolved syllabi. The abiding presence of such legal foundations, wherever one studies, is not a weakness but a strength of our form of education.

Sensenbrenner Hall still stands, now as the home of Marquette University's history department and the dean's office of the Klingler College of Arts and Sciences. The 1968 and 1984 additions are gone, as are separate buildings that once stood to the south, as shown in the photograph from 1935 accompanying this column. Those included what we long knew as O'Hara Hall, home of the university president's office from 1939 until 2010, and the buildings, including several

private residences, on Tory Hill, visible in the upper left-hand corner of the photograph.

In that latter area, of course, today stands Eckstein Hall, our home since 2010, widely praised for its design. Its exterior is, as promised during the planning more than a decade and a half ago, noble, bold, harmonious, dramatic, confident, slightly willful, and, in a word, great. Its interior, also as promised, is not only open to the community but also conducive to a sense of community.

When we moved from the one building to the other, we carried with us the Marquette University mission—succinctly stated as Excellence, Faith, Leadership, and Service—and we carved the words over the fireplace in Eckstein Hall's Aitken Reading Room as a visible commitment. Some of the forms whereby we serve that mission have changed in the last 13 years, or earlier, but the mission has not. It is timeless—even placeless.

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