

George Currie, Teacher

*A Statement of Tribute from the
Law School of the University of Wisconsin*

G. W. Foster, Jr.

On Thursday, October 18, 1984, the Wisconsin Bar Foundation presented to the Wisconsin Supreme Court an official portrait of the late Chief Justice George R. Currie. In a ceremony before the Court itself, memorial statements were made by Attorney Robert L. Rohde (on behalf of Chief Justice Currie's former law firm at Sheboygan); by Professor G. W. Foster, Jr., (on behalf of the Law School of the University of Wisconsin where Justice Currie had taught after leaving the Wisconsin Supreme Court); by Attorney Thomas G. Ragatz (on behalf of the Currie family); and by Chief Justice Nathan P. Heffernan (on behalf of the Court). The formal presentation of the Currie portrait itself was made by Attorney Rodney O. Kittelsen, President of the Wisconsin Bar Foundation.

Bill Foster's statement recalls a notable event in George Currie's career as a Professor of Law at the University of Wisconsin and the statement is set forth below.

I am both flattered by, and profoundly grateful for, the invitation to speak here on behalf of the Law School of the University of Wisconsin in the memory of Professor George Currie.

George Currie was one of the heroes of my life and I count it as one of my greatest blessings that I knew him for more than a quarter of a century.

Thus I shared with many the sense of shock that he had failed in his bid for reelection to the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in the 1967 Spring elections. Riding to work at the Law School with my colleague, Frank Remington, the morning following the election, the two of us quickly concluded that we should try to pick George up as a member of the faculty when he stepped from the Court the

next January. Entering the lobby of the law building, we ran into Dick Effland, another colleague, and learned at once that he, quite independent of us, had reached the same conclusion concerning George.

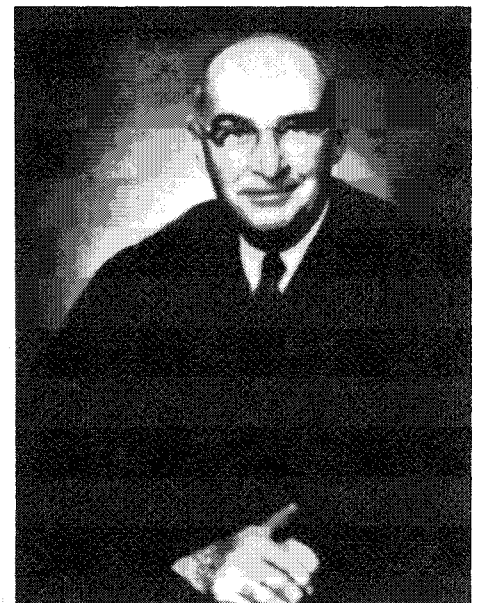
Soon thereafter, we descended on George Young, then Dean of the Law School, and he cheered the suggestion. Within hours, we had the essential—and enthusiastic—support of our faculty colleagues, of Bob Fleming, then the Chancellor of the Madison Campus, and of Fred Harrington, the University's President.

In January 1968, George joined us as a Visiting Professor. As a member of the Court he had occasionally helped us as a classroom lecturer but even with that experience, his teaching got off to a somewhat rough start.

For one thing, the times themselves were turbulent and student challenges to what they saw as The Establishment were nearly constant and occurred in almost every form imaginable, in class and out.

The faculty, too, heard complaints about George as a teacher. Some of the complaints also reached George and he was too acute and caring to be insensitive toward them. Those of us who had particularly championed him for a teaching role sought to remain outwardly confident that the problems would be short-lived and—happily—we can demonstrate with almost mathematical precision that George soon succeeded in establishing himself as a great and respected teacher.

My particular proof for this, however, I did not learn of until several years after he had retired from teaching. And the story I learned from George. He was, as those who knew him were aware, a very



Chief Justice George R. Currie.
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private man in so many respects. And an exceptionally modest one. But in what for him must have been a less guarded moment than usual, he let the story slip.

The University campus at Madison was a particularly turbulent place in the Spring of 1969. George had a large class in Civil Procedure II at the time and this was his third semester with us. One of the students in the class—Sherwood Malamud—approached George at the close of one of the last class meetings and requested that a few minutes be relinquished to him at the beginning of the next class session. The request was troublesome because there had been class disruptions, some of them nasty and difficult to stop. And George's concerns weren't lessened by the student's adamant refusal to explain the purpose for which the relinquished time was sought. As they reached a point of almost certain impasse, the student found a solution.

"Professor Currie," he said, "I give you my word of honor that if you allow us this time, nothing will happen to make you or the University embarrassed or ashamed."

That got George. "Very well," he said, "I will accept your word."

As the next class commenced, there was the student, right up front. Through the doors behind him came other students bearing a proclamation which was then presented to George.

Here is what the proclamation said:

Whereas George Currie prepared his classes to a degree unknown before to man or student;

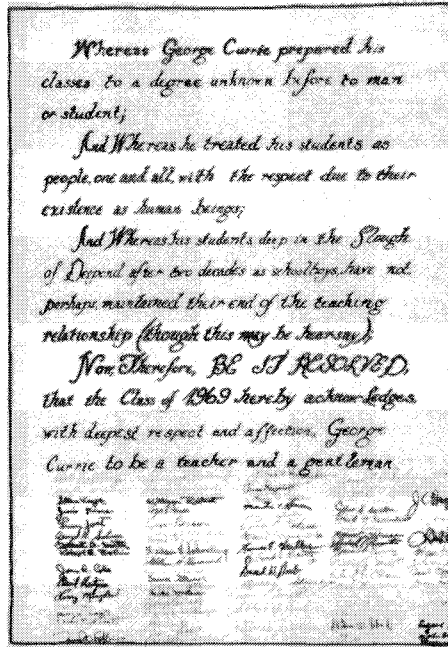
And Whereas he treated his students as people, one and all, with the respect due to their existence as human beings;

An Whereas his students, deep in the Slough of Despond after two decades as schoolboys, have not, perhaps, maintained their end of the teaching relationship (though this may be hearsay);

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Class of 1969 hereby acknowledges, with deepest respect and affection, George Currie to be a teacher and a gentleman.

Here is the proclamation itself, signed by 83 students. Nearly all the signers were enrolled in the Civil Pro II class, though few others in the Law Class of 1969 apparently got wind of the proclamation and added their names to it.

Telling me the story years later, George was quite visibly moved. And when, still later, I mentioned the story at a Law Faculty meeting, it was evident that—proud as George had been of this—he had appar-



Who Signed?

Robert S. Apfelberg	Charles Leveque
Martha V. Bablitch	Sherwood Malamud
Robert F. Bellin	Lawrence A. Margoles
George W. Benson	Perry Lee Margoles
Richard A. Berthelsen	Richard S. Marshall
William J. Bethune	George McCowan
Robert M. Boeke	William C. Mohrman
Richard J. Boynton	James Calfee Munson
Arthur William Brill	David Wallace Neeb
Eugene J. Brookhouse	Michael Keefe Nolan
William Ulick Burke	John Eugene Nugent
Steven Eugene Cherry	Richard John Olson
Steven J. Cohen	Joseph E. O'Neill
James Ray Cole	Joel R. Oppenheim
James Henry Connors	James L. Pflasterer
Jeremy Blake Crane	Richard Jay Podell
Kenneth Asher Dean	Edward Pribble
Steven C. Dille	Gerald Henry Rammer
Anthony Eric Dombrow	William Gene Retert
James M. Du Rocher	David Willis Robbins
Neil D. Eisenberg	Paul Edwin Root
Myron Lloyd Erickson	Michael H. Salinsky
William P. Fallon	William H. Schmelling
Edward Garvey	Michael D. Schmitz
William A. Gennrich	Randall E. Schumann
Heiner Giese	Diana Rich Segal
Conrad G. Goodkind	John Skilton
Robert John Grady	Delbert D. Smith
Paul Grimstead	George H. Solveson
John Roger Guiles	Erwin H. Steiner
R. B. Hammerstrom	James Paul Stouffer
David Klay Heitzman	Sandra Marie Stuller
Martin E. Henner	W. T. Terwilliger
Roger Loren Imes	Ronald I. Weisbrod
Henry William Ipsen	James Edison Welker
William D. Johnston	Charles R. Wilson, Jr.
Larry J. Jost	Joseph M. Wilson.
Juris Kins	
Harry W. Knight, Jr.	
Ellen M. Kozak	
Richard A. Kranitz	
F. David Krizesky	
Edward G. Krueger, Jr.	
Gerald William Laabs	
John Mitchell Leonard	
James Hiram Lesar	

ently told very few of us about it.

Yet that this was for George a special moment in his memorable life can also be demonstrated with considerable precision. When, a few weeks back, I asked George's daughter, Mrs. Ann Roberts, if she knew about the proclamation and whether it still existed, the answer to both questions was an immediate yes and she has generously permitted us to see it here today.

The law faculty concurs in what the students in 1969 said of George Currie. And the students and faculty alike, I believe, would also concur that his quick intelligence, wise understanding, and gentle decency enriched us all. We miss him.