

Edwin Hamlin Woodruff

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EDWIN HAMLIN WOODRUFF

Edwin Hamlin Woodruff, Professor of Law Emeritus, died at Ithaca on July 8th. Professor Woodruff was associated with Cornell University throughout the greater portion of his active life. He graduated from the Law School with its first class in 1888. After two years as instructor in English at Cornell, and one year as librarian of the Fiske Library, Florence, Italy, and after serving as librarian from 1891 to 1896 and as acting professor of law from 1893 to 1896 at Leland Stanford University, he returned to Cornell as professor of law and served it continuously until his retirement in 1927. He was dean of the faculty of law from 1916 to 1921.

After his retirement, his mind was constantly upon the Law School, but, with determination, he disassociated himself physically from it. His counsel was repeatedly sought by subsequent administrations, but it always had to be obtained at his home.

To the teaching profession and to law students at many institutions other than Cornell he was known as the editor of case books on contracts, quasi contracts, domestic relations, and insurance. These collections, first prepared between 1894 and 1905, had a long and extensive popularity, calling for successive editions, a fourth edition of Cases on Contracts in 1925, and a third edition of Quasi Contracts in 1933. They demonstrated Woodruff's rare scholarship and also his understanding of the practical needs of the student. They marked a departure from the earlier Harvard case books in that Woodruff selected and presented for study the most recent significant American decisions. The importance of the historical development of a doctrine was not ignored, and when that was not expounded in his selection of opinions from recent decisions, he revealed and explained it in his footnotes. Very early in his career Woodruff wrote a masterful essay on "Chancery in Massachusetts," published in Volume V of the LAW QUARTERLY REVIEW, in 1889. In 1898, he published his Introduction to the Study of Law.

His theory of law teaching combined the disciplinary with the informational methods, taking advantage of the best features of each and avoiding the weaknesses of both. Though he attached first importance to the student's need for mental discipline, he was practical and did not hesitate occasionally to substitute the lecture for the discussion, when he felt that certain parts of his courses justified the adoption of the former as a more

effective method of widening the horizon of the student's information. Irresistibly and with aptness, drawing upon his extraordinary erudition in many fields of knowledge, he gave his students a liberal education. His meticulously lucid expositions were lightened with a sparkling wit. His understanding of human nature gave him patience and perseverance in the classroom and instilled a confidence that drew students to his office and to his home for advice.

He charmed all with the brilliance of his conversation, which was rooted in a culture of exceptional breadth but inevitably punctuated with humor. Modest, and escaping publicity, he thrived on intimate contacts. Of these, he had an over-supply in the local friends and the stream of returning alumni who sought him out, and in an active correspondence with distinguished persons about decisions, politics, and books.

Having devoted his life to Cornell and to his students, he symbolized the Cornell Law School in the minds of those who graduated from it during the period of his service as professor and dean. Few teachers of any time or place have been so richly rewarded with the admiration and the affection of his students and his colleagues as was Woodruff.

Tributes to Professor Woodruff upon the occasion of his retirement from the Faculty of Law, tendered by President Farrand, Judge Pound, and others of his former associates and students, are recorded in Volume XIII of the QUARTERLY, known as the Edwin Hamlin Woodruff Volume.