

1979

J. Westwood Smithers

William S. Cudlipp Jr.
University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/lawreview>



Part of the [Legal Biography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

William S. Cudlipp Jr., *J. Westwood Smithers*, 14 U. Rich. L. Rev. 7 (1979).
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/lawreview/vol14/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Richmond Law Review by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

J. WESTWOOD SMITHERS

*William S. Cudlipp, Jr.**

I first became acquainted with J. Westwood Smithers in the fall of 1929 when he entered the law school as a student in what was the morning division. I was then in my second year, but due to the small number which comprised the student body and the limited library facilities at that time, not many newcomers remained strangers for long, and West, as he came to be known, was certainly no exception.

His outstanding accomplishments as a student are well documented, but the strongest verification of his capabilities is supplied by his appointment as a full-time member of the faculty immediately after he was awarded his law degree in 1932. The significance of this appointment is underscored by the full-blown depression existing at the time and the number of experienced law teachers who would have been quite happy to accept the assignment.

Dr. Walter S. McNeill, generally conceded to be the most illustrious of all who served on the faculty of the law school, had offered the course in Criminal Law for almost twenty-five years prior to his untimely death in November, 1930. Although not his immediate successor, West's treatment of that basic course for first-year students soon exhibited qualities which clearly demonstrated that he was a worthy successor to that great teacher.

He was equally effective in the presentation of other courses assigned to him, including Agency, Domestic Relations and Legal Ethics, but he found Conflict of Laws most stimulating and succeeded in having the semester hours allotted to it increased from two to four. This preference was fostered and fortified when, as a research fellow at Harvard Law School during the 1935-36 session he had direct contact with Dr. Joseph H. Beale, who undoubtedly was the foremost authority in that field.

After his return from service as an officer in the Naval Reserve, in 1947, when William T. Muse was appointed to succeed Dean Doubles, West took over and has continued, to the present, the conduct of the Bar Review course, sometimes rather appropriately

* LL.B., University of Richmond, 1931; Adjunct Professor of Law Emeritus, T.C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond.

called the "coach class," designed to provide supplemental instruction for aspirants for admission to the Virginia Bar. A host of lawyers, including many who obtained their degrees from other law schools, freely acknowledge that the instruction under his tutelage contributed to their success in passing the bar.

In the spring of 1958, the initial issue of the *University of Richmond Law Notes*, sponsored by the faculty and devoted to Virginia law, was distributed to the alumni. The first six issues of this publication, the forerunner of this Law Review, was edited by Smithers, who also contributed four articles for inclusion therein.

Having yielded in 1960 to the call to become a member of Richmond's City Council, and having accepted the position of Executive Director of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association in 1962, West was constrained to leave the faculty in 1964 and enter the practice of law. In 1970 he was persuaded to return, primarily to conduct the course in Virginia Practice left open by the retirement of Professor Ellsworth Wiltshire. After his return, Torts also was added to his teaching assignment.

In his long and distinguished career as a member of the law faculty, Westwood Smithers has been a strong advocate of modifications in the curriculum and in academic policies which he believed essential because of changes in juridical concepts, influenced wholly or partially by altered economic and social conditions. His counsel in this area also will be missed.

My colleague has reached the unenviable point when he must join others of us who have had "Emeritus" added as a suffix to the designation "Professor." Nevertheless, as he noted recently at a dinner tendered in his honor by his law fraternity, Phi Alpha Delta, he will pursue his function as a practicing attorney and his teaching activities in connection with the Bar Review. No one who has had the good fortune to be associated with him can doubt that he will have continued success in both of these endeavors.