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BOOK REVIEW

THE VIRGINIA LAW REPORTERS BEFORE 1880. Edited by W. Hamilton Bryson. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia. 1977. pp. 127. \$9.75.

*Reviewed by McDonald Wellford**

The Virginia Bench and Bar are uniquely fortunate in having the early *corpus juris* of the Commonwealth as recorded in *Colonial Decisions*, *Virginia Decisions* and the *Virginia Reports*. Due to the documents of our nation's birth students of history are fully aware of Virginia's contribution to the establishment of our country. Relatively few individuals, however, recognize the significant contributions made by several of the authors of these documents toward compiling and recording for posterity the decisions of the Commonwealth's highest court.

Colonial Decisions and the early *Virginia Reports* were prepared from the personal notes which an attorney made for his own professional use. Who were these men, what was their background, were they practicing attorneys and, if so, how successful were they in the profession? There were no standards for reporting a case, variances existed in interests and points of view, and in many instances there are no headnotes to the reported cases. How competent and accurate were these reporters and to what extent can we rely on the record which they made?

The Virginia Law Reporters Before 1880 has in large measure answered these questions for us. The book contains biographical sketches of twenty-one law reporters prepared by seventeen competent authorities. It is itself a useful reference anthology and a worthwhile addition to the law library of any practicing attorney. The small volume is well conceived. The sketches are interesting and informative but merit the inclusion of an index which is not supplied. It would also have been a pleasant addition if likenesses of the reporters had been included.

As illustrative of the standing of the court reporters, mention might be made of the *Virginia Reports*, Volumes 1 and 2, which were the work of Bushrod Washington. Washington was the nephew and heir of George Washington, a member of the House of Delegates, a delegate to the State Ratification Convention which adopted the United States Constitution in 1789 and for thirty-one years an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Other Virginia Law Reporters who labored long and

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hard at their arduous tasks include George Wythe, the first law professor in America, Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, Charles Lee, United States Attorney General, members of the General Assembly of Virginia, Judges of the General Court of Virginia, of the Supreme Court of Appeals and of the United States District Court.

A Table of the Editions of the *Virginia Reports* is included in Appendix I giving the standard renumbering of the Reports, the original volume number, the standard abbreviation of the volume, the city of publication, the publisher and the date of publication. A brief history of the Advance Sheets in Virginia is included as Appendix II.

The editor of the volume and author of three of the sketches is William Hamilton Bryson. Bryson graduated from Hampden Sydney College and received his LL.B. from Harvard Law School, his LL.M. from the University of Virginia Law School and his Ph.D. in Legal History from Cambridge University. He is the author of *Interrogatories and Depositions in Virginia* published by the Michie Company in 1969, and has been teaching courses in Legal History, Virginia Procedure and Equity at the University of Richmond Law School since 1973. Both in training and aptitude, Mr. Bryson is well qualified to have edited *The Court Reporters in Virginia Before 1880*.