

Winter 1982

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Recommended Citation

David K. Hardy, *William L. Eckhardt in the 1960s*, 47 MO. L. REV. (1982)
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/mlr/vol47/iss1/15>

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WILLARD L. ECKHARDT IN THE 1960s

DAVID K. HARDY*

I respond gladly to the invitation to pay tribute to Willard Eckhardt in this special dedication issue of the Law Review.

For more than forty years, he has served the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law, its students, and its graduate attorneys with a very deep devotion. Indeed, his vocation is also an avocation and a focal point of his life.

When Professor Eckhardt came to the University of Missouri in 1938, my father was a second year law student. Twenty years later, when I was thinking of college and law school, Dad began telling me about Willard Eckhardt and the law school in Columbia. The two have been as one in my mind since my high school days. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, I heard countless stories, tales, and anecdotes involving Professor Eckhardt—initially from my father and his attorney-friends, later from my college fraternity brothers and friends who preceded me in law school. By the time I entered the law school in 1964, it had become established fact in my mind that Professor Eckhardt was a superb teacher, the ultimate source of all wisdom in the field of real property, and a living legend. So often great expectations lead to disappointment, but not in this instance. To the contrary, my own law school experiences confirmed those “established facts,” and in the years since my graduation, I have learned that the list is longer. Willard Eckhardt is a true and loyal friend to innumerable attorneys throughout Missouri, and he was a fine dean, increasing the strength and reputation of the law school, its student body, and its faculty.

I confess to an initial lack of interest in property courses. After all, I was to be a litigator, so Torts and Evidence were to be my bread and butter courses, rather than Conveyances, Future Interests, and Mortgages. But even now, fifteen years after my graduation, the courses that stand out most vividly in my mind are those I took from Professor Eckhardt. I was fascinated from the first day of Conveyances. Why? Because I had no choice. Willard Eckhardt called on me regularly, constantly. I learned . . . and learned . . . and learned because he quizzed me repeatedly. I prepared for his class as a matter of course because I knew I would be on the “hot seat.” Surely no law student could miss the fact that Professor Eckhardt was everywhere at once—in the library, in the halls of the law school, in attendance at faculty-student meetings and social functions. When it was time to prepare for the bar examination, Professor Eckhardt’s review course was a veritable explo-

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sion of information. You listened to the man, and “presto,” you were prepared. This can’t be literally true; it just seems that way to me. It is literally true that the first lawsuit I handled following graduation, the first deposition I took, the first pleadings I drafted, were all related to real property problems involving conveyances and future interests. The research was prepared before the case arose because I had my notes from Professor Eckhardt’s classes.

In the early 1970s when I interviewed second and third year law students at Columbia on behalf of my law partners, Dean Eckhardt was always available and always delighted to discuss the law school, its needs, its goals, its accomplishments.

My experience and attitude are not unique. Willard Eckhardt will retire, but he will remain a critical part of the law school’s image in the eyes of attorneys and educators everywhere.