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Third Time's the Charm: The History of the Merger Between the University of Louisville and Jefferson Schools of Law

Marcus Walker

University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandeis School of Law, marcus.walker@louisville.edu

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Third Time's the Charm

Marcus Walker

If you are the slightest bit interested in the history of the University of Louisville School of Law, then you likely know about the merger with Jefferson School of Law in 1950. Yet you may not be aware there were at least two previous efforts at consolidating the schools, the first coming after just Jefferson's third year of existence.

On June 22, 1908, the *Courier-Journal* reported that the faculty of the Law Department of the University of Louisville, Dean W.O. Harris, Emmett Field, and Charles B. Seymour, resigned so the University Board of Trustees "might not be hampered" in pursuing a merger with Jefferson. However, nearly three weeks later discussions were called off, and not only did Harris, Field, and Seymour resume their roles, the number of professors more than doubled to seven.

The proposed combination of Jefferson and Louisville in 1918 was not originally intended to be permanent, but instead a means to allow both schools to continue operating through the First World War. Unfortunately, enrollment remained low, and the joint session was cancelled, with Louisville shifted its role to handling the needs of the Student Army Training Corps, while Jefferson suspended its program for the year altogether. In April 1919, University Board of Trustees President A.Y. Ford suggested a full unification of the schools, but the offer was rejected by the Jefferson faculty, determining that such a union "would impose on the instructors more labor than they would be willing to undertake." Although Ford was acting on the possibility that Jefferson would not resume operations, the closing might well have had a significant impact on the night school's future: prior to the war, Jefferson had begun offering the LL.M. – a degree the University's Law Department did not provide – but did not restart the program afterward.

Despite the lengthier history of the University of Louisville, at the time of the above attempts, the two law programs were essentially peer institutions: While accreditation had begun, it had yet to take a prominent role in legal education. Similarly, although the Louisville program consisted of mostly of dedicated legal professors rather than practicing lawyers as did Jefferson, this distinction was not considered an indication of program quality; in fact, Jefferson touted their faculty's practical knowledge as a benefit for their matriculants.

But by the time of the third consolidation, the landscape of legal education had changed significantly. The University of Louisville School of Law program had been approved by both the ABA and AALS for nearly two decades, and though graduating from a nationally accredited law school was not required to practice law in Kentucky, that would soon to come to an end. While Louisville was initially more eager to reduce Jefferson's student enrollment "to a trickle" by opening a competing evening program, sensibilities changed after the Jefferson School administration approached the Louisville Law School about a merger. The University of Louisville Board of Trustees approved of the consolidation during its April 19, 1950 meeting, making the past students of Jefferson both School of Law and University alumni.

Yet even that was not quite the end of the Jefferson School of Law. Indeed, the original plan was to terminate Jefferson with the establishment of the evening program at Louisville, with then-current Jefferson enrollees becoming University of Louisville Law School students. A snag, however, came in the difference in tuition – Jefferson had charged \$150 per year, while the University of Louisville proposed a cost of \$225 per year to equalize the night tuition with that of the day program.

In order to maintain goodwill, and with the approval of the ABA, the Jefferson School of Law was allowed to teach its second- and third-year students in the University's School of Law building, with only the incoming evening class being taught by the University of Louisville law faculty (and charged the higher rate). Hence the final Jefferson class graduated – and the school truly ceased to be – in Spring 1952.

Marcus Walker is the librarian in charge of the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law Archives. He maintains, curates, and seeks historical material for both the University of Louisville and Jefferson schools of law, and is happy to help with research about the alumni or the history of either school. ■



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MEMBER NEWS

Wyatt's Softball Team Claims Title

Wyatt Tarrant & Combs' Louisville co-ed softball team claimed the title of Louisville Softball Champions after victories against Judge Holton's Dirty Dawgs in the finals, and Phillips Parker Oberson and Arnett in the semifinals.

The members of the Wyatt Team are pictured at right with the Louisville trophy.



LBA Retains President's Cup

In a decisive 24-12 victory over the Cincinnati Bar Association, the LBA retained possession of the President's Cup trophy for another year. This was the eleventh time the two bar associations have squared off in the friendly Ryder Cup-style golf match. Over the years, the LBA has won six times and the CBA has won four times; one match ended in a tie. In addition to bragging rights, the winning teams gets to display the trophy in its bar center until the next match.

Members of Team LBA are pictured below with the President's Cup trophy.



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