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Albert Coates

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II. THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF LAW IN THE MODERN ERA

The War and the Postwar Era: 1945-1964

THE WAR YEARS:
THE DEANSHIP OF ROBERT HASLEY WETTACH (1941-49)[†]

ALBERT COATES
(1968)

*Albert Coates was born on August 25, 1896, in Smithfield, near Johnston County, North Carolina. He attended the public schools in Smithfield, obtained his undergraduate education at the University of North Carolina, and his legal education at Harvard Law School. He joined the faculty of the University of North Carolina School of Law in 1923, and remained a member of that faculty for forty-five years, until his retirement in 1967. He died in 1989. Coates, and his wife Gladys Hall Coates, are best known as the founders of the Institute of Government at UNC. Coates also was a memorable teacher of criminal law, municipal corporations, legislation, and family law. He sought to bridge the gap between "classroom and courtroom, law school and law office, law teacher and lawyer." He was concerned that law students often "learned the words, but didn't learn the tune," and emphasized that "learning the tune" is vital to legal education. Albert and Gladys Coates also were fine historians. Together, they worked on many important books recounting the history of UNC and related topics. When the law school dedicated its new building, Van Hecke-Wettach Hall, Coates authored *The Story of the Law School at the University of North Carolina*, which appeared as a special issue of volume 47 of the *North Carolina Law Review*. Chapters V and VI of that issue are excerpted in the following pages.*

[†] Reprinted from Albert Coates, *The Story of the Law School at the University of North Carolina*, 47 N.C. L. REV., Oct. 1968 Special Issue, ch. V.

Robert Hasley Wettach came to the deanship of the University of North Carolina Law School in 1941, after having served on its faculty for twenty years. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1891, graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with the degree of A.B. in 1913, M.A. in 1914, and LL.B. in 1917, practiced law in 1919-20, and took the graduate degree of S.J.D. from the Harvard Law School in 1921. He became Assistant Professor of Law in the University of North Carolina in 1921, Associate Professor in 1938-39, Professor in 1940, and Dean of the Law School in 1941, at the age of 49.

Starting with McGehee and McIntosh and working through the administrations of successive deans, Dean Wettach acquainted himself with the problems of legal education in North Carolina and throughout the country, and united in his experience the old law school traditions with the new. His work with Bar Association committees, with state commissions such as the Commission to Revise the Insurance Laws (of which he was Chairman), with the Attorney General's office, and with the National Textile Labor Relations Board and the National War Labor Board, gave him a practical awareness of the problems of the legal profession.

Coming events were already foreshadowed when Dean Wettach came into the deanship in June, 1941. During depression years, the student body had fluctuated from 95 to 131, with an average attendance of 110 from 1931 to 1941. During the school year 1941-42, many students volunteered or were called for active military service and enrollment dropped to 21 in 1942 and to 13 in 1943. As for the faculty, Professor Brandis enlisted in the Navy in 1942, completing his service with the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. Professor Hanft enlisted in the Army in 1943, was assigned to military government, and completed his service with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Professor Van Hecke became Chairman of the Fourth Regional War Labor Board in 1942; and Professor Dalzell served as Assistant to the Solicitor of the United States Department of the Interior in 1943. Professor Coates was given part-time leave to act as Director of Training for the Office of Civilian Defense in North Carolina. Dean Wettach was left with three associates to keep the Law School in operation, to maintain a standard three-year curriculum, to handle the administrative duties of his office, to serve as faculty editor of the Law Review, and to make plans for post-war expansion.

Students and Faculty

From the ebb of 13 in 1943 the student body steadily increased to 16 in the fall of 1944, to 42 in the fall of 1945, to 113 in the spring of 1946, to 149 in the summer of 1946, to 221 in the fall of 1946, and to 288 in 1949.

Along with the return of the student body, Dean Wettach saw the core of the old faculty returning to the Law School—from 7 in 1941 to 11 in 1949. This included Wettach himself, Van Hecke, McCall, Coates, Breckenridge, Hanft, Dalzell, Brandis, and Miss Elliott as Librarian, and he added Baer and Aycock in post-war years. Coates began work with the North Carolina Bar Association in organizing and conducting refresher courses for members of the bar returning from military service, and served on the legislative study commission on Private, Social and Special Legislation, directing research. Wettach served as Chairman of the Commission to revise the Insurance laws for the General Assembly of North Carolina. Hanft was appointed to the General Statutes Commission. Van Hecke prepared the revision of the 4th edition of Cook's *Cases on Equity* and served on the Voluntary Arbitration Panel of the United States Department of Labor. Brandis served on the North Carolina Bar Association Committee for Improving and Expediting the Administration of Justice in North Carolina, started a revision of McIntosh's *North Carolina Practice and Procedure in Civil Cases*, and served as special assistant to Frank Graham as a member of the United Nations Commission on Indonesia.

The Law School student body in 1949 included the largest number of students with the best academic training and the greatest maturity and variety of experience of any student body in the Law School's history. The records show that ninety percent of them had spent from one to five years in the military services: in the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps, the Marines; in North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Sicily, Italy, Austria; in Britain, Ireland, Scotland, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany; in New Britain, Australia, India, Burma, China, Bougainville; in the Philippines, Guadalcanal, Saipan, the Marsall Islands, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

They had come out of service with ranks ranging from Private First Class, Seaman First Class, Electrician's Mate, Technician and Aviation Mechanist through intervening grades to Ensign, Lieutenant, Captain, Lieutenant-Commander, Major, and Lieutenant-Colonel.

They had brought with them arrowheads from every major invasion, service ribbons and battle stars from every major theatre of

operations, Combat Infantryman's Badges and Presidential Citations, the Air Medal, Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Legion of Merit, Silver Star, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, clusters and clusters of clusters, and foreign decorations including the Order de Nassau, Croix de Guerre, and Belgian Fourragere.

They brought to the Law School a spirit and a purpose which was expressed by a member of the Faculty to the class in Criminal Law at the close of the first term of the academic year just ending:

Many people anticipated difficulties of returning veterans in getting down to work. Those difficulties have not appeared in this group. In twenty years of teaching I have never experienced a class of harder working students. To efforts to make the most of your time, you have added efforts to make up for lost time. If you hold to the pace you have set, you will get a proportionately better legal education than any class that has preceded you. You are already setting new standards of performance for future classes and adding new values to Law School traditions of painstaking effort and distinctive workmanship.

Dean Wettach saw the 1949 General Assembly respond to his urging with an appropriation to double the size and facilities of the law building he had inherited in 1941. In short, he turned over the Law School to his successor in 1949 as a going concern with the largest and best equipped faculty, student body, building, and facilities in the hundred and four years of its history.