

From the Oral History of

FRANCES MCGANN MCQUADE

Frances McGann McQuade (1916–2007) commenced work at the new UCLA School of Law in 1949 as secretary to the dean and retired in 1982 as assistant dean for administration.¹

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BERNARD GALM (UCLA ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWER): Mrs. McQuade, before we start getting into the history of the law school, I'd like to ask you something about your personal background. Where were you born?

MCQUADE: I was born in Chicago, but I grew up mainly in New York City, and I graduated from Manhattanville College in New York and from the Katharine Gibbs School, which is really a school for people who have



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¹ For further information, see the Editor-in-Chief's introduction on page 1 of this volume: 11 CAL. LEGAL HIST. 1 (2016).

graduated from college to learn how to be executive secretaries. I married [John J. McQuade], and my husband's business brought him to California.

Shortly after we got to California, I decided I needed to look for a job, came to the university — we were living on the Westside — so I came to the university and came to work for Robert Vosper, who at that time was the associate librarian. And while I was in the library building [later Powell Library], part of that space was allocated to the new dean of the law school for temporary offices. And when he came, who was L. Dale Coffman, he was looking for a secretary, and because I was in the building, I heard about the job and applied for it and was accepted by Dean Coffman. The law school at that time consisted of one large room and one smaller room, and we began interviewing applicants for the law school and trying to set up a law school. He had anticipated that he was going to bring with him from Vanderbilt the woman who had been his administrative assistant, I guess. So he really hadn't too much information about how to set up records, and so on, and I had absolutely none; so it took us a while to get the law school organized, I must say.

GALM: Before we get into that aspect of it, let me just ask you a few questions about things that you may not know firsthand, but perhaps that you know secondhand, or thirdhand. And that has to do with the establishment of the law school itself at UCLA. What is your sense of how it [the allocation bill] got through the [California State] Legislature?

MCQUADE: Well, I know very little about that; not having lived in California, of course, I had no knowledge of the legislative procedures. I believe that present Judge [William] Rosenthal was the one who was instrumental in getting the funds allocated by the Legislature. I really have no idea about the determination of the need for a law school on this campus, or anything of that sort. Clearly by the time that Dean Coffman had come, information had been put out about the opening of the school because candidates were coming to apply, and the [law] library had already started. When the building, a small building, was given to the library, they already had a sizable collection to move in there. And I really have no idea how that all began.

GALM: You had mentioned the library. Do you know whether Dean Coffman appointed the librarian, or was that appointment made before he came?

MCQUADE: There was someone in charge of gathering the collection before he came, but when he came he appointed Thomas Dabagh as the director of the law library. He stayed on for about a year or so, and then he went on to Berkeley to become assistant to the president, I think. Then a man by the name of Louis Piacenza, who Mr. Dabagh had brought in as an assistant, was made law librarian. But Dean Coffman made those appointments.

GALM: Did the law librarian also act as an assistant to Dean Coffman? Was that part of his title or job description?

MCQUADE: I have the feeling that that was the intent when Mr. Dabagh was appointed, but I don't think it actually worked out that way. I think that they were not compatible for that purpose.

GALM: Was there an actual focus of incompatibility?

MCQUADE: Well, I think they just — it was a mutual decision that they just simply weren't getting along.

GALM: Let's get back to the actual physical setting of the [temporary law school quarters] — could you describe just what you had and where it was at?

MCQUADE: It was in what is now Powell Library, and I think it was in the area at that time called Special Collections. It was one room, oh, I don't know, I suppose fifteen by fifteen [feet], let me just say, and then another smaller room adjacent to it, which I used as a kind of a secretarial/reception and general room, and the other room was Dean Coffman's office. I think I went to work for him about in February of 1949, and we were there until June, when a building that was a Quonset hut kind — no, they weren't, they were barracks buildings, they weren't Quonset huts. We were given one of those for a classroom, one of them for the library, and then a half of one that was for the office space. We had faculty offices there, the dean's office, and then a general office, which I occupied. The other half of it was allocated to the personnel office of the campus. And those were all, in very general terms, in the back of Royce Hall, kind of where the humanities building [Rolfe Hall] is now. Subsequently, about two or three years after that, when the faculty got larger, we got another building, some distance away, probably two or three buildings on, for additional faculty offices, until we moved into the permanent building in 1951, I think it was.

GALM: I know you had a bit of trouble with your neighbors there. Can you sort of describe just what that problem was?

MCQUADE: It turned out that the building that was adjacent to the classroom building was the building in which the UCLA Band practiced; and as you may or may not know, law classes consist in large part of discussion between the faculty member teaching the course and the students, and the students with each other, and it's essential that they hear. Well, the band had very little regard for the law school activity, and we had a constant argument with the band people trying to get them to arrange their schedule to suit our time when we weren't having classes. We had many faculty members who would simply walk out of the class and say, "I can't teach." And blow into the dean's office, who would then blow into the — at that time it was a provost and not a chancellor, to his office. So I suppose that blowup took place once a week, and everyone was glad when the football season was over.

GALM: Theater arts was your neighbor, too.

MCQUADE: Yes, they were, and we often saw them out building their sets and wearing their costumes, or lack there of, and that was of great interest to the law students and, I guess, the faculty, too. They were never bored, with one thing or another.

GALM: So actually then, how many classes of students did you have in the barracks?

MCQUADE: Well, in '49 we accepted a first-year class, and their classes were — I think there were about fifty students, and so they all met in one section. It was scheduled so they would have an hour of class, and then an hour off, and then an hour of class. They carried approximately fifteen hours of class; so they met, say, three hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon and five days a week, in general terms.

Then in the second year we accepted another class, so that in 1950 we had a first year and a second year. They met in the alternate hours, so that we were able to manage with one classroom for those two classes. Then when we had a third class, we were in the main building and, of course, then able to have a better schedule.

GALM: How many applicants, do you recall, did you get for the first year?