

**A STUDY OF TAPPING REEVE, FOUNDER
of
THE FIRST AMERICAN LAW SCHOOL**

**AN ABSTRACT OF
A THESIS
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OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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This study discusses the contributions of a single institution and its teachers in the growth of a new nation--the United States. Its founder, Tapping Reeve, known for his aptness in the courtroom as an eloquent lawyer and at the bar as an equitable judge, was famous in his role as educator. Reeve, who was thoroughly acquainted with the science of law, passed his knowledge on to more than one-thousand students who in their time did much to shape the government of a young nation.

Reeve's school, a forerunner of today's law schools, introduced the Moot Court. Through this device the students were given a chance to test their ability of defense in debate as well as their understanding of case judgments.

Reeve also initiated the practice of class lectures. Prior to this time apprentice lawyers merely listened to their sponsor discuss a case with a client. They read material from what was too often a scant, outdated law library and occasionally accompanied practicing lawyers into court. Tapping Reeve's law lectures covered more than thirty topics ranging in subject matter from "Divorce Statutes" to "Law and Merchant." When copied they filled a volume of admirable size. These laboriously copied notes provided each student with a fine law text when he left the Law School to enter into practice.

The growth of the Law School in the late eighteenth century and Tapping Reeve's public appointment as Judge of the Superior Court created the need for another teacher at the school. James Gould, a graduate of Reeve's school in 1798,

was selected for this role which he handled ably until the closing of the school in 1833.

Gould brought organization to the school. Until he became a member of the staff no catalogues were kept of those students who attended the school. Family records and receipt books of student fees were the only means through which Reeve's early students could be identified. Gould also added a formal air to the school. His bearing, so academic and stern, was opposite to that of the paternal Judge.

Those taught by the Judge during this second phase of the school's existence left the school thoroughly versed in law, and in many cases with a thorough knowledge of the Bible. The kindly Judge often quoted the scriptures in informal discussions with the boys. His very bearing was that of a truly humble man who had found his relationship with God to be good. Finding this for himself led him to try to do the same for others with sincere, well meaning intent.

Graduates of the tiny, one room school went on to become vice presidents, cabinet members, congressmen, judges, educators, newspaper editors, business tycoons, and ministers. Yale University's law department is an outgrowth of a law school founded in New Haven by one of Reeve's alumnus as are other law departments affiliated with colleges in other parts of the United States.

The school may not have been a financial success in terms of net profit but those listed as its alumni might be termed "human profit" reaped by the care and dedication of a man who laid the foundation of law education in America.