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## HENRY WOODS: FOUNDING FATHER

*Robert K. Walsh\**

In the late fall of 1975, I was contacted by faculty and administrators at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) about interviewing to be the first dean of the law school. Earlier in 1975 the Arkansas legislature had transferred governance of the former Little Rock Division of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville School of Law to UALR. After an initial, informal interview with members of the law faculty at a Washington, D.C., law school association meeting, I was asked to come to Little Rock for several days of interviews with university officials, faculty, and key lawyer supporters.

It was on this first visit early in the spring semester of 1976 that I met Henry Woods. He was introduced to me as an outstanding lawyer who had played a key role in the Arkansas legislative action of 1975. I remember sitting down with Henry in the Camelot Hotel. I had lived in Nebraska, California, and Pennsylvania up to that point and had never even been in Arkansas before. I had questions about living in Arkansas and the viability of this new law school venture. Cigar firmly clenched in his mouth, Henry quickly made all my questions disappear with his usual logic, charm, and passion. From that time on, I was certain I wanted the job. Fortunately, I got it.

My next trip to Little Rock was to give a Law Day talk to a local bar group and to look for a house. My wife, Kathie, came with me, and she sat next to Henry Woods at the speakers' table during the evening. All she could talk about when we got back to the hotel room was how wonderful he was.

Particularly during my first year as dean, I needed almost daily advice about who the key players were in Arkansas Bar Association activities and politics. Henry Woods had been the key advisor to Sid McMath when he was governor. Henry performed much the same function for me in my first year as dean. No matter how many times I would call, Henry would always take time to help. He was not only a sage advisor, but also a surrogate father figure. On a personal level, he invited Kathie and me to his home many times. Henry's birthday was St. Patrick's Day. Some of my fondest memories of Arkansas are being at the Woods home on St. Patrick's Day to celebrate Henry's birthday. We sang around the piano and enjoyed his wife Kathleen's beautiful singing voice.

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\* Dean, University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law, 1976–81; Dean, Wake Forest University School of Law, 1989–present.

As a new law school, the UALR School of Law did not have a ready-made law board of visitors. I told Henry that it would be useful to us to have such a board. The group could support the school with the university administration and the legislature and provide input from practicing lawyers as we refined our program. It was Henry's suggestion that we form what was called the Law School's Committee of the Arkansas Bar Association, which eventually visited both law schools in Arkansas once a year. This committee, which consisted of eight past presidents of the Arkansas Bar Association, was a distinguished group with two lawyers from each of the four congressional districts of the state.

In every biennial legislative session when I was dean, the law school had a special legislative project. One important project was to have the UALR School of Law share in the Legal Education Fund filing fee revenue. With the leadership of Senator Max Howell of Jacksonville, a bill to provide seventy-five cents a case to the UALR School of Law was introduced and easily passed the Arkansas Senate. However, in the larger House of Representatives, we ended up just short of the necessary votes to pass the bill. Fortunately, we had a promise from a member of the House who had voted against the bill to bring it up again. Disconsolate, I called Henry from the Capitol Building. I met him downtown half an hour later. He outlined our strategy, and I trailed in his wake as we visited with key people in obtaining support for our bill. Henry was amazing. When we met with someone whose support could clearly mean victory, I well remember starting to explain why the bill was necessary for quality legal education in Arkansas and being interrupted with: "Dean, if Henry says it's a good bill, I am for it. Just give me the bill number." A day or so later, the House overwhelmingly passed the filing fee bill for the UALR School of Law.

Henry came up with many ideas to bring attention to our programs at the law school. Because he was such a nationally prominent trial lawyer, Henry had become chairman and a member of the Board for the Center for Trial and Appellate Advocacy at the Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. One summer he talked the director of the Hastings program into having a week-long continuing legal education program for trial lawyers in Little Rock in conjunction with our law school. Henry also talked two of his closest friends, Bill Wilson and Winslow Drummond, into performing a model closing argument for this program. Bill was his usual down home and country self. When asked by one of the students how he adopted this style, he said, "That's just me. I was born and raised in Waldron, Arkansas, and I am down home and country as a person." Winslow, with his wonderful deep voice, somewhat like James Earl Jones with a Southern accent, retorted: "That's right. You must always be yourself. I could not be like Mr. Wilson, down home and country. And he could not be like me, logical and reasonable." Henry roared. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

If Henry had not been a great trial lawyer and trial judge, he could have been one of the most prominent law faculty members in the history of Arkansas and the nation. He was an adjunct faculty member throughout my deanship. Even when he took the federal bench in 1980, he continued to team-teach products liability with Bill Wilson. Henry was a scholar, too. In 1978 he published the first edition of his treatise on comparative fault. According to our library director, Professor Ruth Brunson, Henry researched the book in the early mornings before going to his law office. It is a classic. I used it when I was in practice in Little Rock from 1981–1989.

As I was preparing this article, I pulled my copy of Henry's treatise down from the shelf and read the graceful personal inscription from Henry. I was touched by his presence again. I would not have progressed in my career and in life without the sage advice and friendship of Henry Woods. Similarly, the UALR School of Law would not be the wonderful place that it is today if Henry Woods had not been a founding father.

