

## **A Lawyer, a President, and a General**

*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. [W]e must respect the past, remembering that it was once all that was humanly possible.*  
– George Santayana

On September 9, 1836, the Illinois Supreme Court granted Abraham Lincoln a license to practice law. Endowed with the gifts of brevity and clarity and a remarkable talent for influencing a jury of twelve, Lincoln had a hand in at least 5,173 cases during his career. He argued hundreds of cases before his own state’s highest court. In 1849, made an appearance in the United States Supreme Court—and lost. A passage from the notes of a lecture he never gave provides insight to his level of dedication to his law practice: “The leading rule for a lawyer is diligence.” Moreover, his work ethic is legendary. In a letter dated September 25, 1860, he responded to an aspiring student’s request for advice:

Yours of the 24th asking “the best mode of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the law” is received. The mode is very simple, though laborious and tedious. It is only to get the books, and read, and study them carefully. . . [but] work, work, work is the main thing.

After being elected President, Lincoln crossed paths with Union General Oliver Otis Howard, a West Point graduate, who in 1862 had lost his right arm in the Battle of Seven Pines at Fair Oaks, Virginia. A relationship developed between the President and Howard, who was often called the “Christian General” because of his zealous evangelism. At one point, Lincoln confided that he would like to do something for the people of Southern Appalachia because of their loyalty to the Union during the Civil War. At the war’s conclusion, Lincoln’s successor,

Tennessee's Andrew Johnson, appointed General Howard as the first and only commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau, an organization designed to facilitate the integration of the freed slaves into American society. In fact, the General is best remembered for his role in the creation of what later became Howard University in Washington, DC, unique in its early years as a college open to students of both sexes and all races. From 1869 through 1874, the General actually served as President of the University and it was during this period that the first free, fully integrated public school, named Chattanooga Howard<sup>1</sup> in his honor, was established in Hamilton County.

Despite his many exploits, including the publication of his autobiography and nine other books, the General did not forget his conversation with the President. In 1896, he embarked on a lecture tour which included a stop at an elementary school in Cumberland Gap. While there, he met with a local minister, Rev. A. A. Myers, about the possibility of establishing a college in the area. Afterward, the General solicited donations sufficient to purchase a failed resort hotel property, and, within a year, Lincoln Memorial University held its first classes. Today, the campus, located adjacent to the Cumberland Gap National Park in the city of Harrogate, consists of over 1,000 acres and boasts the state's largest medical school. The Lincoln Library and Museum houses a huge collection of Lincoln memorabilia which is valued at over 50 million dollars.

Meanwhile, in Knoxville, some fifty miles to the south, merchant Calvin Morgan donated land in 1844 situated at the corner of what is now known as

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<sup>1</sup> The school boasts several noteworthy alumni including the late Reggie White, an All-American at Tennessee and, as the "Minister of Defense," a Hall of Famer in the National Football League. The "Christian General" would have fully endorsed White's unique style of spreading the Gospel.

Broadway and Summit Hill Drive, and the State appropriated funds for the construction of what came to be known as the Tennessee School for the Deaf. The school opened in 1848, but by 1861, Confederate forces converted the school into a hospital. When the South lost Knoxville two years later, the facility became a Union hospital. After the war, the school reopened with the help of another state appropriation and operated at the same site until 1924, when Knoxville acquired the land for its City Hall. The City used this location until 1980, when its offices were moved into the City-County Building, but retained ownership of the buildings, which have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The TVA and then the Knoxville Area Partnership occupied the property for several years until LMU acquired the lease in 2008 in order to open its Duncan School of Law.

So the wish of a President, who had become a lawyer without the benefit of a formal education, and the commitment of a General, determined to make that wish come true, culminated in the establishment of LMU, now 120 years old, and eventually a college of law. Nothing of consequence is easy, however. When denied provisional approval by the American Bar Association on the first try, LMU made the unwise decision to challenge the denial in the federal courts—without success. Enrollment plummeted because the graduating students could not be guaranteed the opportunity to sit for a bar exam outside of Tennessee. The school, mindful of its responsibilities to its students, faculty, and staff, never gave up, and, by 2014, their diligence paid off—the Council of the ABA’s Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar finally said “yes.” One likely reason? The first graduating classes performed admirably on the Tennessee bar exam, out pacing almost all of the state’s accredited schools. The response of the students and faculty to adversity echoed Lincoln’s advice: “Work, work, work, [that] is the main thing”—pretty good advice for law schools, lawyers, and law students alike.