

The New Home of the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law

The Building's Unique History

Throughout its existence at 1 North Front St. in downtown Memphis, the building that will house the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law has served as a U.S. Customs House, Court House and Post Office. (It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.)

The original facility was built in the early 1880s, and officially opened in 1885. Covering 140,000 square feet on four floors, the Italianate Revival-style building was considered one of the most beautiful in the South when it was built. The building featured a marble exterior, two prominent clock towers on its north and south sides, four lofty-ceilinged courtrooms, brass window cages in the Post Office, hardwood paneling, stone fireplaces, hand-painted wood trim, and other magnificent architectural touches inside and out.

In 1903, as Memphis grew and the amount of business and activity within the building increased, a west addition was built, again using marble as the exterior building material.

Another expansion, to both the north and south sides, was built in 1929, along with a new eastern façade, and a complete renovation of the East Lobby, third-floor courtroom, two monumental staircases and the elevator lobbies. During that project, limestone was used on the exterior of the building and Tennessee marble was used on the interior. Also, the clock towers were shortened at this time.

Although its uses as a Customs House and Federal Court were eventually moved to other facilities, the U.S. Postal Service maintained its downtown office in the building until 2005. In July of that year, serious discussions began between the University of Memphis, Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the United States Postal Service about the possible transfer of the building. The Postal Service required \$6 million to pay for its move to another facility downtown, and the U of M began seeking private donations. Gov. Bredesen and Bill Frist, then a U.S. Senator from Tennessee, also became heavily involved in the transaction and, with the backing of other regional political and business leaders, did much to influence its outcome.

When an agreement was reached and the Post Office had found new downtown quarters, the USPS transferred its easement on the property back to the City of Memphis, and the city, in turn, transferred it to the State of Tennessee for the Tennessee Board of Regents to operate the public university law school on the property. In the fall of 2006, the USPS formally handed over the keys to the property to the state and the university, and the \$42 million renovation and construction of the building began.

In January 2010, when more than 500 students, professors and staff begin occupying the now 169,000-square-foot building, it will function as a state-of-the-art, 21st century learning environment, complete with wireless computer access, a wonderfully open and accessible law library, and all the comforts of a modern, high-tech facility. But it will also offer a remarkable look back more than 100 years into the past, when artistic flourishes were the architectural norm, when the Mississippi River was still a major entryway into the United States for people and goods from around the world, and when Memphis, Tennessee, was on its journey from a rough and tumble frontier town to the most important city on the Father of Waters between New Orleans and St. Louis.

(For downloadable, high-resolution, historical photos of the building, please visit www.memphis.edu/law/presskit)

The Building's Transformation into a State-of-the-Art Learning Facility

The building exterior that is currently in place represents the 1929 Classical Revival remodel and addition to the earlier 1903 and 1886 buildings, both of which still exist in the center sections of the facility. As such, architects with Memphis-based Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects/Fleming Associates Architects Joint Venture have renovated and modernized the interior spaces around three different building structures contained within the current outer skin. (Examples of this are clearly visible with the marble stone facing on the center section of the west side, whereas the rest of the façade incorporates limestone facing; and on sections of the original 1886 west façade and granite foundation walls that are exposed within the renovated spaces.)

In removing years of government-issue paint and other materials, architects found beautiful woodwork, including interior beams covered in intricate, hand-painted stencil designs. Original wainscot paneling also was found and has been repaired and added in various parts of the building. In other areas, sections of original plaster decoration have been restored.

The entry spaces on the east side of the building on Front St. and Madison Ave. will remain the primary entrance areas, which include the historic East, North and South Lobbies, and North Wing Corridor spaces. In addition, the historic areas behind the colonnade on the 2nd and 3rd floors remain substantially intact.

The historic East Lobby remains as is, including the five bronze entrance doors to the law school, the main reception and security areas, and the bronze-fronted elevators and ceremonial stairs. The 1886/1929 U.S. Courtroom on the 3rd floor has been renovated and will be the Moot Courtroom for the law school. (This room is a prime example of the building's many rediscovered architectural details, including a decorative ceiling and roof monitor that had long been hidden by the acoustical tiles of a modern dropped ceiling.)

All five levels of the South Wing will serve as the Plough Law Library. This will include sliding compact shelving on the lowest level, regular law library stacks, and law library administration and reading/study spaces on the upper floors. A new law library reading room has been incorporated into the top level in the center west side, with glass walls overlooking the Mississippi River to the north, south and west. (In addition, two of the building's 10 original security vaults have been retained in the law library area and will serve as study space and a small office.)

In the North Wing, the corridors and former office spaces on the 2nd and 3rd floors have been transformed into the administration and faculty offices. The North Wing first floor now houses a large student lounge and study areas, a law student bookstore, and a Starbucks coffee shop. Specific features of the historic fabric of the existing landmark Post Office have been incorporated into these areas. For instance, although the Post Office removed the original brass locked mailboxes, new 'ghost-image' mailboxes have been designed in the plate glass walls and doors of the student lounges. In that same area, formerly the mail sort room, an enclosed 'catwalk-lookout' has been left intact, including its original peepholes and one-way windows, which postal inspectors used for security purposes.

The lowest floor level of the North Wing will contain the Legal Clinic, with its own entrance plaza from Front St., as well as student locker rooms and student organization offices.

Five large classrooms with tiered floors and state-of-the-art AV/IT features are incorporated into the original 1903 structural addition, which is located in the center rear section of the facility. This part of the renovation includes large-span structural spaces within a concrete seismic shear wall. A new student terrace has been constructed on the west side of the building outside the student lounge in the North Wing. In addition, the former west drive, parking and loading dock areas have been reconfigured with terraces and additional landscaping to enhance the west side of the building. These, along with two study terraces on the 2nd floor, overlook the Mississippi River. These rear spaces on the west side of the building tie into the Riverwalk and Confederate Park enhancements being carried out by the Riverfront Development Corporation.

The Front Plaza will feature streetscape changes, including the introduction of new benches, bike racks and landscaping. The landscape and seating areas have been upgraded with low-maintenance landscaping. New accessibility ramps and handrails have been added to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Similar accessibility functions, such as automatic door openers, door openings, toilets and ramps have also been added throughout the entire building.

In addition to the overall renovations outlined above, the building underwent a \$2,021,000 seismic retrofit. This included the bracing of parapets, balustrades, and the east limestone columns; the installation of floor slab diaphragm ties to exterior walls and seismic floor tie plates between existing construction phases; the installation of new shotcrete shear walls at corners and veneer ties around exits; and the addition of seismic tie struts between the East/West Wings and the central 1903 edition. The structural engineer for the project was Burr & Cole of Memphis. The specialty seismic consultant overseeing the project was the San Francisco-based firm of Rutherford & Chekene, an internationally recognized expert on seismic design of historic structures.

“Great lengths have been taken to preserve the historical integrity of the building while transforming it into a high-tech, cutting-edge learning environment,” says architect Bill Nixon, project director. “The building is on the National Register of Historic Places, so large areas of the facility were preserved in close collaboration with the Tennessee Historic Preservation Commission. The site, building and location are a perfect fit for the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, and it is personally rewarding to know that this exquisite downtown building has been recycled and repurposed for such great use and noble cause.”

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The Historic Building’s Impact on Current and Future Students and Faculty

Situated downtown in the heart of the city’s legal, governmental, and business communities, the new home of the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law is a world-class facility that will provide students and faculty with the opportunity to interact daily with judges, lawyers, governmental officials, and business leaders, enhancing the students’ prospects for externships and clerking positions, and providing access to a wealth of highly experienced adjunct professors and guest lecturers. The beautiful, Classical Revival building, which is nearly three times larger than the school’s previous home on the U of M campus, will be the center for legal study and intellectual inquiry in the Mid-South.

The building’s state-of-the-art AV/IT equipment and modern classroom design will dramatically enhance the quality of the educational experience for law school students. In addition, two courtrooms and three live-client clinics will provide students with real-world environments in which to train. A wireless environment will allow students to conduct electronic legal research throughout the building, including a stunning reading room on the top floor that features a wall of windows facing the Mississippi River.

In addition to the building’s many amenities, the law school’s new downtown location will provide the nearly 500 students, faculty, and staff with a variety of convenient parking, dining, retail, entertainment, and residential options – all within a short walking distance.

“The move to the new building will significantly enhance our ability to carry out our mission to prepare the next generation of lawyers and judges, as well as provide greatly needed access to the legal system for underserved groups through our in-house legal clinics,” says School of Law Dean Kevin Smith. “In addition, the new facility and location will enable us to compete for the best students throughout the region and country.”

For additional information, please contact Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law Dean Kevin Smith at (901) 678-3648 or ksmith@memphis.edu.

History of the University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law

From the beginning of his presidency of what was then Memphis State University in 1960, Dr. Cecil C. Humphreys knew that a fully accredited law school would be an asset to the community. His initial opportunity to add that field of study came on May 4, 1961, when the historic Cumberland Law School in Lebanon, Tenn., approached him about becoming a part of Memphis State.

Founded in 1847, Cumberland had long been a leading law school in the South. It was the first institution in the state to offer a two-year course of study in law, and its 6,000 graduates included 15 state governors, more than 100 U.S. Congressmen, and two U.S. Supreme Court Justices. By the mid-20th century, the school's enrollment had declined, resulting in severe financial problems, and the school was in danger of losing its American Bar Association approval. Cumberland would not be able to remain open for the fall semester in 1961, so its leadership wanted to become part of Memphis State as soon as possible. If the university were willing and able to pay Cumberland's debt of \$80,000, the school would transfer its library, records, and name to Memphis State.

Dr. Humphreys had had previous discussions with the presidents of two independent, but unaccredited law schools already operating in Memphis – Southern Law University and the interestingly named University of Memphis Law School. From those conversations, he knew that these institutions would gladly close their doors and send their students to Memphis State if it started a law school that offered daytime courses as well as evening courses, which was all the independent schools offered.

From May 4 - June 27, 1961, Humphreys worked tirelessly to make the Cumberland move to Memphis a reality. However, despite the tremendous amount of support the proposal had in the city and from Memphis and Cumberland alumni, there was even greater opposition, primarily from the University of Tennessee administration and its supporters in Nashville. Ultimately, Cumberland moved out of Tennessee completely to Howard College in Birmingham, dealing "a tragic loss to Memphis and West Tennessee," as Humphreys told the media.

The idea of a Memphis State University law school did not die, however. Supporters of Cumberland's proposed move to Memphis began to discuss the consolidation of the two independent Memphis law schools into a full-time law school at Memphis State, which would open in the fall of 1962. University of Memphis Law School alumni, in particular, were active in this movement, raising enough money – \$5,000 – to buy half of the school's stock, and persuading the holders of the remainder of the stock – the widow and family of S. Walter Jones, longtime dean of the school – to give it to the alumni group.

In the meantime, the head of Southern Law University announced that he would not start a new class, and that he would close his school within two years and donate its library to Memphis State, if MSU established a law school. In February 1962, Dr. Humphreys proposed to the State Board of Education (at that time the governing body for all colleges that were not part of the University of Tennessee) that a law school be established at Memphis State, and he urged the SBE to act quickly so the program could be started in the fall of 1962.

A five-member committee was appointed by the SBE chairman, with three of them from West Tennessee, something Dr. Humphreys took to be a good sign. On April 3, 1962, at a special session of the SBE, a vote was taken on the chairman's recommendation that the board authorize a new law school at Memphis State University, which would open in the fall of 1962. The vote was unanimous in favor of the new school.

Since he had anticipated victory this time around, Dr. Humphreys had already begun planning for the law school. Fees had been set at \$225 a year for full-time students, to be prorated on a per-hour basis for part-time students, the same as the fee arrangement at the University of Tennessee Law School in Knoxville. Initial enrollment was projected at 100, with two full-time faculty members, one of whom would also function as dean, plus a number of part-time instructors, all lawyers of known ability and integrity who had practiced in Tennessee for at least five years.

The idea of a law school at Memphis State continued to gain even greater support from the local bar, and a number of bequests and other donations were made to the school. In early June 1962, Robert D. Cox, a young member of the law faculty at the University of Tulsa, was named acting dean. On June 20, the Board of Law Examiners of the State of Tennessee was petitioned for approval of the school, which would offer daytime and evening classes beginning on September 17, 1962. The evening division would offer a complete schedule of classes immediately, while the daytime division would offer only first-year classes in academic year 1962-63, adding the second year's classes in 1963-64, and third-year classes the year after that.

Physical space was at a premium across the MSU campus, because enrollment had been climbing, and a student population of 8,000 was expected for the fall of 1962. Still, space was made in Johnson Hall for classrooms and offices, and a reading room in the 'old library' was converted into a law library, which held 10,000 volumes.

On Sept. 24, 1962, the new Memphis State University Law School opened its doors to its first students, just over 140 of them. In early 1965, the American Bar Association's House of Delegates accredited the MSU Law School. The following year, the University began holding classes in a new facility built specifically for the law school. And on May 6, 1978, the Memphis State Law School unveiled a portrait of Dr. Humphreys and a plaque on the new building officially naming it the Memphis State University Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law.

Almost 40 years later, the law school building on the University of Memphis main campus was suffering from age and several shortcomings, including small classrooms and poor classroom configuration, student overcrowding, a flawed HVAC system, and serious flooding of the basement during heavy rains. Eventually, the building became a factor in the school's accreditation, requiring that something had to be done.

The University of Memphis and the Tennessee Board of Regents initially considered two options: renovate the existing campus structure or build a new facility on the U of M's Park Avenue Campus. However, then-Law School Dean Don Polden, along with a number of local lawyers, judges, and businesspeople, brought up the idea of moving the school to the old U.S. Customs House/Courthouse/Post Office at 1 North Front Street in downtown Memphis.

Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law Points of Pride

In almost a half century of preparing students to practice law, the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis has amassed an enviable history of accomplishments, including the following:

- The school's **first-time passage rate for the bar exam** is higher than the Tennessee state average, and it is consistently the highest among state schools. For July 2009, the state average was 81.5 percent, while the University of Memphis student average was 90.7 percent, which was the highest in the state.
- The school's **graduates' job attainment rate** is consistently high and higher than national average. Specific to the class of 2008, within 9 months, 95% had jobs, exceeding the national average rate of 94.5%
- **Federal clerkships** for advanced-level students are common. Newly named clerks and the judges they will be clerking for include:
 - Anna Vergos Blair, Judge S. Thomas Anderson, U.S. District Court, Western District of Tennessee
 - Shea Barker, Chief Judge Jon P. McCalla, U.S. District Court, Western District of Tennessee
 - Derek Carson, Judge Terry R. Means, U.S. District Court, Northern District of Texas, Fort Worth Division
 - Erno Lindner, Chief Bankruptcy Judge David S. Kennedy, U.S. District Court, Western District of Tennessee
- Student Diana Comes from Florida was recently awarded the Sandra Day O'Connor Scholarship, named for the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice and awarded by the National Association of Women Judges.
- The school's students continually **excel in national advocacy competitions**. The list of such accomplishments is long, but some of the most recent advocacy successes are:
 - 2008 ABA National Appellate Advocacy Competition, Runner-up to first-place Harvard; Best Oral Advocate
 - 2007, National Environmental Moot Court National finalist
 - 2006 National finals, National Moot Court Competition, Runner-up to first-place Duke; Best Oral Advocate in final round
- The school's **faculty** members are not only outstanding teachers in the classroom, but they extend their expertise well beyond Memphis via the textbooks they write and publish. Within the past year, they have published in such diverse areas as civil procedure, legal research and writing, the law as it pertains especially to the elderly, business transactions, civil litigation, family law, the peculiarities of practicing in circuit courts, and a look at family law from a global perspective as it is practiced in China and Italy, as well as the United States. One of the more intriguing subjects covered by a faculty member's book published this year can be found in *1L of a Ride: A Well-travelled Professor's Roadmap to Success in the First Year of Law School*.
- Alumni of the school can be found practicing law, sitting as judges, and serving as civic and community leaders at all levels throughout the nation.

Law School Gala Grand Opening Celebration

On the evening of January 16, 2010, the University of Memphis Alumni Association and the entire city will celebrate the grand opening of the new Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law with a spectacular black-tie gala. The event will take place throughout all three floors of the historic downtown building and will include entertainment provided by student musicians from the U of M's Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music and several local legends. In addition, more than 16 local restaurants and caterers will provide a variety of gourmet cuisine in small-plate servings at booths on every level of the building. Current law students will conduct tours throughout the evening and will enjoy a late-night party geared towards students and young lawyers. A VIP reception, presented by SunTrust, will take place from 6 - 7 p.m. in the level-four reception room.

The event, which is being co-chaired by the Honorable Judge Diane Vescovo and the Honorable Robert "Butch" Childers, will be attended by more than 1,500 higher-education, political, business and civic leaders from throughout the city, state and region, as well as U of M law school alumni from across the country.

"The gala is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law's history of excellence and untapped potential for future greatness," says Judge Vescovo. "The new building will help elevate the school to new heights and serve as the crown jewel of downtown's renaissance, and the gala will serve as a festive grand opening of this truly grand building."

Speakers for the Formal Program:

Countdown to Downtown – Vision to Reality will be told by Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, University of Memphis President Shirley C. Raines, Capital Campaign Chairman Charles Tuggle, and President and CEO of FedEx Express David Bronczek.

VIP Reception Sponsor:

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Special Note: No University of Memphis or taxpayer dollars will be spent on the gala. The event is being funded entirely by sponsorships and ticket sales. All proceeds will benefit the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law.

For more information about the January 16 gala, please visit www.memphis.edu/alumni/lawgala or contact Chelsea Dubey at (901) 678-1562 or ctdubey@memphis.edu.