

## An Evening with Wisconsin's Garrisons

*Dean Cliff F. Thompson*

**T**his fall, Judith and I had a wonderful evening with Ellen and Lloyd Garrison, Dean of the Law School from 1932 to 1942, in Purdys, New York, at the home of mutual friends, Shiela and Steve Swett. The Swett's daughter, Evelyn, took the accompanying photo a year ago. Although Dean Garrison is presently recovering from a broken hip, I am happy to report that both he and Ellen are as vigorous as they look.

Before coming to Wisconsin, I knew of Dean Garrison and his role in fostering interdisciplinary law and society studies in legal education, which was then dominated nationally by scholars who produced traditional casebooks. I also knew of the famous New York law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, but—forgive me—I had not realized the two Garrisons were related, were in fact the same person.

When I did my homework, I learned that Dean Garrison had taken leave from Wisconsin in 1942, after the start of World War II, to become General Counsel and Executive Director of the National War Labor Board. Other aspects of his career were equally fascinating, such as the fact that before becoming Dean at age 35, he had co-authored with Solicitor General Thatcher the Report to the President on the Bankruptcy Act and its Administration in the Courts of the U.S. But my intention here is not to summarize his distinguished career. I simply want to share some sense of our evening with the Garrisons.

Professionally, the feeling of continuity was strong. Scholars who came to the faculty during his deanship were pioneers in areas where Wisconsin provides leadership today: Charles "Bob" Bunn, Nate Feinsinger, Willard Hurst, Jake Beuscher, and others. Law-in-action

studies were then a novelty, but then are still rare enough in the mainstream to make our efforts distinctive. On the personal level, the Garrisons' affection for Madison was warming. Ellen recalled with vivid detail and good humor their early housing problems, and made her judgement, "a lovely place for a family to live—our happiest years were in Wisconsin." By the way, if her photo looks familiar, it might be, because she plays "Mia Farrow when she is older" in Woody Allen's film *Zelig*.

Since we have been collecting Professor Herbie Page stories, I asked Dean Garrison if Herbie was really any good. "Sharp as a tack" summarizes his appraisal. I learned more about Dean Garrison's role in bringing John Steuart Curry's famous mural, "The Freeing of the Slaves," to our Law School after it had become too controversial for the Department of Justice in Washington. (See the story of the mural in Vol. 16, No. 1 (1985)). But Lloyd was much more interested in discussing current issues, including the debate over the confirmation of Chief Justice Rehnquist.

At the risk of shirking current controversies, I will not quote Dean Garrison after the event, but end by retelling his beginning experience in teaching, which has a timeless moral for any law teacher. His first course was Equity, a subject which seems perilously mysterious. After days of preparation, he still felt hopelessly inadequate, so he cancelled his first class, scheduled for a Friday, and continued to work all weekend. With considerable misgiving, he began on Monday. After a few minutes, a student asked the first question. His head grew light with relief. "It was marvelous, a miracle. However little I knew," he chuckled, "they seemed to know even less!"



Photo by Evelyn R. Swett

Lloyd and Ellen Garrison: A summertime stroll in the country