

IN MEMORIAM  
REMEMBERING PROFESSOR JOSEPH C. SWEENEY

*Dean Matthew Diller\**

Professor Joseph C. Sweeney was a beloved member of the Fordham Law faculty for forty-seven years. He was a leading expert on maritime law, which grew out of his career in the Navy. But, he also had a deep love for the law overall and for legal history. Professor Sweeney's rich and multifaceted career encompassed military service, scholarship, diplomacy, and the teaching of law. He served under five Fordham presidents and five Law School deans, and he taught approximately 15,000 students during his time on the faculty.

Professor Sweeney grew up in Boston and attended Boston Latin School. He graduated from Harvard University in 1954, earned his J.D. from Boston University in 1957, and then went on to receive an LL.M. from Columbia University in 1963.

From 1957 to 1962, Professor Sweeney was an active duty naval officer. He served as a legal officer at a naval air base in Georgia and on the legal staff of the Destroyer Force of the Atlantic Fleet at Newport, principally working as counsel to formal investigations of collisions, groundings, fires and explosions.

He joined the Fordham Law family in 1966, although he continued to remain active in the naval reserve. In 1972, Professor Sweeney was appointed to teach as a visiting professor at the Naval War College. When he wrote to Dean McLaughlin to share the news in May 1972, he did so with his trademark humor. "I have finally received the appointment to the Naval War College for the next year . . . I have told them that I shall accept. In a way it makes an outrageous pun—I shall be the land professor of the sea, as the full title is the Emory S. Land Professor of Maritime Affairs."

In 1970, Professor Sweeney was tapped as an advisor to the late Ambassador Richard D. Kearney to give answers from the

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\* Dean and Paul Fuller Professor of Law, Fordham University School of Law.

Department of State to questionnaires from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law. This work was the beginning of Professor Sweeney's apprenticeship as a diplomat over the next 25 years. He represented the United States at three diplomatic conferences: the 1978 U.N. Conference on Carriage of Goods by Sea in Hamburg; the 1979 Special Drawing Right Protocol to the Hague Rules, held in Brussels; and the 1991 U.N. Diplomatic Conference on Liability of Terminal Operators in International Trade, which was held in Vienna. Professor Sweeney also spent eight years negotiating and drafting the 1978 Hamburg Rules, which 33 nations ratified or acceded to.

Over the course of his career, Professor Sweeney was the author of numerous books, including *The Law of Marine Collision*, with Nicholas Healy, and *The Life and Times of Arthur Browne in Ireland and America 1756-1805*. He was also the co-author of *Aviation Law: Cases, Law, and Related Sources*. Professor Sweeney's most recent work—his magisterial biography of the 18th century American-born Irish lawyer statesman, and scholar Arthur Browne—is a tour de force. It reflects Professor Sweeney's encyclopedic knowledge. It is beautifully—and I would say joyfully—written, reflecting his love of law, history and storytelling on every page. It is both learned and exuberant—as was its author.

In 1977, Professor Sweeney, together with Ludwik Teclaff, founded the *Fordham International Law Journal*. Today, the Journal is one of the most read international law periodicals in the world and is one of the most frequently cited student-edited legal publications dedicated to the study of international law. To honor Professor Sweeney, the Journal's office was named for him when the new Law School building opened in 2014.

During his forty-seven years as a professor, Professor Sweeney taught a wide range of courses at Fordham Law, including International Business Transactions, International Conflict Dispute Resolution, History of the Supreme Court, Torts, and Admiralty. He also taught law students through the Fordham summer program in Ireland for the program's first five years.

He picked up new subjects with alacrity and enthusiasm. Writing to Dean Mulligan on July 18, 1969, about his teaching schedule, which included a new course on aviation law, he noted

the upcoming launch of Apollo 11, joking, “Perhaps I can add ‘Moon Law’ if all goes well.” Professor Sweeney never did get to teach moon law, although maybe he slipped it into aviation law.

I first had the pleasure of getting to know Professor Sweeney when I joined the Fordham Law faculty twenty-seven years ago. He was a kind, warm, and generous teacher who was treasured by students and faculty. I will never forget his great sense of humor and hearty laugh. These are some of the words that Professor Sweeney’s students used to describe him over the years: “Smart, funny and kind”; “a gem”; “passionate about the material”; “he brought history to life”; “Professor Sweeney amazes me in every class. I can’t imagine someone knowing so much about the Supreme Court in history. It’s astonishing. He can recite everything off the top of his head. He knows the facts and holdings of hundreds of cases [and he] could tell you who the opinion was written by, as well as the dissent and as well as who was president at the time”; “Truly a genius and awe-inspiring”; “I could listen to Professor Sweeney speak forever.” Lastly, my favorite comment about him: “Professor Sweeney is one cool cat.”

Professor Sweeney was one cool cat. I miss him, and we all miss him. But he’s left us a tremendous legacy as a scholar, a teacher and friend that will live on at Fordham Law in perpetuity.

