Roger A. Cunningham, 1921-1994

Professor Roger A. Cunningham, a member of the law school faculty for more than 30 years, died January 31 in Ann Arbor. A specialist in the areas of land use and property, he was the author of numerous books and monographs, including the prominent casebook Basic Property Law.

At a memorial service held at the Lawyers Club March 6, Dean Lee Bollinger praised Cunningham. "No one took teaching nor scholarly expertise more seriously than Roger. He was also invariably kind and generous to students and faculty who sought his advice or help. A nationally-recognized expert on property law, he was a model professor of the old school. Roger will be deeply missed for his unsurpassed breadth of knowledge and his eagerness to share it."

"Roger Cunningham was a scholar and a gentleman in the best sense of those terms," said Professor Emeritus Olin Browder, co-author of Basic Property Law. "I valued him as a reliable, faithful, and considerate co-editor. His scholarship was expressed in both books and articles, all of which reflected the best traditions of legal writing."

Cunningham was born in Paxton, Illinois in 1921 and attended Harvard University, where he received a bachelor of science (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa) in 1942 and a law degree (cum laude) in 1948.

He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, then practiced at the Boston firm of Nutter, McClennen and Fish for a year. He began his teaching career as a fellow at Harvard Law School in 1949. In 1950, Cunningham was named assistant professor of law at George Washington University. In 1954, he moved to Rutgers University as associate professor of law and was promoted to professor in 1957.

Cunningham joined the U-M Law School in 1959. He was named to the James V. Campbell chair in 1988 and was granted emeritus status in 1991. In addition, he served as a visiting professor at Washington University, University of Florida, and Florida State University.

At the memorial service, family and faculty members remembered Cunningham for his integrity, his vast knowledge in a surprising range of fields, and his propensity to share that knowledge. Professor John Reed noted that Cunningham took a critical interest in music. On that topic and many others, he was "knowledgeable, interesting, and never in doubt. In music, as in the law, he insisted that all efforts be undergirded with a fine attention to detail," Reed said.

Cunningham’s wife, Elizabeth Chase, recently preceded him in death. He is survived by a brother, James; a sister, Janice Fridley; four children: Teresa Beem, of Evanston, Illinois; Peter, of Tallahassee, Florida; John, of New Haven, Connecticut; and Christina Postema, of Ann Arbor; and eight grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Nature Conservancy or the Roger Cunningham Memorial Fund at the Law School.