

Law Schools ^[1]

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by Memory F. Mitchell, 2006

See also: [Richmond Hill Law School](#) ^[2].

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, legal education in North Carolina was a haphazard undertaking. A young



Duke School of Law Library, 10 April 1949. Image courtesy of Duke University Archives. Durham, North Carolina, USA.

^[3]law student studied on his own or under the tutelage of a licensed lawyer, reading books owned by an attorney and picking up information from his mentor. Such noteworthy early attorneys and public figures as [Thomas Ruffin](#) ^[4], [David L. Swain](#) ^[5], [Robert Strange](#) ^[6], [William Gaston](#) ^[7], David F. Caldwell, and [Archibald D. Murphey](#) ^[8] instructed students in their offices.

In due time, private law schools were organized. The first to be advertised was that of [John Louis Taylor](#) ^[9], whose school opened in [Raleigh](#) ^[10] in 1822. Other private schools were conducted by outstanding lawyers such as [Murphey](#) ^[11], [Leonard Henderson](#) ^[12], and [Frederick Nash](#) ^[13]. Two teachers of note were [Richmond M. Pearson](#) ^[14], who had law schools in Mocksville and later at Richmond Hill, and [William Horn Battle](#) ^[15] of Chapel Hill. Battle's was the first law school to be affiliated with an established institution of higher learning. He and James Iredell Jr. had taught law in [Raleigh](#) ^[10] in 1841, prior to Battle's 1843 move to Chapel Hill. In Chapel Hill he began teaching in his office; by 1845 he was professor of law at the [University of North Carolina](#) ^[16]. The university offered the bachelor of law degree beginning at that time.

Four other university-level law schools were subsequently established in North Carolina, forever replacing the small private schools of the antebellum period ^[17]. [Wake Forest University](#) ^[18]'s School of Law was established in 1894. [Duke University](#) ^[19] was founded in 1924, and immediate efforts to provide legal education led to the establishment of a law school in 1930. [Trinity College](#) ^[20], out of which Duke University grew, had offered an undergraduate class in law in 1868 and set up a school of law in 1904. Raleigh's [Shaw University](#) ^[21] established a law school for [African American](#) ^[22] students in 1888, but it was closed in 1914. [North Carolina Central University](#) ^[23]'s School of Law was opened in 1939. It immediately closed for lack of students but reopened the next year and continues to operate successfully. Finally, [Campbell University](#) ^[24] established a law school in 1976.

References:

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Harold R. Washington, "History and Role of Black Law Schools," *North Carolina Central Law Journal* 5 (Spring 1974).

Additional Resources:

John Louis Taylor, NC Highway Historical Marker H-55: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=H-55%20->

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