

# Book Notes: John J. Robinette, Peerless Mentor: An Appreciation, by George D. Finlayson

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*JOHN J. ROBINETTE, PEERLESS MENTOR: AN APPRECIATION.* BY GEORGE D. FINLAYSON. TORONTO: THE OSGOODE SOCIETY FOR CANADIAN LEGAL HISTORY, 2003. Pp. 420. Photographs, notes. \$29.00 cloth.

BY GAIL HENDERSON

John J. Robinette is generally considered to have been Canada's greatest legal counsel. His practice, spanning six decades, covered criminal, civil, and constitutional litigation. Unfortunately, upon his death in 1996, Robinette left little behind in the way of a record of his life and career. As a result, the Honourable Justice George D. Finlayson wrote this biography in the form of a memoir of his own experiences of working with Robinette, first as his junior and later as his partner and friend. This approach provides a personal look at Robinette's illustrious career, including Robinette's own thoughts on the legal arguments he made and the resulting judgments. There is a brief description of Robinette's background and family life, as well as his years as a professor at Osgoode Hall, but the focus of the book is on Robinette "as [Finlayson] saw him" in his career as a litigator. There are detailed descriptions of his most famous and interesting trials, namely the murder trials of Evelyn Dick and Boyd Gang member Steven Suchan, the libel suit against former Toronto mayor Alan Lamport, the corruption trial of Justice Leo Landreville, and reference cases at the Supreme Court of Canada, particularly the *Patriation Reference*.

Through the re-telling of these legal dramas and the use of excerpts from trial transcripts, Finlayson brings the reader into the courtroom to demonstrate the skills and techniques that elevated Robinette above his peers. Several interviews were conducted for the book, and the inclusion of quotations from these interviews helps maintain the personal tone and anecdotal approach after the point in the narrative where the author was appointed to the bench and, therefore, no longer actively involved in cases with Robinette. This biography is interesting not only for telling the story of Canada's greatest trial lawyer, but also for exposing the influence a great counsel can sometimes have on the ultimate outcome of a case.

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