

WILLIAM T. RIESER ('57)

BY LISA KAISER

"I had no intention of becoming a lawyer after I knew how hard my father worked," said William T. Rieser ('57), son of Robert M. Rieser, who received his law degree from the Law School in 1914.

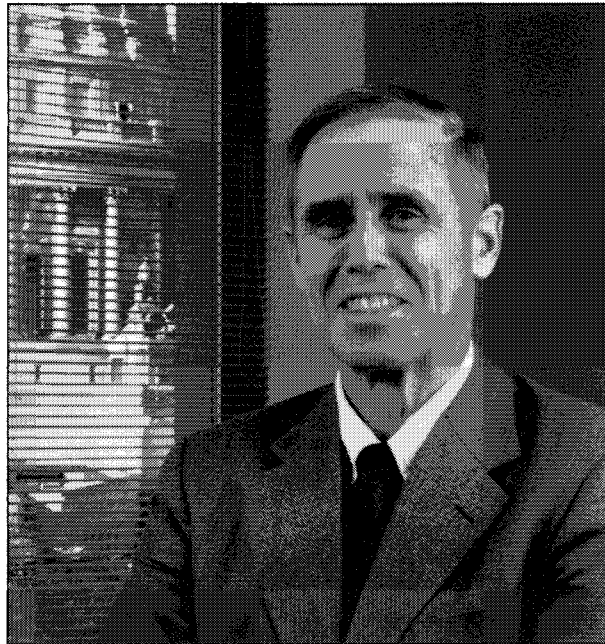
Although the two Riesers became lawyers, they went about it in different ways. Robert became intrigued by the law when he was 14 years old and had some time to kill while visiting Baraboo in 1902. He wandered into the courthouse and saw a case argued by two of Wisconsin's most prominent attorneys—John Olin and Robert LaFollette. He then decided he wanted to practice law.

"The interesting thing is that my father ended up being a partner with John Olin in 1923, in the firm Olin & Butler," Rieser said. The firm was one of the largest and most prestigious in the state. "It was a small world for this kid from a farm."

Rieser remembers his father talking about his experiences in law school, his efforts as the only one in his rural Blackhawk area family who was able to get an education.

"He used to tell us about law school when we were young," Rieser said. "It took him a long time to get through law school because he was working at the same time. He also took time off to sell books, traveling around the midwest."

Bill Rieser studied geography for a while, switched to economics, and focused on business courses in the hopes of



becoming a stock counsellor. It was not until Rieser was in the military that he decided to become a lawyer. He was defense counsel in a court martial despite his lack of legal knowledge—the prosecution and the judge were not lawyers and did not know anything about the law either. The proceedings were a mess. "The judge kept ruling against me and I was frustrated because I thought he was wrong," Rieser said.

He later found a manual for court martials with its highly praised evidence section, found he was right after all and was hooked. "I just became fascinated with it," Rieser said. He entered law school and was quite successful, earning Order of the Coif and being selected for the Law Review.

Rieser said that his father did not try to influence him in deciding on a career. "He had a stand-off attitude when it came to my career," Rieser said. "My brother tried law

school and he didn't enjoy it. I think my father decided that pressure wasn't the way to go. He was pleasantly surprised when I decided to become a lawyer, and when I succeeded in law school. There are natural inclinations for things, and I just found I could do well in the law."

His father's career only affected him when he was looking for his first job. "I had trouble finding a job because everybody assumed that I would work for my father, even thought I didn't expect to," Rieser said. Eventually he accepted the offer made to him by his father's partner at the firm of Rieser, Mathys, McNamera & Stafford in Madison, now Stafford,

Rosenbaum, Rieser & Hansen.

"We worked together for five years," Rieser said. "He never looked over my shoulder. I was amazed. It was great, though. I could ask him questions at any time and he was always there to help."

Rieser and his wife Gretchen are also contributing to the Law School by setting up a scholarship fund through a charitable remainder trust—the Robert M. and William T. Rieser Fund—for law students who came from a rural background or would like to study legal issues that affect rural areas.

Rieser said that contributing to the School still surprises him. "The interesting thing about my involvement with the Law School is that I've always wanted to be involved and participate but I never thought that I'd be doing it in the capacity that I am," Rieser said. It's just another surprise in his career.