

Background Information about Lemuel Shaw:

The Honorable Lemuel Shaw was born in Barnstable, Massachusetts, on January 9, 1781. At the time of his birth "the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was less than a year old; the Federal Constitution had not yet been adopted and the entire American community of 13 colonies was located along the Atlantic seaboard."¹

Shaw graduated from Harvard in 1800 and spent the year following his graduation as a teacher in the Boston South Reading School. During that year he made occasional contributions to the *Boston Gazette*. In September 1804, he was admitted to the bar in Hillsboro County, New Hampshire and then two months later in November he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar by the Court of Common Pleas in Plymouth County. His first law office was on Congress Street in Boston.

He served as a member of both bodies of the General Court and of the Constitutional Convention of 1820. When he served as a State Senator, Shaw was one of the managers of the impeachment proceedings against Probate Judge James Prescott before the Senate of Massachusetts in 1821 and he made the leading argument against opposing counsel, Daniel Webster. He was both a Director and Counsel for the New England Bank, a practicing attorney, a selectman of the city of Boston, a member of the Boston School Committee, and a member of a commission to revise the laws of the Commonwealth. He also drafted the act of incorporation and the charter of Boston. He served as a member of the Board of Overseers for many years.

In 1830, Lemuel Shaw was appointed Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. From 1830 until he retired in 1860, Chief Justice Shaw wrote approximately 2,200 opinions on nearly every legal subject, which had a significant impact on the development of our common law. Interesting to note, Chief Justice Shaw was the father in law of Herman Melville, who in 1851 wrote *Moby Dick*.²

Sources:

Malon, Dumas. *Dictionary of American Biography: Volume IX Sewell - Trowbridge*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935. Print.

Adlow, Elijah. *The Genius of Lemuel Shaw: Expounder of The Common Law*. Boston: Massachusetts Bar Association, 1962. Print.

Levy, Leonard, W. *The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957. Print.

###

¹ Adlow, Elijah. *The Genius of Lemuel Shaw: Expounder of The Common Law*. Boston: Massachusetts Bar Association, 1962. Print

² Malon, Dumas. *Dictionary of American Biography: Volume IX Sewell - Trowbridge*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935. Print.