

THE LAW LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES : PREPARATION, PERFORMANCE, AND PROFESSIONALISM*

LAW LIBRARIANSHIP is an intensive subject librarianship, just as any special librarianship where the collection and clientele are specialized and are of homogeneous character, and where the services and operation are unique and are determined by the administration and objectives of the plant or institution of which the library is a part, or perhaps the heart. Like lawyership, the law librarianship is relatively better regarded and better paid because of its superior professional competency. (There are several law librarians who are paid ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year—a salary not received by a president of most universities, or by a professor in many disciplines, and not even by some of the directors of big universities library systems). Again like lawyers, the law librarians tend to regard themselves as a “superior species” and they try to live in the world of lawyers, think like lawyers and operate like lawyers, although they prove to be more as administrators and persons of public services and public relations. To characterise them further, again at the risk of some exaggeration, they are relatively conservative in their attitudes, reserved in their associations, and proud in their pursuits. This obviously is because the law librarians are first lawyers and second librarians. They are basically interested and trained in law and add to their skills library science to perform also as librarians.

There are many types of law libraries, *viz.*, bench and bar libraries, county, state and federal government libraries, firm and company libraries, and in all these there are usually two kinds of law librarians: (1) those who generally happen to be head law librarians, or occupy other senior professional positions in case of large law libraries, and they are first trained in legal education, and, second, may acquire varying degree of preparation or competency in library procedures; and (2) those who form the supporting line and they are primarily trained in library procedures, and, second, in legal bibliography and legal literature either in the form of auditing some courses in the law school where they work, or special courses in law librarianship offered in some library schools such as the University of California, Berkeley, or by attending all the four (or eight) rotating institutes in law librarianship offered by the American Association of Law Libraries in conjunction with their annual conventions, at basic and advanced levels over eight years, in legal bibliography and legal literature, law book selection and acquisition, classifying and cataloging of legal literature and law-related subject areas, and management of materials and administration of library operations. Besides one or two semester-length courses offered by a few library schools in law librarianship, the University of Washington has an

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exclusive programme in law librarianship extending over a year, admission to which generally and preferably is limited to law school graduates and the University of Chicago offers a doctoral programme where a librarian with a basic professional degree in his field can take first year of the law school curriculum and then write simply a dissertation for the library school in order to get the doctorate. The same university allows a law school graduate only to write a dissertation on law librarianship for a doctoral degree, without having to fulfill any course work in the library school. In other words, a year's work (or more) in the law school is regarded as equivalent to the course preparation in order to graduate to the dissertation stage in the library school. However, the trend and requirement by the accrediting agency is to acquire both the degrees—one in law and another in library and information sciences, and nearly half of the senior law librarians seem to have degrees in both the professional disciplines.

Most law school libraries are small and stereotype regardless of their kind and situation. Because of one national accrediting agency of the law schools, characteristics of all libraries seem to be same by size without having much regard to their regional variations, and this may be further owing to one national professional association of law libraries which has a great influence in determining the like character of all the libraries. They seem to share in their common sorrows and pleasures—meager funds and facilities as against demanding clientele and services. Besides, mobility of talent from one place to another ensures such a uniformity in library operations and services. However, it does not mean that total uniformity exists in all aspects, but basically the features are pretty much comparable with one another all over the country. Typically, a small law school library is a two-man library operation, with clerical, secretarial, student, and other supporting staff, where two people with different professional preparations play a complimentary role, one performing the administrative and reference functions, besides building up the collection, and the other taking care of technical services and supervising the circulation procedures and other related activities, besides sharing the responsibilities and filling the absences of the former. As a result there ordinarily is little conflict in their roles and interests.

However, there are a number of libraries managed by a single librarian who may be only a lawyer or librarian, and in the latter case, just as some times in the former case too, the legal bibliography course of one to three hour credit is offered by one of the regular teaching members of the faculty. There are still some law school libraries where the head, as well as, assistant or associate law librarians are all primarily trained in librarianship. Likewise, many law firm libraries employ only the library-trained person. They say that they do not need another lawyer only to run their library. There are, of course, some firms which employ lawyers and some others employ secretaries as librarians. A certification activity of the Association of American Law Schools recognizes the law-trained librarians and library-trained librarians, as well as, those trained in both law and librarianship, all alike upon the fulfilment of certain conditions. This does not exclude others

who may have long experience or publications to their credit, or made some significant or substantial contribution to the profession, but are wanting a degree in either professional discipline. In the early days of certification activity, however, many in these three categories benefited with fewer or lesser requirements to fulfill under the 'grandfather' clause. Employment preferably of the Association-certified librarians by the member schools as fulfilment of one of the several criteria laid down by the Association of American Law Schools makes the certification more important, as well as, authoritative.

The collection is built up first around the courses offered; second, by the law-related subjects; and, third, by the areas of research interest of the faculty. Selection and acquisition are done by the head law librarian, with responsibilities shared often by the assistant or associate law librarian, along with faculty and other clientele who suggest or recommend titles for their course, research, or related reading needs. The collection has been organized until very recently in almost all law libraries, in subject groups and within them by author or title, perhaps more by title as in public libraries. The library of Congress published only two years ago the KP classification, covering only United States law, while scheme for other jurisdictions is being worked out slowly. The work has been retarded for want of, perhaps, suitable and interested persons, as well as, low priority or little pressure on the Library of Congress by the libraries using it. However, the Los Angeles County Library Classification which was prepared by Carleton Keyon¹ known also after him as "Kenyon Classification" was in vogue in some libraries and continues to be in existence in a few of those libraries in spite of the Library of Congress onslaught. The Los Angeles County Classification system is widely praised for some of its helpful features. Besides, institutions such as Harvard Law Schools have their own systems which may be again adaptations of other known systems.

The collection of any library falls into three categories: primary authority, secondary authority, and finding tools. In other words they hold federal, state and local laws, all court reports, treatises or monographs, and law school reviews and reputed journals, and reference and research tools such as encyclopedias and digests, *etc.* Each law school publishes a review produced by its students and faculty and in exchange with other law schools, each library gets their law reviews. In addition, a typical law school library subscribes to more than a hundred journals published by professional bodies and organizations. Other items that form part of a law library collection are a lot of government documents—state, federal, intercountry, regional, and international agencies. There is a growing trend to study the law in expanded relationships with other social sciences, and as a result, the library collections are developing into several law-related subject areas such as environmental sciences, urban problems, *etc.* In order to meet such new

1. Now Law Librarian of the Library of Congress; former Chairman, Classification and Cataloging Committee, American Association of Law Libraries,

demands made upon law librarianship, summer institutes in legal aspects of environmental sciences, urban problems, and social sciences are conducted by the interdisciplinary faculty.

The routine work of issuing books, answering reference, or advisory, or other types of "location" questions including those like "where is the Coca Cola machine?" are minimal. Students change books themselves and replace them whenever they are through under the "honor system". In fact, many law school libraries provide a key to each student for use whenever he likes, day or night. There is very little circulation, hardly twenty books a day with the clientele of about three hundred plus a few members of the local bar, although there is a great demand on the materials placed on reserve which are lent for two hours each time. The students have to devote intensively their time and attention in analysing case after case in the text books and they seldom seem to go for extensive collectoral or supplemental reading unless they are working on some research papers for certain courses. They are not trained to know all there is to know, but to know how to think. This is how the legal discipline differs from other disciplines, and so does law librarianship from other lines of librarianship.

Under the United States legal system a lawyer ought to be nearly half librarian : for this reason in the first semester or quarter itself the students are given an intensive credit course in legal bibliography and legal literature, and later fortified by another course in legal research and legal writing, so that they become acquainted thoroughly with all the tools of reference and research for day-to-day course work and help themselves from then onwards. Likewise, the faculty members help themselves most of the time.

The law librarians have a closely-knit association where practically every one knows the other. Just as admission to law schools was restricted to a privileged few, at least until a few years ago, so is the recruitment to law librarianship. Not every qualified person is a potential law librarian. Like library science teaching positions, never are the posts in the law librarianship advertised in general library journals, nor are they offered to any merely-qualified graduate. Selectivity is of a superior kind, based on personal background in terms of motivation, authority, aggressiveness, and ability to perform under pressure. Appointments or relocations are made through private channels, or by word of mouth, and each one's movements and whereabouts are known to the other, and so are his performance and professionalism.

Most professional law librarians are members of the American Association of Law Libraries and/or its chapter and the dues are ordinarily paid by the library where they work and nearly one-third of them have an opportunity to involve themselves actively in the organizational matters or programmes of the Association or its chapter. The Association gatherings seem to avoid most of the ceremonial details as far as possible, plunge into action straightway to transact the business very seriously, and they prove to be real working conventions. Holding an office in the Association

(or its chapters) is more a responsibility than anything else. There is an effort on the part of the Association to introduce every possible newcomer to the profession by providing financial assistance for travel and/or maintenance with the help of publishers and book dealers. Every year they award more than two dozen scholarships which practically take care of all the new entrants (and some old timers too), who are otherwise unable to bear the costs, or when the institutions where they work fail to help finance their attendance. In addition, several summer institutes under the National Science Foundation (or under other sponsorship) and the rotating institutes of the Association bring people together. Other types of scholarships given by the Association help the practising members improve their qualifications in either professional discipline.

The Law Library Journal, a quarterly organ of the Association, provides an outlet for professional expression by productive members, and the monthly *Newsletter* keeps the membership informed of the news and developments in which the president of the Association under "President's Page" communicates with the members and philosophers of the profession like Ranganathan, besides giving talks at the chapter or regional gatherings on the aesthetics of the profession. Like *Library Trends*, the *Journal* devotes sometimes the whole issue to a single topic keeping in view the practitioner's needs and the trends in the profession, while the *Newsletter* provides an awareness service of the current literature and recommends professional reading. To meet the specialized needs in the areas of book trade, book selection and acquisition in the law libraries, it undertakes, supports, collaborates in, or sponsors such publications as *Law Books Recommended for Libraries*, *Law Books in Print*, *Law Books Published*, *Current Publications in Legal and Related Fields*, *Index to Legal Periodicals* (Wilson), *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals*, etc., besides several working tools and manuals such as "AALL Publications Series."

The Association also engages in such activities and efforts as to exercise control over the unfair trade practices on the part of law-book publishers and dealers, to exchange surplus copies between the member libraries, to encourage, at regional and national levels, bibliographic ventures, and, to ensure a concerted effort as a network of libraries in pursuit of common goals by means of strong liaison and active relationship with sister organizations such as American Bar Association, Association of American Law Schools, American Library Association, American Society of Information Science, Council of National Library Associations, International Association of Law Libraries, International Federation of Library Associations., etc.

Like general librarianship, law librarianship is on the threshold of some important technological developments which may improve administration of the library operations and managements and servicing of the library resources to a great deal. Inclusion of law librarianship in the recent federal legislation may ensure benefits to law libraries in receiving federal funds for various needs, whether for development of resources, for procurement

of equipment, or for experiments in technological innovations, law librarians or law libraries have been known for a long time as forgotten children; and it seems very true when one looks at the assistance given to similar special libraries such as medical libraries.

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