

# Institutes from the Point of View of the Student

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At the first law librarians' Institute sponsored by the American Association of Law Libraries in Los Angeles in 1953, Miles O. Price suggested that the truly indispensable person in a law library was the patron and further "affirmed his philosophy of librarianship as based on the cornerstone of service to the user."<sup>1</sup>

Since it is axiomatic that the principal user of a law library is one trained or being trained in law, it may not be entirely irrelevant to note what changes have taken place in legal training in the 50 years since the organization of the American Association of Law Libraries. The development of American legal education has been chronicled and discussed by others,<sup>2</sup> but among the most significant general trends have been those toward (1) increased period of pre-law training; (2) a more or less stabilized period of formal law study; and, more recently, (3) greater provision for post-graduate training, not merely for the legal scholar in pursuit of an ad-

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1. 46 L. Lib. J. 335 (1953).

2. REED, TRAINING FOR THE PUBLIC PROFESSION OF THE LAW (1921); REED, PRESENT-DAY LAW SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA (1928); Seavey, "The American Association of Law Schools in Retrospect," 3 J. Legal Ed. 153 (1951); Currie, "The Materials of Law Study," 3 J. Legal Ed. 331 (1951); HARNO, LEGAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES (1953).

vanced degree, but for the ordinary practitioner, through a variety of programs for "continuing legal education."

Much of the impetus behind these trends has been provided by such professional organizations as the American Bar Association, the Association of American Law Schools and, particularly with respect to the third item, the American Law Institute's committee on continuing legal education, the Practising Law Institute, some local bar associations and some law schools. Fundamentally, however, these developments have been based on the felt needs of the legal profession itself.

If law libraries are indeed primarily the handmaidens of that profession, it seems reasonable that comparable needs should be felt and that similar developments should take place in the training for law librarianship. And it might be assumed that the American Association of Law Libraries, as the major professional organization of law librarians, should take the lead in articulating those needs and in formulating a program of development.

Lacking any sanction or control comparable to that exercised through the American Bar Association's council on legal education or the Association of American Law Schools' standards and requirements for admission to membership, the American Association of Law Libraries has hardly been

in a position to prescribe minimum standards of educational preparation for law librarianship. This is not to say that the desirability or necessity of establishing standards has not occupied the attention of the Association nor that the subject has not been frequently discussed in the pages of the *Law Library Journal*.<sup>3</sup>

If it is permissible to compare the results of a 1936 survey of law school libraries<sup>4</sup> with those of a 1952 survey limited to non-law school libraries,<sup>5</sup> the conclusion may be justified that there is some slight trend toward more adequate preparation of law librarians. But it is undoubtedly still true that a substantial number of law libraries "have staffs inadequate in respect to formal training and experience,"<sup>6</sup> and that it is "unmistakably clear that there is no educational standard, however modest, which has in the past been generally applied in the selection of the head of a law library."<sup>7</sup> This seems to make more emphatic the need that some provision be made for "continuing," if not *ex post facto*, law librarianship training.

Just as the persistent problem of closing the gap between law school and practice has received increasing attention, so it must be recognized that the best organized course in law

librarianship, or any hybrid alternative, produces something short of a full-fledged law librarian. The gulf between professional competence and the somewhat haphazard preparation of others who may find themselves working in law libraries is even greater. What seems to be required, then, is some sort of telescopic bridge, adaptable to a chasm of inconstant width—surely a challenge to the most ingenious engineer. Yet it is something in the nature of such a structure that the American Association of Law Libraries has attempted in the design and building of two promising test models.

Doubtless inspired by the success of such local efforts as the Institutes sponsored by the Ohio Association of Law Libraries,<sup>8</sup> the Chicago Association of Law Libraries' Workshops,<sup>9</sup> and the popular reception of those programs "devoted to the practical bread-and-butter subjects"<sup>10</sup> at the annual meetings of the Association, the executive board voted in favor of sponsoring the first Institute at Los Angeles in 1953 and the second at Chicago in 1955.

The response in each case exceeded expectations, with over 50 registrants at the Los Angeles Institute and more than 70 at Chicago. Part of the increase in attendance may be attributed to the more central geographic location and to the availability of more scholarships, but certainly the proven success of the first was also an important factor. Chicago was not merely a repeat performance, but a

3. *Law Library Journal* articles by Bitner, 40:49 (1947); Frantz, 44:94 (1951); Hicks, 19:61 (1926) and 23:62 (1930); MacKavitt & Boyd, 33:81 (1940); Roalfe, 31:141 (1938), 31:335 (1938) and 32:1 (1939). And see the lively panel discussion on education for law librarianship in PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND WORKSHOP ON LAW LIBRARY PROBLEMS, p. 36 (Chicago Association of Law Libraries, 1954).

4. Survey and report of the Committee on education for law librarianship, 29 L. Lib. J. 199 (1936).

5. ROALFE, THE LIBRARIES OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION (1953).

6. ROALFE, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

7. ROALFE, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

8. 45 L. Lib. J. 54 (1952); 47 *id.* 40 (1954).

9. 46 L. Lib. J. 35 (1953); 47 *id.* 41 (1955).

10. 46 L. Lib. J. 5 (1953).

new production under a different management and several individuals found it not only practical but profitable to attend both sessions.

Each of the writers had the opportunity to attend but one of the Institutes. We have therefore joined forces in undertaking to present the student's viewpoint of such an enterprise. Of course, the viewpoint of no single student could be called typical. Due to the wide diversity of backgrounds, differences in age, sex, national origin, experience, type of library represented and special fields of interest, each individual brought something quite different to the Institute and therefore came away with correspondingly differing rewards.

This disparity in background of the prospective audience must have seemed to present a difficult problem to the planners, not only in the selection of topics to be considered, but in their presentation of those matters, which must necessarily be pitched at a level within the range of all. The dilemma, we suspect, was more illusory than real, however, and it is doubtful that any individual student felt either lost in the wilderness or bored by over-familiar scenery.

This may be less a tribute to the skill and ingenuity of the instructional staff than merely a commentary on the nature of law library work, concerned as it is with such a wide range of subject matter, as well as with such a variety of technical and administrative problems. None of its subject matter is so static or inflexible as to foreclose new developments; none of its problems permits stereotyped solutions that will stand for all time and under

all conditions. Rather, they will bear constant fresh analysis and inquiry into their underlying reasons for existence. Bound as we are by inertia, inherited tradition, a parochial and short-sighted view of our own four walls, and a provincial distrust of alien ideas, a healthy, uninhibited look at familiar problems from a new perspective may often reveal an unsuspected fresh approach or inspire constructive thinking unfettered by routine habit. And where our duties in a particular library environment have become limited to a narrow phase of library operation, it is well to raise our eyes occasionally and reconsider its relation to the over-all library function of service to the user.

The substantive knowledge to be acquired, is, we assume, the primary objective of attending an Institute. And from Association officer to the lowliest neophyte, we feel confident there was no one who could not gain something new from instruction by experts of intelligence and experience. Nor was this knowledge on a highly abstract level, but rather related to practical, down-to-earth problems. Legal bibliography, technical processes and reader services were featured at the first Institute. Formulation of acquisition policy, order work procedure, processing of continuations, physical arrangement of materials, and a particularly intensive consideration of law cataloging received attention at the second.

Provision of mimeographed materials was most helpful, eliminating the need for extensive note-taking and leaving the student free to participate more readily in discussion. Although

the supply was unfortunately inadequate at the first Institute,<sup>11</sup> an outstanding feature of the second was the advance distribution of syllabi to the registrants. These materials have permanent value for later use, containing as they do such tools as bibliographies, checklists, tables and charts.

Ample opportunity was provided for the submission of particular problems and specific questions to a sympathetic and informed group for serious consideration. Student participation and the free interchange of ideas, experiences and problems was spontaneous, spirited and rewarding. The result was an increased sense of obtaining vital, personal and real information of lasting value. A substantial number of most practical pointers cropped up in open discussion: tips on a novel way of handling an old or recurring library problem; a current policy of certain publishers and dealers; word of some forthcoming publication or enterprise. This type of information is seldom found in published literature, nor is it ordinarily included in a planned lecture by an instructor. This is but one way that the varied background and wide range of experience of the group could be shared and utilized to the advantage of all.

In furtherance of the practical aspect of the Institutes, participation and cooperation by dealers, publishers and vendors of equipment was evident and welcome. In Los Angeles demonstrations were presented on the use of loose-leaf services and in Chicago various types of record-keeping equipment were displayed. Finally,

11. 46 L. Lib. J. 340 (1953).

the opportunity to visit law libraries of different types accessible in a metropolitan area such as Los Angeles or Chicago was a means of gaining further understanding of the particular problems, technical devices and services of each.

To suggest that every registrant immediately puts into practice every valuable scrap of information gleaned from a week's program is, of course, unrealistic. But at least his eyes and ears and, one trusts, his mind have been opened. The verity of that old library science slogan, "Practices Vary" has new meaning and makes him less uncomfortable, aware as he may now be of some of the reasons for variance. He is consequently in a better position to make an enlightened choice among myriad alternatives.

Not the least significant attraction of an Institute is the additional week of association with other law librarians beyond that afforded merely by attendance at an annual meeting of the Association. It is always satisfying to widen the circle of one's acquaintances in a field of common interest, not only in order to gain insight into common problems, but to share in the profit friendship itself brings. Even the burden of future correspondence is lightened when your addressee becomes an identifiable face rather than merely an impersonal holder of a position. Future cooperation is facilitated by mutual recognition and the memory of shared experiences.

Indeed, it would give a false impression if the student's viewpoint were presented as being limited to his reaction to the substantive content of the lectures, discussions and demonstra-

tions. For this stimulating period of association with other students acquires an aura not unlike the nostalgic college days of earlier years. The member of the class of Chicago '55 may not long remember Pollack's pronouncements on A.L.A. cataloging rules; it is unlikely that he will soon forget Farmer's historic shopping expedition in Yankee territory, Coonan's bid for male popularity by moving that shirt-sleeves be made uniform of the day, Johnston's involuntary third dip in Lake Michigan, McNabb's forthright position on the rights of LaSalle Street jaywalkers, the pleasant medley of accents, foreign and domestic, during Northwestern's hospitable coffee breaks, the impressive infusion of young blood represented by the alert crop of scholarship winners, midnight strolls along the lake shore, Dean Havighurst's classic "commencement" address, etc., etc. The Los Angeles alumnus will have his memories of a Piacenza swim party, a Turnabout Theater soirée, and Mary Helen Stevens' touching tribute to the Institute's beloved director. And both will, of course, be proud possessors of a Certificate of Attendance as a tangi-

ble symbol of a worthwhile experience.

Itself a product of cooperation—by the American Association of Law Libraries, the universities and the chapters, an Institute can be a most effective way of promoting cooperation among law librarians generally. The Institute "graduate" must surely realize that no law library, however extensive its collection, however competent its personnel, can be completely self-sufficient. Most important, he will be able to identify himself as part of a special group, with which he will feel the need to establish and maintain such a relationship as "can alone completely change the conception of the tasks involved, and this in turn can have a profound effect on the quality of the service of the library represented"<sup>12</sup> by him. Thus in sponsoring this type of program, the Association has not only taken steps to fill an obvious current need, but has laid groundwork which may make the organization itself more effective in the future. May the next 50 years see this promise fulfilled.

12. ROALFE, *op. cit.*, p. 356.