

*AALL Centennial Feature**

A Tribute to Viola A. Bird on the Occasion of Her 100th Birthday

As the American Association of Law Libraries approaches its centennial in 2006, one of its most illustrious members, Viola A. Bird, will celebrate her own one-hundredth birthday on June 6, 2005. In celebration of this milestone in Viola's life and in recognition of all that she has done for the law library profession and for her many friends, we thought it appropriate to share some personal stories about her as part of the AALL Centennial Feature series.

Viola A. Bird—A Biographical Sketch**

*Patrick E. Kehoe****

¶1 Viola Avis Bird, or Vi as she is more generally called, was born in Fall River, Wisconsin, about thirteen months before AALL was founded. Having grown up in the nation's heartland, Vi eventually found herself in California where, in fall 1923, she enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Apparently the pull of the upper Midwest was too strong because Vi returned there a year later to continue her studies at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, where she earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1927.

¶2 The following autumn saw Viola again in California where she began the study of law at the University of Southern California. Her stay there was also to be rather short, however, because at Christmas time she married Winfred W. Bird who was a junior faculty member in the department of speech at the University of Washington in Seattle. Their marriage would last forty-seven years until Win's death in 1976. The newly married Viola transferred to the University of Washington's law school where she resumed her study of law.

* *Editor's Note:* The American Association of Law Libraries was founded on July 2, 1906, by a handful of law librarians who met during the Annual Conference of the American Library Association at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island. To commemorate the AALL Centennial that will be celebrated with a yearlong series of events and activities in 2005–06, culminating at the 2006 Annual Meeting in St. Louis, *Law Library Journal* is including an "AALL Centennial Feature" article in each issue published through 2006. While the focus common to each article is the history of law libraries, law librarianship, and AALL, the specific topics vary according to the interests of authors and readers. Individuals interested in contributing a "Centennial Feature" article should contact Frank G. Houdek, Editor, *Law Library Journal*, Southern Illinois University School of Law, Lesar Law Bldg., Mail Code 6803, Carbondale, IL 62901-6803, (618) 453-8788, houdek@siu.edu.

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¶3 As a law student Viola was not the typical stay-at-home faculty member's wife of that era. The eventual birth of their two daughters, however, and the desire to rear them herself altered Viola's law school plans. She dropped out of school and became more involved in the kinds of family and church activities in which faculty wives more typically engaged. During World War II, however, Vi found herself doing work outside the home as part of the war effort. Following the war, with her daughters then in high school, Vi decided to return to law school on a part-time basis. In June 1950, she received her J.D. degree.

¶4 Because she had been a law student who had taken a quarter-century to complete her degree, Vi thought that she would be at a disadvantage when it came to obtaining a job as a lawyer. As it was, however, Marian Gallagher, the law librarian at the University of Washington, had a friend in the speech department where Dr. Win Bird was now a distinguished associate professor. This individual told Vi that "I have a friend [meaning Marian Gallagher] who went to law school, and when she finished she went to library school." Vi decided to do the same and, while in library school, took the law librarianship course that Marian then taught. Vi completed her library degree in 1953.

¶5 After library school graduation, Vi and her family took a brief trip. When they returned, she found a note from Marian Gallagher waiting for her. The note mentioned that the assistant law librarian, Mary Sanders, was leaving to become the state law librarian in Sacramento, California, and if Vi wanted to split the resulting open position with one of her former library school professors, Gertrude Wulfekoetter, Marian would seek permission to offer it to her. Vi accepted.

¶6 Marian's plan was that Wulfekoetter would become the cataloger and head of technical services, and Vi the head of public services. The only possible bar to Vi's getting the job was the rule that prohibited two members of the same family from working at the university. Only the president could approve an exception to this rule. Marian wrote to him. Her argument was based in part on the fact that only 29 of the 114 law school librarians then in the United States had both law and library degrees. Apparently, the president agreed that the university would certainly benefit from having two of them working at its law library and approved the request. Thus Vi became the assistant law librarian, a post later to become full-time and from which she would retire in 1972.

¶7 While at the law library, Vi became Marian's internal manager. This meant that essentially Vi ran the place. Among her duties was the hiring and supervision of those who worked at the circulation desk or otherwise performed public services-related activities. A teenage Pat Kehoe was one of the persons whom Viola hired and supervised during her early years at the library. Later she and I were to become lifelong friends and colleagues, and I would count Viola as being one of my four principal mentors.² I came to realize that during the eleven

2. See Patrick E. Kehoe, *Mentors Four*, 91 LAW LIBR. J. 229 (1999).

years I had ultimately worked at the library, Viola had instilled in me a leadership ethic that would serve me well for the remainder of my career.

¶8 Marian Gallagher often acknowledged that Vi was her chief inside manager. In 1981, Viola was awarded the University of Washington School of Librarianship's Alumni Award. In Marian's letter of nomination for this honor, she described Vi as follows: "Saying that she was the chief assistant does not do justice to her activities. She was personnel director, chief planner, super reference librarian, trouble shooter, hatchet man, and problem solver."³ After Vi had retired, Marian wrote letters recommending Vi for various consulting jobs. She described Viola in one of these letters as follows: "Mrs. Bird has been our Executive Law Librarian since 1953, acting as head of Readers' Services with responsibility for overseeing both Circulation and Reference Divisions, and has done more of the training of part time assistants than any other person. She retired on October 1 because her husband had retired from teaching at the University, but is not by any means the kind of person who will be able to fill her time knitting."⁴

¶9 While working at the university, Vi did much more than run the library. She edited the library's *Current Index to Legal Periodicals* and co-authored *Order Publications* which was published in the AALL Publication Series.⁵ Vi was also very active professionally both locally and at the national level in AALL. She attended most of AALL's Annual Meetings and served in such leadership roles as chair of AALL's Scholarship Committee (1964–65) and as a member of the Executive Board (1968–71 and 1972–73). Vi was AALL's president in 1971–72. The Association formally recognized her contributions when it awarded her its Marian Gould Gallagher Distinguished Service Award in 1990.

¶10 One of the first to hire Vi as a consultant was Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who commissioned a study of law library resources in Canada. In connection with this undertaking, Vi traveled all over Canada visiting law libraries and meeting colleagues. In the end, she produced an extensive report⁶ that would serve as a guide for the development of Canadian law libraries for many years to come.

¶11 Vi also consulted for firms in or near Seattle and soon found herself working on a part-time basis as the founding law librarian for Preston Thorgrimson Holman & Ellis. This job was to last for ten years and then, only at the age of eighty-one,

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3. Letter from Marian G. Gallagher, Law Librarian, University of Washington School of Law, to Peter Hiatt, University of Washington School of Librarianship 1 (May 11, 1981) (copy on file with author).
 4. Letter from Marian G. Gallagher, Law Librarian, University of Washington School of Law, to Robert K. Leick, Prosecuting Attorney, Skamania County (Washington) 1 (Dec. 17, 1973) (copy on file with author).
 5. VIOLA A. BIRD & STANLEY PEARCE, ORDER PROCEDURES: A MANUAL (AALL Publications Series No. 2, 1960).
 6. VIOLA A. BIRD, LAW LIBRARY RESOURCES IN CANADA (Resource Collections in Canadian Libraries II, Special Studies No. 3, 1975).

did she retire for good. In addition to her work for Preston Thorgrimson, Vi frequently “helped out” at other law firms and at the county law library.

¶12 During her retirement years, Vi has been an extensive world traveler who always dutifully reported about her journeys in her annual Christmas letters. Today her trips are more limited, but she is able to continue to visit family, now consisting of four generations, and frequently sees friends. She also stays active by participating in outings and activities with fellow residents of her retirement community where Viola is readily acknowledged as the person to whom you go if you need help in learning how to use a computer. Viola has never been one to forgo new challenges.