



What do you do with old law books?

*The following responses are available on AALLNET only. For the responses published in the May 2008 issue of *AALL Spectrum*, please see the issue in its entirety.

“When I was at the Golden Gate University Law Library in San Francisco in the mid-90s, the most interesting disposition of unneeded law books was when we would sell them to production companies for use as backdrops in the filming of ads.”

- Brent Bernau, reference librarian at the University of San Diego School of Law Legal Research Center



“We recently made the decision to discard the first series of reporters that still lined our office’s hallways. As we were discussing what to do with the volumes, Ann Hemmens of the University of Washington posted a

message on the Law Librarians of Puget Sound online discussion list noting that the YMCA of Greater Seattle was looking for old law books. I followed up directly with the YMCA contact and found that she was looking for old law books to use as table decorations for a luncheon honoring a local judge. We were happy to supply 300 of our dusty, leather bound reporters for her to use. At the conclusion of the luncheon, the hotel recycled the books.”

- Amy J. Eaton, senior librarian at Perkins Coie LLP in Seattle

“Our library just completed a major remodel. We handled the issue of old law books in several ways.

“If the set was still being used and there was room, we maintained it and moved it to a new spot. Of course, our shareholders wanted us to plan the arrangement of reporters so that the ‘nicest looking sets’ are stored in the elevator lobbies or by their offices.

“If the set was not being used (case reporters) and we could cancel the subscription, we first sought to donate the set(s). And, if we were unable to find a donor, we either sent it to the landfill or stored it. We do, in fact, have most of our Pacific Second in storage just in case we need it again. But, I suspect that we will dispose of it by the end of the year; not many calls for photocopies of cases these days.”

- Brenna Louzin, library manager at Heller Ehrman LLP in Seattle

Member to Member

“I would like to share with you a recycling/reuse effort our law firm library undertook that was subsequently reported on in a December 26-January 8, 2008, *Indiana Lawyer* newspaper article titled, ‘Firms look to keep old items out of landfills.’ Our entire firm is moving to new space this fall, and as a result the physical library space is being significantly downsized. The library made a determination that we would not take our case law books with us and thus cancelled the bound case law upkeep subscriptions on them. Not wanting to have the books end up in the landfill we decided to give them away for the cost of postage. Via posting the book giveaway for cost of postage to several law library online discussion lists, I am happy to report that all told we found homes for approximately 3,000 case law books. The libraries taking them ranged from as far away as Nigeria and Oregon to as close to home as a St. Louis law firm and a soon to open Magnet High School for Law and Public Policy in Indianapolis, Indiana. While I was proud to be a part of this endeavor, I was even more thrilled to find new homes for the nearly 3,000 books.”

- Cheryl Niemeier, director of library services at Bose McKinney & Evans LLP in Indianapolis

“I have tried it all: discarding, selling, reusing, and recycling!

“During our giant weeding project at Pace Law Library, I tried to keep books from being destroyed ‘as long as there was some use for the book by *someone*.’ But who was that someone? I canvassed used book dealers...some wanted old law books, some didn’t. I listed sets on online discussion lists, such as Law Acq and Law Library Association of Greater New York. Then there was the packing and mailing of the boxes: time consuming and exhausting. Textbook buyers take some materials and pay fairly well. Student book sales may generate some funds for older materials. The Prisoners Reading Encouragement Project takes some materials selectively. Sending books to overseas libraries is expensive and time consuming; and how much do they really need old American materials? Some agencies or charities will take donations to their own book sales. I have sold sets to alumni who need window dressing in their new office spaces. My

most successful disposal of old law books came from a furniture store decorator who needed to fill book shelves with clean, unmarked books. Imagine getting a dollar a volume for the New York Supp!

“There are many other outlets for old books that I haven’t tried but which seem promising: bLogistics in Colorado, Ebay for more valuable and unique materials, local archives, Alibris, and Amazon for single titles.

“The old standby, of course, is recycling...as a last resort.”

- Alice Pidgeon, head of technical services at Pace University School of Law Library in White Plains, New York

“Two years ago at Davis & Kuelthau we created several putting greens using old reporters and treatises as part of the course. This was for National Library Week, and the winner got a gift certificate to a book store for the lowest score.”

- Kellee L. Selden-Huston, director of library services at Davis & Kuelthau, SC, in Milwaukee



“We do several things with old law books—we make about \$4,000 a year selling older editions and donated books we can’t use; we sell them to restaurants or bars for wall décor and to lawyers, paralegals, or the public. One man wanted a wall-full to use as a ‘nice-looking way’ to keep the cold from seeping in one side of his house. We also give extra large books to a blind group that hollows them out to make jewelry, gun, or hiding boxes. Talk about recycling!”

- Gayle E. Webb, director of the Riverside County Law Library in Riverside, California

“The University of Chicago D’Angelo Law Library recently converted book stack space to study space and withdrew 65,000 volumes that were duplicated in this or the university library. Duplicate copies of law journals and reporters were discarded. Duplicate law monographs were offered to other law libraries on the Needs and Offers list; 80 percent were requested. Relying on print copies in our university library, as well as electronic access, we sent Congressional hearings to the University of Hawaii and the Congressional Serial Set to Tulane University. Law Library Microform Consortium received titles needed for its projects. Unique non-law monographs and serials were transferred to the university library. Other non-law monographs and titles not suited to other law libraries were sent to Better World Books, which, along with Needs and Offers, allowed us to find homes for thousands of books, including gift books donated by our faculty as their offices were renovated. Our success in finding new homes for so many of our books made the project positive and rewarding.”

*- Judith Wright, associate dean for library and
information services at the University of Chicago
D’Angelo Law Library*