

Allen Mercer Daniel:

A LEADER IN LIBRARIANSHIP

by Cynthia Berry

In recognition of Black History Month, AALL Spectrum presents the following tribute to Allen Mercer Daniel, the first African-American law librarian, who began promoting diversity in the profession in the early '30s.

In all walks of life, there are people who lift up their communities, both by their actions and through the force of their example. In the law library community, one such person is Allen Mercer Daniel, the first African-American law librarian.

Long before "diversity" became a popular buzzword, he encouraged people of all races to explore the profession. He spoke out against racism and prejudice, and did not allow the endemic practice of segregation to keep him from his proper place among his peers. He was a mentor and a role model, admired and respected by several generations of law librarians.

Allen Mercer Daniel was born in 1887. He graduated from the Howard University School of Business in 1906, and from Howard

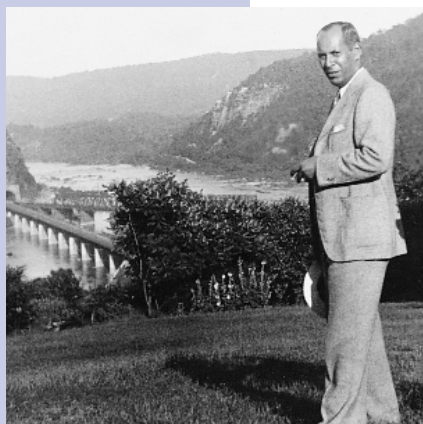
Law School in 1909. He was admitted to the District of Columbia Bar, and worked as an attorney at the War Department for a number of years. He fought to have blacks nominated to attend the Military Academy at West Point. In 1923, Daniel began his library career with his return to Howard University as Special Assistant to the Librarian. He moved swiftly up the ladder. From 1924 to 1931, he served as Assistant Librarian. In 1931, he became Acting Law Librarian. In 1940, he was appointed both Law Librarian and Assistant Professor of Law. One of Daniel's students was Thurgood Marshall, who went on to argue *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the watershed case in ending institutionalized segregation, and who later became the first African American Supreme Court Justice. In 1952, Daniel was promoted to Associate Professor. On several occasions, he served as Acting Dean of Howard Law School. In all, his service to Howard

University spanned 33 years. In recognition of this, Howard has renamed its law library the Allen Mercer Daniel Law Library.

In the world of his profession, Daniel was a pioneer. In 1939, he became one of the founding members of the Law Librarians Society of Washington, D.C. He joined AALL in 1934, and attended AALL Annual Meetings, even when doing so involved exposure to the institutionalized racism of segregation. In 1935, for example, the Annual Meeting was held at the Brown Palace Hotel in Colorado, which did not accept Daniel as a guest and would not allow him to use the dining room or hotel lobby. This was hardly the only time that he met such circumstances, but Daniel did not let this keep him from attending every single Annual Meeting from 1934 until 1975, 19 years after his retirement.

As a professor of law, Daniel led a protest against the lynching of a young Jewish man in Georgia, calling it a "fiendish crime" and using it as an example of the inhumane treatment of minorities. He worked to bring justice to oppressed people of all races, both in America and the world over. His example, as a law librarian and a citizen, is one that remains a standard for us all.

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AALL Archives

Allen Mercer Daniel at Harper's Ferry in 1933. The photo is captioned in his own hand, "Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and a West Virginian."



AALL Archives

Allen Mercer Daniel at a Howard University banquet, date unknown. In his handwriting the photo is captioned, "Three volumes were presented to me by the Faculty of the School of Law."