



## AALL Member Profile: *Paul McKenna*

### Lecturer at Dalhousie University's School of Information Management

There's a fine Robert Frost poem, *The Road Not Taken*, which nicely captures much of my own career trajectory. Frost speaks about choosing a certain path... "and that has made all the difference." After following one road that led me into law librarianship, I diverged into other disciplinary pursuits and doubted that I'd ever get back to this profession. Well, things have evolved in interesting ways that could not have been predicted.

#### Early Educational Exploration

I began undergraduate studies at Victoria College, University of Toronto, believing that my future would be engaged with English literature. Eventually, I found that English literature could not provide a solid foundation for a career. This realization was driven further afield by a growing interest in political science. The University of Toronto had a formidable political science department at this time (the 1970s) with highly regarded scholars like Walter Berns, Allan Bloom, C.B. Macpherson, and others with international reputations. Accordingly, I entirely redirected my studies toward political science with an emphasis on ancient and modern theory. This led to graduate studies at the University of Western Ontario where I was able to synthesize several interests in a thesis on the social and political thought of Jonathan Swift. Upon graduation, it was not feasible to consider teaching because the prospects were blindingly competitive. This led to some conversations about completing an MLIS at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Library and Information Science (as it then was).

#### Seeing the Light

Schools of library and information science or management have clearly evolved over the decades, and it amounts to a platitude to say that technology has driven the most fundamental changes in this area of study and practice. In the 1980s, we worked with punched cards to learn about library automation and

concerned ourselves with the new intricacies of AACR2. However, the moment I stepped into my first law librarianship class, the scales fell from my eyes and I saw the light. Balfour Halévy was our lecturer for this course. He was the law librarian and professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto. Balfour's personal charisma, prodigious knowledge of Canadian legal bibliography, and forthright approach to learning the complexities of law librarianship were a template for good professional practice. Indeed, attempting to ensure that you were fully prepared for his rigorous

collection development budget, as well as exceedingly capable colleagues, allowed me to quickly become involved in all areas of law library management, administration, and planning. With Halévy at the helm of the law library, we were provided the most generous and enlightened encouragement and support. Everyone was given leave (both figurative and literal) to take part in the conferences and events of key professional associations, which included the Toronto Association of Law Libraries, Canadian Association of Law Libraries, and, most importantly, American Association of Law Libraries. My first

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classes was akin to the character James T. Hart in the film "The Paper Chase" who drives himself to distraction in order to satisfy Professor Kingsfield.

During my MLIS days, I also worked part-time at the University of Toronto's Centre of Criminology Library. This institution exemplified the spirit of interdisciplinarity. It also brought me into close proximity with an interesting array of legal research materials, as the centre was built to support a growing and evolving program involving sociologists, political scientists, criminal law faculty, psychologists, historians, and others all working toward studies that would meet at the nexus of criminology: the study of crime and criminals.

#### Restless Spirit or Three-Legged Stool

Following graduation as a librarian, I was fortunate to be offered a position as a law librarian at Osgoode Hall Law School. Unfortunately, this job was in the cataloguing department, which was not at all an area of personal strength. Yet working in this major law library with a formidable and comprehensive

AALL conference in Detroit was an eye-opener given the impressive range of people, programs, and panels on display. Being able to serve on some AALL committees (the Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographic Award, for one) allowed me to truly understand the nature of professional commitment necessary for effective law librarianship. Being introduced to such remarkable individuals as the late Morris Cohen, who exemplified what is best in conscientious law librarianship, allowed me to formulate models of good practice.

But a somewhat restless spirit prompted me to seize an opportunity to start a law library for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Academy. This position allowed me to work on a fascinating range of in-service training manuals for police officers within the OPP (equivalent to American state police departments), ensuring that their learning tools continuously reflected the most current state of the law. I was also able to learn more about the whole training cycle from needs analysis to formative evaluation and eventually assumed management functions within

the OPP Academy. Following a brief stint as the chief law librarian for the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, I gradually migrated to more strategic policy roles within the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and discovered that my working life could be greatly enhanced by deploying my interdisciplinary skills as a private consultant. The notion of a three-legged stool came to mind whereby I could combine writing, teaching, and consulting in some interesting ways that would be heavily grounded in the knowledge, skills, and abilities I had developed as a law librarian. And while my pre-eminent focus would now be on policing, law enforcement, and public safety, it was this foundational understanding of legal literature and research methods that would stand me in good stead.

### **Ariadne's Thread or Rip Van Winkle?**

In Greek legend, Theseus is able to find a route out of the Minotaur's cave with the help of fleece thread given to him by Ariadne. During the past few years, I have followed a somewhat labyrinthine path that has brought me once again to serious engagement with law librarianship. As a result of relocating to the Atlantic province of Nova Scotia, I have become involved with the province's Department of Justice and the School of Information Management (SIM) at Dalhousie University. It has

been my pleasure to teach courses relating to information literacy and government information resources, which nicely tap into my earlier academic interests. But the icing on this particular cake has been the wonderful opportunity to teach a graduate course on Legal Literature and Librarianship at SIM. This role allows me to deconstruct my earlier academic and special law library experience and recast it in the context of the new modes and orders that hold sway in (post)modern law library settings.

I often feel like Rip Van Winkle, having missed the intensity of so much "revolutionary" change and transformation in the actual practice of law librarianship. I also retain an allegiance to learning research skills that are firmly based upon the print-based tools that have been transformed into computer-assisted legal research formats. But the ability to view these developments from an architectonic vantage point allows me to bring certain perspective to the exciting challenges that await those students who may wish to pursue a career in law librarianship. Being engaged in an intellectual manner with these students has allowed me to reflect back upon several decades of law library evolution while also integrating some of the most compelling developments that face the profession today, including RDA; digitization; free access; collection development for comparative, foreign, and international

law; legal research; and instruction, among others.

The law library profession has always been immensely challenged by its symbiotic relationship with the legal profession. Law librarians have often transcended this challenge through the dual-degree approach, which typically works to the librarian's advantage. Canadian law libraries are increasingly being led (and staffed) by such doubly credentialed individuals. However, in order to further enhance their public and organizational perception, law librarians have adopted titles like knowledge manager and information consultant, and there's a growing incorporation of project-management skills and responsibilities within the law librarian's position description.

As a former law librarian practitioner who has returned to facilitate learning among new and emerging students in the field, I could not have made this transition without the kind of reverse Ariadne's thread—represented by the resources, reports, and research offered by AALL—leading me back into the complex realm of contemporary law librarianship. As a Canadian, it's my favorite bit of cross-border shopping. ■

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