

Memorial: Leon M. Liddell (1914–2003)

¶1 Leon Morris Liddell was born in 1914 and died February 13, 2003. He received both an A.B. and a J.D. from the University of Texas in 1937. He started his law library career as an assistant to the Tarlton Law Library director, Helen Hargrave. He went on to do postgraduate work at Columbia University in 1948, after receiving a B.L.S. degree from the University of Chicago in 1946.

¶2 Mr. Liddell, his preferred form of reference, was librarian and assistant professor at the University of Connecticut from 1946 to 1947, law librarian and professor at the University of Minnesota from 1949 through 1960, law librarian and professor of law at the University of Chicago from 1960 through 1973, and emeritus from 1974 through 2003. He was lecturer at the University of Chicago Graduate Library School for many years during his tenure at the University of Chicago Law School. After retiring from the University of Chicago Law School in 1974, Mr. Liddell also served as librarian and professor of law at Northwestern University School of Law until 1979.

¶3 Mr. Liddell's publications include *The Connecticut Library Survey*, with Edward Allen Wight,¹ and a chapter on administrative law in the fifth edition of *How to Find the Law*.²

¶4 Mr. Liddell's memberships included the American Bar Association; the International Association of Law Libraries, where he was a past vice president; the Chicago Association of Law Libraries, where he was past president; the American Association of Law Libraries, where he was a member of the Executive Board in 1970–71; and the Special Libraries Association.

¶5 Mr. Liddell's awards include the American Association of Law Libraries Marian Gould Gallagher Distinguished Service Award in 1989, and the Benefactor Award of the North Central Texas College Library.

¶6 I worked for Mr. Liddell in various capacities from 1966, while I was still in law school, until the end of 1973, when he retired from the University of Chicago and I became his successor as law librarian. Mr. Liddell was a profound artist in the use of a few simple phrases to fit an infinite number of situations, and one that I remember best from these years was, "Mr. Bowler, we are not engaged in the search for pure truth." What this meant to me was that whenever I was conflicted and not able to solve a particular problem, I must think in terms of cutting my losses and getting on with the resolution of the generalized mess around me, so I would be able to face the rest of the messes that were waiting for me in the future.

¶7 During the years 1941–46 Mr. Liddell rose from first lieutenant to major in

1. EDWARD A. WIGHT & LEON LIDDELL, *THE CONNECTICUT LIBRARY SURVEY* (1948).

2. Leon M. Liddell, *Administrative Agencies—Rules, Decisions, and Other Publications*, in *HOW TO FIND THE LAW* 95–108 (William R. Roalfe ed., 5th ed. 1957).

the U.S. Army. He continued to serve as a reservist until his retirement in 1973. His military experience was reflected in his short phrase artistry. He never used explicit military analogies, but often his use of phrases was effectively underlined by a military-like thought. That is, while there was no express military analogy, there was an underlying thought process that gained its strength from the military form of thinking.

¶8 Applying Mr. Liddell's injunction that we are not engaged in a search for pure truth, the first thing I must admit is that I do not remember when I first met him. Many memorials are highlighted by the instant impression made by the memorialized person on the writer. My relationship with Mr. Liddell was characterized by how we grew on each other over time. While my early employment by Mr. Liddell may have been characterized by a brief meeting, led by another phrase of Mr. Liddell's, "Good-oh, glad to have you with us," it is unclear to me the first time I experienced this greeting.

¶9 Mr. Liddell could be scathing in attacking incompetence among librarians. His great goal was to get the books they needed to his faculty colleagues at the law school. To that end, the constant failure of the interlibrary loan system at both the University of Chicago and the schools it dealt with led him to end every phone call about an interlibrary loan (and there were many) with a pleasant "Why, thank you so very much for all your help, good-oh, goodbye." This was followed by slamming the phone down, pounding his desk, and yelling "That person has the mind of a gnat, mind of a gnat!"

¶10 Mr. Liddell, in spite of his dual urban experiences in Chicago (from his sophisticated Mies van der Roh apartment on North Lake Shore Drive, to the law school, surrounded by Chicago's huge South Side ghetto) never lost his Texas roots. His West Texas accent was fully intact, and when he really disliked something, he would say it "stinks worse than the cattle pens in Denton, Texas."

¶11 Mr. Liddell was, in fact, a descendant of Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll's model for the little girl in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He was very proud of this, but told few people about it. He collected editions of the books. I saw his collection once at his apartment, and it was a bookman's delight. Small but exquisitely chosen. This may, indeed, be Mr. Liddell's one real search for pure truth.

¶12 While Mr. Liddell's greatest accomplishment at Chicago was certainly his devotion to serving the faculty's teaching and research needs, and his success in doing so, no memorial would be complete without mention of his other great achievement, the cataloging and classification of the University of Chicago Law Library. In 1948 the Library of Congress published Elizabeth Benyon's *Classification: Class K, Law*,³ later revised and republished by the University of Chicago Law Library in 1967.⁴ Mr. Liddell was always a great admirer of Ms.

3. ELIZABETH V. BENYON, CLASSIFICATION: CLASS K, LAW (1948).

Benyon and tirelessly supported the cataloging and classification of the collection while she was still there and after her retirement. Many thought this was Mr. Liddell's search for the Holy Grail, and certainly a violation of his anti-pure truth rule. But Mr. Liddell stuck to his rule, and when the faculty objected strenuously to arranging the treatises by subject ("When we want a book on contracts, we don't want to go to shelves of contract books, we want to be able to get Corbin or Williston quickly and easily"), Mr. Liddell immediately got on with the task of classifying the treatise collection alphabetically by author.

¶13 There is no better epitaph for a man than that he saw his job clearly and got on with it. Mr. Liddell always did just that, and we remember him fondly for it.—*Richard L. Bowler*⁵

4. ELIZABETH V. BENYON, *CLASSIFICATION: CLASS K, LAW* (rev. ed. 1967).

5. Consulting Law Librarian, Albuquerque, New Mexico.