In the Service of Research: The Cornell Law Library

Antonia Saxon

The Gould Reading Room, the heart of the Cornell Law School library, calls to mind the magnificent common rooms of medieval colleges and monasteries. Banks of windows provide light even on the dullest days; lofty ceilings and open spaces suggest freedom and clarity of thought. It is easy to believe that the carved woodwork and the portraits that look down from the walls have endured here for hundreds of years. But Myron Taylor Hall is less than a century old, and the library's most recent addition—the Jane M. G. Foster '18 expansion, which houses two more floors of stacks and carrels—was completed in 1988.

Beneath the leaded windows and oak shelves, information moves through the library at lightning speed. Library director Claire Germain and the two dozen staff members who organize and tend the Cornell Law Library collections don't have much time for quiet contemplation. They are too busy teaching students how to sift through thousands of public and proprietary databases, and how to use complex search tools to locate contemporary scholarship in online electronic journals. Wireless connections beam case citations onto the screens of students' laptops. Clicking keys are heard at least as often as the rustling of pages.

The law library looks like a refuge for timeless scholarly enterprise; it's also one of the fastest-moving, forward-looking legal information centers in the country. "The Cornell Law Reading Room really is the most beautiful of the study rooms at Cornell. The wireless internet systems and plugs at each of the study tables have maintained the beauty of the room while making it an excellent place for students to study in and research from. Additionally, the new computer terminals have really enhanced the ability of students to conduct legal research while in the library," says William Fork '05.

The Law Library's Rare Book Collection: A Critical Resource

Before the word "online" was coined, the library's treasures were all in printed form. The Law School library started with the purchase of a four-thousand volume collection assembled by Merritt King, a local attorney. At that time, in 1887, the school and its library were housed in Morrill Hall; it wasn't until 1893 that the Law School got a building of its own. Named after the Law School's first dean, Judge Douglass Boardman, Boardman Hall cost $110,000 to build, and boasted steam heat and electric light.

After his death, Dean Boardman's widow and daughter purchased for the Law School the enormous library of Albany attorney Nathaniel C. Moak. The twelve-thousand-volume collection doubled the law library's holdings at a single stroke.

Many of Mr. Moak's volumes can still be found in the Dawson Rare Book Room. Thanks to the generous gift of Donato A. Evangelista '57 in honor of his father-in-law, the Rare Book Room is home to a collection of important early editions of landmark legal treatises, court decisions, and statutes; it ranks among the top ten such collections in the country. Cornell students can see at first hand the flowering of Anglo-Norman common law as they examine sixteenth-and seventeenth-century and court reports (year books) from England, while rarities from the Continent trace the growth of legal systems derived...
from Roman law. One of the library's treasures is a copy of the first printed edition of Bracton's *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, an early attempt to lay out systematically the entire corpus of English law. Other treasures include copies of Coke's *Institutes* and Blackstone's *Commentaries*. The collection forms, as Cornell law library curator of law rare books Barbara Grant once described it, "a replica of the library any self-respecting barrister in seventeenth-century Britain would have owned."

The law library has acquired more archival treasures over the years. The *Earl J. Bennett (class of 1901) Collection of Statute Law*—much of which is now held in "the Cage," a secure wire enclosure on the old ground floor—contains session laws and compiled laws for the federal government, as well as all states and territories. Some date back to the colonial era. Many academic law libraries have old state session laws on microfiche, but few still maintain actual paper copies of superseded state codes. Although researchers need the assistance of a librarian to access volumes, information on laws pertaining to slavery, women's rights, voting and taxation can be viewed without having to peer at documents on microform. More recent acquisitions include the

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William P. Rogers '37 and Adele Langston Rogers '36 Collection of papers and memorabilia from the former Secretary of State, generously donated to the Law School by the Rogers family, and the trial records of Samuel S. Leibowitz '31, counsel for the defendants of the Scottsboro Trials. The Dawson room also holds nearly one hundred and fifty bound volumes of documents belonging General William J. Donovan (1883–1959), special assistant to the U.S. chief prosecutor, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. These documents were donated to the law library by Henry Korn, a generous benefactor of the Cornell Law School. Many of the documents in this latter collection survive in other libraries, but the Donovan volumes contain pieces of private correspondence not found elsewhere.

The Donovan collection provides a good example of the many forms in which legal information can exist today. Cornell has entered into a collaborative agreement with the *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion* to make General Donovan's papers more accessible to researchers. The RJLR has a special interest in those materials in the collection that document the Nazi plan to destroy systematically the structure of the Christian church in Germany. The law library

**Alumni Support the Library with Generous Gifts**

- The Jack Clarke '52 Comparative Law Book Fund, for foreign, comparative, and international law materials.
- The Sheppard A. Guryan '67 Law Library Endowment, for the acquisition of books and related materials on the History of Jurisprudence and American Legal Thought.
- The Judge Alfred J. Loew Memorial Fund, to which the Mervis family has made generous additional contributions.
- The Earl J. Bennett (class of 1901) Collection of Statute Law.
- The Harry Bitner Research Program, to which Richard Gilden '71 and Lorraine Bitner have made generous additional contributions. The fund honors Mr. Bitner, Ms. Bitner's father, who served as director of the Cornell law library from 1965–1976, and who is remembered as a giant in the field of law librarianship.
- Several alumni also regularly donate books to the Rare Book collection.
has agreed to make both acid-free print copies as well as digital copies of each of the documents in the archives for the RJLL; the RJLL, in turn, promotes the documents to the scholarly community.

From Page to Screen: The Transformation of Information

Why is it so important to put documents like these online? For one thing, it brings the law library as close as one's computer. The Cornell Law Library website is an online presence for law students, faculty, and scholars who prefer to make use of the law library's resources from their laptops, whether they are working in their own studies, in Cornell courtyards, or in airport lounges in Berlin or Mumbai.

Through its website, the library provides a wealth of legal research information from other sources to its users. Several links on the website deserve particular mention. The law library portal features a link to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and serves as a mirror site for the Court. In 1995, Stephen Schwebel, then president of the Court, heard about Cornell's expertise in web-based technologies, and contacted the law library to request help establishing a website. The library introduced him to John Greco '98, a computer-specialist-turned-law-student who was working as a library research assistant. The following summer, Mr. Greco traveled to the Hague to help design and set up a site for the Court. A couple of years later, the Court asked the law library if it would serve as its official U.S. mirror site. (When a site is heavily used, mirror sites are set up to duplicate the content of the original site on another server.) The court's docket and decisions are just a couple of mouse clicks away from the law library's portal.

The library also serves as the official web site for the International Labor Organization (ILO), which itself maintains a massive directory of resources dealing with labor standards in all the countries of the world. Documents pertaining to child labor law, migrant labor, occupational workplace hazards, and other special research topics are clearly indexed and instantly available from the ILO site.

Since 2001, the law library has been working with the Small Business Administration (SBA) on their egovernment site. Jean M. Callihan, head of reference services, is the senior editor for New York State content portion of the site, updating it several times a year. She works with SBA staff members in Seattle and the District of Columbia. "Partnering with the SBA has been a great experience," says Ms. Callihan. "On a practical level, my familiarity with New York government agencies, law, and regulations has increased. On a more important level, however, the enthusiasm and innovation put into the project by my SBA partners is contagious, and causes me to think about implementing our online services to faculty and students in new ways."

The Law School has a web-based research portal of its own: the Legal Information Institute (LII), one of the most heavily consulted general-use legal websites on the net. While the law Library and the LII websites link to each other, the LII is a separate entity. The site was the subject of a story in the Cornell Law Forum ("The Mushroming Virtual Law Library on the Net," July, 2000).

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Online Legal Research Sources

"Lawyers don’t know the answer to every question that walks through the door. But they must know how to research legal issues to develop the answer. In our complex, fast-paced society, the law develops on multiple fronts and is discoverable from a variety of angles. Law students are learning the skills to succeed, and that has to include legal research skills. Law librarians at Cornell are teaching students the strategies to find the law, and the judgment to determine the authoritativeness of varied print and web sources. These are research steps that no attorney can afford to skip," reports Patricia G. Court, Assistant Director for Administration and Public Services.

Over the past two decades, legal research has seen wholesale transformation as federal and state jurisdictions put cases and codes online, and citation services have digitized their databases. When the library surveyed Cornell law students this past summer, 50 percent said they used a combination of online resources and print material; 74 percent said they were eager to learn more about online legal research. In response to their requests, library staff members—many of them holders of dual degrees in law and library science—have tailored courses to produce researchers who can offer law firms superbly-honed sets of skills.

Special one-credit courses are offered in international law, business law, and other sub-specialties.

The library staff helps students cope with the "drinking from the firehose" phenomenon, the overwhelming flood of legal information available online. The staff selects, catalogs, and organizes information to assist all users of the law library, training students to integrate text and on-line resources most efficiently and effectively. They teach students how to get the most out of their proprietary database search time.

If a book lies hidden away in an attic for two hundred years, it can still be opened and read. Information in electronic form has a much shorter lifespan.

They provide beginning and upper-level research courses that supply them with tools and methods for legal research. During reunion, the law library staff schedules training sessions to teach alumni to use new research techniques. The law library also publishes a newsletter, both online and in print, to inform researchers of new developments. In InSITE, a separate online publication, the library staff reviews legal websites they think legal researchers might find useful, and offer brief commentary and guides. Alumni are welcome to sign up to receive the newsletter and InSITE (see box).

It’s not just the wealth of online information that poses a problem for the law library. "The main problem with digital information," Professor Germain points out, "is that the library owns nothing. It pays for content, but does not physically or contractually own the information. Furthermore, typically, when the subscription is cancelled, the library does not have any archival rights. That is why we in the library are trying hard to negotiate better electronic licenses with the publishers, including the right to download archives of materials to a local server. Another problem posed by digital information," she continues, "is its built-in obsolescence. It does not last as long as paper, and it needs to be refreshed, migrated, and somehow archived in a permanent way." If a book

Website and InSITE Information

The library’s website is http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/

For an e-mail subscription to InSITE, alumni may send their request to: listproc@cornell.edu: in the message put Subscribe InSITE-L [YourFirstName] [YourLastName], or visit the website at www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/RESOURCES/insite.htm.

To be notified when the Law Library Newsletter is available online, send an e-mail to the editor, Jean Callihan at jc374@cornell.edu.
lies hidden away in an attic for two hundred years, it can still be opened and read. Information in electronic form has a much shorter lifespan; punch cards and reel-to-reel tape have already become obsolete.

What will happen in another twenty years, when companies no longer service or sell the software packages that allow users to navigate through databases? Big research libraries have begun to systematize the “migration” of data, moving it to more appropriate media to ensure its usefulness over the long term. Stored information must be migrated into new forms and technologies as they appear, and libraries have to find a way to do this quickly and economically. Professor Germain has brought the library into NELLCO (the New England Law Library Consortium) and LIPA (the Legal Information Preservation Alliance), groups formed to purchase electronic databases more efficiently, and to assist with archiving and migrating problems.

In the Service of Research: Where Cornell Law Library Excels

With all the emphasis on online sources, it can sound as if the books in the library’s collection are becoming superfluous. Nothing could be further from the truth. Books and serials in print form still constitute the heart of the library’s collection. Legal publishing hasn’t slowed at all in the past ten years. The library’s purchase of books and periodicals “continues to support new programs that have emerged in the past few years, such as the death penalty clinic, feminist jurisprudence, law and economics, and an increasingly global curriculum,” says Professor Germain.

Even authoritative online sources need print backup. Court case reports online are not always correct or updated dependably. While cases are easy to read online, state and federal codes are sometimes easier to handle in print form. The director of the law library at the University of California at Davis, George Grossman, has said, “If legal information were available only in electronic form, someone would invent the book.”

A Sampling of the 8,550 Questions Answered by the Law Library Staff

- How can extradition from France of a U.S. citizen be handled when the citizen faces the death penalty, a punishment to which the French government is opposed?
- What is the legislative history of the original 1790 patent laws?
- How does Talmudic law vary in Jewish communities worldwide?
- How did voting statutes and poll taxes develop and change in various states?
- Are legal qualifications transferable between the member nations of the EU?
- What is the nature of the diplomatic relationship between Sierra Leone and Nigeria?
- How does the California experience of energy deregulation compare with that of Germany?

The People behind the Print

Print materials are essential; so are the specialists who can make sense of competing sources. If you ask Law School faculty members how they feel about the library, it’s the library staff members and their expertise that tend to get mentioned. “When you take into view the collection and the service, the Cornell Law Library is the best in the nation,” says Professor Kevin M. Clermont. Professor Steven Shiffrin talks with enthusiasm about the library’s faculty-staff liaison program, which assigns a researcher from the library staff to every professor. “All I have to do is give her some idea of what I’m looking for,” says Professor Shiffrin of the liaison he has worked with, “and she comes back with piles of great material. It’s not the kind of library where they don’t want you to get anywhere near the stacks,” he adds.

To say that the law library director’s job doesn’t have much turnover is something of an understatement. Only seven people have held the position since the founding of the Law School in 1887. The position of administrative assistant to the director has, if possible, even less turnover. Administrative assistant Crystal Hackett, who started at the Law School in 1964, has served four of the library’s seven directors. She has gone from taking shorthand and making car-
bon copies for her first boss, Lewis Morse, to desktop publishing for Professor Germain.

Under Professor Germain's predecessor, Jane Hammond (1976–1993), the library catalogue was put online for the first time, and the Foster addition was completed. Now, under Professor Germain, the library's collection has continued to grow, particularly in the areas of international and interdisciplinary law; it ranks among the top twenty of the 185 law libraries in the country. The service counter in the Gould Reading Room has been opened up to make staff members more approachable. The law library makes use of the online services of WorldCAT, a huge library catalog database; Borrow Direct, an interlibrary loan service which allows researchers to borrow books directly from another library without the help of a librarian; and Ariel, an internet-based document-scanning system.

Even in an electronic world, though, there is no substitute for human relationships. Behind the electronic links to organizations on the library's website lie warm professional ties. The alliance with the International Court of Justice came about when Judge Schwebel himself made contact with the library. More relationships have been fostered through Professor Germain's networks in the world of French law and in her position as director of the joint degree program between the Law School and the Université Paris 1—Panthéon Sorbonne. The official of the International Labor Organization who approached the law library about linking to its website, Jean Pierre Lavee, was a French law professor. Professor Germain is also pursuing an alliance with Montreal's McGill University; this Canadian law school, with its superb French and English-language legal scholarship, lies closer to Cornell geographically than many such schools in the United States.

Community, after all, is what makes the library. There is even a little time for romance. William P. Rogers '37, the former secretary of state whose collected artifacts and memorabilia are stored in the Dawson Rare Book Room, met his wife in the Gould Reading Room, an occasion he said was "the best thing that ever happened to me." Professors Emily Sherwin and Kevin Clermont were married beneath its towering windows not too long ago. Professor Germain, who has made a private collection of such stories, cites a recent wedding piece in the New York Times in which the couple stated they'd met while studying in the law library. The clean lines and uplifting spaces of the Reading Room may inspire great scholarship of the mind; but they also give freedom to the hearts of individuals.

The law library welcomes correspondence, and is especially interested in archiving alumni memories of Cornell Law School and the Law Library. Please write to cmg13@cornell.edu.

### Time Line for the Cornell Law Library

1912  - First catalog, handwritten cards  
- Shelf list created (cards filed in call number order)
1936  - Typewritten Library of Congress guide cards replace handwritten cards in catalog
1939  - Complete inventory of collection made
1965  - Acquisitions, cataloging, reference, & circulation departments created
1975  - 300,000 volumes in collection
1978  - Law library becomes depository for U.S. government publications
1988  - Online Public Access Catalog introduced
1991  - All cards now in machine-readable form in online catalog
1992  - 400,000 volumes in collection
1995  - Cornell Law Library web site created
1998  - International Labour Organization mirror site established at Law Library
2002  - Paperless ordering and invoicing is implemented via Electronic Data Interchange
2003  - 40,532 titles cataloged
- 8,550 reference questions answered
- 24,586 materials checked out, renewed, or in use
- 665,000 volumes in collection

Additional research for this article was provided by Claire M. Germain, the Edward Cornell Law Librarian and professor of law; Crystal B. Hackett, administrative assistant; Matthew M. Morrison, reference librarian; and Elizabeth Teskey, assistant to the head of technical services.