

Judith A. Gaskell
Librarian of the Court
Supreme Court of the United States

Guest Speaker at CALL Annual Meeting
May 26, 2005

Supreme Service @ the Supreme Court

What it is like to work in the Library of the Supreme Court? After almost two years as Librarian of the Court, I am still honored and pleased to be able to direct one of the most beautiful and most service-oriented law libraries in the U. S. How did the Library develop this supreme service? The nine Librarians prior to me worked for 117 years to reach this pinnacle. Now I strive to sustain and continue to raise the level of this service.

The main mission of the Library is to assist the Justices in fulfilling their constitutional responsibility by providing them with the best support in the most efficient, ethical and economic manner. In order to serve the full range of research and information needs of its patrons, the Library has developed an outstanding staff and collection. Staff members tend to work at the Library for a long time and many of them have served for over twenty on up to thirty-two years. The combined expertise and dedication of all 29 of its staff members means that the Library can provide timely and personalized service to the nine Justices, their 35 law clerks, 10 Court Officers, over 400 Court support staff, members of the Supreme Court Bar, Members of Congress and their legal staff, and Government attorneys. Normally members of the public can come to the Library to use the Supreme Court Records and Briefs and government documents, but currently these are unavailable until Fall of 2006, when most of the Library's phase of the Infrastructure Modernization Project will be completed. Researchers can use other items that are unique to our collection with my written permission.

The Library Past

It took a long time from when the Judiciary Act of 1789 established the Supreme Court as the highest court in the U. S. to develop the Library's current excellent services and collections. During its first 145 years, the Supreme Court met in the nation's capitol building, originally in New York, then in Philadelphia, and finally in Washington, D. C. The Supreme Court did not have its own building until the present one was finished in 1935.

In the early years, the Justices had to rely primarily on their personal law collections for research. They got some relief in 1812 when a joint resolution of Congress gave them the right to use the Library of Congress, which had been established in 1801. Then in 1832 a separate Law Library was established within the Library of Congress, and the Supreme Court Justices were authorized to make the rules for the use of that collection. Beginning in 1841, a collection of duplicate books from the Library of Congress was shelved in the Justices' Conference Room under the care of the Clerk of the Court. By 1873 this collection was firmly established by statute as a private library for the Justices

when \$2,000 was appropriated to purchase new books. The Justices also maintained collections in their chambers consisting mostly of books withdrawn from the Library of Congress.

The first Librarian of the Court, Henry DeForest Clarke, was appointed in 1887 and was put in charge of the Conference Room collection and the Justices' personal collections. Typical of the dedication and long tenure of Court Librarians, Clarke's son, Oscar DeForest Clarke, served as the third Librarian from 1915 until 1947. The position of Librarian was designated as an officer of the Court in 1938 and became such by statute in 1948. Helen C. Newman served from 1947 to 1965 as the fourth Librarian and was the first woman to serve in that position.

In 1935 the Supreme Court Library started out in its new building with a collection of around 72,500 volumes. Seventeen thousand of these volumes were from the Justices' Conference Room collection, 25,000 from the Law Library of Congress, and 23,000 from the Elbridge T. Gerry collection, which had been donated by his son, Peter Gerry, in 1928. By 1980, the seventh Librarian, Roger F. Jacobs, who served from 1978 to 1985, reported that the collection had grown to 230,000 volumes.

The original shelving in the Library soon filled up with the growing collection, so additional shelving was added in the 1950's and the 1970's and an off-site storage facility with 47,277 linear feet of compact shelving was completed in 1991. More detailed information about the early librarians and the growth and development of the book collection can be found in articles written by former Librarians Edward G. Hudon, who served from 1972-1976, and Shelley L. Dowling who served from 1989-2003.

The Library in 2005

Today, in 2005, the size of the collection has grown to over 500,000 books and 200,000 microforms. This includes 5,500 serial titles. The book collection is particularly rich in United States federal and state primary law and government documents, law reviews, treatises on Constitutional Law and History, legal dictionaries, and British case reports and treatises. The extensive microform collection includes the Supreme Court Records and Briefs and the CIS Microfiche Library.

In addition to an impressive book and microform collection, a variety of electronic resources are available to patrons in the Court building. Lexis and Westlaw have been used extensively since the early 1980s. Additional electronic resources now available include Berkeley Electronic Press, LegalTrac, HeinOnline, JSTOR, LLMCDigital, several Wilsonweb databases, Encyclopedia Britannica, Oxford Reference Collection, and ProQuest Historical Newspapers (New York Times and Washington Post). The collection development committee continues to evaluate the addition of new electronic resources that will both complement and expand the scope of the current collection.

As a Statutory Court Officer, I report to the conference of justices. With the invaluable assistance of an outstanding Administrative Secretary, I manage a Library staff that grew from one librarian and three library assistants in 1935 to a total of 29 in 2004. Currently

the staff members are organized into four departments: Collections Management, Technical Services, Library Technology, and Research. Each department is managed by a department head with the title of Assistant Librarian.

Almost all of the major processes of the Library are automated. The Library has Millennium, Innovative Interfaces' Integrated Library System (ILS), which was brought up in 2003 in a migration from the former VTLS system. Quills, the OPAC, is available to everyone on the Court's internal network. Additionally, all of the Library's catalog records are available in OCLC.

The seven staff members in the Collections Management Department are responsible for book circulation; collection preservation; Interlibrary Loan; delivery of material in the building; retrieval of material from and returns to our nearby storage facility and other locations; book and microform shifting; and stack space planning. Collections Management maintains an Interlibrary Loan database to keep track of the many books borrowed from other locations. We borrow most frequently from the Library of Congress, but rely on a variety of federal and academic libraries as well. Stack space planning for the upcoming Supreme Court Building Modernization was done using AutoCad software to map the location and contents of every stack section in the Library and the offsite storage facility.

The nine Technical Services Department staff members are responsible for acquisitions for the Library and for other Court offices; renewals of serial titles which comprise 95 percent of the collection; paying for, receiving of and routing of all the new materials; cataloging; and binding and conservation. The Library is a selective government depository and the department receives and catalogs those materials. The staff use the cataloging and serials modules, which are part of the Millennium ILS. The acquisitions work interfaces with the Court's financial system. The binding preparation software is the web-based Able system. The department manages and provides access to the Rare Books and Special Collections, and provides reference assistance to help Court staff and members of the public identify Records and Briefs which are then retrieved by Technical Services staff members.

The three staff members in the Library Technology Department, which was established in 2002, install and maintain software (including the Millennium ILS), serve as primary contacts with Data Systems, manage the imaging projects, support departmental databases, and coordinate Library web design and content development.

The eight Research Department staff members are responsible for providing patrons with a variety of information ranging from ready reference answers to complex comparative studies done over many months and even years. Questions from the Justices and their Chambers are given top priority. As time permits, questions from the public directly pertaining to the history and work of the Supreme Court may be answered. Since the Supreme Court is the highest court in the U.S., there is a wide range of subject matter in the state and federal cases brought up on appeal and those that come under original jurisdiction. This means that Research Librarians have to deal with questions on

any subject matter. There has been a gradual shift over the years to doing more non-legal research to supplement the legal research being done by the law clerks and other Court staff. If you see cites in Supreme Court decisions to medical, economic, statistical or other sources such as poetry or songs, they may well be the result of work done by the Research Department. Most research and book requests are submitted to Library staff through the Ask Research web form on the Court's internal network. The Research Department enters all requests into a Research Request Database so that the questions and the resources used to answer them can be tracked and counted. The Research Department also maintains other services to its in-house patrons such as the online Index to Current Term Cases and the Virtual Library, which organizes the links to our subscription databases and useful free web resources.

The Library Future

Currently the Court is in the process of the first building infrastructure modernization project since its building opened in 1935. Thus the Library's short term challenge is to move the physical collection and staff out of the way of the construction and to add appropriate electronic resources that will be available during this transition.

In preparation for the Modernization work in the Library, which will begin this summer and continue through the fall of 2006, the Library has moved over 10,000 boxes of books and over 400 boxes of microforms to the offsite storage facility. Materials now shelved there include the books from the Justice's Library on the second floor, books in call number ranges A through KF9827 and L through Z from the Bar Stacks, and Records and Briefs from 1830 through 1915 and from 1991 through 2002. By the end of June, the Reference Collection will be moved off-site as well. Later on in the year, the rest of the Records and Briefs and the microform collection will also be moved off-site.

The Library staff will be moving too. By late June, the Research staff will be divided between the North trailer and the Library off-site storage facility. Later this fall, fifteen more Library staff will move to those locations. Despite these changes, we are making every effort to provide our full range of services during this period.

Even after all of the modernization project has been completed, our long term challenge will continue to be to evaluate new resources and services; then to add the most useful of the new resources in the most efficient and cost effective formats, while striving to improve and add services to those already available to our primary patrons.