

SNELLA'S *OBITER DICTA*

Official Newsletter of the Southern New England Law Librarians' Association

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SNELLA News

**Official SNELLA
Ballot enclosed
Spring Program**

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6594.

Publications: Lawrence Cheeseman/ Connecticut Judicial Branch/ Law Library at Middletown/ One Court Street/ Middletown, CT
06457-3372/ Email: lcheese@comcast.net

Publicity Chair: Roseanne Shea/Proskauer, Rose/1585 Broadway/New York, NY 10036/email: rshea@cl-law.com

Scholarship: Sandee Molden/ Cohen & Wolf/ 1115 Broad Street/ Bridgeport, CT 06604/ (203) 337-4146.

Public Relations/ CBA Liaison/ AALL Relations Liaison: Dottie McCaughtry / McCaughtry & Associates, Inc./ 44 Portland Drive/
Ashford, CT 06278/ 860-429-7637.

Articles, comments or questions about the publication should be submitted to the Editor: Lawrence Cheeseman or Associate
Editor: Jeffrey Dowd/ Connecticut Judicial Branch/ Law Library at Middletown/ One Court Street, Room 208/ Middletown, CT
06457-3372/ 860) 343-6560/ FAX (869) 343-6568. Email address: lcheese@comcast.net or jeffrey.dowd@jud.state.ct.us.

All material submitted for publication is subject to editorial revision. Electronic submission is encouraged.

Get Ready for the AALL 2007 Annual Meeting and Conference with Books and About New Orleans!

by Brian Huddleston
Loyola University New Orleans College of Law Library

The 2007 AALL Annual Meeting and Conference in New Orleans is still a few months away, but you can whet your appetite for the city with some of the best books about, and set in, New Orleans. The members of NOALL, the New Orleans Association of Law Librarians (and their friends and colleagues) have suggested their favorite titles for you to peruse while waiting for this year's Annual Meeting.

An excellent roadmap to the New Orleans literary scene is Susan Larson's The Booklover's Guide to New Orleans. Her guide offers thumbnail biographies of New Orleans authors from the city's founding through the present day, provides a guide to locations and places featured in New Orleans books, and has a history of literature and writers in New Orleans.

If asked to name the single, definitive, and best novel about New Orleans, A Confederacy of Dunces (1980) by John Kennedy Toole would probably be the unanimous choice of most of the city's residents. It's a story of archetypal New Orleans characters in all their quirkiness, at the center of which is the protagonist, Ignatius J. Reilly. Ignatius, though in his thirties, still lives at home with his mother and his contempt for all things modern peaks when he is forced by family circumstances to finally get a job (a rote plot description like that *pales* next to its hilarious realization). Toole is the only major New Orleans writer who was a true native and few, if any, have captured the city in prose better than he did. Amy Schwarzenbach (a former New Orleans law librarian) likes Confederacy because it provides "a snapshot of the city's singularity at its peak in the 1960s."

Tennessee Williams lived much of his adult life and set several of his plays in New Orleans, including the iconic A Streetcar Named Desire (1948). Streetcar is a story of contrasts and confrontations both violent and subtle: refinement versus earthiness, class distinctions versus social equity, and a longing for the past versus an acceptance of the present. If your only exposure to this work is the classic movie, reading the play is well worth your time; the dialogue can be savored at a leisurely pace and you will discover some of the more coarse and salacious elements that had to be buffed out for the movie version. And for anyone who enjoys behind-the-scenes Hollywood dramas, Sam Staggs' When Blanche Met Brando: The Scandalous Story of "A Streetcar Named Desire" is a comprehensive book about the history of the play and its transformation into a movie, lavish with details and replete with gossip.

Another noted New Orleans author is Walker Percy. Percy's best novel, The Moviegoer (1961), won the National Book Award, beating out Joseph Heller's Catch-22 and J.D. Sallinger's Franny and Zooey. The main character, Binx Bolling, is a disenchanted young stockbroker on a search for some higher meaning in his life. The book traces the final week of Carnival leading up to Ash Wednesday, which coincides with Binx's thirtieth birthday. Chuck Lowry (of American Lawyer Media and an honorary New Orleanian) says that "Percy's elegant writing and sly humor carries us almost unaware to important lessons in the search for meaning—even when that search involves elements as simple as oysters and cold beer on Magazine Street on a Friday night."

New Orleans is also the setting for many crime and detective novels. Foremost are the Dave Robicheaux books by James Lee Burke. Burke has been called the Faulkner of crime fiction. He introduced Robicheaux in 1987's The Neon Rain and the forthcoming The Tin Roof Blowdown will be the sixteenth book featuring the former New Orleans detective. Readers have watched Burke battle his alcoholism, suffer the loss of his wife, and raise an adopted daughter alone all while his cases entangle him with every manner of Louisiana lowlife.

At close to three centuries old, New Orleans history has plenty of subject matter for history both fictional and factual. The patron saint of the goth underworld of New Orleans, Anne Rice, serves historical fiction straight-up, sans vampires and witches, in The Feast of All Saints. Set in antebellum New Orleans, it is a story of race and class among the descendants of white plantation owners and their black slaves. Professor Mitch Crusto of Loyola University New Orleans College of Law says this book "provides insight into the world of free people of color and their frustration at existing in a state somewhere between being free and being enslaved."

Unfortunately, New Orleans suffers from a lack of good, recent general history books. [Cont'd]

Many residents are familiar with Beautiful Crescent: A History of New Orleans (1982), by Joan B. Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer and though it has a lot of detail, it is poorly organized. You can get a definitive history of New Orleans up through 1900 in Henry Rightor's Standard History of New Orleans, Louisiana. Or, for a colorful look at the early city's criminal history, Herbert Asbury's The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld (1936) has been recently re-published. Asbury, a journalist and popular historian, also wrote The Gangs of New York, which inspired the Martin Scorsese film of the same name. Asbury's books about urban crime and depravity (he also wrote volumes on the criminal histories of Chicago and San Francisco), have been criticized for being more sensationalistic than scholarly, but they make for enjoyable reading. And for a quirky, funny take on the city, New Orleans Unmasked (1985) by S. Frederick Starr, is part history, part travelogue, and all New Orleans. Subtitled "Being a Wagwit's Sketches of a Singular American City" it's a series of short vignettes about nearly every aspect of the city. Etheldra Scoggin, reference librarian at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, says that Starr's book "manages to capture the heart and soul of New Orleans better than other, more comprehensive attempts to describe this city."

Post-Katrina New Orleans is the subject of many books chronicling that disaster and its aftermath. Of the numerous books offering a narrative of the hurricane and the city, The Great Deluge, by Douglas Brinkley, may have the best scholarly pedigree, but it has been described as a 700 page Nexis search disguised as a book. A preferable history of the catastrophe may be Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City by Jed Horne, a reporter for the New Orleans Times-Picayune. But Katrina is still too recent in memory to thoroughly and objectively examine all the detailed books about it. However, a definitive history of Katrina on a *personal* scale, and a book that has been a best-seller in New Orleans since it was published, is 1 Dead in Attic, by the Times-Picayune columnist Chris Rose. This collection of Rose's newspaper columns chronicles the immediate weeks and months of Katrina's aftermath through the stories of the people he met and his own explorations and reflections on what the city has gone through (many of the columns are also archived on the newspaper's web site at <http://www.nola.com/rose/>).

Two other post-Katrina titles are worth mentioning. First, Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?, edited by David Rutledge, is a collection of essays and literary marginalia about the history of the city, its culture, slices of life before the storm, and tales of its aftermath, all interspersed with tidbits such as 19th century song lyrics, favorite local recipes, and transcripts of Katrina news coverage. Second, Why New Orleans Matters, by Tom Piazza, is a manifesto for New Orleans' survival. It was written during the weeks after Katrina struck in response to then-House Speaker Dennis Hastert's comments questioning the prudence of rebuilding New Orleans.

To close on a happier note, if you only have time for one book about New Orleans, consider its entry in Hill Street Press' anthology series of works that focus on major southern cities. Literary New Orleans, edited by Judy Long, is an collection of fiction, non-fiction, and essays about New Orleans that spans its entire history (pre-Katrina history, that is, having been published in 1999). Starting with accounts of early explorers and settlers, through excerpts from works by Walk Whitman and Mark Twain, the selection is a varied survey of New Orleans as captured in the written word that concludes with contemporary writers like Christine Wiltz and Andrei Codrescu. It, or any of the books in this article, can help you get in the mood for New Orleans.

For even more information about New Orleans books, the city, and this year's AALL Annual Meeting in general, check out the Local Arrangement Committee's web site at <http://www.lb5.uscourts.gov/AALL/>.

NE2007 : Libraries Without Borders II

Toronto, October 17-20, 2007

It's officially spring, and those things which have been developing under ground are now ready to burst forth in full flower. So it is with the tulips in my front yard, and so it is with the 2007 meeting of the North East Regional Law Libraries.

The meeting is on course for October, and there's so much to tell you already!

Conference pricing has been set (although Registration will not open for another few weeks). See the website for rates and dates.

The Preliminary program offers a wealth of opportunities to learn and to exchange ideas. From research workshops to cross-border insolvency and copyright, the "Librarians and the Law" stream provides insight into the legal systems and legal issues of the United States and Canada.

"Law Librarians and Librarianship" looks at the future of law librarianship attracting, educating and managing staff to keep libraries a vibrant part of the legal world. This stream will also provide opportunities for you to reflect upon your own career path, and expand your management skills.

"Law Libraries beyond the law" is, in many ways, the most wide-ranging stream. Meet the Librarians Without Borders and hear about their work in Angola. Meet librarians who are taking their careers beyond the traditional border of the library, like Sabrina Pacifici, founder and editor of LLRX and beSpecific, key resources in law librarianship and legal technology.

The Social Committee has also been extremely busy - from the opening reception at the Ontario Legislature to the closing banquet at the beautiful Toronto Marriott Downtown Eaton Centre, you'll get to see some of the best that Toronto has to offer.

Keep up on the latest developments by checking our conference blog (<http://librarieswithoutborders.wordpress.com/>) and our website (<http://www.librarieswithoutborders.net>) - RSS feeds available!

And don't forget to mark your calendars:

Toronto, October 17-20, 2007

Wendy Reynolds
Ontario Securities Commission

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Ballots should be returned by May 18, 2007 to:

Louise Tucker
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SNELLA SPRING 2007 PROGRAM

June 5, 2007

Quinnipiac University School of Law Library
Registration & Continental Breakfast 9:00 a.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Program 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Board Meeting Following

Podcasting 101

Podcasting was the word of the year in 2005, and more and more libraries are jumping on the podcasting bandwagon. What is it, how do you do it, and what are the benefits? Join us for an exciting session on looking at the podcasting phenomena. Learn how to subscribe, listen to and manage podcasts. Discover best practices in law library podcasting.

Guest Speaker:

Beth Gallaway

Library Trainer/Consultant for Youth Services
Metrowest MA Regional Library System

Cost \$20.00 – includes program and breakfast
Registration Deadline May 25, 2007

Please return the registration form and payment (made out to SNELLA) to:
Claudia Jalowka, Connecticut Judicial Branch Law Libraries,
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SNELLA's Obiters Dicta

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A Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)

Editor

Lawrence Cheeseman
Connecticut Judicial Branch Law Library
One Court Street, Room 208
Middletown, CT 06457

Phone: (860) 343-6560

FAX: (860) 343-6568

Email: lcheese@comcast.net



OUR INTERNET ADDRESS IS

HTTP://www.aallnet.org/chapter/snella/

Lawrence Cheeseman, Editor
Jeffrey Dowd, Associate Editor
Connecticut Judicial Branch Law Library
One Court Street, Room 208
Middletown, CT 06457

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