

Miles O. Price—Teacher and Friend

By HARRY BITNER*

Miles and I first met in June 1946 in St. Louis at the annual meeting of AALL. Though Miles was busy with being president of the association, he took time to talk with me. I had no idea at that time that within a few months I would be working for him. My association with Miles was to be a most rewarding one both professionally and personally.

I became the associate law librarian, under Miles, at Columbia in November 1946. I learned much from Miles, who always gave a great deal of himself to his staff. He could not be just a boss; he was also a teacher and a friend. He was a perfectionist and demanded high standards from his staff. He taught by giving his staff as much free reign as he felt they could handle. Beneath the somewhat gruff exterior there was great warmth and understanding.

My own experience at Columbia was an example of Miles' approach in training his staff. Immediately upon assuming my duties, I was placed in charge of an outstanding staff, all of whom had been in law libraries longer than I. This method of training, which permitted one to make his own decisions, also instilled confidence. I have followed this procedure with my own staff.

Another example of Miles' approach in the development of his staff came in connection with his course in law library administration. He asked several members of his staff to lecture on special aspects of law librarianship, such as reference and cataloging. Miles expected those of us who were asked to participate to prepare our lectures without being told what to do or to say.

Miles' preparation for his course was also a valuable lesson to his staff. Even though he had been giving this course for years, each lecture was prepared with great care and detail. Since Miles covered a great deal of ground in each lecture, he would arrive very early every morning to make certain that all the material was ready and in place for his demonstrations.

In using the members of his staff in this course, Miles meant to indicate the importance of a good staff in general, and especially to a

well-run law library. In addition to this point, he also created a high morale for his staff, who were very pleased and proud to be asked to assist him in his course.

The philosophy of service that Miles advocated and practiced was one of the very important lessons that I absorbed right from the very beginning of my tenure at Columbia. Every means and every effort was used to provide the faculty and the students with the most efficient service possible. There was never any relaxation in this goal, and any dissatisfaction or criticism expressed by the faculty or students brought forth renewed efforts to improve these services.

The impact of this philosophy has gone beyond the Columbia Law School. Many of the students during Miles' tenure have become law professors in various law schools throughout the country. They have expected the same excellent service in their libraries that they received as students.

Of course, for me a most valuable learning experience and one that was fully rewarding, was the opportunity to become a co-author with Miles on *Effective Legal Research*. Prior to becoming so associated with Miles, he had discussed with me his ideas and plans for the book. He wanted it to serve many purposes: As a reference tool, a bibliographic guide, and a teaching tool. He was concerned about this and, because he knew that I had taught a course in legal bibliography, he brought up for discussion the feasibility and practicality of such a publication as he envisioned. It seemed to be a good idea, and he went ahead with it in the first edition.

When Miles suffered a severe ulcer attack that necessitated the removal of three-fourths of his stomach, he was advised that his recovery would be slow. In order to keep the work going, I was asked to join him as co-author and to perform various duties. A good deal of my work was research on various matters, mostly minor details that Miles felt were important. He wanted to be absolutely certain that everything was covered and that there would be no errors of omission or commission.

It was a valuable lesson in thoroughness for me. I had seen some of his manuscripts prior to my becoming a co-author, and I was amazed by

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his coverage and the detail of his intended publication. I was surprised, therefore, by the research assignments he gave me because I thought he had already covered it all so well. Miles, as I have indicated, was a perfectionist; and he wanted to be absolutely certain that he had not overlooked a single detail. At every stage of the development of the book, Miles checked and rechecked every item to be certain that there would be as few errors as possible.

In the preparation of the manuscript, I had to read carefully every draft, and discuss every aspect fully with Miles. He expected full and complete objectivity and he would not be pleased if he felt that I were just being agreeable. He would not always agree with all adverse comment, but he would listen and think about it carefully.

When it came to the "Workbook of Library Exercises," to be used with the text of *Effective Legal Research*, Miles decided that I was to be responsible for this task. He felt that, since I had given a course in legal bibliography in law schools, I would be more qualified than he to design the most effective library problems for first-year law school students. I was quite surprised by this decision. Miles had formulated an excellent set of library problems for his course in law library administration, but he felt his problems were too long and too difficult for first-year law students. With the guidance of the problems used by Miles, as well as some that I had used, the "Workbook" was completed to his satisfaction.

The teaching and learning between us continued during the years following my departure

from Columbia. Miles was very proud of the men who had been his first assistants and particularly in their success as head law librarians. This interest was gratifying and welcome.

It was my good fortune to have one more "association" with Miles in what was to be an important endeavor of his last years. This was the Libraries Study Project of the Association of American Law Schools. Miles was appointed director of the project in 1964.

The primary objective was to provide a basic list of books for every subject of the law school curriculum, to be used as a basis for selection by law school libraries. Miles undertook this immense task with all the enthusiasm and vigor of a very young man. He gave to the project a scope that few could have given to it. Unfortunately, Miles was unable to complete this task because of poor health; and I was appointed the director in February 1967. I had many misgivings about being able to carry on in Miles' footsteps. As I became more and more involved in the project, it was a revelation to learn what a tremendous contribution Miles had made in setting up the goals of this undertaking. To the very last, he had remained a great teacher for me.

Miles was a unique and distinctive person with his own special philosophy and style. His contribution to librarianship, and to law librarianship in particular, was outstanding. He was a great leader, and law librarians were extremely fortunate in having had his leadership and his great wisdom to guide them for so many years. He will be long remembered by his associates, colleagues, and friends.