

Helen in Academe

S. CHESTERFIELD OPPENHEIM*

Helen Newman's long term of pre-eminent service as Librarian of the Supreme Court of the United States is doubtless her outstanding professional achievement. But there is an earlier part of her career which may not be generally known and yet leaves precious recollections to one, such as this writer, a law teacher, who first knew Helen as Law Librarian of the George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C.

It was there that I began my law teaching career in 1927. In the Fall of that year I first met Helen under amusing circumstances. She was also Secretary of the Law School, and in that capacity she would be available to help advise early registrants. When I arrived at the Law School I came to the office counter where entering students made their appearance. Helen, with her usual graciousness, asked me whether I wished to complete my registration as a law student. I told her I had arrived to begin my law teaching on that faculty. With that disclosure we both laughed. Helen's discomforture was eased and my ego was elevated by being mistaken for a young first year law student.

Thus began a friendship with Helen I valued over almost four decades.

Helen's exceptional talents as a Law Librarian were first displayed at George Washington. With a limited Law Library budget she accom-

plished wonders. By unremitting perseverance she searched for, and purchased volumes of, law reviews that soon contributed to the Law Library as complete a collection of law journals as could be found elsewhere in Washington. Helen manifested a genius for stretching the Law Library dollars to fill gaps in the collection of treatises. She missed no opportunity to procure specialized materials from government sources. During her period of service at George Washington all of these efforts resulted in building an excellent working collection in the Law Library for faculty and students.

Helen's appointment as Librarian of the Supreme Court enabled her to broaden her superb services to the legal profession. While her primary function was to respond to the needs of the Justices of the Court and their law clerks, the facilities of the Library are also available to members of Congress, members of the Supreme Court Bar and government attorneys. My admission to the Supreme Court Bar brought me the good fortune of being able to use the Supreme Court Library for my research. Time and again I witnessed Helen's unfailing readiness to assist with warmth of interest all those who availed themselves of the Library's great collection. Helen never regarded herself as the guardian of the Library's resources to the point where its availability for use would have been impaired. Her goal

* Professor of Law, University of Michigan.

was to maximize the Library's service.

Helen's excellent attributes as a Librarian were combined with an outgoing personality which won her many

lasting friendships. Admired and respected for her professional qualities, she was also beloved for her sterling character traits.