Symposium
Legal Information and the Development of American Law: Further Thinking about the Thoughts of Robert C. Berring

Introduction*

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¶1 Few will argue with the proposition that Bob Berring of the University of California-Berkeley School of Law has been throughout his career the foremost thinker about the influences of legal information—the literature of the law—on the development of the law and legal thought in the United States. His 1987 suggestion that “[f]rom the late nineteenth century, the development of the American legal system can be seen as a history of the development of forms of legal publication,” and his own explorations of “whether the forms of publication have been mere vehicles for the transmission of legal knowledge or important influences in the development of that knowledge”1 have inspired the thinking of numerous other writers and provided a lens through which to view the dramatic changes that have taken place in the legal information environment over the past twenty-five years.

¶2 Bob’s writings on the historical role of legal information and the impacts of digital technologies in the legal information environment inspired the articles in this symposium, which was organized not only to honor Bob for his work but also to provide the opportunity for others who have made significant contributions to the literature of legal information to explore the continued vitality of Bob’s writings and their own work, and to think together about contemporary issues in the legal information environment. In issuing invitations, I was gratified that everyone I asked enthusiastically accepted the offer to write for the symposium. In October 2006, nearly all of the authors gathered to deliver their papers at a conference at Boalt Hall, the home of the UC-Berkeley School of Law. The final versions of the papers are published in this issue of Law Library Journal.2 I think that each speaks for itself and requires no elaboration here.

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¶3 In addition to the participants, each of whom recognized that this was a special project, I am grateful to Frank Houdek, who not only provided space in the Journal, but generously offered his support and advice throughout the year we worked on it. His always careful editing improved each article. I also want to thank Jennifer Behrens of the Duke Law Library for her editorial work on many of the articles and Katherine Topulos of Duke for her work on Morris Cohen’s article.

¶4 Law Library Director Kathleen Vanden Heuvel, Katherine Imura, and the staff of the law library at Boalt Hall deserve high praise for their hard work organizing the conference in Berkeley in October. We are all grateful for the financial and other support for the conference provided by Dean Christopher Edley, Jr., and the Robbins Collection of the UC-Berkeley School of Law; and for the generous support of Thomson-West. Additional support was provided by Haworth Press.

¶5 Finally, of course, I wish to thank Bob Berring, both for allowing us to organize the symposium around his writings, and for providing the rich body of work that made it possible.