

A Truly Special Collection

The Stotter Family Law Collection

By Sara Sampson

What makes a collection special? Do the items in the collection need to be rare or unique? Should the collection have a cohesive focus? Are the components special because they have emotional significance? Whatever the definition, the Stotter Collection at The Ohio State University (OSU) Michael E. Moritz Law Library fits. The Stotter Collection includes just over 200 items that all focus on the subject we now call family law, but, more importantly, it is the culmination of a passion for the subject and for books. The Moritz Law Library received the Stotter Collection in 2006 as a gift from alumnus Lawrence Stotter.

The Benefactor

Stotter's lifelong passion for books began when he was 10 years old and a friend loaned him *The Land of Oz, a Sequel to the Wizard of Oz*. In the preface to his own book, *To Put Asunder*, he wrote that by this act "a fire was ignited." He always preferred to own the books he read as opposed to borrowing them from a library. Stotter served in the Korean War and attended OSU on the GI Bill. He graduated from OSU's law school in 1958 and then went on to practice law in California, eventually specializing in family law. He served as the chairman of the American Bar Association's (ABA) Division of Family Law and was the first editor-in-chief of the section's magazine, *Family Advocate*. His love for books evolved when he purchased a book from an antiquarian book dealer who was exhibiting at an ABA conference.



The Collection

Stotter worked extensively with Luttrell to develop his collection. Luttrell believes that the first book he purchased through Meyer Boswell was a book on the role of the law of women in Germany. He followed that with a similar book on the law of women in India. Among the first expensive books Stotter acquired was a 17th century book written to describe how the law applied to women: *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights*. This is also Stotter's favorite piece in the collection, and he believes that this is the first treatise on the topic we now know as family law.

admires Stotter so much that when he found himself needing a lawyer, he turned to Stotter, who was by then among the leading divorce lawyers in the nation. Stotter took his retainer in rare books—some of the very same books that are in the Stotter Collection at the Moritz Law Library today.

"He's a very effective lawyer, but he has a genuine warmth," Luttrell says of Stotter.

The collection contains many volumes of trials for causes of action related to family law, such as adultery, bigamy, seduction, divorce, and criminal conversation. One of the collections of trials brags that it is in the form of narrative, rather than "in the Tedious Form of Depositions." There are also many books on marriage laws of various jurisdictions or religions. The documents are some of the most interesting items. There are several documents from 1897 from private matchmaking services that are quite interesting and provide insight into how marriages were formed at that time. A preprinted form from an unknown decade of the 19th century titled "Bastards, No. 9" allowed a woman to seek the assistance of a court to force the father to provide support for the child.

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"Individual lawyers who collect law books often collect in their practice area," says Joe Luttrell of Meyer Boswell Books. So it shouldn't be a surprise that Stotter, a national expert in family law, went on to develop a collection of books related to the history of family law.

Luttrell calls this work a "cornerstone" of Stotter's collection. Luttrell also notes that a willingness to go back centuries to find books of central importance to a subject area vaults a collector into a much more serious type of collecting. Luttrell

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There are also more modern monographs about family law topics, such as divorce, birth control, children, and general legal history, which offer a window into what a successful California divorce lawyer thought was important to have and to use in his practice. A small collection of family law casebooks, California family law CLE materials, and other teaching materials round out the collection.

Not content to simply acquire a large number of materials about family law, Stotter used them to write *To Put Asunder: The Laws of Matrimonial Strife* (Regent Press 2011), a selected history of family law with several thorough appendices that family law researchers will find helpful. The appendix on Selected Cases and Trials (900-1,897), for example, is a list of the accounts of trials on topics that we now consider family law.

The Gift

In 2006, Bruce Johnson was the associate dean for information services and director of the Michael E. Moritz Law Library. According to Johnson, he received a call “out of the blue” from Stotter with an offer to donate his collection. Accepting the gift was an easy decision given the items in the collection, but it was especially easy because it was a carefully curated collection of a wide variety of types of material on a specific subject. While most of the Stotter Collection can be found in digital collections, marginal notations and slight differences in printing, as well as the quality of Moritz’s copies, make these books valuable. For some books, the Moritz copy is in better shape than the books that have been digitized. The comprehensiveness of the collection is also important. For scholars, being able to use a large collection of

materials relevant to their research in one place can be important.

The Impact

“I think as libraries are focusing increasingly on electronic formats, what’s moving to the fore in importance are special collections, such as rare books,” observes Johnson, currently a professor emeritus of law at OSU.

This gift gave the library’s rare book collection a subject focus. Moritz Law Library continues to add to the collection as items become available. With Johnson’s retirement, a new generation of law librarians must steward the Stotter Collection. As the librarians master the collection and the process of acquiring older materials, it is helpful to have a subject on which to focus. A research guide on the collection is in the works, and at least one faculty member reports having used the materials in her research. ■



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