

Memorial: Della M. Geyer (1927–1999)

¶1 Della M. Geyer, my friend and mentor in law librarianship, passed away at her home in Marlin, Texas, on October 19, 1999. Della retired from the Baylor Law Library on October 1, 1992, but we remained friends even in her retirement years. She brought me along from being a “baby law librarian” to a full-fledged law librarian during the course of the eighteen years we worked together. She was always willing to share her knowledge of law libraries, and of the Baylor Law Library in particular.

¶2 Della was born in Marlin on September 11, 1927, to Carl Paul Geyer and Leata Grace Youngblood Geyer. She graduated from the Texas State College for Women (now Texas Women’s University) in Denton, Texas, in 1948 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in library science. Her professional career, which spanned forty-four years, was spent as librarian at South Texas College, law cataloger at the University of Texas School of Law, and as law librarian (later executive director) of the Law Library and Special Collections at Baylor University School of Law.

¶3 Even as a young woman beginning her library career, Della realized that to rise in the law library profession, one would have to have both law and library degrees. She planned to continue with her education by obtaining a law degree, but was never able to bring this plan to fruition. She was a strong, service-oriented professional as it was, but I would like to think that she might have risen even higher in her field had she been able to obtain the law degree. Nevertheless, she ran the law library at Baylor with only student assistants from 1956 until I was hired in 1973 as the assistant law librarian.

¶4 For several years before she took over at Baylor, the library had been under the supervision of young lawyers who eventually left to practice law or to teach at other law schools. Judge Abner McCall, then Dean of Baylor Law School, wrote to Roscoe Rouse in Ann Arbor, Michigan, regarding the availability of someone to come to Baylor. Judge McCall stated in his letter that “we have been hiring young lawyers but they all have left us after a few years. Now I want to hire a person...with library training who will come and stay with us.” I believe Della fulfilled this request more than adequately, staying for thirty-six years. Early in her tenure, Della, with the help of her student workers, went through the library to accession all of the books into one numbering system. The law school had only moved into its present home a year before she came; prior to that time, the collection was housed as part of the university library.

¶5 In the larger world of law libraries, Della was a founding member of the Southwestern Association of Law Libraries in 1958, its president in 1966–1967, and recipient of its Life Membership Award in 1993. She attended the annual meetings of SWALL and those of the American Association of Law Libraries

nearly every year of her career. Her first AALL meeting attendance was arranged by Helen Hargrave, law librarian at the University of Texas. This was back when the Association membership was small enough that a group picture was taken at the closing banquet with everyone dressed in their finest clothes, long dresses and everything! Della was also a “Bender Baby,” receiving a scholarship from the Matthew Bender Company in 1955.

¶16 Anyone who knew Della for very long was aware of her forceful personality that concealed a soft heart. David Guinn, now the senior member of the law faculty at Baylor, enjoys telling the story of how, when he was a prelaw student studying in the law library, Della found him with his feet on the table. According to Guinn, she told him in no uncertain terms to get his feet off that table and that she was prepared to help him accomplish this action if need be. I think the story may have grown through the years, but David and Della both got a laugh each time he told it in her presence.

¶17 Retirement brought Della more time to indulge in her favorite leisure activities—gardening, traveling, and supporting the Aggies of Texas A&M. She was an expert with house plants, outside plants, and lawns. For any question I had in these areas, Della was my source for the definitive answer. We took many short trips together: to shop in Dallas, to visit the Wildflower Center in Austin, and to attend Aggie football games at Kyle Field in College Station. Her love of the Aggies was a family tradition as her older brother graduated from Texas A&M, as well as two of her nieces and their husbands.

¶18 Our friendship was one of mutual respect and common interests that withstood the test of time. The time should have been longer, but the shared memories will stand for the rest of my lifetime.—*Susan Kendrick*¹

1. Cataloging and Government Documents Librarian, Caston Law Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.