Cornerstones for Enduring Law Libraries: Morris Cohen’s Influence at Yale*

S. Blair Kauffman**

Morris L. Cohen was one of the great scholar-librarians of the twentieth century and will long be remembered for the scholarly contributions he left behind and the many students and librarians he influenced along the way. His contributions as a library administrator may be less well known, but his leadership of the Yale Law Library helped shape it to be one of the premier law libraries of the twenty-first century and stands equal to his scholarship as a memorial to his positive influence.

¶1 Morris Cohen capped a long, illustrious career in law libraries at the Yale Law School, where he directed its library during a critical period and placed in motion programs that helped put Yale’s law library in the premier position it enjoys today. For anyone who wants a sense of Morris and his values, a visit to Yale’s law library is in order, for this is the institution that benefited most from Morris’s decades of experience as one of the great law librarians of the twentieth century.

¶2 Morris came to Yale in 1981, following a succession of ever more prestigious and challenging directorships, beginning at the University of Buffalo, then on to the University of Pennsylvania’s Biddle Law Library, and finally to the Harvard Law Library. He directed the library at Yale Law School for a decade, from 1981 through 1991, and remained an active member of the law school community as a Professorial Lecturer in Law until his death in late 2010. Yale was truly Morris’s home.

¶3 While Morris led some of the best academic law libraries of the twentieth century and was a pivotal director at Yale, he is remembered primarily for his scholarship. Others in this issue have detailed that scholarly work, but Morris was far more than a scholar. He was first and foremost an exceptionally warm, kind, generous, and caring person. He was endlessly curious about people. Clearly, his study of anthropology as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago provided good training for this seemingly natural trait. He wanted to know what drove people, why they did whatever they did. He was always asking questions and was a master of getting others to talk. This made him a great teacher, and Morris truly enjoyed teaching both in and out of the classroom. Long after he retired as library director at Yale, he continued to teach and combine his teaching with his scholarly interests. His last course, which he developed over several years, was Research Methods in

---

* © S. Blair Kauffman, 2012.
** Law Librarian and Professor of Law, Yale Law School, New Haven, Connecticut.
American Legal History, which he cotaught with John Nann. Morris invited John to join him as coauthor of a book on this topic¹ and raved about how terrific John was as a teacher. This was how Morris worked. He engaged other librarians to follow in his path; his passion for teaching and research was contagious.

¶4 Morris clearly enjoyed the professional identification of librarianship, and he proudly wore the title of law librarian. However, it’s less clear whether Morris enjoyed the day-to-day business of managing libraries. As the law library director at both Harvard and Yale, his administrative style was to hire a trusted deputy and delegate much of administrative work to that person. Certainly his decade at Harvard was one he was ready and happy to abandon by the end. One can assume this was largely due to the stress and burden of overseeing such a huge operation, which distracted him from teaching and scholarship. After another decade as director at Yale, he chose to move out of the director’s chair for good and pursue his teaching and research interests full time. These were his true loves. Nevertheless, Morris accomplished much as a library administrator.

¶5 By the time Morris came to Yale, he had developed a set of principles for law librarianship that helped guide his activities as a library director. He articulated these principles near the start of his tenure at Harvard, while he was serving as president of the American Association of Law Libraries:

1. Law librarians must carry out the policies and purposes of the organization they serve.
2. Law librarians must know those purposes and policies and must also know their readers and the work of their readers.
3. Law librarians must be teachers of legal bibliography and of the methods of legal research.
4. Law librarians must provide access to materials through whatever administrative or bibliographic techniques are necessary to meet their readers’ needs.
5. Law librarians have the primary responsibility for developing and organizing their libraries’ collections and must make conscientious and informed critical judgments in fulfilling that responsibility.
6. Law librarians have a duty to advance their art and their profession in whatever way they can be most effective.²

¶6 A decade later, following his experience at Harvard and shortly after taking over the law library directorship at Yale, Morris published a general set of goals to stimulate discussion about where law libraries should be going in the future:

1. Services: “Offer a full range of readers services . . . designed . . . to provide maximum access to the library’s resources, . . . assist users in obtaining any information which may be needed in their work, . . . instruct users in the effective use of the library’s collections and in . . . legal research generally[,] . . . and inform users . . . of the library’s resources . . . .”
2. Collections: “Develop, maintain, and improve research collections of high quality including primary sources, secondary sources,” and finding aids in

¹ The book is in progress and has been accepted for publication by Yale University Press.
² Morris L. Cohen, President’s Page: Towards a Philosophy of Law Librarianship, 64 LAW LIBR. J. 1, 4 (1971).
law and materials from other disciplines as needed by the institution the library serves.

3. Access tools: “Create and maintain records of the library’s holdings, which are adequate: (a) to inform its readers and to facilitate the most effective use of the library’s resources; (b) to support the efficient administration of the library’s collections and services; and (c) to reflect the library’s holdings to those beyond its primary users . . .”

4. Professional development: “Contribute to the advancement of librarianship, information science, bibliography, and legal scholarship: (a) through the development of the library’s own collections and services;” (b) through the evaluation and use of appropriate technology and techniques and participation in library networks and cooperative ventures; (c) “through the encouragement of individual professional activities, [including] writing, teaching and consultation . . . ; and (d) through the support of educational programs, internships, [and] exchanges . . .”

5. Administration: “Administer the library’s functions and programs . . . (a) to provide a humane work atmosphere [supporting] the dignity, well-being, and professional development of all staff members; (b) to assure the effective, convenient, and safe use of [the library’s] facilities and resources; (c) to preserve and protect the library’s . . . resources for future use; and (d) to use its funds and fiscal resources responsibly . . .”

These principles and goals helped set the guidelines for his accomplishments at Yale.

When Morris arrived at Yale, he was following some of the most influential law librarians of the twentieth century, including the great Frederick Hicks, who directed the library from 1928 through 1946, and Harry Bitner, who was director from 1958 to 1965. The quirky and eccentric legal historian Samuel Thorne and the multitalented Arthur Charpentier also took turns directing the Yale Law Library, from 1946 to 1956 and from 1967 to 1981, respectively. But the experience

---

6. Samuel Thorne was not a librarian by training. Rather, he was an authority on English legal history and common law dating to the twelfth century. *See On the Laws and Customs of England: Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne* (Morris S. Arnold et al. eds., 1981). He joined the Yale Law School faculty in 1945 and served as librarian from 1946 to 1956, when he retired from libraries and joined the Harvard Law School faculty.
7. Arthur Charpentier served simultaneously as librarian and associate dean at Yale Law School from 1967 to 1981. *Arthur A. Charpentier, 69, Ex-Librarian*, N.Y. Times, Mar. 30, 1989, at B3. Unlike Hicks and Bitner, he did not fit the mold of a scholar-librarian and left a thin trail of publications. His contributions at Yale were most obvious in his role as a law school administrator.
Morris accumulated prior to Yale provided him with a uniquely broad professional perspective, perhaps beyond that of any of his contemporaries, which enabled him to build upon the work of his predecessors to lay the groundwork for the critical changes needed to make it one of the very best law libraries of the twenty-first century.

¶8 The list of notable achievements implemented at the Yale Law Library under Morris’s leadership is long. High on that list are the improvements he brought to library security. When Morris arrived, the library was open twenty-four hours a day, with no security during many of the late-night hours. Morris implemented around-the-clock staffing. During his watch, an automated circulation system was launched and the collection was inventoried. These measures undoubtedly helped stem the loss of books from our priceless collection. Another notable achievement was a staff reorganization that focused more attention on faculty services. He created Yale’s first Faculty Services Librarian position. This led both to the professionalization of access services and to the inauguration of the Yale model of maximum faculty service. Also worth mentioning is Morris’s informal personal administrative style and commitment to service, which made the library a welcoming place and helped pave the way for our current exceptional atmosphere.

¶9 Perhaps of equal importance, Morris viewed the library and its services expansively. He saw the library as playing a critical part in many different aspects of the life of the law school; the university; the law library profession; the legal community; and the scholarly communities of law, history, library science, bibliography, and information science. This broad and ambitious view of the library’s role continues to influence our library today. Morris also changed the self-image of the library’s staff, encouraging them to be more professional and innovative. He hired or promoted people like Fred Shapiro, Dan Wade, and Mary Jane Kelsey, who are among the leaders in their fields.

---


9. Dan Wade was hired by Morris to be foreign and international law librarian and is now curator for foreign and international law. In 2006, AALL’s Special Interest Section on Foreign and International Law named an award in Dan’s honor: The Daniel L. Wade FCIL-SIS Outstanding Service Award. Daniel L. Wade FCIL-SIS Outstanding Service Award, Foreign, Comparative & Int’l Law Special Interest Section, http://www.aallnet.org/sis/fcilsis/DanWadeaward.html (last visited Oct. 26, 2011).

10. Mary Jane Kelsey was promoted by Morris to be head of technical services and is now associate librarian for technical services. She is a leading figure in law library technical services and in 2007 was awarded AALL’s most prestigious award for technical services librarians, the Renee D. Chapman Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions in Technical Services Law Librarianship. Renee D. Chapman Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions in Technical Services Law Librarianship, TS-SIS: Technical Servs. Special Interest Section, http://www.aallnet.org/sis/tsssis/awards/chapman/ (last visited Oct. 26, 2011).
As we struggle to articulate the role of libraries in the twenty-first century, Morris’s advice continues to hold. The many positive changes that were implemented at the Yale Law Library after Morris stepped down as director were put in motion by him. Morris agitated for a building renovation program, and pushed to automate library processing, develop the rare book collection, expand the teaching role of librarians, and make the library a more welcoming destination for students. An integrated library system, utilizing Innovative Interfaces, was inaugurated during his tenure, and the resulting online catalog bears his name: MORRIS.

The library was renamed the Lillian Goldman Law Library shortly after Morris’s departure, in recognition of a naming gift that enabled the law school to carry out the library renovation plans he had outlined. A rare book room and climate-controlled stacks were included in this expanded facility, and the rare books Morris saved from the open stacks found a safe and secure home. Student use of the library continued to expand as the library launched the kinds of initiatives for which Morris would have advocated. A new reference and instructional services department was created to emphasize the teaching role of librarians, and new research courses, making full use of Morris’s legal research textbook, were created.

Yale Law Library’s most recent strategic plan was developed during the last year of Morris’s tenure as Professorial Lecturer in Law and covers the five-year period from 2010 through 2015. The plan maps out the direction for a library firmly rooted in the twenty-first century, but it reflects the principles of law librarianship set out much earlier by Morris. The first two guiding principles in this plan could have been written by Morris and clearly represent his values:

1. We provide excellent service to our patrons.
2. Every employee contributes to unlocking our rich and unique collection.

This emphasis on service and access is fully in line with the goals stated by Morris when he arrived at Yale in 1981. Further, the goals and objectives set out in the strategic plan echo the goals Morris articulated for Yale. The strategic plan’s six goals, with added labels, are set out below:

1. Collections and Access: “Continue to build, disseminate, and make accessible our unparalleled collection.”
2. Services: “Make the library the place where everyone wants to go.”
3. Administration: “Be a creative, flexible, and smart organization in an ever-changing environment.”
4. Instruction: “Continue to develop and improve reference assistance and legal research instruction.”

11. Two elective legal research courses at Yale, Effective Techniques in Legal Research and Advanced Legal Research, use MORRIS L. COHEN & KENT C. OLSON, LEGAL RESEARCH IN A NUTSHELL (10th ed. 2010) as the text.
13. Id.
14. Compare our first two guiding principles with the first three principles stated in Morris’s article. Cohen, supra note 3, at 196.
5. Professional Development: “Contribute to the larger body of global knowledge.”

6. Good Citizenship: “Increase environmental consciousness and responsibility amongst library staff and patrons.”\(^{15}\)

Clearly, Morris’s spirit guided the implementation of this plan, and we feel certain he would approve of the strategic initiatives derived from it.

\(^{14}\) We continue to develop and promote our collections following methods put in place by Morris. For example, one of the objectives articulated under collection development is to “Continue to develop and publicize what makes us unique.”\(^{16}\) Morris would be pleased with Yale’s emphasis on improving collections, especially the development of the rare books collection and its promotion through creative exhibits. The unique collection of juvenile jurisprudence books Morris donated to Yale\(^ {17}\) reflects Morris’s interest in the less traveled path to collection building and fits perfectly with the illustrated law book collecting focus Mike Widener has adopted for Yale’s rare book collection. The library’s illustrated book collection is rich and deep with historical materials,\(^ {18}\) but includes contemporary works as well. The exhibit titled “Superheroes in Court! Lawyers, Law and Comic Books,” which was ongoing at the time of Morris’s death, expands the concept of illustrated law books in an unusual direction, intended to pique the curiosity of an audience that might not otherwise be interested in the world of rare books.\(^ {19}\) This imaginative approach is in the spirit of Morris, who enjoyed working with library exhibits throughout his career.

\(^{15}\) Similarly, Morris’s interests are reflected in library programs developed to “[m]ake the library the place where everyone wants to go.”\(^ {20}\) One such program is the library’s film series, which is put on in conjunction with law school graduate students. The graduate students are a small group of approximately twenty-five foreign LL.M. students. Librarians work directly with the students at the start of each academic year, when each student picks out a favorite film from his or her home country. The library acquires the film and promotes the program, and the student who chose the film leads a discussion after it’s shown. The film is added to

\(^{15}\) Strategic Plan 2010–2015, supra note 12.

\(^{16}\) Id.

\(^{17}\) This unusual collection of more than two hundred law-related children’s books was donated by Morris to the Yale Law Library in 2008. The collection is being added to and continues to grow. For a list of the titles in the collection at the time of the gift, see Juvenile Jurisprudence: A Collection of Law-Related Children’s Books (Oct. 2008), http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/News_&_Events/CohenChildrenBookList.pdf.

\(^{18}\) For example, the collection includes early editions of two of the most heavily illustrated books in legal history, both published by the Flemish jurist Joost de Damhoudere in the sixteenth century: ENCHIRIDION RERUM CRIMINALIUM (Louvain, Walther & Bathen 1554) and PRACTIQUE JUDICIAIRE ET CAUSES CIVILES (Antwerp, Jean Bellere 1572).


the library’s collection for future use. This is a perfect Morris Cohen program, since Morris loved films and always enjoyed discussing them.

¶16 Morris’s strong support for professional development is restated as a goal in our plan to “[b]e a creative, flexible, and smart organization in an ever-changing environment.”21 A key initiative flowing from this goal is our spotlight series, which enables each library staff member to present a program describing his or her work and how it fits into the larger mission of the organization. This is a pleasant and fascinating method for creating a shared appreciation for the work and interests of each staff member. This program also offers librarians an opportunity to discuss a scholarly project or presentation with an audience of interested colleagues and get feedback in a mutually supportive environment. For example, one month this year we heard Fred Shapiro describe his work in compiling the Yale Book of Quotations. The next month we heard Femi Cadmus talk about whether employees have the right to be happy.22

¶17 Of course, one of Morris’s great passions was teaching, and this is reflected in the library’s broadly stated goal “to develop and improve reference assistance and legal research instruction.”23 Morris was directly involved in carrying out this goal by adding to the library’s expanded array of research courses. His course, Research Methods in American Legal History, continues to be taught by John Nann, who, with Camilla Tubbs, is working on a host of other research initiatives launched under the auspices of the reference and instructional services department. These initiatives include a multitude of credit-based research courses taught by librarians, a highly successful outreach initiative to each of the clinical programs, and specialized research workshops and online tutorials, all intended to help students develop their research skills at the points where they may benefit the most. The ever-expanding teaching role of librarians follows Morris’s advice to “instruct users . . . in the effective use of the library’s collections and in . . . legal research generally . . . .”24

¶18 Even the library’s green initiative reflects Morris’s values. One of this goal’s stated objectives is to “promote less waste and more recycling and upcycling among library patrons and staff.”25 Anyone who had the pleasure of dining with Morris knows his favorite course tended to be dessert, but he always wanted to share. One line I heard frequently was, “I cut, and you choose.” What better way to limit waste than to follow Morris’s excellent example set at dessert!

¶19 Morris will live on in our memories and in the scholarly record he left behind. He also lives on through institutions like Yale, where he left his mark. Anyone who wants to know more about Morris Cohen need only visit Yale’s law library. The collections, services, staff, and building all are a reflection of Morris and will continue as enduring markers of his values.

21. Id.
22. In July 2011, Femi presented this talk at AALL’s Middle Managers’ breakfast at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries in Philadelphia.