

# THE LAW SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

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A year ago the writer, who, as librarian of a large law-school library, teacher of a course in law library administration, and chairman of the Placement Committee of the American Association of Law Libraries, receives many such requests, was asked by the dean of a small but excellent law school for names of eligible candidates for the librarianship of his school, setting up the following standards:

Man preferred. Law- and library-school trained, with some successful experience in law library administration. Not a lame duck, but eligible in every way to take his place on equal terms as a member of our faculty. Salary, with one month vacation, \$3200.

The dean, still without a librarian, has now amended these specifications in two important respects, as follows, but has not yet filled the position:

. . . Assistant Professor of Law and Law Librarian . . .  
teaching Legal Bibliography and opportunity to teach a substantive law course if so inclined . . . Salary, \$4000 upward, depending upon qualifications and experience of applicant.

This incident illustrates at once a cause, an effect, and a trend: because law librarians have in the past failed to receive salaries and status commensurate with the qualifications demanded and the importance of the services rendered, insufficient qualified young men and women have been attracted to the profession to meet the present demand, even though better salary and status inducements are now being offered. The writer hopes that this paper will answer many of the questions asked by law-school administrators in search of librarians as to standards, salary, and status.

Law-school librarians properly regard themselves as an integral part of legal education—a feeling fortunately shared to an increasing extent by law-school deans. The study of law on the level offered by schools of the Association of American Law Schools is a complex matter of legal principles, economics, political science, sociology, and criminology, and just as the subject matter of teaching and research has expanded far beyond its former boundaries, so has the literature of the law outgrown its former tight categories. It is therefore a practical impossibility for the law teacher in most subjects today to keep up with the material—legal, borderline, and non-legal—required in his specialty, without the assistance of a trained and competent person, interested in that sort of thing, who will collect it, and bring it to his attention.

This person is or should be the law librarian, with a background of general, technical, and legal education enabling him to appreciate the breadth of the problems involved, who knows how to present and use the material once it is on the library shelves. In his triple role of bibliographer, administrator, and teacher he can be of immense service to the faculty, students, and alumni.

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As deans increasingly recognize this, they typically are now demanding qualifications requiring eight years of college, law-school, and library-school education, a program not lightly to be undertaken or pursued without such inducement as to convince first-class young men and women that law librarianship is a suitable career.

Most law-school librarians, including some of the best, do not possess all these desirable qualifications, just as in an earlier day most lawyers were not law-school trained: William Howard Taft was the first Chief Justice of the United States to have been graduated from law school. However, such qualifications are common among the younger librarians, many of whom attend law or library school while on the job to acquire them, when an enlightened administration permits them to do so for credit toward a degree.

The dearth of available qualified candidates for law-school librarianships is directly due to the inferior salary and status offered heretofore. Men and women, though they may prefer library work to practice or teaching, are not, in sufficient numbers, willing deliberately to accept inferior positions; and this means that qualified librarians are now demanding and often receiving anything from assistant professorships to full professorships, with the same opportunities for future advancement accorded the rest of the faculty. Replacements since 1945 have reflected this attitude on the part of deans and librarians, but much remains to be done, as will be seen.

The writer recently sent a questionnaire to some ninety libraries of member schools, exclusive of Columbia, Harvard, Michigan, and Yale—those having the largest collections—requesting information concerning salary, status, and control, and seventy-one, or 79 per cent, provided the desired information. The salaries and status, particularly when compared with those of librarians in other fields, are as a whole distressing, though for those schools which have employed new librarians during the past three years they are definitely encouraging.

Though the median salary of the librarians reporting is \$3250 and the average \$3500, 27 per cent receive \$2400 or less, though two-thirds in this lower group have law degrees and most of them have some library-school training. Twenty-six per cent have salaries of more than \$4000, of whom several receive more than \$7000. All but one of this higher group have law degrees and several have both law and library degrees, the average salary of head librarians in the latter group being \$4500. Most of these are young men and women in smaller libraries. A number of assistant librarians, not included in the above averages, earn \$4000 or more, and nearly all of these have both law and library degrees, a hopeful sign. Hard to believe is the fact that the eighteen library-trained persons without legal training receiving less than \$3300 average \$2650, whereas the fourteen law- but not library-trained persons in this group average only \$2315. Definitely, in the lower salary ranges, legal training is not compensated.

By no means inspiring to the prospective law-school librarian is the fact that three-quarters of the profession receive, for eleven months' work, less than the average minimum salary received by teachers for two semesters; nor is it encouraging that the maximum even in the higher reaches will probably be several thousand dollars less than that of the teacher. Closed to him also for the most part are the prerequisites of the teacher—additional pay for summer teaching and sabbatical years for study.

Status looms large in the eyes of the prospective law-school librarian, who naturally hesitates deliberately to seek an inferior one. Though half the reporting librarians have faculty status of some kind, a quarter of them teach substantive-law courses, and more than half teach Legal Bibliography, the actual status in most cases is not equal to that of the teacher, and there is little opportunity for research and writing. This in spite of the fact that more than two-thirds have law degrees (all but three at \$3000 and above), and more than one-third have library degrees and many have both.

The pull of law-school library salaries is to a considerable extent determined by the counter-attraction of competing salaries in like fields. Following are a few pertinent salary statistics showing the sort of competition to be met.

Average beginning salaries of inexperienced graduates of the Columbia University School of Library Service in 1948 were about \$2800. Minimum salary schedules of the public libraries of Yonkers, Mount Vernon, White Plains, and New Rochelle, New York, respectively, for professional assistants are \$2700, \$2800, \$2900, and \$3000. These people lack any legal training, and their college and professional education has required five years—not the six to eight of graduates of law schools or of the increasing number who have both law and library-school degrees. Twenty-seven per cent of reporting member law school libraries pay their librarians from \$250 to \$1150 less than this library-school beginning average, though 60 per cent of these law librarians have law degrees and many have library-school training as well.

A recent survey by a partner in a prominent New York law firm in search of a librarian disclosed that competing firms in his area having libraries of 15,000 volumes or more paid a minimum of about \$3000 and an average of about \$3500. Most of these librarians are women, not more than two or three having law degrees (though many have library degrees), but their average salaries equal those in the reporting member schools, which demand much higher qualifications.

From a recent survey by the Special Libraries Association I have taken statistics on medical-school libraries, as being the group most nearly comparable to law-school libraries. This group reported average salaries of \$3600—higher than those of law-school librarians, though, contrary to the law-school situation, where over two-thirds of the librarians have law degrees, only 10 per cent of medical librarians have medical degrees; and these, curiously enough, are in the smaller libraries for the most part, indicating that the "librarian" is a professor entrusted with the key to the library. Only two of the librarians of large medical-school libraries have M.D.'s. There is thus a higher reward offered to medical librarians, for substantially less professional training, than to law librarians. In the medical-school group, furthermore, only one reported a salary of less than \$3000. Law-school librarians deserve as high a minimum.

The American Library Association, a highly conservative and realistic group, adopted in January, 1948, a revised schedule of recommended salaries, under which the minimum beginning salary for professional assistants (not head librarians), just out of library school and with no experience, is \$2800; it further recommended that ". . . school librarians and

professional assistants in school libraries should be on the same salary schedule effective for teachers with equal training and experience. . . .”

These are sordid details, but they are the reasons why law schools cannot, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, find and keep law librarians of the kind wanted, at the salary and status too often offered. Some men and women prefer library work to teaching, but it is difficult to persuade them to make the obvious sacrifice or to keep it up. I have in mind a former president of the American Association of Law Libraries who, after years of vain effort to persuade his faculty to compensate him at the same rate as a law teacher, renounced librarianship for a professorship in the same institution.

The number of eligible men and women contemplating law-library work at present is distressingly small, too small to satisfy the demand. The result, as often as not, is a drafted professor whose major interest is still teaching and research and who turns over the actual administration of the library to a good assistant. This is an unsatisfactory arrangement for everybody concerned, including the students, who are entitled to interested service.

Training a law librarian is a long-range task. It is vital, therefore, that sufficient prospect of advancement be held out to law librarians of all grades to induce a steady flow of ambitious and capable men and women, with potentialities equivalent to those of the best teachers, gaining experience in the smaller law-school libraries but with legitimate aspirations of succeeding to positions in the larger libraries offering the same rewards as to full professors in the schools served. Provision should be made in law-school rules to enable the librarian without a law or library degree to earn it through part-time study while on the job.

That there is considerable doubt in the minds of eligible young prospects is shown by the dearth of such people in law-library service. In my own experience during the past two years, four excellent men of the type I have described—all graduates of good colleges, law schools and library schools, fulfilling the highest requirements set forth by law-school administrators, and full of energy and enthusiasm—have been lost to the profession. One of these, because of the limited field and equivocal status ahead of him in law libraries, left to become director of libraries in a large university, with the rank of dean; another has become a public librarian; while the other two are using their G. I. rights to study for the Ph.D. in public law, with a view to general university library administration.

This is a trend which must be reversed, for the good not only of law librarians but of law schools, which cannot afford to depend upon material willing to accept inferior salaries and status.

Member law schools should establish a minimum salary of \$3000 for qualified professional library staff members, at least equal to that of inexperienced library-school graduates without legal training. There should be a premium on legal training as well as on library training, but in the lower ranges the opposite is now true.

For head librarians, including most emphatically those in the large number of law libraries in which the head librarian has no full-time staff members but depends upon student help, the scale should be substantially higher. These people have a scope of responsibility above that of the inexperienced

library-school graduate referred to, who for some years is likely to be merely a technical worker under direct supervision. In no library is the importance of the head so paramount as in the smaller law-school library. Law schools paying low salaries must either meet the competition of libraries offering more money for less training, or very shortly be forced, in replacing their present librarians upon retirement, to take people less qualified personally and professionally, who have failed to get jobs in other kinds of libraries. The choice is there, and plain. It cannot be avoided.

Most law librarians, particularly those of schools having law reviews, moot courts, compulsory essays for point credit, and professors who do considerable writing—in other words, where a substantial amount of research is habitually carried on—should, if qualified by education, scholarly attainment, and personality, be able to achieve an equivalence in pay and status to the higher ranks of the teaching faculty in their respective institutions. If the library is part of the law school, then the equivalence should be to the law faculty; if part of the general library system of the university, then to the ratings established for the faculty at large. I mean, of course, a genuine faculty status and all that goes with it, not the nominal one too often accorded by university statutes.

This paper so far has been concerned chiefly with head librarians, but most of what has been written applies with equal force to the remainder of the library staff. It is just as impossible in a law library to render good service with an inferior staff as it is for a dean to run a first-rate law school with a second-rate faculty. Good professional and clerical library assistants must be properly compensated: the days when competent cataloguers or reference librarians could be had for \$2400 are over.

The law-school library is at the crossroads: either it must remain an integral part of legal education, advancing under the direction of a thoroughly competent and trained librarian possessed of satisfactory salary, status, and opportunity, or it must fail in a most important part of its mission, to the corresponding detriment of the school it serves. Fortunately, in the experience of the writer at least, most law-school administrators are prepared to meet the challenge, once they know the facts.