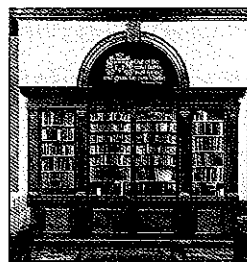


Can You Really Store a Library in Cyberspace? Renovating Langdell Hall & Other Tales¹



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In 1991, I was invited to Canberra to deliver a paper at a professional meeting.² In fact, I also delivered what I thought was a rather inspiring after-dinner speech in the Great Hall at the High Court of Australia. Unfortunately, no one now remembers that speech. As I concluded my remarks, an Australian librarian advanced to the podium holding a long piece of hollow, decorated wood.

"I understand you play the didgeridoo" he said

"Why, yes," I replied. "I do. It's the oldest form of trumpet in the world and I am a trumpeter. I learned to play the didgeridoo two years ago on my first visit Down Under."

"Will you play for us now?" he asked

"Of course," I replied and I did

The spectacle of an American librarian and a Harvard professor playing this native aboriginal wind instrument in the Great Hall of the High Court of Australia was so amazing, that to this day no one remembers what I said

Because I do want you to remember my remarks today, I have left my own didgeridoo at home.

My topic for today involves our current plans to renovate Langdell Hall and to modernize our major library facility. I want to explain why we are undertaking this massive project, how we are going about it, and what we hope to gain from what can only be described as a painful undertaking.

Let me go back a bit. In July 1993, 3,000 law librarians descended on Boston for their annual convention. Naturally, many took the opportunity to visit Harvard. The Law Library arranged a series of tours which the staff had great fun conducting

¹ Delivered at the Spring 1995 meeting of the Harvard Law School Association, 8 April, 1995

² "Wizards of Oz: Architects of the Virtual Library" In *Achieving Excellence - Proceedings of the 4th Asian Pacific Special and Law Librarians' Conference with the 9th Biennial Health Librarians' Conference, Supplement One*. Canberra: September 1991.

When the Librarian of the High Court of Australia called me to ask if she could visit the “temple of the law,” I naturally said yes but arranged to conduct the tour myself. Jacqui Elliott had been very gracious to me on my previous concert tour. She also possesses what I consider the most beautiful office with the most beautiful view of any law librarian in the world.

I met Jacqui outside Langdell one hot July morning. We entered Langdell past the statue of Joseph Story carved by his son, William Wetmore Story. I took my usual opportunity to roll up a copy of the *Harvard Gazette* and stick it in Joseph’s hand. The main elevator was cranky that morning so we walked up two flights to the Reading Room.

On the way up, I asked her if she would autograph our copy of her *Pacific Law Bibliography*³. She seemed pleased we even had it, but I told her that our Australian collection was quite extensive.

When we entered the Reading Room, Jacqui immediately noticed that most of the lights were turned off. I explained that it had been exceptionally hot during the past two weeks and that the lights in our false ceiling, installed in 1960 by a famous Broadway lighting designer, consumed 70% of the electrical energy in the building and produced a lot of heat. To keep the temperature down, we turned them off at 80°. Actually, the temperature had already hit 88° and it was not yet noon. I could see only two readers, both in shorts, strategically placed in front of one of the large fans vainly attempting to circulate the humid air.

Jacqui asked what library staff were doing at one end of the room where several books stood splayed open on the tables. I explained that a heavy rain the day before had caused the Cambridge storm sewers to back up and one of our basement stacks areas flooded. Books on the lowest shelves got wet. Fortunately, only a few were in the Harkness freezer waiting to be shipped to our freeze-dry contractor in Philadelphia. Most of the books just needed a good airing.

Before Jacqui could ask any more questions, I ushered her into the antique elevator that graces the Reading Room. Fortunately, we were friends because the elevator is rather cosy for two people and positively intimate for three. When Langdell was designed, only library staff or faculty with offices in the stacks were expected to need access to the building’s interior. That is also why the stairs that lead from the Reading Room to the stacks are so narrow: only the stack boys used them.⁴

3 Elliott, Jacqueline D. *Pacific Law Bibliography* (2nd ed.) Hobart, Tasmania, Australia: Pacific Law Press, 1990.

4 In 1928, only males were hired to work in the stacks. Dean Griswold, when an assistant professor with his “office” a carrel in the stacks, did recommend to my predecessor that the Library hire women as shelvers. He was disgusted at the way the stack boys treated the books and thought we could profitably copy the Radcliffe Library on this point. (Ref. *Papers of Erwin Griswold*, Harvard Law School Library)

When we reached the basement, I carefully closed the interior gate to the elevator and made sure the door was shut all the way. Otherwise, no one could call the elevator back up to the Reading Room. We proceeded north through the basement stacks, through the periodical collection and the British collection, flicking on lights as we went. I began to wonder if I shouldn't have stayed in the Reading Room long enough to look up the call number of Jacqui's bibliography. At the end of the floor, we descended a small, iron staircase to the Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand stacks.

"Australia really is down under, isn't it!" I heard Jacqui mutter.

The carrels in the north sub-basement were, as I expected, utterly deserted. The lack of natural light and low traffic keep the area somewhat gloomy even in a hot, mid-summer day. In the bleak midwinter, some students refuse even to visit the area alone. I don't blame them. The only students I'd ever met enthusiastic about being assigned a carrel here were a former monk and a former member of the New Zealand All Blacks National Rugby Team.

We toured the Australian collection, with many gratifying exclamations from Ms. Elliott.

- "Now that's very rare."
- "Did you know that's out-of-print?"
- "Even I don't subscribe to that!"

Unfortunately, we did not spot her own work. So we retraced our steps up the small, iron staircase, back through the British collection and periodical stacks, flicking lights on as we went. Our Financial Dean some years ago insisted we put ten-minute timers on our stack lights. We spend thousands on the Reading Room lights but save pennies in the stacks.

When we reached the elevator, it refused to come when called. So we walked up the three stack levels back to the Reading Room. Fortunately, we encountered no one on the way and avoided the staircase sarabande. At the top, I discovered that someone had not closed the door to the elevator tightly.

Looking in HOLLIS, we discovered her work had been shelved in the ILS reference collection. Thus, we avoided a repeat trip to the basement.

I did manage to get Jacqui's autograph. I can only hope that her next trip to Harvard will introduce her to a library truly fitting for "the temple of the law."

What Renovation Brings

For some years, the Law School has been planning a major renovation of Langdell Hall. The newest portions of Langdell are 68 years old. Its mechanical and electrical systems have exceeded their expected lifetimes.

A new heating system and the installation of air conditioning will provide a more suitable environment for people and books. A new power sub-station will support improved lighting throughout the building, plus more outlets in more places. Extensive wiring for telecommunications will permit a higher level of computer use throughout the Library. Removing stack-supported floors and interflooring the core stacks and the Langdell North Middle classroom will produce a building flexible in its arrangement of books, new technologies, and study areas. Elevators that stop at every library floor and staircases wide enough for two people to pass each other will improve movement through the building. Wheelchairs will be able to move throughout the Library and we will be in full compliance with the ADA [*Americans with Disabilities Act*].

Changes in educational philosophy and information technology since 1928 also require modernization of library facilities. When Langdell was planned, the student body was somewhat smaller than today. The prescribed curriculum essentially consisted of large classes in American law. There was one law journal, no clinical program, and a small graduate program. The amount of independent study or research was limited. The Reading Room was largely a study hall and access to the stacks was limited to library pages and to faculty members whose "offices" were carrels in the stacks.

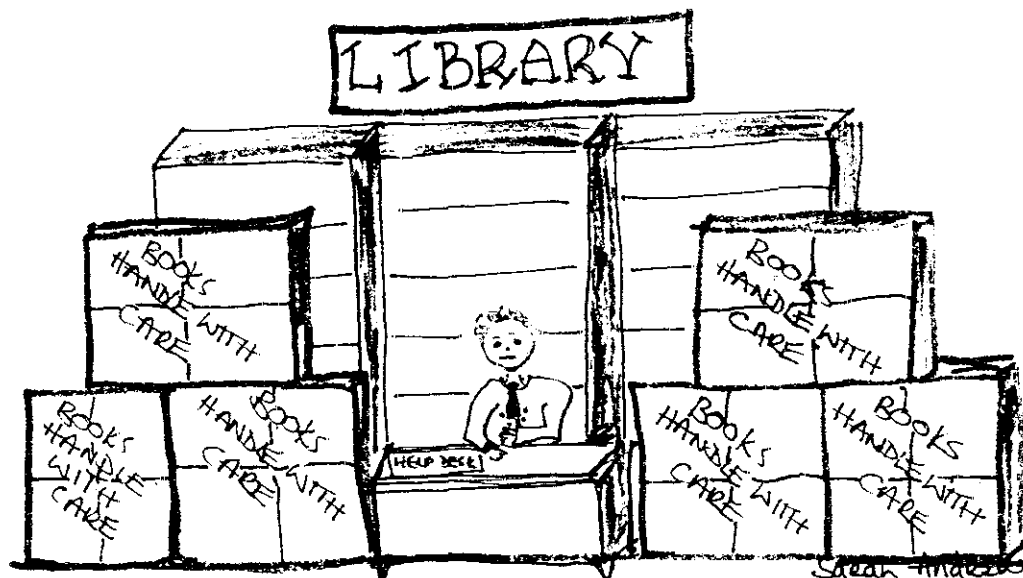
Today's diverse curriculum provides many opportunities for individual research as well as growing opportunities for collaborative work by groups of students. The Library's role as a center for teaching new technologies and techniques of research has grown.

Moving the circulation and reserves desk to a new ground-floor entrance to Langdell will make the set of library services associated with that desk more directly available. A new state-of-the-art legal reference and information center will be located on the 4th floor of Langdell West, connected directly to the library areas in Langdell and Lewis. The Langdell Reading Room, as a result, will become a quieter, more pleasant place to read. The possibility exists to convert the ILS Reading Room into a less noisy place as well.

The addition of many more individual carrels to the Reading Room and placing group study rooms, private studies, and more soft chairs and lounges throughout the stacks will greatly increase the variety of private and group spaces in the Library. New computer labs, expanded facilities for audio-visual, interactive-video, digital storage and microforms, information kiosks on all floors, and jacks to the Internet everywhere, will all help the Library stay abreast of new developments.

How Do We Do It?

Getting from here to there, however, will be very tricky indeed. During the 1996/97 academic year, Langdell will be closed. A temporary reading room will be located here in the Ropes-Gray Room. It will contain a core reference collection of approximately 30,000 volumes, about the size of a good law firm library, plus as much technology as we can cram in. The remaining 770,000 volumes currently shelved in Langdell will be placed in temporary storage.



That process has already begun. Special Collections staff are beginning to pack up the most valuable rare books for shipment to the Harvard Depository, where they will reside during the project. Our manuscripts collections and other selected books are being bar-coded. They will start to go to the Depository this summer but can be recalled if wanted. Also this summer, books from the open stacks will start being moved to the Depository. We presently have 190,000 stored there and want to process as many as possible before next April rolls around. Nineteenth and 20th century American and British treatises go this summer. Early periodicals go next fall. Duplicate sets like the official state reports and lesser used sets like Canadian provincial reports and statutes will not be processed for retrieval by the time we evacuate Langdell. We should have 350,000 volumes at the Depository that will be cataloged in HOLLIS and tagged for retrieval. But some 400,000 books will end up a warehouse marked *Do Not Open Until Fall of 1997*.

We will conduct serious discussions this summer with certain international research libraries, such as the Bora Laskin Law Library at the University of Toronto, the Bodleian Law Library at Oxford University, and the Library of the High Court of Australia, about preferential access to their collections of Canadian and British and Australian law. In return, we hope to provide them with access to the comprehensive collection of legal compact disks we are starting to build. I am very excited about the post-renovation possibilities for maintaining closer relationships with these institutions.

As early as January of next year, our rare books, manuscripts, and art collections, as well as the Treasure Room, will close for two years. The packing of books will reach fever pitch. Oil paintings, statues, antique furniture, and other valuable objects will be moved to storage. Staff will be reassigned to other, more essential, services.

In February of next year, I hope we will have concluded negotiations for the 10,000 square feet of rental space we will need to keep our acquisitions, cataloging, and processing operations going during renovation. We will need some months to install the wiring, network servers, and shelving these departments use.

In March, a big hole is dug in Holmes Field so a new power sub-station can be built. This will permit continued delivery of electricity to Langdell West when the rest of the building is closed. Shortly thereafter, work begins on removing asbestos from the sub-basement areas that have not yet received that treatment.

Next April, we will close down technical services for a week or so, pack up everything, and move desks, files, computers, books in process, and staff to their temporary home. Then we will turn our attention to getting this space ready as a temporary reading room.

Library staff are planning to do all we can to moderate the impact of renovation. Many of the sources students will need that year will be available online. In fact, we will not take up valuable space that year by storing here any books whose contents are available electronically: no National Reporter System, no legal periodicals. We will saturate our temporary reading room with computers to provide access to such material. In addition, the School is about to begin a major upgrade in its computer services. That should result in major improvements to the speed and ease of access to e-mail, the Internet, and commercial information services. By that time as well, HOLLIS, our computerized library system, will have implemented direct patron recall of materials stored at the Harvard Depository.

Reference hours will be extended and telephone hot lines as well as special Internet bulletin boards will be created so students can get staff assistance from wherever they are logging in.

Library staff are developing plans to make other heavily used materials somehow available upon request. We will move additional staff into our interlibrary loan service. I will cash in some promises made years ago by local colleagues. Harvard staff and Harvard photocopiers will set up shop in the law libraries at BU and BC.

The ILS Library will continue to be available for study and research, although it is possible that lesser-used portions of its collections may not be. However, the bulk of the Library's historical collections in Anglo-American law will not be available for use and I have encouraged our current first-year class interested in legal history to get as much of their research completed next year as possible.

On June 10, 1996, Langdell will close. All ninety library staff will be in temporary quarters. All 150 terminals will be relocated. All of the 800,000 books in Langdell will have been moved. So will our microforms, files, equipment, and any furniture expected to return. Half of the Langdell tables will go to a furniture restorer with instructions to "take time." The other half will be shipped to the lucky winner of the auction that will have been conducted by Baker House.

On June 11, 1996, the men in hard hats arrive with their dumpsters, cranes, and jack hammers. Anything not marked *save* will be ripped out and tossed. The false ceiling in the Reading Room comes down. The stack supported floors come out. The benches and tiers in the North Middle Classroom are removed and two new floors inserted.

Old elevators and stairs are removed and new ones inserted. Old radiators are removed and new heating and air-conditioning units installed. False beams are built in the Reading Room to hide the air-conditioning vents. New lights are installed. Outlets and conduits are run everywhere. All this takes place night and day, as double shifts throughout the project are required to meet our deadline for reopening.

The carpenters, finishers, painters, carpet layers, electricians, telecommunications experts come and go. New furniture arrives.

By the summer of 1997, books are being moved back into parts of the building. Technical services staff return from their Charlestown warehouse. In July, the Ropes-Gray Reading Room is closed for good and the new information center is opened. By Labor Day, all is ready for the students to take back their library and for the Class of 2000 to see for the first time what will be the world's premier center for legal information.

But much finishing work will remain. Parts of the collection will continue to return for unpacking throughout the fall. The Treasure Room and special collections operations remain closed until Christmas. By January 1, 1998, however, all the loose ends will have been tied up. On that day, Dean Robert C. Clark will visit me at the McLean Hospital.

"It's all over, Terry," he will say. "I took Jacqui Elliott through it last week and she thinks it's beautiful. She said to tell you that she still has the best office with the best view, but Harvard has the best temple."

"You should be very satisfied," the Dean will tell me. "The nagging you started in the Fall of 1981 has paid off. The students are back in the Library in greater numbers than ever. Circulation of books is up and the demand for private carrels still exceeds supply. The group study rooms are filled with debaters. The computer labs are constantly busy. There are always students in the interactive video rooms arguing with the image of Arthur Miller. Even faculty can be seen in the Library,

drinking that awful Starbucks coffee you permit and conversing with students in the cafe across from the circulation desk. The Law School will be very well served by its rejuvenated library for the next century. When your nerves are better, you really must come and see it.”

Then the Dean will say, “I just composed a new piece of music for the didgeridoo. How about playing it before I return?”

“Of course,” I reply. So I do.

