

# REFERENCE

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## *T[h]reading Through The Seamless Web Of Law*

When I think thus of the law, I see a princess mightier than she who once wrought at Bayeux, eternally weaving into her web dim figures of the ever-lengthening past - figures too dim to be noticed by the idle, too symbolic to be interpreted except by her pupils, but to the discerning eye disclosing every painful step and every world-shaking contest by which mankind has worked and fought its way from savage isolation to organic social life

*Oliver W. Holmes*, "The Law", in *Speeches*  
17-18 (1918)

In an earlier Reference column (October 1994) I stated that 'the total content of a law library, unlike other libraries, may be viewed as an extended or seamless reference library'. I should have quoted the old legal maxim 'the law is a seamless web' in order to give my perception of a law library more weight. Ethan Katsch has stated that 'this metaphor suggests that law not only has an intricate structure, but also that all parts of the law fit together smoothly, that each part is linked to every other part and that the whole arrangement grows and evolves according to plan'.

In a paper titled *Network Publishing on the Internet in Australia* presented at the 1995 Information Online & On Disc Conference, Tony Barry stated

'The library as a place exists because books are physical artefacts. In view of the *low use of much material that libraries collect (research libraries in particular)* [my

emphasis] there will be little incentive, other than conservation, to retrospectively convert all material'.

This statement lends validity to my earlier stated opinion regarding the 'significant difference' between a law library and other libraries. This unique quality lies in the fact that a law library may be perceived as one large reference library, the contents of which are constantly in use, and on the whole are essential to the day to day work of practitioners, judges and researchers. Furthermore, due to the 'seamless web' nature of the law, the collection may never be seen as redundant.

The advent of computerisation in the field of law has widened the gap in 'significant difference' even further. Much of the print material essential to law is now accessible in electronic format either on CD-ROM, online or via the Internet. Furthermore, although several projects are being undertaken to digitise or scan discrete collections in the science and humanities field, the only research/academic library, as far as I can ascertain, to have successfully made a major part of its contents available electronically to both local and remote clients, is a law library. In June 1991 the Chicago Kent Law Library became the world's first electronic library.

Reva Basch delivered a paper *Super Searchers at the Millennium* at the 1995 Information Online & On Disc Conference which cited Bob Berring's views on the changing role of the information specialist faced with the technological changes which have rapidly occurred, over the past few years. Of the many traditional tasks previously handled by librarians Basch stated that *reference* was the only survivor. There will always be a demand for good reference or research librarians. The fact remains that information will always be with us and, ipso facto, there will always be a need for expertise in evaluating, organising,

synthesising, and accessing either large, or discrete amounts of this commodity.

Apart from these four areas of expertise available to reference librarians there is the important task of educating the user or client. The role and methods of teaching users should reflect the change in the way the material is now available. It is no longer simply a matter of discussing the purpose and method of how to use a specific research tool. The reference librarian needs to know which package is the most effective - does it offer among other things the full text of a case, legislation and treaty with full signatories, are there links to other relevant tools or documents such as citators or articles, is there an effective search engine, what is the means of printing or downloading documents and what is the overall cost to the user/client.

The method of teaching may consist of hands-on instruction with small groups, or it may take the form of computer-aided instruction allowing individuals to move through a series of tutorial modules at their own pace. Computer aided learning has been implemented in various forms beginning with simple directional instruction informing the user about certain aspects of the library such as the layout, hours of opening borrowing rights and other associated information to more complex tutorial based instruction.

Tutorial instruction is aimed at both a basic level, informing students with regard to the content of and methods for retrieval of documents from reading lists, and at a more advanced level allowing for instruction in a variety of substantive law units and legal research skills. Although Computer Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) is most prevalent in the United States, few libraries in Australia have followed this course. However, with the technological changes wrought in the area of delivery of information perhaps a change in teaching methods will follow suit. This may prove to be a further opportunity for law reference librarians to display their expertise whilst encapsulating the area of legal research teaching into the 'seamless web' of law.

## *New Reference Titles*

*Compiled by Roy Jordan*

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This list of recent reference items is a by-product of the compiler's scanning of the National Library's daily intake of material. Titles of ready reference value in the subject areas of law and government documents have been included. General material has been listed when there is substantial law content. "Back of the book" bibliographies are included where these are substantial, i.e. more than 200 items or about ten pages.

To help the reader the list has been divided by country. The titles of publications included are usually self-explanatory. Annotations have been made in some cases where the subject or legal content is not clear.

Prices and ISBNs appear only if they were easily ascertained. Full addresses have been provided for minor publishers.

### *International*

*The International law of youth rights source documents and commentary* William D Angel. Dordrecht : Nijhoff, 1995. 1143p. ISBN 0792333217

*International law politics and values* Louis Henkin. Dordrecht : Nijhoff, c1995. 376p. ISBN 0792329082

Contains a detailed bibliography on p. 349-365.

*Repertoire de la jurisprudence de la Cour Internationale de Justice (1947-1992) = Repertory of decisions of the International Court of Justice (1947-1992)* Giuliana Ziccardi Capaldo. Dordrecht : Nijhoff, 1995. 2v. ISBN 0792335155.

This present *Repertory* presents in manual form the case-law of the International Court of Justice. It attempts a popularization of the Court's rulings in plain language for easy reading so as to provide not only internationalists but also practitioners and students with a full and readily consultable digest on a rich and important body of judicial opinions, in the knowledge of the Court's decisive role in ascertaining, noting and developing the rules of international law" - p lix

### **Australia**

*Australian legal system.* Gerard B. Carter Bondi Junction, N S W : Blackstone Press, 1995 276p ISBN 1875114424

An encyclopaedia of Australian law

*Guide to the papers of Edward Koiki Mabo in the National Library of Australia* Adrian Cunningham Canberra : The Library, 1995 31p ISBN 0642106509

Available gratis from the Manuscript Section, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT 2600.

The *Guide* has also been published on the National Library's web server at the URL: [http://www.nla.gov.au/1/ms/find\\_aids/8822.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/1/ms/find_aids/8822.html)

For an interesting account of the sensitive negotiations which led to the National Library's acquisition of Eddie Mabo's paper, see *Making history acquiring the Mabo papers*, by John Thompson in *National Library of Australia News* (ISSN 1035-753X), vol. 6, no. 1 October 1995, p 17-21

*Law via Internet the Australasian Legal Information Institute* Graham Greenleaf, Andrew Mowbray

(1995) 69 *Australian Law Journal* 581-584.

*A Methodology for computer-based retrieval of legal decisions* Leslie A. Stein

(1995) 69 *Australian Law Journal* 650-662

### **New Zealand**

*Brooker's law directory and diary 1995.* Sydney: Law Book, 1994 396p ISSN 1323-0611.

### **Unites States**

*The History of statutory compilations in Pennsylvania* J Fisherman

(1994) 86 *Law Library Journal* 559-596

*Law and literature 'brought to book'. a provisional bibliography of bibliographical sources* P. O'Connor

(1994) 86 *Law Library Journal* 781-815.

*Legal aspects of passive smoking. an annotated bibliography* M Okonska

(1994) 86 *Law Library Journal* 445-501.

*Sexual orientation and the law. a selective bibliography on homosexuality and the law, 1969-1993* AALL Standing Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues.

(1994) 86 *Law Library Journal* 1-103

*Twentieth century Virginia legal periodicals: a bibliography and commentary* W Bryson.

(1994) 86 *Law Library Journal* 541-558.

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