

Harry Bitner

July 22, 1916 — May 5, 2001

Harry Bitner had a profound influence on law librarianship as a profession and legal research as a faculty specialization. He is responsible for some of the key elements and essential features of law librarianship that the profession now takes for granted. Many of Harry's innovations occurred while he was at Cornell.

Harry received his J.D. degree in 1939 and his A.B. degree in 1941, both from the University of Kansas City (where he was a member of the University of Kansas City Law Review); and his B.S. L.S. degree from the University of Illinois in 1942. He served as Law Librarian, 1939-42, and Instructor in Law, 1942-43, at the University of Kansas City Law School. His academic career was interrupted by Army service, with successive promotions from private to technical sergeant, 1943-46. Following his return to civilian life, he served briefly in 1946 as Reference Law Librarian, Biddle Law Library, University of Pennsylvania Law School. In the same year, he had the good fortune to become Associate Law Librarian at the Columbia Law School, under Miles O. Price, the recognized Nestor of law school librarians. During eight years at Columbia, he co-authored with Price their magisterial book, *Effective Legal Research* (1953). It was the first standard work on legal research, and, with its later editions, is still widely considered to be the best book in the field.

Harry next became Librarian for the Department of Justice, 1954-57; Law Librarian, Yale Law School, 1957-65; Professor of Law and Law Librarian, Cornell Law School, 1965-76, retiring as Professor of Law and Law Librarian, Emeritus, 1976. Following his Cornell retirement, he and his wife, Anne, moved to New York City's suburbia, where they could be closer to their daughter, Lorraine Gilden and her family. At the same time, Harry continued his professional work as a bibliographer and law library consultant, first as Head of Bibliographic Services at Fred B. Rothman & Co., 1976-78, and then as Legal Bibliographer at Columbia University, 1978-89.

In 1960, Harry had his first major contact with Cornell and its Law School. With the strong support of both the Cornell administration and the University Librarian, the Law School invited a team of two outstanding law school librarians, Price of Columbia and Bitner of Yale, to come to Ithaca, review the Law Library and its problems, and advise us what would be necessary in order to make the library and staff fully competitive with the best law libraries at the top ranked smaller university law schools (i.e. University of California at Berkeley, University of Chicago, Stanford and Yale). They spent several days and prepared a very comprehensive and helpful report of their recommendations, including the estimated costs of additional books to be added to our collection and

the substantial increase in the number of properly trained staff members. With President Malott's enthusiastic support, the law library budget became a part of the University library budget and would no longer be dependent on funds from law student tuition.

In 1965, Professor Lewis W. Morse retired as librarian. The first choice to succeed Lew was, of course, Yale's Harry Bitner. The invitation to Harry included an appointment as Professor of Law, together with a commitment to finance every recommendation that Miles Price and he had made in their 1960 report. He promptly accepted.

When Harry Bitner arrived at Cornell in 1965, it was definitely his goal to implement the 1960 consultants' report that he and Miles Price had written together. As the Law School's first professionally trained Law Librarian, he played a particularly vital role in the development of both the book collection and the staff. He introduced scientific methods and standards to library processes, and brought professional acumen to the organization and staffing of the library. He substantially improved all areas of the law library, expanded and reorganized the staff, increased and classified the collection, and developed services to faculty and students. He started a new program of instruction in legal bibliography as part of the first-year curriculum. He was also responsive whenever feasible to student requests, including keeping the library open for more hours and providing copy services.

Harry gave his immediate attention to the preparation of the budget and the organization of the law library. He promptly increased the size of the staff from eleven to sixteen, and at the height of his Cornell career, the library staff totaled twenty-six. In strengthening the collection, he increased the number of legal treatises and related material in the social sciences with substantial emphasis on the acquisition of international and foreign law materials, particularly those of Latin America. In 1966-67, the total number of volumes in the collection was 205,456 and book expenditures were \$119,678. In 1974-75, the collection passed the 300,000-volume mark and annual book expenditures had increased to \$208,800.

In the words of his secretary, Crystal Hackett, who has worked at the Cornell Law Library from 1964 to date:

"He had a commitment to his staff. He fought to raise the status of the professional librarians with the University and improve working conditions for the staff. And he won! He would listen to the faculty, students, and staff. He cared about them."

Crystal Hackett remembers him as a

"quiet, gentle giant. People who did not know him were afraid of him at first, but were quickly put at ease when he started talking. He enjoyed getting to know people, and would ask about their families."

During his eleven years as Cornell's Law Librarian, as well as his preceding eight years as Law Librarian at Yale, Harry was active as a leading figure in the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), serving a term as its President, as had his mentor, Miles Price. He also was responsible for other important Association projects earning wide respect among AALL members. Professor Morris L. Cohen, one of Harry's successors as Yale's Law Librarian, stated:

"Harry Bitner must certainly be counted among the giants of law librarianship. He was a quiet and gentle man, but a giant in mind and heart and in his many contributions to our profession."

Even in an era of wide sweeping, revolutionary changes in the production and dissemination of legal information, Harry Bitner still epitomizes the qualities that make for a great academic law librarian:

- serving faculty and students, first and foremost;
- building strong collections—in his time books were only printed, now increasingly they are digital—of Anglo-American law, and also international and foreign law;
- critically evaluating legal scholarship and using expert bibliographical skills; and
- sharing knowledge about legal information and teaching legal research methods.

He is remembered as a man of many talents who was most generous in sharing his vast knowledge with younger librarians. His law library colleagues remember him as a librarian extraordinaire and a fine gentleman. The Cornell alumni remember Professor Bitner as a beloved and enthusiastic teacher whose impact was felt by all of his students.

All in all, Harry Bitner is an inspiration to us all, and a model to follow. His memory lives with us every day.

Faust Rossi, Gray Thoron, Claire Germain