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Recommended Citation

James G. Milles, Marcia Zubrow & Ellen T. McGrath, *The University at Buffalo Law Library's Recovery from Fire*, 30 ALLUNY Newsl. 9 (2005).

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/other_scholarship/63



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The University at Buffalo Law Library's Recovery from Fire

coverage contributed by Ellen McGrath, Jim Milles, and Marcia Zubrow; with photos by Jim Milles

An Introduction -- from 03/22/05

James Milles, Associate Dean for Legal Information Services, Director of the Law Library, Associate Professor of Law University at Buffalo Law School, The State University of New York, from the files of Law-Lib (reprinted with permission of the author):

On Saturday morning, March 19, O'Brian Hall was damaged by a fire located in a food court located on the second floor, across the hall from the Law Library. Several law school offices and classrooms were damaged, and repairs are now underway.

Unfortunately, some of the most extensive damage occurred in the Law Library. While no materials were lost, soot and smoke permeated the entire Law Library, requiring a more extensive and prolonged clean-up.

The Law Library staff is working very hard to resume services as quickly and fully as possible. ...



The former Food Court, scene of the fire, after clean up had begun

We are very grateful to the staff and administration of the University Libraries for their support in helping us continue to meet the special needs of the Law School's faculty, students, and staff. Thank you all for your patience as we adjust to this difficult situation.

University at Buffalo Law Library in Exile: The Road to Return

by Marcia Zubrow, Head of Information Services, Charles B. Sears Law Library, University at Buffalo

Saturday, March 19, 2005 was a memorable day for the University at Buffalo Law School and the Charles B. Sears Law Library. Early in the morning, a fire broke out on the second floor in the Law School Food Court, a room with food vending machines that also contained the student mailboxes. The fire was relatively quickly contained but left in its wake major damage to the area where it raged and significant damage to John Lord O'Brian Hall, the Law School's building. Luckily, no one was hurt and all of the damage could be repaired. Although the Law Library's book collections were covered with soot and smelled of smoke, no books were burned or damaged by water, another common source of damage in a library fire. In this article, I will focus on the effects of the fire on the Law Library and its services. Within a very short time after the fire was out, the University began cleaning and reconstructing O'Brian Hall. The response time was admirable; the University began to implement the University disaster plan immediately. All clean-up and reconstruction was

directed by the New York State Office of General Services and was accomplished by a combination of state employees and outside contractors.

Once the initial shock of the fire passed, work by the library staff began on two fronts. For those readers who are not familiar with Law Library, we have six floors occupying floors two through seven of O'Brian Hall. On the first front, we had to pack everything from the offices on the second (entrance) floor of the Library. Those offices were most affected by the fire and are the work "homes" of thirteen of our nineteen staff members. In terms of the book collections, the second and third floor books sustained the worse damage. When I say that the packing process was nasty work, it is an understatement. Because of a three story atrium in the Law Library, smoke was drawn into that open space and left an aftermath of soot and air laden with smoke. Everything was covered with grimy soot and the air reeked of smoke. The air handling system was closed down for cleaning and no fresh air came into the building. We had two days to complete all

(Continued on page 7)

University at Buffalo Law Library in Exile: The Road to Return

(Continued from page 6)

the packing in order for the complete contents, including furniture, of the offices to be moved into huge storage containers sitting outside of O'Brian Hall. Also, all the books from twelve book ranges had to be moved and the ranges dismantled. This work was in preparation for asbestos abatement that was required prior to any cleaning and reconstruction. Miraculously, we were able to complete all of the packing in the time allotted. We were helped by the other libraries and librarians on campus and by the Law School. For example, the University Libraries micro-computer support team and the Law School's Law IT team helped dismantle all of our computers. The University Libraries loaned temporary shelving and extra book trucks and individual librarians offered to help with packing. We are very fortunate to have had assistance from our library and university colleagues. During the first few days, we also had to establish a book cleaning protocol and Marilyn Kramer, Head of Cataloging in the University Libraries Central Technical Services Department, was invaluable in helping to write the protocols. Also, we received valuable advice from the Northeast Document Conservation Center in writing the protocols.



Soot damage in Susan Dow's office

The second front concerned planning and implementing a plan to provide library services for our law school community. On Monday, March 21, two days after the fire, the law librarians met with the Director and Associate Director of the University Libraries and several other key colleagues and friends from the University Libraries. The purpose of the meeting was to find temporary locations for our now displaced library staff. Lockwood Library and Central Technical Services, both located just down the hall from the Law Library, were able to accommodate everyone except Jim Milles, the Law Library Director, his administrative assistant, Amy Hothow, and Terry McCormack, the Audio-Visual Librarian. Jim and Amy stayed in temporary offices in O'Brian Hall to be on location for decision making as the reconstruction proceeded. Terry stayed because the Law School began classes within four days after the fire and he needed to be in the building to provide the normal audiovisual services. Terry and his student assistants did an admirable job providing service as usual under very difficult circumstances.



2nd floor reading room

By Tuesday, March 22 (the first day of spring), all of the remaining Law Library staff members from our Technical Services, Access Services and Information Services Departments were welcomed to their new locations which had been outfitted with computers and telephones. Then we worked on providing services to our "normal" patrons and I am very proud to say that we were able to commence our services on Wednesday, March 23, only four days after the fire. The Access Services Department, including circulation, reserve, and interlibrary loan, was located in the main circulation area of Lockwood Library. We decided that we would retrieve any books from the Law Library that were requested by patrons. However, before we could deliver them to the patron, we needed to have the books cleaned either by a cleaning crew in the Law Library or by the Preservation Program in the University Libraries Central Technical Services Department. Many people think that our patrons just use databases now and do not want to use books. However, we discovered the opposite was true. We were retrieving numerous books all of the time we were in Lockwood Library. The Technical Services Department, including Cataloging and Acquisitions, because of the constant flow of incoming materials, continued to process standing orders as well as order new titles. Throughout the entire time the Law Library was in exile, the Acquisitions Department's Passport Acceptance Facility continued to operate



Reference shelves removed

(Continued on page 8)

UB Law Library in Exile: The Road to Return

(Continued from page 7)

in our various locations. In addition, the Technical Services and Access Services departments worked closely together in retrieving requested print materials from the Law Library and readying them for the requestor.

The Law Library's reference desk in exile was located in the Business/Government Documents area of Lockwood where we were welcomed by our colleagues. Some of the government documents duplicated our collection and, in many instances, Lockwood's collection contained documents that we do not own since Lockwood has been a federal



The Law Library staff receives cleaning instruction. Left to right: Marcia Zubrow, Nina Cascio, Mary Miller, Melissa Bednarz, Lisa Paschis, Nancy Babb, Terry Dy-chowski, Janet Adornetto

depository library much longer than the Law Library. A prime example is the relatively complete serial set owned by Lockwood that is always requested by law students, especially law journal cite checkers. We were able to retrieve the serial set volumes for our students ourselves rather than just sending them down the hall to Lockwood. The Law Library Information Services Department also has a document delivery service for law school faculty which we were able to continue during the time we were in Lockwood. Law students, and our other non-law student patrons, had no trouble finding where we were located and, after the first week, we maintained our normal reference service hours. We brought a core collection of reference books with us and were able to function fairly well with that collection, electronic resources, and retrieving other print materials as needed.

We spent three and a half weeks in Lockwood while the reconstruction work continued in O'Brian Hall. During those weeks, we were back and forth between the two locations constantly, retrieving books, choosing new carpeting and paint colors, and meeting to plan our return to O'Brian Hall. As I mentioned earlier, floors two and three sustained the most soot and smoke damage and needed the most reconstruction. Every book in the Law Library was cleaned; those on the second and third floors were given the most complete treatment. Our rare book collection of approximately 2000 volumes was cleaned using specially developed procedures as a separate project after the entire Law Library reopened. The upper floors, four through seven, were cleaned first and readied for library patrons. Also, computers and printing services were made available for law students. All of the law student computers, many of which are normally on the third floor of the Law Library, were cleaned and moved to the sixth floor of the Law Library. Printing capabilities from the law student computers and from Lexis and Westlaw were re-established.



Marcia Zubrow provides reference service from the Archives

Wednesday, April 13, was an exciting day for us and law students when we moved back into the upper floors of the Law Library. The fifth floor, the permanent location of the Audio-visual Department, became our main floor of operation. All of our services, Access Services, Technical Services, and Information Services, were provided from the fifth floor. Also, the Law Library's Administrative offices were on the fifth floor. As you can imagine, there were many challenges, such as developing a system to allow non-law school patrons needing legal materials into the Law Library and one telephone line for both Technical Services and Information Services, but we were very happy to be back in O'Brian Hall. On Monday, May 9th, only seven weeks after the fire, floors two and three were ready for reoccupation and we moved all of our services back to their original locations. Work continues on fine tuning the location of equipment, computers, and furniture but our services are generally back to normal now.

Immediately after the fire occurred, Jim Milles decided that maintaining communication among the Law Library staff and with our patrons was extremely important. For the staff, he set up a daily meeting during the noon hour in one of the campus cafeterias. Although we were not all able to attend everyday, it was an invaluable time for us to be updated on

(Continued on page 9)

UB Law Library in Exile: The Road to Return

(Continued from page 8)

the reconstruction, exchange ideas on necessary decisions, and interact with each other. For our patrons, Jim immediately created the Law Library blog called [UB Law Library in Exile](http://ublawlib.blogspot.com), now renamed by a law student poll [UBLaw Phoenix](http://ublawlib.blogspot.com) <http://ublawlib.blogspot.com>. We used the blog to inform our patrons of our available services, locations, and contact numbers as well as to update them on the reconstruction process. Jim included photos so there is a visual record of the fire's aftermath and the reconstruction. Just as we were displaced from our normal workplaces, the law students were displaced from the Law Library, too. There is much discussion in library literature about the library "as place" and it became evident that the Law Library serves several functions in the lives of law students. Many students expressed to us that they felt lost without having the Law Library available to them. It is hard to say who was happier about our return to the Law Library - students or library staff. Finally, from my own perspective, the experience of being part of a construction site was very unique. The experience allowed me to see a totally different culture from the academic world and to gain an appreciation for that culture.

In summary, we hope that the fire in the Law Library was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We are extremely fortunate that no one was injured and we did not lose any of the book collections. Also, we are fortunate that we are

part of a University that was prepared to provide the necessary support to accomplish such a large reconstruction project. We are fortunate to have librarian colleagues who offered a great deal of support. Finally, we are fortunate to have dedicated and committed Law Library staff members who worked together as a team to get the job done, no matter what the job was. What else can we say but, we are very lucky and thank you to everyone who helped us!



Welcome home!

*L-R:
Maureen Glenn,
Susan Dow,
Jim Milles,
Mary Miller,
Amy Hothow,
Nancy Babb,
Karen Spencer
(kneeling),
Janet Adornetto,
Melissa Bednarz*

**Visit the UB Law Library at
ALLUNY's Annual Meeting,
9/30 - 10/2**

*see the Local Arrangements Committee report on
p. 46 for more information about the Annual
Meeting.*

Random Fire Reflections from Ellen McGrath

Head of Cataloging, University at Buffalo Law Library

- Having good relationships with colleagues, while always helpful and rewarding, can pay off big time when disaster strikes. Our University Libraries' Central Technical Services (CTS) had computers setup and took in our technical services staff almost immediately. Our Libraries' Systems Office staff also played a big role in our many moves.
- Having access to most cataloging tools on the web means that we truly can catalog anywhere. And we did, as we moved multiple times: to CTS, then to a temporary space upstairs in the Law Faculty Library, and finally back to our completely refurbished offices.
- Keeping our Cataloging Department well-organized and categorized helped so much when it came time to box it all up and label it for later retrieval. Unpacking went fairly smoothly as a result too.
- Along those same lines, clearing out your office regularly is a good idea. When you have to do it in a hurry, you do not always make the best decisions.
- Writing your user IDs and passwords down or better yet, keeping them stored remotely becomes essential when you lose access to your own computer. While macros can make your life a lot easier on a daily basis, they are of no use if they are only stored locally on your computer and that machine is gone. By extension, having all your files networked and backed up remotely is a lifesaver when you cannot use your own computer. It means you can access everything you need from anywhere and everywhere. And we did!
- Being flexible is always an admirable trait, but especially so when disaster strikes. Everyone pitched in and did whatever had to be done in order to reach the goal of getting the library reopened as quickly as possible.
- Having a lot of "house dust" on the books can actually protect them when a layer of soot settles on top of it. I always felt guilty about the dusty books. Who knew?