



1999

Memorial: Hibernia Prather Turbeville

Gail M. Daly

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/smulr>

Recommended Citation

Gail M. Daly, *Memorial: Hibernia Prather Turbeville*, 52 SMU L. Rev. 3 (1999)
<https://scholar.smu.edu/smulr/vol52/iss1/4>

This Tribute is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in SMU Law Review by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

MEMORIAL: HIBERNIA PRATHER TURBEVILLE

*Gail M. Daly**

IN its life, each law school develops unique traditions and legends. The personalities and stories that make up these legends come from students, faculty, staff, and friends—those who make an indelible impression on the culture and history of the school. These are the people whose character, talents, quirks, and strengths help shape the school's development and build its community. They are the stuff of stories at class reunions, their personalities inextricably bound with memories of the school, and their influence on the people whose lives they touch permanent and profound.

Hibernia Turbeville, Director of the Law Library from 1947-1975, played such a role in the development of the Southern Methodist University School of Law. The Underwood Law Library building at the corner of Hillcrest and Daniel is, in part, a memorial to Hibernia, for she helped plan it, never took a day off during the three years of its construction, supervised moving the collection from Storey Hall to the new building (legend has it that she and her student assistants moved much of the collection in Neiman-Marcus shopping bags), and saw it through its first five years. Her part in the School's history extends far beyond the library she built, however, and antedates the building by nearly a quarter-century.

Miss T, as everyone knew her for most of her life, was born in 1908, in Cooper, Texas. She earned her bachelors degree from East Texas State University, majoring in English and history, and returned home to teach in the Cooper public schools for twelve years. She found her way into law librarianship by accident when she visited Austin one summer, accepted a summer job in the University of Texas Law Library, and enjoyed herself so much that she resigned from teaching and accepted a permanent position. While the concept of law librarianship as an irresistible siren song might seem strange, for Hibernia the profession represented a fascinating opportunity to deal with interesting issues, challenge her intellect, and come to know the exciting world and people of the law.

Whatever stereotypes attach to librarians in our culture, Miss T proved them false. She was outgoing and outspoken. She brought to law librarianship an enthusiasm and reverence for the law mixed with a quick wit and a love of people. She rapidly learned the many different jobs in the

* Associate Dean for Library and Technology at Southern Methodist University School of Law since 1990. B.A., M.A. (Library Science), University of Michigan; J.D., University of Minnesota.

University of Texas Law Library and was soon its associate director. It was in that role that, in 1947, she attracted the attention of SMU's Dean Robert G. Storey, who had determined that SMU needed to appoint its first law librarian to oversee the legal collection and to provide research services to law faculty and students. Persuading Miss T to leave Austin was no simple feat; she declined the first two offers, even after he had raised the salary offer and sweetened it by including free meals in the SMU dormitory. Dean Storey was able finally to lure her to SMU only by promising to send her to study at the prestigious law library course at Columbia University. At that time, Columbia offered the only specialized training in the United States, and Miss T became one its star graduates, making professional friendships that lasted throughout her career and her life.

When she arrived at SMU, the law collection was housed in the basement of Dallas Hall and contained approximately 20,000 volumes. She spent her early years building the collection and bringing order to the previously uncataloged and disorganized shelves. She consulted with senior faculty for advice in book selection and carefully built the collection to mirror the School's present and future strengths in business, taxation, and securities law. She offered research services to faculty, tailoring them to particular interests and individual personalities, becoming a model for other academic law libraries. She began to collect rare legal materials that lay the foundation for what is now the excellent rare books collection in Underwood. She moved the library, the first time, from Dallas Hall to a new home in Storey Hall.

Many students attended law school at that time on the G.I. Bill and remember Miss T fondly for her willingness to find jobs in the law library for those who needed financial help. She was adept at identifying those most in need of financial aid and always tried to combine routine tasks in the library with those that would help them develop good legal research skills. Miss T followed her students' careers with interest, taking personal pride in their accomplishments, confident that their work in the library had directly led to their later success. Law School alumni who visit the library today still remark on the legal research skills they learned from Miss T, and how well those skills serve them in their practice. She was, in fact, a self-taught legal expert herself, having audited most of the courses offered by the Law School and attending law-related seminars and programs whenever possible.

In the late 1960s, the law collection once again outgrew its home, and Miss T worked with Dean Charles O. Galvin on the design and construction of the Underwood Law Library. Her stories about the building's construction included that of the master bricklayer on the project who, dissatisfied with the pattern of bricks on a finished exterior wall, ordered it disassembled and entirely rebuilt so that the pattern would be perfect. She was just as particular as he, supervising every facet of the construction and furnishings and staying up most of the night before the building's

dedication to take care of details the construction crew and cleaning staff had overlooked or failed to perform to her satisfaction. At the time the Underwood Law Library was dedicated in 1971, it was the largest academic law library building in the country.

Miss Turbeville supported her chosen profession by participating in national and local professional organizations. She was a founding member and president of the Southwestern Association of Law Libraries. In 1990 the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) awarded her its highest honor, the Marian G. Gallagher Distinguished Service Award, in recognition of her service to AALL and to law librarianship. Her most important contributions, however, were on the personal level—the law librarians she mentored and trained and then sent on to other institutions. She supervised internships for students in library school, provided advice for beginning librarians, and taught at law library seminars and institutes around the country.

Miss Turbeville's work with the Underwood Law Library continued long after her retirement, as she counseled and encouraged her successors. Her historical knowledge of the Law School and its family, her familiarity with the Dallas legal culture, and her expertise in legal research and law librarianship provided subsequent directors with valuable assistance. She took pride in watching as new technology changed the nature of legal research and was especially pleased that the Underwood building accommodated these developments while continuing to fulfill its traditional role as a useable collection of print materials.

I first met Miss T in the summer of 1990 at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries, at which she was awarded the organization's Gallagher award. I had accepted the directorship at SMU a few months earlier and was preparing to move to Dallas and begin work in a few weeks. A mutual colleague introduced us at the luncheon that was held in Miss T's honor, certain that SMU's first library director and its newest would have much to say to each other. Miss Turbeville took me under her wing at that moment and remained ever after my friend and adviser. She made sure I understood how fortunate I was to take the helm of one of the finest academic law libraries in the country, but was totally unaware that the opportunity to become her friend and to learn from her were the best perquisites of the position.

Library staff had recently begun working with Miss Turbeville on an oral history of the Law School and had completed the first lengthy taping session with her shortly before her death. Her interview is a delight, a lively and insightful recollection of the School's history, told not in terms of chronology and statistics, but rather of personalities and events that shaped it. Her anecdotes are both entertaining and instructive. Her affection for the School and the people associated with it is transparent.

Miss Turbeville's portrait hangs in the Underwood Law Library just inside the main doors, and her name is on the dedication plaque on the building's ground floor. More important, however, her influence endures

in the depth and richness of its collection, the tradition of service to SMU and the local community, and the relationships she nurtured among members of the Law School family.