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Book Reviews

Henry M. Shine Jr.

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BOOK REVIEW

LEGAL SECRETARY'S COMPLETE HANDBOOK. By Besse May Miller.

New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1953. Pp. xxii, 662. \$7.50.

Miss Miller has performed a real service for the legal profession of this country. Though her book is primarily designed to aid the legal secretary of any size law office, the breadth and scope of the subject matter makes the book a "must" for practitioners, particularly those partners whose responsibilities include office management.

With the apparent whole-hearted cooperation of advisory and legal committees of secretaries, in addition to the assistance of the National Association of Legal Secretaries, the author has ably succeeded in enlisting the aid of representatives from every state, thus ensuring proper coverage for each of the forty-eight states. The system of nationwide reports made possible the inclusion of certain tables which eliminate hours of research, *e.g.*, the general statutes of limitation, basic requirements for incorporating, and particular court systems. The inclusion of such tables guarantees the usefulness of the book throughout the United States, having determinedly avoided any regional inclinations.

The organization of the text is efficiently arranged in five parts: (1) Usual Duties in a Law Office; (2) Preparing Legal Instruments and Documents; (3) Courts and Litigation; (4) Assisting in Specialized Practice; and (5) Reference Material. The table of contents makes use of phrases rather than words to indicate the subject matter in the twenty-seven chapters, providing the reader with a more definitive reference to topics.

Chapter One, "You, the Lawyer, and the Law Office," properly puts things in their correct perspective at the outset, raising the question of relationships, *i.e.*, lawyer-secretary and lawyer-client. Preliminary matter relating to: the law office (*e.g.*, layout, equip-

ment, furniture, and supplies); the organization of the firm; and the method of handling new matter, is included.

Some of the chapters are concerned with secretarial duties which are common to all offices, but distinct peculiarities of the law and practice are broached which have not appeared generally in print prior to Miss Miller's book. As an example, some of the chapters of Part One read as follows: "Contacts with Clients and other Callers," "Filing in the Law Office," and "How to Keep Account Records in the Law Office."

Without question Chapter Three, "Reminder System and Practices," is all important. With the competent use of a tickler file, attention to the lawyer's appointments, reminding the lawyer of the court calendar, and the development of an office diary, life-blood in the form of active and punctual practice is assured. At first reading, this and other chapters might appear to be superfluous, for is not the well trained secretary supposed to know and do such things without any reminders? However, the text serves as a ready reference for the myriad details that require constant attention. It serves, in fact, as a check-off list ranging in subjects from punctuation to billing the client.

Part Two serves as the guide to preparing legal instruments, both basic and detailed, including affidavits, powers of attorney, and wills.

Part Three, Courts and Litigation, traces the workings of the American court system, distinguishes between law and equity, defines a court clerk's duties and functions, gives examples of properly prepared court documents, including those of a specific nature (*e.g.*, demurrers, complaints, interrogatories). The coverage in this part is particularly essential because the stenographer must know the meaning of motions, findings of fact, conclusions of law, judgments, decrees, and orders. How time-saving and comforting it is to have a secretary that knows: the intricacies of the judicial system, how to ready a brief, the correct citation

form, what steps must be taken to prepare manuscript for the printer and, when it is returned, how to check galley and page proof!

Specialized Practice and Reference Materials are the topics for Parts Four and Five. The attempt to include basic suggestions relating to particular specialized practices, *e.g.*, foreclosures, probate matters, corporate organization, and commercial transactions, is worthwhile, but the reader is cautioned that the *précis* treatment may be inadequate even for the secretary. Reference materials and the establishment of a law library, with sections on Latin words and brief explanation of frequently used legal terms, complete the book.

The present writer is convinced the legal secretary will be delighted to see this book, truly the first of its kind. Here answers to perplexing and time-consuming questions may be easily found through use of the table of contents (with phrase identities) or an index which is efficiently cross-referenced. However, one is prompted to suggest the text should not become the sole domain of the secretary. How useful it may be for the new practitioner, the beginning law student (who struggles with courses in legal bibliography), and the office manager! No doubt there are deficiencies or shortcomings, but it would appear Miss Miller will be awaiting the reaction of the users and will revise the text only after thorough study and use by many legal secretaries.

*Henry M. Shine, Jr.**

*Formerly Administrative Editor, OIL AND GAS REPORTER (Southwestern Legal Foundation); member of the Texas Bar.

