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The Rewards of Tedium

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Practicing Reference . . .

The Rewards of Tedium*

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While routine projects can be tedious, Ms. Whisner points out factors that make those tedious projects a little easier to bear, as well as some lessons to be learned from a specific project she undertook.

¶1 You don't often hear people say that they really want a job where they get to work on tedious projects. And yet, sometimes I realize in the middle of a big, repetitive project that I am enjoying it. Face it: Librarianship does offer its fair share of tedious projects, so it's a good thing when we can find some pleasure in them. I offer here the story of a recent project, with some reflections on why it was interesting and rewarding, and what can be learned from it.

The Question

¶2 My boss, Penny Hazelton,[1] wanted a list of graduates of our law school (the University of Washington) who became law professors. The alumni office was able to produce a list of people currently in its mailing list database who work at law schools. But the school has been turning out graduates since 1901, and there could have been a number of graduates since then who went into teaching and then left the profession or died. Of course those people are not in the current mailing list database, so the project became one for the reference department—and, as it turned out, for me.

The Method

¶3 The key to tracking this information was being able to use the Association of American Law Schools' *Directory of Law Teachers*, with its biographical entries for each professor. Going through the print volumes page by page would be possible, but prohibitively slow. So I was happy to remember that HeinOnline contains the whole run of the directories.

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1. Associate Dean for Library and Computing Services, University of Washington School of Law.

¶4 Having the *Directory* online was just a start, though. Because HeinOnline scans print documents, and then provides an OCR (optical character recognition) version of searchable text, the biographical entries are not structured in fields— e.g., a name field, an employer field, and a field for law school attended. So you cannot simply search for "university of washington" in the law school field (the way you can in the current year's *Directory* on Westlaw, available in the WLD-AALS database). Instead you have to search the full text—where the University of Washington might show up as a professor's undergraduate school or employer, rather than the law school he or she attended.

¶5 It took a lot of fiddling to come up with good searches. I started with the earliest years (the *Directory* began in 1922) and searched for "univ. of washington." I saw that some biographies listed "univ. of wash." instead of the full name. So I knew I'd have to search both ways. And I found the false hits that show up in any database when searching for the University of Washington: "Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.," "American University, Washington College of Law," and so on.

¶6 Could I narrow it to graduates (rather than employees) of the school by requiring the degree (J.D., LL.B., LL.M.) to be within a couple of words of the school's name? That would work for some graduates, but it might miss some whose entries had the law degree separated from the university name by quite a few words. For instance, Arthur S. Beardsley's degrees were listed: "Graduate, Ellensburg Normal School, Ellensburg, Wash.; LL.B. 1918, B.S. (Library Science) 1924, A.M. 1925, Ph.D. 1928, Univ. of Washington."[2] At the same time, it would still lead to false hits, when the professor's B.A. (or other nonlaw degree) was from the University of Washington, and the law degree was from another institution. I decided I was willing to lose precision in favor of recall. I'd skim to eliminate the false hits.

¶7 My next challenge was in browsing the results. There didn't seem to be a good way to jump from hit to hit to hit. I'd click on "View Matching Text Pages" and see that my terms showed up a number of times; I'd click on the first hit and examine it; then I'd have to go back, click "View Matching Text Pages" again, and look at the next hit. And if there were more than about ten hits, I'd have to click on "View All Results," and slog through—again clicking the back arrow, clicking the next hit, and so on. That process was so cumbersome that I switched from trying to find all the graduates in the *Directory* in a given year (say 1933). Instead, once I found one graduate, I would run a search for that name throughout all the years of the *Directory*. Then I could go back and look for another graduate and find all the years he was listed. At this point, I was still trying to build my list, recognizing that I might be missing some.

¶8 After spending some time in this way with the old-timers, I decided to try out some searches with more recent volumes of the *Directory*. Searching by name for alumni I know who are currently teaching, I discovered that their degrees were listed neither as "Univ. of Washington" or as "Univ. of Wash." They were listed as "Wash., Seattle" (to distinguish the University of Washington from Washington University, which is listed as "Wash., St. Louis"). Later—after searching through

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2. Ass'n of Am. Law Sch., Directory of Teachers in Member Schools 1942–43, at 30.

many years of entries—I found that the *Directory* standardized this format around 1968.

¶9 My Word table was growing ungainly. I switched to an Excel spreadsheet, because it allows so many more columns and rows. And I figured out a way to browse hits much more quickly: I downloaded the biographical section of a year's *Directory* in text format (in 200-page chunks), and then used *Find* to search for "wash., seattle," clicking Next to go through from hit to hit. I still saw all the people who had ever taught at the University of Washington or who had another degree from the university—some bachelor's degrees and a lot of master's in librarianship degrees. But skimming was fine, and it wasn't hard to learn to skip over the false hits. At last I had a process that would enable me to go through all the years with reasonable—but not total—comprehensiveness.

¶10 The technique missed some individuals I knew should be listed. Double-checking, I found that the system wasn't retrieving "Wash., Seattle" if the "Wash." was at the end of one line and "Seattle" was at the beginning of the next. It also missed the instances where "Wash., Se-" was on one line with "attle" on the next. To pick up at least the latter, I began searching for "wash., se."

¶11 Searching for just "wash" yielded far too many hits, because it picked up all the law schools in Washington, D.C., as well as anyone who worked for a firm or government agency there. I figured I'd pick up many of the people missed in one year's *Directory* because of the line break problem in a different year, since the line breaks fall in different places as a professor's biography grows. Even though the biographical entries have a similar format from year to year, the length of the different fields (title, university, etc.) can change enough to make the line breaks fall in different places (see figure 1). For instance, my searches might have missed Stanley M. Johanson in 1964, when the University of Washington showed up as "U. of" on one line and "Wash." on the next. And the search might have missed him in 1979–80, when "Wash.," was on one line and "Seattle" was on the next. But his career has been long enough that the search found him in many years' volumes and I could go back later to fill in the years that I'd missed.

Potential Pitfalls and Inconsistencies

¶12 There were other ways that I might have missed some graduates. There's human fallibility of course—searching and skimming through thousands of pages, I could well have overlooked someone I shouldn't have. But the more years someone was listed, the less likely I was to miss him or her. Some people could also be missed because of imperfect OCR. The program that converts the page images to searchable text sometimes gets it wrong. For example, in the 1941–42 *Directory*, the text version of the *Directory* showed Arthur Sydney Beardsley's name as "BEARUSLEY. ARTHIUR S`-DNNEY." If the school's name were botched as badly as his name, my searches would have missed it. But, again, this risk is reduced when you consider that someone might be listed in a dozen directories and it's unlikely that the OCR would be unreadable in all of them.

1964 (p. 188):
JOHANSON, STANLEY, M., Assoc. Prof. of
Law, Univ. of Texas, Austin 5, Texas. b.
B.S. 1955, Yale; **LL.B. 1958, U. of
Wash.**; LL.M. 1963, Harvard. Admitted: . . .

1968–70 (p. 222)
JOHANSON, STANLEY M., Prof. Univ. of
Texas School of Law. b. 1933. B.S. 1955, Yale;
LL.B., 1958, Wash., Seattle; LL.M., 1963, Harvard. . . .

1979–80 (p. 436)
JOHANSON, STANLEY M., Judge Benjamin
H. Powell Prof. The University of Texas School of
Law. b. 1933. B.S., 1955, Yale; **LL.B., 1958, Wash.,
Seattle**; LL.M., 1963, Harvard. Ed.-in-Ch., Wash. L. . . .

1989–90 (p. 453)
JOHANSON, STANLEY M., (M) Fannie Co-
plin Regents Chair. Univ. of Texas. b. 1933. B.S.,
1955, Yale; **LL.B., 1958, Wash., Seattle**; LL.M., . . .

1999–2000 (p. 575)
JOHANSON, STANLEY M., (M) Univ. Dist. Tchg.
Prof. & Fannie Coplin Regents Chair. Univ. of Texas.
b. 1933. B.S., 1955, Yale; **LL.B., 1958, Wash., Seattle**; . . .

2009–10 (p. 809)
JOHANSON, STANLEY M., (M) Univ. Dist. Tchg. Prof.
& Fannie Coplin Regents Chair, Univ. of Texas. b. 1933. BS,
1955, Yale; **LLB, 1958, Wash., Seattle**; LLM, 1963, Har-
vard. . . .

Figure 1. Sample entries from the AALS Directory of Law Teachers

¶13 Who is listed in the *Directory* varies. For instance, the *Directory* listed one graduate who was the director of Placement, Alumni, and Development at the University of San Diego,[3] but did not list a graduate who I knew was Washington's placement director from 1995 to 2000.[4] Some schools submit entries for administrators and others don't. The *Directory* generally doesn't include part-time faculty, but a more complete list of graduates in law teaching would include some of the

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3. *See William M. Cummings, in* Ass'n of Am. Law Sch., Directory of Law Teachers 1976, at 279.
4. *See* Perkins Coie, Michael R. Gotham, http://www.perkinscoie.com/mgotham (last visited Aug. 29, 2010).

dedicated lecturers and adjuncts who pour themselves into their teaching (and sometimes scholarship, too).[5]

¶14 The *Directory*'s coverage is limited. It didn't start until twenty-one years after the law school's first graduating class, so it was possible that somebody began and ended his teaching career before it started. This doesn't seem like a big gap, because it's unlikely that many people—if anyone—from those small early classes of a start-up school in the Northwest would have gone on the national market, and they weren't on Washington's own small faculty.

¶15 There are other gaps in the record as well: AALS suspended publication in 1943–45, during World War II, and the 1967 *Directory* did not include biographical information about the people listed (apart from their subject specialties).[6] No *Directory* was published in 2008–09.

¶16 The most significant gap, though, is that the AALS *Directory* does not list faculty outside the United States and Canada. A number of the graduates of Washington's LL.M. and Ph.D. programs in Asian and Comparative Law have taught in foreign law schools. Creating a list of them would require a different tool.

The Fun

¶17 Since most readers of *Law Library Journal* are librarians, I'm sure that some have quickly recognized the fun in this project. We like solving the puzzle of sifting needed information from the sources available, and this was a great puzzle in that regard. The fun of solving a puzzle is related to the nerdy delight of exploring a source and poking at its corners to see what's there.

¶18 In addition, skimming the brief biographies of professors gave me the chance to think about the people listed, their careers, and how they fit into the broader picture of American legal education. For instance, I saw people who spent only a year or two teaching and others who appeared in volume after volume of the *Directory*.[7] I could see people who practiced for many years before teaching as well as some who went almost directly into the academy.

¶19 It's well known that a handful of law schools are "feeder schools" for the professoriate,[8] but certainly there have always been some people from less presti-

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5. We have some part-time faculty who have taught for many years. One affiliate professor teaches and publishes as much as some full-time faculty members. *See* Foster Pepper PLLC, Hugh D. Spitzer, http://www.foster.com/profile.aspx?id=102&pid=1.

6. Instead of the regular biographical entries, the 1967 *Directory* has a list of professors with numerical codes indicating their subject areas. *See* Michael H. Cardozo, *Foreword, in* ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS 1967, at 3 (1966).

7. Impressively, Warren L. Shattuck taught law for sixty years, 1935–73 at the University of Washington and 1974–95 at the University of California, Hastings. ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., THE AALS DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS 1995–96, at 844–45 (1995). Shattuck was a member of the "65 Club"— professors hired at Hastings after they had reached mandatory retirement age at their home institutions. *See* THOMAS GARDEN BARNES, HASTINGS COLLEGE OF THE LAW: THE FIRST CENTURY 336 (1978).

8. *See, e.g.,* Daniel Gordon, *Hiring Law Professors: Breaking the Back of an American Plutocratic Oligarchy,* 19 WIDENER L.J. 137, 149 (2009) (footnotes omitted):

    The faculty of American law schools remains dominated by graduates of a few law schools. Fifteen law schools during the 2007–2008 academic year provided 52.9% of the faculty listed by

gious schools who have become teachers. Some have stayed at their home schools, but others have traveled far. So I was interested to notice whether a Washington grad began teaching at Washington or elsewhere.[9] I also noticed the Washington alumni who added to their credentials with graduate law degrees from feeder schools.[10] On the other hand, some of our teaching alumni obtained their first law degrees from other schools before earning LL.M. degrees at the University of Washington.[11] Of course, as a law librarian, I was interested to see the biographies of the twelve Washington law graduates who were or are also law librarians.[12]

¶20 I was also interested to see the increasing representation of women as the decades progressed. And the sheer size of the directories gave an unmistakable lesson in the growth of law schools. Just look at the length of the biographical section over time: 114 pages in 1930, 372 pages in 1970, and 1186 pages in 2009–2010!

Some Thoughts on Tedious Projects

¶21 Being interested in the general subject—the history of this law school and the history of legal education—helped make this sprawling and tedious project palatable. Reference librarians who are curious about the subjects they work on are

the AALS member schools and fee-paying schools. In the same time frame, fifteen of the 200 law schools accredited by the ABA provided one out of every two law professors in the United States, while two law schools, Harvard and Yale, provided over twenty percent of the law professors in the United States during the 2007–2008 academic year.
See also Donna Fossum, *Law Professors: A Profile of the Teaching Branch of the Legal Profession*, 1980 AM. B. FOUND. RES. J. 501.

9. For example, Alfred Harsch (LL.B., 1928) spent his entire teaching career at Washington, first in the business school (1930–35) and then in the law school (1940–67), including a couple of terms as acting dean (1949–50, 1951–52). ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS IN AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS 1966, at 162 [hereinafter 1966 DIRECTORY]. On the other hand, L.A. (Scot) Powe, Jr. (J.D., 1968) first taught at the University of British Columbia (1968–70) and since has spent his career at the University of Texas (1971–present), with visits to Georgetown, Berkeley, and Connecticut. ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., 2009–10 DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS 1135 [hereinafter 2009–10 DIRECTORY].

10. For example, Harry Willmer Jones (LL.B., 1934) got an LL.M. from Columbia in 1939 before teaching, 1966 DIRECTORY, *supra* note 9, at 182; Richard W. Bartke (J.D., 1956) got an LL.M. from Yale in 1967 before becoming a professor, ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS 1980–81, at 188 (1981); Stanley M. Johanson (LL.B., 1958) earned a Harvard LL.M. (1963), 2009–10 DIRECTORY, *supra* note 9, at 809. Even some of those who taught at Washington got advanced degrees elsewhere before returning to teach. *See, e.g.*, Alfred Harsh (LL.B., 1928; LL.M., 1940 from Columbia), 1966 DIRECTORY, *supra* note 9, at 162; John Huston (J.D., 1952; LL.M. 1955 from N.Y.U.), 2009–10 DIRECTORY, *supra* note 9, at 793. William B. Stoebuck (J.D., 1959) got an S.J.D. from Harvard in 1973, nine years after he began teaching. *Id.* at 1326. John Burrill Sholley (LL.B., 1932), began teaching in 1933, and got a J.S.D. from the University of Chicago in 1937. ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., TEACHERS' DIRECTORY 1952–53, at 296 (1952).

11. *See, e.g.*, John O. Haley (LL.B., Yale, 1969; LL.M., Washington, 1971), 2009–10 DIRECTORY, *supra* note 9, at 729; John Alton Duff (J.D., Suffolk, 1990; LL.M., Washington, 1995), ASS'N OF AM. LAW SCH., THE AALS DIRECTORY OF LAW TEACHERS 2004–2005, at 425 (2004).

12. According to my searches, they are Arthur S. Beardsley, Barbara Bintliff, Edgar Bodenheimer, Marian Gould Gallagher, Dennis R. Hyatt, Mary Ann Hyatt, Patrick E. Kehoe, Oscar Carl Orman, Kenneth E. Rudolf, Spencer L. Simons, Larry B. Wenger, and Elizabeth R. Wilkins. (This list does not include all of the graduates from other schools who studied law librarianship at the University of Washington.)

lucky. But there were two other important factors that made this project a positive experience.

¶22 First, there was little time pressure. Penny told me that she didn't need the results right away; she just wanted it in the spring. That meant that I could work on the project for a few hours here and there and put it aside when I had other work (or when my eyes tired). A tedious project that has to be done in a short time can be overwhelming—bad for the mind, the eyes, the neck, and the spirit.

¶23 Second, I had the sense as I was working on this project that whatever I found could be useful for a long time. Once I found the people who were teaching during the 1930s and the 1940s, I would not have to go through those years of directories again.[13] Unlike Sisyphus, if I pushed the rock up the hill, it would stay there. Alas, not all tedious projects are like this, and it can be discouraging to work on one knowing that the work will likely have to be repeated.

¶24 The project also offers a couple of other lessons about reference work. First, it gives yet one more confirmation that questions that are easy to state are not necessarily easy to answer. The question was simple: Which Washington graduates, living or dead, have taught in law schools? Finding the answer took some creativity in searching and many hours (spread out over weeks) of plodding through results. And even so, the answer was incomplete. It's always worth acknowledging and addressing limitations in a research product—that is, explaining why the simple question does not have a simple answer. When I gave Penny my list, I explained the potential gaps and errors.

¶25 This project also shows how big projects (and sometimes even small projects) may require experimentation and false starts. I had to try different searches to find the information I needed. I also had to experiment with ways to browse the results. It took me a while to figure out how to record my results, starting with a Word table and switching to an Excel spreadsheet, adding some columns of extra information (e.g., degrees from other schools) as I went along.[14] This sort of experimentation and adjustment is often necessary.

¶26 Although we all need to try out different approaches sometimes, that's easy to forget on a bad day. I've heard librarians and interns chide themselves for "wasting time" because they didn't start in the right database or use the right search terms. But it's often only in hindsight that we know which approach will be fruitful. A certain amount of floundering is part of the process. Or, less judgmentally, instead of "floundering," let's call it intelligent experimentation, assessment, and adjustment.

¶27 This project was rewarding because it was interesting, I had time to do it, and I knew the results would be useful for a long time. Like many projects that start out with a simple question, it presented complexities and could not be answered definitively. And like many research problems, getting a handle on it required experimentation and false starts. It was a good project, and I was even able to use it for a column topic.

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13. That's not to say that there won't be more work to do. Maybe we'll want to search for publications by those graduates or obituaries of the ones who have died. Maybe we will want to sift the profiles we've found for more information: Who was on law review? Who taught international law? But those tasks would build on what I've done, not require me to do it again.

14. Eventually, I created a third document: a Word document with a copy of the entry for each graduate from the latest directory where the graduate was found.