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*Legal Information Management*, 17 (2017), pp. 5–10

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doi:10.1017/S1472669617000056

## WAYS OF WORKING

# Placemaking and Assessing Physical Space in the Academic Law Library

**Abstract:** The concept of placemaking has been widely utilized by public and university libraries to create spaces with library users in mind. This article by Lee F. Peoples describes how academic law libraries can employ placemaking concepts to support their parent law school's program of legal education, encourage collaborative learning, and connect students with their school's community, values and traditions. This article explains how academic law libraries can assess placemaking activities and other uses of library space and demonstrate a return on investment made into library spaces. The article concludes with some predictions for the future of assessing library space use.

**Keywords:** library space; space management; placemaking; library design, qualitative assessment; academic law libraries

## INTRODUCTION

Placemaking as a formal concept is largely associated with the American journalist and urbanist William H. White.<sup>1</sup> The four key elements of successful public places as articulated by the Project for Public Spaces are: 'they are *accessible*; people are engaged in *activities* there; the space is *comfortable* and has a good image; and finally it is a *sociable* place.'<sup>2</sup> A common definition of placemaking is 'the art and science of crafting spaces in ways that transcend their physical attributes and contributes to the well-being of the occupants.'<sup>3</sup>

The successful implementation of placemaking concepts in an academic law library must be sensitive to the economic, market, and regulatory pressures confronting law schools. Placemaking requires a commitment of resources including space, personnel, and funding. No placemaking activity should be undertaken before a clearly defined plan of assessment is developed. A thoughtfully developed assessment plan can help an

academic law library react to the current market for legal education and comply with accreditation requirements.

## I. PLACEMAKING IN THE ACADEMIC LAW LIBRARY

According to architect Jeffery Scherer, 'after a generation of intensive work in building the virtual library, often at the expense of maintaining and developing the quality of physical space in the physical library, librarians have reawakened to the place-making role of the library building.'<sup>4</sup> Some key qualities of placemaking as applied to libraries are drawing on the character of the existing place, integrating both print and non-print resources, 'co-locate[ing] library and non-library uses'; evolving along with the needs of library patrons, and supporting the 'serendipitous nature of library use and the range of choices available.'<sup>5</sup> Another key component of placemaking relevant to academic law

libraries is enhancing 'the patron's sense of connection with their community and its values and traditions.'<sup>6</sup>

Only a few articles have discussed placemaking in the context of academic law libraries. Ray Oldenburg's theory of the third place' to an academic law library was explored in an article titled *Looking Beyond the Stacks: The Law Library as Place*.<sup>7</sup> *Designing a Law Library to Encourage Learning* discussed placemaking in the context of encouraging learning through the creation of a learning commons in a law library.<sup>8</sup> The most recent article to discuss placemaking in the context of academic law libraries is Jordan A. Jefferson's 'We're Going to Make You Popular': *Popular Collections in the Modern Academic Law Library*.<sup>9</sup>

Jefferson's article describes how a popular reading collection can be used to remake a law library's image thereby 'rejuvenating the law library's place within the law students' educational and recreational lives.'<sup>10</sup> The article explains how a popular reading collection can be a useful asset in establishing the law library as a place.

Another collection that can be useful in creating a sense of place is a subject-specific collection. These collections have the potential to develop a sense of place within the library. Additionally, they can support the school's curricular, scholarly, and service programs and objectives.<sup>11</sup>

### Should subject-specific collections have their own space?

Subject specific collections enjoy a long history in academic libraries. The seminal work on library design, Leighton and Weber's *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings* describes the divisional subject plans popular in the 1940s and 1950s. During this era, it was popular for libraries to have 'separate reading rooms, reference services, and shelf areas for the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences.'<sup>12</sup>

Many academic law libraries have spent decades developing subject specific collections that support the special centres and concentrations of their parent law school. Citing space considerations, many law libraries have absorbed subject specific collections into their general collection in recent years.

Libraries wishing to explore placemaking should consider locating subject specific collections apart from their general collection. Space created by discarding digitized print materials could be used to house a subject specific collection. When a separate space is created for a subject specific collection, the collection gains its own 'cognitive and social meaning.'<sup>13</sup> This can help a library achieve some key elements of placemaking which include using design to articulate difference, having pronounced borders and clear spatial definitions.<sup>14</sup>

A separate and clearly defined space for a subject specific collection is important because it blurs social distinctions between faculty and students using the collection and helps spur collaborative learning.<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, law schools are filled with spaces that underscore the authority of the faculty member. The faculty office and the classroom

typically 'reinforce inequalities of authority in knowing.'<sup>16</sup> Most attempts at faculty and student collaboration occur in these spaces. Attempts at collaborative learning might be more successful if they occurred in a place that was not the exclusive domain of one member of the law school community. Library space planner Scott Bennett calls these 'domestic spaces' where 'people construct knowledge working together in groups, interdependently.'<sup>17</sup> The knowledge created in these spaces is not the property of an individual person but of the community that constructed it.<sup>18</sup>

A subject specific collection located apart from a general collection can be a useful tool for encouraging collaborative learning in law schools. Furniture that promotes collaboration and interaction should fill this space. Large reading tables, soft-seating areas, and furniture on casters can be used to encourage collaboration.<sup>19</sup> Students and faculty members who visit the subject specific collection can expect it to serve as a levelling environment that provides respite from the hierarchical structures of the legal academy. Collection visitors are not in the classroom or faculty office which is clearly the domain of the faculty member. They are not at a library table or study carrel, a space where law students study. They have come to the collection because they share a common interest in the subject. In the well-defined space of the collection, they leave behind inequality and can browse, discover, and discuss, as members of the law school community interested in gaining knowledge and understanding, about the subject the collection is devoted to. As this example demonstrates, locating space for collaboration inside a subject-specific collection can deliver the added placemaking benefit of connecting students and faculty with their community and its values and traditions.<sup>20</sup>

### Subject specific collections beyond the library

Some academic law libraries have located subject specific collections outside of library walls. These libraries are boldly following their counterparts in law firms who have been decentralizing their print collections and placing subject-specific resources in or near the offices of attorneys or practice groups who frequently use them.<sup>21</sup>

Clinical and experiential course offerings have expanded rapidly in recent years.

Some law libraries have located print collections of supporting resources inside their law school's clinics.<sup>22</sup> Libraries that adopt this approach will not only be providing useful resources to the clinic or centre they are supporting. Providing the materials in the manner that the students will encounter on the job fulfils the additional requirement of the proposed revision to ABA Standard 606(a) that libraries provide materials in a format that prepares 'students for effective, ethical, and responsible participation in the legal profession.'<sup>23</sup>

Placing library resources in a law school clinic, centre, or other student service point achieves multiple

placemaking goals at once. The very act of locating library resources in these spaces will achieve the goal of 'drawing on the character of the existing place.' Locating library resources in these spaces demonstrates a commitment to the placemaking goal of 'evolving with the needs of the library patrons' by providing resources to patrons at the point where they are needed. Law students who discover library resources placed in a clinic, centre, or other service point will likely experience the placemaking goal of serendipity by noticing library resources they might not have been aware of. Law libraries should not hesitate to explore the placemaking potential of specialized collections located outside of the traditional confines of the library walls.

### **The Placemaking power of artwork, objects and other curiosities**

Locating artwork in a law library can help achieve the placemaking qualities of improving the comfort and attractiveness of a place and can engage people in activities and increase the sociability of the place. According to the Project for Public Spaces:

Public artworks are stimulating and inviting active dialogue rather than just passive observation, thereby fostering social interaction that can even lead to a sense of social cohesion among the viewers themselves. A good public space, on the other hand, is not only inviting, but builds a place for the community around an artwork, or culture venue, by growing and attracting activities that make it a multi-use destination.<sup>24</sup>

Several academic law libraries have tapped into the placemaking power of locating art in library space. The University of Texas' Tarlton Law Library contains the Hyder collection, an outstanding assemblage of over 1,000 pieces of art and historical objects related to law.<sup>25</sup> The library thoughtfully uses the collection to create a sense of place by locating art and artifacts from foreign countries near library materials from those jurisdictions.

Libraries who do not hold collections as extensive as Tarlton's can still employ the placemaking power of artwork to improve their physical space. Photographs of important alumni or images of the school's first graduating classes are commonly found in law libraries. Physical objects like gavels, barristers' wigs, or judicial robes can provide a three-dimensional element. Photographs of alumni who have achieved success in particular legal specialties can be displayed in subject-specific collection areas. These photographs and objects can be used to achieve the placemaking goal of connecting students with their community and its values and traditions.<sup>26</sup>

### **Co-location of uses**

Another key concept of placemaking in libraries is the co-location of library and non-library uses. Several

academic law libraries have created subject-specific collections to support what are traditionally considered non-library activities or uses. Innovative librarians are exploring ways to more fully integrate themselves and their libraries into the life of the law school.<sup>27</sup>

One law school library has created a subject-specific collection of guide books to the local community. The collection gives students who are not from the area an introduction to the community and helps them make contacts with the local alumni network. The collection includes general resources on the area, hiking guides and restaurant guides.<sup>28</sup> This collection also serves the placemaking function of connecting library patrons with their community and its values and traditions. Academic law libraries have created health and wellness displays showcasing resources supporting law student wellness.<sup>29</sup> Other law libraries have created collections on mindfulness and its relation to the legal profession.<sup>30</sup>

Collections of practical, legal career planning materials are typically maintained by either a law school career services office or a law library. The University of Georgia (Atlanta) has created a special location for job-finding resources.<sup>31</sup> The collection is called the CPR collection (Career and Professional Resources collection). It includes law career guides, job searching tips, resume writing books, interview questions to expect, etc. The collection is prominently located near a high-traffic area in the law library. Signs promoting the law school's training sessions on job searching are displayed near the collection. The print collection is supported with a libguide for legal career services.<sup>32</sup> This collection provides an example of how a subject-specific collection can achieve the placemaking goal of supporting what is traditionally thought of as a non-library use. Additionally, this collection demonstrates the entrepreneurial spirit of the University of Georgia law librarians in working to assist law students as they enter a difficult legal job market.<sup>33</sup>

The University of Oklahoma's Donald E Pray Law Library recently added two virtual reality stations to its Collaborative Learning Center. The VR stations are 'loaded with interactive modules like simulated surgeries and detailed oil rig renderings'<sup>34</sup> and they 'enable students to experience the law virtually and explore resources not previously available to law students.'<sup>35</sup>

Another trend on the horizon for academic law libraries is the location of 3D printers and maker spaces into law libraries. Public and university libraries are leading the way in adding these amenities.<sup>36</sup> Law schools with a focus on intellectual property law or technology startup programmes could leverage the placemaking power of a 3D printer or maker space to support their school's programmes and encourage collaboration between students, faculty, technologists and entrepreneurs.

Placemaking activities require library space, personnel and financial resources. Law school deans may wish to convert library space for other purposes or may be hesitant to commit scarce resources to improve library space. Before proposing a placemaking activity, a law

library director should define the desired outcome, develop a plan to assess the activity and consider how to demonstrate a return on investment. The next section will explore outcome measures, assessment, and return on investment in the academic law library.

## 2. ASSESSMENT, OUTCOME MEASURES AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

The American Bar Association recently adopted significant revisions to the accreditation standards governing law schools.<sup>37</sup> The standards ushered in a new era of evaluating schools by the achievement of outcome measures. Standard 301(b) requires schools to 'establish and publish learning outcomes designed to achieve' a program of legal education that prepares students 'for admission to the bar and for effective, ethical, and responsible participation as members of the legal profession.'<sup>38</sup>

Law libraries were not immune from change during the standards revision. The standards charge law libraries with supporting their parent law schools in 'carrying out its program of legal education, accomplish[ing] its mission, and supporting scholarship and research'<sup>39</sup> Libraries are now required to engage in perpetual planning and assessment 'including written assessment of the effectiveness of the library in achieving its mission and realizing its established goals.'<sup>40</sup>

In addition to pressure from new accreditation standards, law libraries and their parent law schools located in the United States and beyond are subject to rapidly changing market forces. Historically low enrolment, shrinking endowments and continued cuts to law school and library budgets have created a poor financial outlook at many law schools.<sup>41</sup> Commentators have questioned the continued viability of the current model of legal education.<sup>42</sup> Others have predicted that a certain number of law schools will shut down in the near future.<sup>43</sup> These predictions are becoming reality with the recent closure of the Indiana Tech School of Law<sup>44</sup> and the ABA's recommendation to not accredit the recently opened University of North Texas – Dallas School of Law.<sup>45</sup>

Traditional methods of assessing the use of library space need to change in light of market forces and new accreditation standards. Historically, library space usage was assessed by having a staff member roam the library and record the number of patrons present in the building at various times throughout the day. Electronic eye devices were used to count the number of people passing through a library's main entrance. Occasionally, a library might survey users to measure student satisfaction with library space, rules, hours and other physical attributes. These quantitative measures seem outdated and ineffectual in light of the new focus on outcome measures and qualitative assessment.

Law libraries are searching for new ways to assess their performance and demonstrate value. The American

Association of Law Libraries recently released a white paper titled *Defining ROI: Law Library Best Practices*.<sup>46</sup> In a section of the report titled *Show Me the Value*, Joan Howland posits that libraries 'need to measure the impact of services or other aspects of its operations in a manner that produces data that can be clearly linked to the furtherance of institutional goals.'<sup>47</sup> She urges libraries to reconfigure space to promote and support academic support and bar passage programs. She calls these spaces 'group study rooms on steroids' where students can find 'relevant electronic and hard-copy resources, including study aids, bar examination preparation tools, and sample tests.'<sup>48</sup> Howland imagines these spaces 'furnished with both individual carrels and shared study tables.'<sup>49</sup> Key to demonstrating the return on investment (ROI) for these spaces is 'tracking and reporting the improved academic performance and bar passage data of these students [who used the space] as compared with students who do not avail themselves of the library service, could persuasively demonstrate the value of the funds invested in this enterprise.'<sup>50</sup>

Law schools who partnered with the SmithGroup architectural firm to construct impressive campuses are engaged in innovative post-occupancy studies of the use of library space.<sup>51</sup> When designing their spaces, these schools made deliberate decisions about furniture, interior colours and other finishes with the goal of influencing user behaviour. The post-occupancy studies will be conducted by a behaviorist who will observe users and test assumptions made during the design process to determine if design choices have any impact on user behaviour.

Many law schools and libraries do not have the luxury of designing a new campus or even conducting a post-occupancy study led by a behaviourist. However, steps can be taken before, during and after improvements to library space are made, to evaluate the effectiveness of planned changes. Most furniture vendors will gladly provide sample chairs, tables and other items under consideration for purchase. The Oklahoma City University School of Law set up a variety of chairs and tables under consideration for furnishing its new building and allowed students to vote for their favourites. A mock-up of a custom lectern proposed for the classrooms was displayed near faculty offices several months before the lectern order was finalised. Faculty were invited to try out the lectern and submit feedback on its design. Several three-dimensional planning sessions were led by architects using Google Sketchup to evaluate classroom design and ensure adequate sight lines existed between students and faculty before classroom designs were finalised. Efforts like these to solicit input from students and faculty, the primary users of law school and library space, resulted in a more successful finished law school building.

Online surveys are often used to assess library services, collections and space. Response rates to these surveys can be abysmal unless they are planned and executed carefully. Many law students suffer from email fatigue and will ignore a request to complete an online

survey unless it is properly timed and participation is incentivised. Surveys should be sent during a quiet time in the academic calendar. Prizes like the use of a reserved study room stocked with snacks can help improve survey response rates.

Traditional survey questions are one-dimensional and do not allow for in-depth exploration of complex topics. Law libraries should consider forming a standing law student advisory committee to provide feedback on issues related to library space. Another option is convening a law student focus group to explore library space considerations and rules relevant to library space use. Questions about proposed changes to library space rules can be posted to a library's social media account with a request for student feedback.

Law schools and libraries who utilise electronic access control systems should leverage the data stored by these systems for assessment purposes. Key fob systems, electronic locks, and CCTV technology have enabled law schools to provide students with 24/7 access to study space at a relatively low cost. Some schools have implemented electronic room reservations systems that allow students to reserve study rooms online. The data stored in these systems can be mined to understand what types of spaces are most in-demand by students. Usage patterns can be explored to make adjustments to building

use policies and staffing schedules. A comparison of study room usage with academic success and bar exam passage could be used to demonstrate a return on investment and to encourage other students to improve their study habits.

## The Future of assessment

The internet of things presents new opportunities to assess and improve the use of library space. Researchers at MIT developed a sociometric badge.<sup>52</sup> The badge is a wearable electronic device that captures 'face-to-face interactions, extracting social signals from speech and body movement, and measuring proximity and location of users. This data is combined with electronic communication data, such as email and IM data, to gain a complete view of how people are collaborating.'<sup>53</sup> The company who brought the sociometric badge to market claims that data from the badge can tell its clients 'if teams are under-communicating, visualize how they spend their time, and understand their communication preferences.'<sup>54</sup> To date this product has only been deployed in corporate environments.<sup>55</sup> An enterprising law school could utilize it to measure the effectiveness of collaborative spaces or faculty office arrangements.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> William H Whyte <<http://www.pps.org/reference/wwhyte/>> accessed 7 December 2016.

<sup>2</sup> What Makes a Successful Place <<http://www.pps.org/reference/grplacefeat/>> accessed 7 December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Scherer, Principal, Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle Architects, Placemaking: Creating Libraries that Matter Now and in the Future (American Library Association National Convention June 28, 2008) <<http://msrlibraryworld.wordpress.com/2009/01/29/library-placemaking/>> accessed 7 December 2016.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Steven Young, 'Looking Beyond the Stacks: The Law Library as Place' (2010) AALL Spectrum 16, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Peoples, 'Designing a Law Library to Encourage Learning' (2014) 63 Journal of Legal Education 612.

<sup>9</sup> (2013) 32 Legal Reference Services Quarterly 78–109.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* 99.

<sup>11</sup> Law school libraries subject to the American Bar Association's Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools are required by Standard 606(a) to have a collection that supports their school's 'curricular, scholarly, and service programs'.

<sup>12</sup> Philip D Leighton and David C Weber, *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings* (3rd ed, American Library Association, 2000) 61.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Scherer (n 3).

<sup>15</sup> This blurring of boundaries is one of the seven guiding principles of placemaking in libraries as articulated by Jeffrey Scherer.

<sup>16</sup> Scott Bennett, 'Righting the Balance', in *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space* (Council on Library and Information Research, 2005) 19.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Peoples (n 8).

<sup>20</sup> Scherer (n 3)3.

<sup>21</sup> LaJean Humphries, 'Cheaper Online? Our Firm Library's Gradual Move to All Electronic' (2013) AALL Spectrum 18.

<sup>22</sup> Email from Caroline Osborne, Director of the Law Library and Professor of Legal Research Washington & Lee University School of Law (1 July 2013 - copy on file with author). Email from Michelle Wu, Director, Law Library, Professor of Law, Georgetown Law (20 June 2013 - copy on file with author).

- <sup>23</sup> ABA Standard (n 11).
- <sup>24</sup> 'Collaborative, Creative Placemaking: Good Public Art Depends on Good Public Spaces' <<http://www.pps.org/reference/collaborative-creative-placemaking-good-public-art-depends-on-good-public-spaces/>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Barbara Bintliff, Joseph C Hutcheson Professor of Law and (26 September 2013) Director, Tarlton Law Library/Jamail Center for Legal Research, University of Texas at Austin School of Law.
- <sup>26</sup> Scherer (n 3).
- <sup>27</sup> For an example see Leah Sandwell Weiss' 'The Evolution of Law Library Support to Law School Administrative and Staff Offices' in Barbara Bintliff and Lee F Peoples (eds) *Public Services in Law Libraries: Evolution and Innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Taylor & Francis 2007) 233.
- <sup>28</sup> Email on file with author. Sender of email asked that her school not be identified.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Email from Carol A Watson, Director of the Alexander Campbell King Law Library, University of Georgia School of Law (18 June 2013 - email on file with author).
- <sup>32</sup> Career Resources from the Library <<http://libguides.law.uga.edu/careers>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>33</sup> Law School Grads Face Worst Job Market Yet – Less Than Half Find Jobs in Private Practice, <<http://www.nalp.org/2011selectedfindingsrelease>> accessed 7 Dec. 2016.
- <sup>34</sup> 'OU College of Law Dedicates Inasmuch Foundation Collaborative Learning Center' *Tulsa World* (27 September 2016).
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Heather Michele Moorefield-Lang, 'Makers in the Library: Case Studies of 3D Printers and Maker Spaces in Library Settings', (2014) 32(4) *Library Hi Tech* 583. The North Carolina State University libraries have lead the way in not only implementing placemaking into their libraries but also adding maker spaces and 3D printers. <<https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/services/makerspace>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>37</sup> ABA Standard 301(b).
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid* 301(a).
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid* 601(a)(1).
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid* 601(a)(3).
- <sup>41</sup> Peoples (n 8).
- <sup>42</sup> Richard A Matasar, 'The Viability of the Law Degree: Cost, Value, and Intrinsic Worth' (2011) 96 *Iowa Law Review* 1578.
- <sup>43</sup> Debra Cassens Weiss, 'Profs Predict Law School Closings as More Grads Earn Less than Break-Even Pay' *ABA J.* (19 October 2010) [http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/profs\\_predict\\_law\\_school\\_closings\\_as\\_more\\_grads\\_earn\\_less\\_than\\_break-even\\_p](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/profs_predict_law_school_closings_as_more_grads_earn_less_than_break-even_p)
- <sup>44</sup> 'Indiana Tech Law School to Close, Citing \$20 Million In Losses' <<http://abovethelaw.com/2016/10/indiana-tech-law-school-to-close-citing-20-million-in-losses/>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>45</sup> 'How UNT-Dallas' Grand Law School Experiment Could be Overruled' <<https://www.texastribune.org/2016/08/23/unt-dallas-wants-fix-law-school-it-may-not-get-cha/>> accessed 7 December 2016. The school is seeking reconsideration of the denial of accreditation.
- <sup>46</sup> American Association of Law Libraries, 'Defining ROI: Law Library Best Practices' <<http://www.aallnet.org/hc/NewsCallout/AALL-Releases-ROI-White-Paper.pdf>> accessed 7 Dec. 2016.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid* 12–13.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Billie Jo Kaufman, Associate Dean for Library and Information Resources Professor of Law, American University College of Law (December 2015).
- <sup>52</sup> <<http://www.humanyze.com/products.html>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>53</sup> <<https://www.linkedin.com/company/sociometric-solutions>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>54</sup> <<http://www.humanyze.com/products.html>> accessed 7 December 2016.
- <sup>55</sup> <<http://www.humanyze.com/case.html>> accessed 7 December 2016.

## Biography

Lee F. Peoples is the Frederick Charles Hicks Professor of Law and Law Library Director, Oklahoma City University School of Law. He will serve as the Interim Dean of the School of Law beginning in July, 2017. For Emma and Amelia. This article is adapted from a previously published article, 'Placemaking in the Academic Law Library' (2014) 33 *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* 157. Updates and additions have been made to the text as it originally appeared in *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*. Any errors or omissions are entirely the author's fault.