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DEAN RASCO AND THE LAW LIBRARY

HARRIET L. FRENCH*

It will probably be many years before the full impact of Dean Rasco's contributions to the University of Miami will be realized. Everything happened so quickly that it is hard to believe that one man could have accomplished so much in such a short time. Moreover, the people who knew the obstacles he had to overcome and the little that he had to work with are passing from the scene, one by one, and generations coming on are apt to look upon the functional buildings, the excellent library, the *Law Review* and other assets of the school as though they had always been there. So easy it is to forget. It is well, therefore, for us to record the history of our school and, interwoven with it, the miracles performed by this amazing man.

The library is probably Dean Rasco's greatest love and it is certainly one of his finest achievements. It would not be here, if he had not breathed it into existence almost like a dream come true. For Dean Rasco was a man with a dream—a dream of a great law center at the University of Miami, and in order to have it he knew that he had to have a fine library. The first time I met him—I can remember him still, a hotly intense heavyset man with the eyes of a visionary and the physique of a football tackle—he pounded out to me, “I want the finest law library in the South,” and because he seemed so sincere and confident I felt that he would have it and I was impelled to help him try.

Those were really inspiring days following World War II as thousands of Veterans were turning to the law schools and no place was big enough to hold them all. They poured in until they were practically hanging out of the windows—a gay group of bright, interesting and, for the most part, mature men and women, enthusiastic about the law and capable of organizing a student body so that those things the University had never had could become a reality. We laughed and joked and worked like mad and Dean Rasco was here, there and everywhere, day and night, working, fighting, and dreaming up ideas for “his boys” and his school. The truly remarkable part of it all was he knew how to convert ideas into reality and nothing stopped him.

Like the library, for instance. He knew that it would take money and lots of it to get what he wanted. He saw all those thousands of GIs enrolling in the law school with Uncle Sam picking up the tab. Why shouldn't the good “Uncle” help build up his library, too? The story is that he approached the University officials with the idea of charging a library fee in order to buy books but they turned him down saying that the Veterans' Administration would never approve it. When the copy for

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the catalog was sent over to him for his approval, however, he just slipped in an item of a library fee of fifteen dollars a semester and it was printed that way. The Veterans' Administration never complained and thousands of dollars began to pour in for the library. The announced purpose of the fee was to buy books and buy books we did.

It was rather fun building up a collection almost from scratch because we could take advantage of unusual opportunities to buy up whole libraries and still not get involved in duplications. A library became available through The Old Author's Farm in Toronto, which contained a fine selection of legal history and jurisprudence items we wanted, and Mr. Clarke, the owner of that fabulous institution, wrote me that it was the first time he had had a collection purchased from a pre-publication list before the list could even be printed. The books came in, packed in big wooden boxes, and it was just like Christmas opening them and taking out our new treasures one by one. In fact, that following Christmas Mr. Clarke sent us boxes of English chocolates for the library staff, to express his own interest and appreciation in our developing collection. Then there was the Wlassak collection of Roman law that we purchased from H. P. Kraus from an advertisement in the American Bar Journal, that was full of exciting incunabula.

Rasco's enthusiasm enlisted the aid of many people. Law book dealers went out of their way to find out-of-print materials we needed. Mr. Fred O. Dennis of Dennis & Company of Buffalo, credited Rasco with giving him the encouragement he needed to go into the law book business and he has been a good friend of our library from the beginning. He sold the school thousands of dollars worth of periodicals that were needed for us to gain American Bar Association approval, on a contract basis of fifty dollars a month with no interest. After I came to Miami I had a meeting with Dennis and several University officials to try to straighten out our account and I shall never forget Dennis telling us that he sold the books to Rasco on those terms, at a time when he couldn't afford to do it, simply because he liked Rasco. O. O. Beck, the West Company representative here for many years, was another good friend. He negotiated contracts to help us purchase his company's books up until his death, one having been approved a short time before he died. He was always looking out for things we needed and made the contact for us through which we purchased our valuable collection of early Florida session laws. Other good friends who have passed on were Ralph Lahr of Bancroft-Whitney Company and Evan Jones of The National Law Book Company. The Carswell Company, then represented by Mr. William T. Hibbitt who is now their Manager, made it possible for us to get together a remarkably fine collection of English and British Commonwealth materials including the Statutes of the Caribbean countries that are practically irreplaceable. Philip Cohen, owner of Oceana Publications,

found a number of rare English volumes for us. Rasco looked upon law book dealers as his friends and they responded warmly with a real personal interest in the struggling but growing library that was taking shape here in Miami.

It was a struggle, too, all the way. When enrollments dropped off our funds dipped so low that we could not even pay for our continuations and Rasco persuaded the University Administration to set up a budget for us in addition to the library fees. At one time the fees were eliminated, then reinstated, then finally merged into tuition but somehow or other we survived, bought books, went into debt and were bailed out again. We signed contracts for almost \$100,000 during a relatively short time and one of these is still being paid out at the rate of \$1000 a year. We spent a good deal of money, much of which we didn't have, but as a result we now have a collection that is not only worth far more than we paid for it but one which contains materials that are almost impossible to purchase. Last year we passed the 100,000 volume mark, a significant milestone in the development of any library, and we have a collection valued at more than a million dollars. It is housed in a cheerful building of its own for which those of us who have lived through its predecessors can be constantly grateful.

Our housing was another one of Dean Rasco's constant battles. When I came to the University of Miami in the Fall of 1947 the school was located on North Campus in, around and about a former apartment building—the Hugo Apartments, now being used by The Marine Laboratories. The first floor had been made available for the library. Partitions had been removed, plumbing had been disconnected and pulled out, leaving disconcerting looking pipes in places, but these were rapidly covered up with book shelves and books. The place had a definite charm and I think back with nostalgia of the little rooms into which we could divide our sections. Jurisprudence had a room all to itself, New York had its private quarters and Pennsylvania poured out of another. We were constantly moving them, however, because they quickly outgrew their space, and we were finally beginning to get desperate when the exciting news came that we were going to move to the old Riddle Building on Alhambra and LeJeune.

Dean Rasco and the students made elaborate plans for the move. The students were to have a holiday and they would move the books. At the end of the day a big picnic was to be served them in the new quarters. I do not remember the picnic but I remember well the move and seeing a chain of students passing books out of the windows on to trucks that carried them to their new home. Some of the books we never saw again and there were several sprained backs, but it was a gay affair and on the whole a very satisfactory move.

The new quarters were grossly inadequate, however, from the very beginning. The neighbors complained, justifiably, of some 1000 students, all of whom it seemed with cars, being turned loose on them with no parking facilities. Some of the classes were held a block away in the American Legion Hall. Rats from a riding stable located down on Salzedo where the Coral Gables Bus Terminal is now, roamed the area. The library was in a large gymnasium-like room with only one small outside door on the alley at the back. The principal entrances were either through the classrooms or the dean's office. Marvelous tales were told of people wandering around in the stacks trying frantically to find their way out. I have never understood why the fire inspectors ever allowed us to go into that place. We moved as quickly as possible and this time to the developing Main Campus.

There we appropriated a part of the General Library's space in the Merrick Building and large areas were taken over for classes and offices. The library like a hungry monster kept swallowing classrooms, one by one, and when the art gallery moved out we took over their space for our foreign collection. None of this space was relinquished without a battle, but Dean Rasco was in there fighting every step of the way. It is needless to say that when we were told that we would have our own building the joy that burst forth was not alone from the law school but everyone else rejoiced to see us go.

In 1956 we moved into our own buildings the unique design for which was Dean Rasco's. The separate library unit needed another floor even when we were planning the building and Rasco tried in every way to have it added at that time when it could have been done quite reasonably. We failed in this fight, however, and the "battle for the third floor" is still being waged. Dean Rasco was always ahead of everyone else in his planning and this caused him trouble from time to time with people who failed to understand what he was trying to do. But he knew where he was going and the "long view" will eventually show the pattern of his plans. What we have now has been brought about almost out of nothingness—that is, if you consider his dream, his drive, his enthusiasm and the contagious effect of his zeal which brought into focus the talents and faith of others to help, if you consider these mere "nothingness." Anyway you look at it it is a miracle and the miracle man was Rasco.