

October 2006 Library of the Month: Cleaves Law Library



The Cleaves Law Library is the oldest law library in Maine and one of the oldest in the country. It was founded in 1811 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's father Stephen and Prentiss Mellon, first Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Court. Librarian Nancy Rabasca (right) says "Cleaves was the first law library in the country to offer free, unlimited public access to Lexis and Westlaw. It has the largest collection of Supreme Court briefs in the State."



The library has been located in five different court houses in the city of Portland, and survived two building fires. It is currently housed on the third floor of the County courthouse, in the heart of the legal district near the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, other state courts and major law firms.



The Cleaves library is currently preserving and archiving over 1400 photographs of the Maine legal community. Housed in an acid free environment, the photos are assigned archival labels for retrieval by researchers. The collection archivist is Abraham Schechter, B.F.A., M.L.S.



The library is about 3400 square feet and contains 25,000 volumes and 700 serials -- most of them online.



Membership in the library is open to lawyers licensed to practice in Maine who are in good standing; members have 24/7 access. The library's services are also available to the public when the library is staffed.



In 2002 the Cleaves Board of Directors authorized the organization of an oral history project to assemble a historical record about the legal profession and the organized bar of the State of Maine. This public service endeavor...



involves extensive interviews of diverse occupations within the legal profession and includes firsthand accounts of important events. Harriet P. Henry (Maine's 1st woman judge), Duane (Buzz) Fitzgerald, and Justice Gene Carter are just some of the many interviews included.

Library Information

- **Library Director:** Nancy Rabasca
- **Board President:** David McConnell
- **Address:** 142 Federal Street, Portland, ME 04101
- **Phone:** 773-9712 (best to get in touch by email: info@cleaves.org)
- **Website:** www.cleaves.org
- **Hours:** Mon - Fri 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Library of the Month Archive

- [September 2006](#) - Fryeburg Public Library
- [August 2006](#) - Old York Historical Society
- [July 2006](#) - Library Makeovers

Mission Statement: The Nathan and Henry B. Cleaves Law Library exists to serve in a professional, efficient and modern manner, the educational, historical and legal research needs of its members, and to provide access to such information to the general public, utilizing the most modern technology possible, and to preserve and maintain legal materials and artifacts that are in the Library's care. The Library strives to maintain a complete and up-to-date collection of materials in an appropriate physical setting, and to deliver competent, professional research assistance that allows Library patrons to make full use of the Library's resources. The Library will be responsive to the changing needs of its patrons, and provide a cost-efficient means to share legal resource costs and resources for the benefit of all.
