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Cleaves Law Library Fosters Right-Brain Activity

It bills itself as "the best (small) law library in Maine," but the Cleaves Law Library in Portland might just as well call itself "the law library with flair." Tucked away in a corner of the Cumberland County Court House, the Cleaves Library dares to suggest, albeit quietly, that a life in the law need not be drained of personality.

The nineteenth century legal luminaries who gaze solemnly down from their ornately framed immortality include the two after whom the library is named, Cleaves brothers Henry B. and Nathan, but the pantheon of the deceased co-exists serenely with copiers, fax machines, and desk-top computers. For all of its unpretentious though traditional atmosphere, Cleaves was the first law library in the country to offer free public access to Lexis and Westlaw.

Testifying to the library's finger on the contemporary pulse is a copy of an e-mail posted on one of the library bulletin boards from one Dhiraj Aggarwal [dhiraj@e-bookservices.com] of New Delhi, India, which Aggarwal describes in the message as "one of the most preferred outsourcing destinations for high-quality, low cost work, with excellent delivery schedules." Among the outsourcing services offered is "Legal Research & Information."

More frivolous indicia of the library's immersion in 21st century culture include stacks of T-shirts for sale in beguiling shades of raspberry, melon, sage, yellow, and two shades of blue, each bearing a printed version of the Cleaves brothers' portraits. The T-shirt text reads: "Nathan and Henry B. Cleaves... my partners in law." The shirts cost \$15 and come in sizes ranging from

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Nathan & Henry B.
CLEAVES LAW LIBRARY

small to capacious enough for Rumpole-of-the-Bailey.

Rumpole also makes his presence felt at the library by way of a healthy sampling of books from the popular John Mortimer series in the eclectic lending library that occupies a small free-standing bookcase in the main reading room. The collection also offers "A Civil Action," two copies of "Human Sacrifice," the recent book by James Moore about the controversial trial and conviction of Dennis Deschaine for the murder of a young girl, an array of John Grisham titles, a book of humorous stories about Maine by Tim Sample, non-fiction works such as a book about the Saco and Vanzetti trial, and a thin, worn book about Judge Roy Bean with the wonderful title of "Vinegarroon."

For the past several months, the walls of the Cleaves have also served as gallery space for an exhibit of art by Maine Supreme Court Clerk Jim Chute. A range of media is represented, including boldly colored acrylics on canvas, more meditative watercolor monotypes, a charcoal drawing, and several mixed media collages. Although the dominant style is abstract, sketchy representational forms sometimes drift among the layers that make up Chute's surfaces. Most of the works are untitled.

Contacted by MLR, Chute explained that a monotype is a type of print where "the matrix is not fixed and the image is not repeatable." Chute said that he has been painting for about four years. He has also experimented with some small sculptures. Chute joked that his interest was spurred by the need to keep pace with his children. Chute's son has a degree from the Rhode Island School of Design in painting; his daughter currently attends Maine College of Art.

One of the works originally on display has fallen victim to what is sometimes referred to as a "five-finger discount." A sign near the entrance to the reading room points out that the art exhibited is on loan from the artist and asks that the painting be returned. Chute acknowledged the compliment implicit in the theft but called it nonetheless "annoying." He said the work he likes best hangs in his office at the courthouse "where I can keep an eye on it."

Cleaves boasts what it describes as "the single largest collection of photographs of Maine judges, lawyers and legal scenes" and uses the ample wall space along its corridors to display selections from the archive on a rotating basis. It also has available oral histories of eminent figures in the Maine legal community, past and present, available for check-out.

Becoming part of the State Court Library System in 1981, the library has the largest collection of Maine legislative history documents outside of Augusta, the largest collection of archived law court briefs and appendices in the state, and the well-known resourcefulness of librarian Nancy Rabasco.

The library's tradition of service goes back to 1811 when a small group of Portland lawyers agreed to pay an annual subscription fee of \$2 to promote the preservation and growth of "the Cumberland Law Library." The library was burned out of two previous locations and has moved several times for other reasons as well.

Its current form is a hybrid of the several earlier versions including the Greenleaf Law Library, established in 1866 when the widow of Simon Greenleaf's son, Mrs. James Greenleaf, presented her father-in-law's law library to the Cumberland County Bar Association. In 1912, Governor Henry B. Cleaves also willed his law library to the Association. The two collections merged in 1940 but it was not until 1997 that Cleaves became a fully separate section 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, which operates independently from the Cumberland County Bar Association.

The library's web-site, www.cleaves.org, offers a variety of ways that lawyers can contribute to the library's financial well-being. In 2000, its Board of Directors created a memorial fund as a way of commemorating the lives of members of the Maine legal community. Although gifts of any size are welcome, when donations made in the memory of an individual total \$10,000 or more, a named fund may be established.

Although Cleaves is open to the public during staffed hours, only Library Members have borrowing privileges. Membership also confers other benefits, including reduced service fees and the ability to request e-mailed documents and Shepardizing results. The annual cost of membership is \$125 for solo practitioners, with a range of per lawyer discounts for law firms of varying sizes.

Members have 24/7 access to the library, even on holidays, which may be either a benefit or a form of enabling for workaholics, depending on one's perspective. Library rules prohibit sleeping or bathing on the premises, however, and members may not "[c]onstitute a nuisance to other patrons or the Library staff by reason of offensive evidence of lack of personal cleanliness" — perhaps another way in which the library gently reminds obsessive types to get a life — or at least a shower and some shut-eye.