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From the Reference Desk to River City: A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert C. Berring*

Frank G. Houdek**

Professor Houdek documents the prolific and eclectic body of work of Robert C. Berring, including the books, chapters, articles, and assorted other materials he has written to date on subjects ranging from law libraries and legal information to legal research instruction and Chinese law and history.

¶1 In his long career of scholarly pursuits, Robert C. Berring has taken enthralled readers from the reference desk¹ to Meredith Willson’s River City²—and to many places in between. Given his long-time connection to Berkeley, California, as student, library director, dean, and now law professor,³ it’s not inappropriate for the harried bibliographer trying to somehow corral Berring’s prolific and eclectic body of work to be reminded of that most famous lyric by the Bay Area’s Grateful Dead, “what a long, strange trip it’s been.”⁴

¶2 Documenting the written work of Berring—Bob to his friends and Uncle Zeb⁵ to his Boalt Hall students— is a challenge. To say he has been a “productive”

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* © Frank G. Houdek, 2007. This work is expanded from a bibliography distributed to attendees at Legal Information and the Development of American Law: Further Thinking about the Thoughts of Bob Berring, a symposium held at Boalt Hall on the University of California, Berkeley campus, Oct. 21, 2006.

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3. A graduate of Harvard College in 1971, Berring earned JD and MLS degrees, both in 1974, from the University of California, Berkeley. After stints as assistant law librarian at the University of Illinois Law Library (1975–76), associate law librarian at the University of Texas Tarlton Law Library (1976–78), deputy law librarian and acting director at Harvard Law School Library (1978–81), and professor and law librarian at the University of Washington (1981–82), he returned in 1982 to his alma mater as professor of law and director of the law library at Boalt Hall, University of California, Berkeley. During his tenure as director, he held a joint appointment in 1986–89 as dean of Berkeley’s School of Library and Information Studies. Berring also served as interim dean of the law school from January 2003 to June 2004. Named to the Walter Perry Johnson Professor of Law Chair in 1997, he stepped down as director of the law library in 2005. He continues as a full-time Boalt Hall faculty member, teaching contracts, advanced legal research, and Chinese law. He also regularly teaches an undergraduate course about China for Berkeley’s Legal Studies Department, and offers freshmen seminars about law and cognitive studies.


A scholar throughout his professional career is to shortchange not only his amazing output but also the wide range of subjects, styles, and publication formats this work has encompassed. A law librarian for most of his professional career, Berring began by writing on traditional library subjects—collection development and reference work, for instance—and has continued to contribute to that literature to the present day with articles and essays on the future of libraries and librarians. Over the same time, he not only authored or coauthored important tools of legal research instruction in various formats, but also wrote about the theory and pedagogy of teaching in this field. Of course, as amply demonstrated in each of the articles in this symposium focused on Berring’s work, but especially in the review of that work and its progeny by Richard A. Danner, the publication of legal information and its impact on the law has been a major and overriding concern for this perceptive and original thinker.

But Berring did not stop there. In 1981, he was the founding editor of what has since become a well-respected journal in the field of law librarianship and legal information, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*. He continued in this position through volume seventeen, published in 1999. Throughout this long tenure, Berring frequently contributed an “editorial” to the quarterly issues. Some of these merely introduced the contents of the issue, but beginning with volume six (1986), Berring used them as a forum from which to offer his latest thoughts on one or more of his favorite issues. And in yet another twist, this man of eclectic interests is, in addition to everything else, a well-respected teacher and scholar of Chinese law. Not surprisingly, this interest added a number of China-related pieces to the Berring canon that are probably unknown to many of his professional law library colleagues.

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¶4 This combination of long productivity and diverse interests makes it difficult, if not impossible, to produce a definitive list of everything that Berring has written to date in his professional career. While I am confident that this bibliography does include all of the major works, and many of the “minor” ones as well (if such a descriptor can be used in conjunction with anything Berring writes), I am equally sure that I have missed pieces that rank as someone’s favorite, maybe even Bob’s! For that I apologize and plead limitations of time, energy, and space.

¶5 The bibliography is arranged by publication format: books, chapters, articles, columns, editorials, book reviews, memorials and remembrances, and oral history and personal reminiscences. Within each category, the materials are listed in reverse chronological order.

Books


Chapters


15. Contains a collection of articles reprinted from various American law reviews from 1890 to 1979.
16. Berring’s contribution to a collection of essays about law-related films considers DEFENDING YOUR LIFE (Geffen Pictures 1991), a film about the trial which the protagonist, recently killed by a city bus, must undergo to determine his fate. According to Berring, “[p]rocedural fairness and the public’s perception of the judicial process anchor the movie.” Robert C. Berring, Defending Your Life (1991): Due Process in the Afterlife, in SCREENING JUSTICE—THE CINEMA OF LAW: SIGNIFICANT FILMS OF LAW, ORDER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE 575, 575 (Rennard Strickland et al. eds., 2006). He also notes that there is a “touch of Kafka” to the film: “the whole process is hurried along, and [the protagonist] never really knows what the standards are.” Id. at 579. Berring compares this to the perception of the judicial system by ordinary citizens: “For most people in our culture, legal proceedings have this same sense of bizarre incomprehensibility.” Id.


### Articles


“The Paperless Chase: Don’t Throw out the Librarian with the Library.” *California Lawyer* 20 (June 2000): 50–51.


“Ring Dang Do.” *Green Bag (2d Series)* 1 (1997): 3–6.\(^{18}\)


“Universal Citation Systems: Will Tinkering with the Future Be the End of Reliable, Standardized Opinions.” *ABA Journal* 82 (July 1996): 74.


\(^{17}\) Writing in the guise of the retiring custodian of the Boalt Hall Law Book Depository and Archive and the “last human faculty member of what was once the Boalt Hall Law School,” Berring delivers an account both humorous and chilling of the intervening years since his arrival in 1981 to his impending retirement in 2027. He notes the development in 2005 of software that allowed “all cases ever decided, all statutes ever passed, and all rules and regulations ever made to be digitally stored and sorted by subject,” soon followed by a program that replicated “the thinking processes of wise judges, respected figures and moral paragons.” Robert C. Berring, *A Few Parting Words: Proposed Draft Submitted to Censors Dec. 31, 2027*, 1 *Green Bag* 2d 227, 228 (1998). The combination of the two led to the “perfect judge”; adding a system that provided “access to a person’s actual internally stored sense projections” made “perfect justice” possible. *Id.* It was soon apparent that lawyers and judges were no longer needed; when the ABA fought back, the Anti-Lawyer riots resulted. When the smoke cleared, the “Law Library at Boalt Hall was the largest such facility left undamaged”; declared a national landmark, “the ranges of books and periodicals . . . are a favorite stop for virtual tourists who wish to have an adventure and perhaps scare the children.” *Id.* at 230.

\(^{18}\) Reflecting on the ultimate meaning of the 1996 sale of the West Publishing Company to Thomson, Berring speculates on the future of legal information in a world where “[p]ublishing cases is . . . easy” and the “value of editing . . . has been set aside in the rush of enthusiasm for homemade delivery systems and snazzy search engines.” Robert C. Berring, *Ring Dang Do*, 1 *Green Bag* 2d 3, 5 (1997).


“Acquisitions and Selection of Primary and Secondary Legal Materials for Social Science Collections.” *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian* 1 (Winter 1979): 127–35. (With Roy M. Mersky & Michael Richmond.)

**LLNM Columns**²¹


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¹⁹. This article was written in reply to Christopher G. Wren & Jill R. Wren, *Reviving Legal Research: A Reply to Berring and Vanden Heuvel*, 82 LAW LIBR. J. 463 (1990).

²⁰. This article was written in reply to Christopher G. Wren & Jill R. Wren, *The Teaching of Legal Research*, 80 LAW LIBR. J. 7 (1988).

²¹. From 2000 to 2003, Berring contributed a column to *Law Librarians in the New Millennium*, a free newsletter for law librarians published five times a year by the Librarian Relations Group of Thomson-West. As usual, while Berring’s short pieces mainly focused on librarians and libraries, they covered a wide range of subjects. A highlight was the leisure reading book recommendation Berring offered at the end of most columns.
Law Library Journal


“Show Us the Money!” Law Librarians in the New Millennium 2 (Fall 2000): 2.


LRSQ Editorials

“Editorial.” Legal Reference Services Quarterly 17, no. 4 (1999): 1–2.\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{22}\) In 1981, Berring served as founding editor of Legal Reference Services Quarterly, a publication of Haworth Press. He continued as editor through volume seventeen, published in 1999. Berring frequently contributed an editorial to the quarterly issues. Initially he primarily introduced the contents of the issue, but beginning with volume six (1986), Berring used the editorial as a forum from which to offer his latest thoughts on one or more of his favorite issues.

\(^{23}\) In ending his tenure as editor, Berring writes that “[h]aving started LRSQ eighteen years ago on a Selectric typewriter as a one man band, I feel great affection for it.” Robert C. Berring, Editorial, LEGAL REFERENCE SERVICES Q., 1999, no. 4, at 1, 1. He goes on to thank those who helped him produce the journal, especially Managing Editor Kathleen Vanden Heuvel, and those who contributed to it, including Nancy Carol Carter, Barbara Bintliff, Scott Pagel, Tom Woxland, and Kent Olson (“the author of my all time favorite book review,” Id. at 2 (referring to Kent C. Olson, Federal Reporter, 2nd Series, Vol. 750, LEGAL REFERENCE SERVICES Q., Fall–Winter 1986, at 199)).
(With Kathleen Vanden Heuvel.)

24. Responding to readers’ queries concerning the “direction of LRSQ,” Berring notes that “[r]eaders have noticed that we publish articles on new topics while continuing to explore old reference tools, and that our article mix includes long, detailed analyses and short, thought pieces. Such a lack of focus may in some respects be a drawback, but in all honesty it is exactly where I want LRSQ to be. By presenting a broad spectrum of articles we hope to provide information in each issue that will be of some immediate use to almost every reader.” Robert C. Berring, *Editorial*, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, 1985, no. 2–3, at 1, 1.

25. After the usual description of the contents of the issue, Berring summarizes his feelings about LRSQ at the end of its third volume: “My original plan had been to edit the Quarterly for two volumes, but at the end of volume two things were just getting settled. Now I find myself about to end volume three. To be honest, this is getting to be fun. The enjoyment comes from getting so many interesting articles, from interacting with authors and members of the Board of Advisors and, most of all dealing with readers.” Robert C. Berring, *Editorial*, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, 1983, no. 4, at 1, 2.

Book Reviews


26. Introducing the new publication of which he is the founding editor, Berring announces that Legal Reference Services Quarterly will aim to serve not only law librarians, but also “all reference librarians who must deal with the increasing number of reference questions that involve the law or where the legal aspect must be shown as part of the complete reference answer.” Robert C. Berring, Editorial. Legal Reference Services Q., 1981, no. 1, at 1, 1. He adds that the journal “is designed to contain the type of article that can be of assistance in one’s day-to-day work.” Id.

**Memorials and Remembrances**


**Oral History and Personal Reminiscence**


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28. Berring contributes a short remembrance of Antonette “Babe” Russo, AALL’s administrative secretary from 1969 to 1989, who passed away on March 28, 1994. He recalls that Russo “held AALL together through days when she was the entire Headquarters staff, when budgets were hand-to-mouth and everyone had to improvise.” Robert C. Berring, *Tribute to Babe Russo*, 25 *Am. Ass’n Law Libr. Newsl.* 366, 366 (1994). But most importantly, “Babe was a wonderful, funny lady. She knew how to laugh and how to find humor in the tar pit of organizational bureaucracy. . . . For a stretch of years she was AALL. For many of us, she always will be.” *Id.*

29. Berring admits to collecting “books in an eclectic array,” including first editions of his favorite books (e.g., *Farewell My Lovely* by Raymond Chandler) and favorite authors (e.g., Don DeLillo, John Gardner), “fine printing from the past one hundred years, and some oddities.” He says about his books: “They make me smile.” Houdek, *supra* note 13, at 586.