

## **In Memoriam**

**Philip F. Cohen**  
1911-1998

As I began a career in law librarianship, shortly after the end of World War II, law schools and law libraries were beginning to expand their horizons to encompass jurisdictions beyond American law. For years, relatively few institutions had concerns beyond national and multi-state matters, and traditional international law. The conflict just ended had opened eyes to the wider dimensions of human problems and the potentials of commerce being carried on in the world marketplace. Now, human resources had to be trained, those who were to do the training had to be re-tooled and the resources customarily supporting training had to be redesigned to provide the scope necessary for expanded support. These challenges called for imaginative people, boundless energies and, of course, extensive new funding. What a time to become a law librarian.

One of the first persons I met, representing the business community that dealt with the production and distribution of information resources, was Philip F. Cohen, then President of Oceana Publications. His visit was brief and to the point — welcome to law librarianship, congratulations upon your appointment, and let us explore the ways in which we might work together to address the new international and multi-national challenges we both face in our respective arenas. That is exactly what we did for some twenty years. Our relationship was always friendly, mutually helpful, and at arms length because we played different roles. The goals we pursued had much in common; we worked together to reach them to the satisfaction of each of us.

I always marveled at the energy he had and how he applied it to his business. He was tireless when it came to his second hand law book business. Buy low, sell high to accumulate funds to be invested in the publishing business. The receipts of each supported the other until it could support itself seemed to be the successful formula on the route to reaching goals. By moving into the foreign marketplace, the added dimension really assured attainment of goals.

Ideas for projects and products seemed to flow endlessly from him. He had a knack for finding pockets of information that needed organization

and presentation to some segment of the using public. He also had a knack for addressing the right people for developing his or their own ideas into quality products. Relating to domestic or foreign law, each such effort contributed to better understanding and improvement of relations between people.

Professional meetings were wonderful opportunities for contact. When law librarians, working under the leadership of William Roalfe, met at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York to discuss the formation of an International Association of Law Libraries, a base was established that brought into focus the efforts of all who were involved in the handling of relevant legal information. There was now a forum in which ideas could be tested and issues raised by emerging plans of action thoroughly discussed. Philip Cohen was well known for his support and participation in this and other professional organizations.

In fact, he was often a speaker, a panelist or participant in seminars and institutes whether or not he had participated in the planning of the program or was solicited by others. Also, he was ready at a moment's notice to share his knowledge and experience.

I was privileged to lead a program at the Law School of the University of the Philippines. Some seven Asian countries were represented by law librarians from law schools, government agencies and law firms, gathered to learn about American law librarianship and to share their own experiences and problems with the other students. As the course was coming to an end, a morning telephone call announced that Mr. Cohen, on a business trip, was in Manila. He invited students and faculty to lunch. During the meal, I invited him to spend the afternoon talking with the class. He did so with great joy.

However, he was not finished with the class. While conducting his business, he arranged a commencement reception and dinner at the home of the leading law publisher in Manila. What a grand affair! The evening was not only a lovely social affair, but an occasion for meeting new colleagues, sharing of personal and professional experiences, forming new friendships. One more way that Philip Cohen contributed to the enhancement of law librarian and law publisher relations.

Not all of his products and services were the result of his own creativeness; he recognized where the efforts of others might fit into the

broader fabric of legal information. The Harvard Catalog of International Law was such an item. When approached for advice regarding marketing, he was as helpful as ever. The multi-volume set was produced by the Harvard Law School Library and marketed by Oceana Publications. Following a fine tuned schedule the project resulted in satisfaction with the benefits each participant had expected.

As technology appeared in various aspects of law librarianship and law publishing, Phil Cohen made adjustments, cautiously and as necessary for the improvement of his operations, of his products.

Knowing Philip F. Cohen was an opportunity to learn so many things from a man who continuously learned in a world I did not know. At each meeting he reflected new thoughts that he had absorbed from his many friends and colleagues, from his experiences. He was always sure that confidential matters remained confidential; all else he willingly shared to contribute to the growth of each of us around him. He set goals and he set an example. Are we wise enough to have him show through us?

*Earl Borgeson  
Law Librarian, Emeritus  
Sherborn, Massachusetts*

I had just begun working at Oceana, when Phil Cohen, whose secretary was out of the office, asked me to type up his itinerary for his once-a-year around the world trip. He was then in his sixties and I in my early thirties. It was very detailed and as I was typing it, my disbelief kept growing. No-one, I thought, in his right mind could want to subject himself to such an ordeal. He would have meetings at some airport during the middle of the night, catch another flight soon after, have another meeting, and so on. When I handed him the finished papers, he asked me whether I would not want to come along. "No way," I said, and meant it.

Phil Cohen was a demanding boss, but he demanded as much or more of himself as he did of others. We were often at odds; he did not tolerate much dissent. Most of middle management at Oceana was young; we were learning our profession at Oceana whether we admitted it or not. And, most of us thought we knew better than our boss, who did not want to hear what we had to say.

None of us could understand why the boss would come in every morning at 7 or so to open the mail, or why one of us from middle management had to do revolving Saturday duty, without pay, to help open Saturday's mail. Only gradually, after I started my own publishing company, did I realize that I was doing many things just like Phil Cohen. I still insist on opening each day's mail in order to really see what business is like, or what the problems, complaints, and inquiries are. Most certainly, my employees consider me as odd as I once thought Phil Cohen to be.

I could fill pages with stories of our disagreement. However, my years of experience have taught me in how many ways Phil Cohen was actually right and how much I, indeed, have learned from him. When I informed him I was going to start my own company, he told me that if I failed, he would not have known me, but if I succeeded, he would take credit.

He did not talk to me for several years. Eventually, however, he forgave me for leaving the "family." A number of years ago I told him that it was time for him to take some credit for what I had accomplished; much to my regret, he did not remember his earlier remark. As I sat through his funeral service, it occurred to me, that despite our differences, he had, in fact, inspired me to get out there and do it my way — to establish a successful, independent company, much the way he had created Oceana.

*Heike Fenton*  
*President, Transnational Publishers, Inc.*  
*Ardsley, New York*

Philip F. Cohen, President and founder of Oceana Publications, Incorporated was an active friend of law librarians throughout the world. He was the first American law book dealer to travel internationally, selling American law books and buying local law books for resale in America. By such travels, he made many friends in England, Italy, Germany, India, Singapore, and other countries. This was certainly evident when Mr. Cohen died in 1998 when letters of condolences from his many international friends poured into his family and former company. His life was a fulfillment of the American dream, having come to this country from England as a lad of sixteen with fifty dollars in his pocket. Joining relatives in New York, he began a law library career, serving as a page in the Columbia University Law Library for nearly a decade. He often said that the legendary law librarian there came looking for his page, who could often be found reading! He then

went off with the United States Army serving in the Air Force in Europe, and upon returning to this country he established Oceana Publications, Inc. He undertook to publish many innovative titles, but soon found his niche in publishing international and comparative legal materials.

Mr. Cohen would make one or two trips around the world each year. These trips were exhausting, even for a younger person. Mr. Cohen's practice was to take overnight flights, sleep on the plane, and arrive at his next destination ready to make calls on libraries in the area. He liked to arrive early in the morning, make a number of calls during the day and be ready to go back to the airport in the evening for the next flight. Mr. Cohen could keep up this grueling pace with energy and aplomb.

In time, Mr. Cohen became the international representative of the West Publishing Company and the Lawyer's Cooperative Publishing Company and was successful in selling a number of sets of the *National Reporter System*. It is surprising when one visits law libraries in Europe, Africa and Asia, to find sets of *National Reporter System* which was sold to them by Philip F. Cohen. Other publishers tried to follow his efforts abroad, but none were as successful.

Philip F. Cohen had many adventures during his travels. At social functions, he loved to tell of these adventures, but I treasure the memories of his telephone calls, outlining tales of law books when he returned. I regret that I did not take more care to record these narratives, many of which were reported in the *Oceana Newsletter*. Later, his companion on many of these trips was Edward Newman, and later James McCue.

Mr. Cohen established branch offices of Oceana in several locations abroad; namely, in London and Rome and had a representative in Kenya for a time.

Mr. Cohen encouraged the establishment of several library associations in at least two countries to the knowledge of this writer. During his life, he made it a point to attend the annual meetings of the British Law Library Association. This writer was with Mr. Cohen on a trip to Nigeria when he encouraged the establishment of the Law Librarians Association in that country.

When one tries to summarize such a rich and varied life with many contributions to law librarianship through his publishing programs and his business of selling law books, it is very difficult if not impossible. The present world will never provide the conditions that made it possible for such an enterprising individual to do the many things that Mr. Cohen did. Materials are easily reprinted or copied today whereas in the 1950's and 1960's reprinting meant manufacturing by setting the book in type, a costly and time consuming process. Secondhand books were valued and many libraries were glad to add them to their collection. The generation of law librarians that follows will never experience the friendship and companionship of such book dealers as Philip F. Cohen who brought news about other librarians and law publishing. His knowledge of law books was fantastic whether American or British. Few law librarians now value such unique titles as Mr. Cohen made possible for libraries to possess. Very few will long remember how books were produced, bound and sold.

Philip F. Cohen was a personal friend, a companion in legal bibliography, and a promoter of the law library profession both in America and abroad. No one else will inspire such love, or leave such a lasting legacy as did Philip F. Cohen.

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