

Remarks at the Opening of the La Forest Rare Books Reading Room

by
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It's a happy privilege to be here at the launch of this jewel of an addition to the La Forest Law Library.

The La Forest Rare Books Reading Room will do three things.

- It houses and displays print works and memorabilia from one of 20th-century Canada's great judges and one of UNB's most distinguished alumni. The Law Faculty is honoured to recognize in this way not only Mr. Justice La Forest's career but especially all that he's done, over many decades now, for UNB's law program and our students. It is great, and it's fitting, to be able to call this the La Forest Rare Books Reading Room.
- The second thing this new facility does is recognize the long and continuing contribution of Anne Crocker to strengthening New Brunswick legal education. On this present project, Anne worked for years, with three law deans, to make it a reality. We're delighted to be able to honour her vision, dedication, generous support, and indeed her whole career by establishing within this Room the Anne Crocker New Brunswick Legal Heritage Collection.

And we know well that much of this would not have come together for us without the financial backing of the New Brunswick Law Foundation. Ever since its establishment in 1975, the Foundation has made a priority of supporting law libraries and accessibility to legal information. When we invited the Foundation to take an interest in this initiative, it took the lead, recognizing that the La Forest Room and its Crocker Collection are to be provincial resources. Without the Foundation's backing, this Room would have taken much longer to come together.

- The third feature of the project is, of course, that the La Forest Rare Books Reading Room will house and preserve significant parts of New Brunswick's print heritage, particularly books

considered important because of their association with the great and the more ordinary figures in our legal past.

On the shelves of the Crocker Collection you see many such books already. If you go volume by volume, you'll find the signatures and annotations of our legal ancestors. But much still remains to be collected. One thinks, for example, of the New Brunswick Law Society library that was formed in the 1830s. Before being sent over from England, its books were given a distinctive binding. When I last visited the present Law Society's library in Fredericton, some of these books from the 1830s were still there on the shelves, quite identifiable because of their bindings. These are just the sort of volumes that this Room might house in its capacity as a provincial resource. Here, rare books have a home that meets strict standards for temperature and humidity and that filters ultraviolet light.

Also part of the Crocker Collection will be books and materials associated with the evolution of the UNB Law School and its Law Library. For the first half of the school's now 120-year history, students used mostly the library of the Saint John Law Society. As late as 1941, this Law School had only 2000 books of its own. All of them were either donated by alumni or purchased through the law teachers giving up their stipend. But part of Lord Beaverbrook's decisive intervention in the 1950s was the donation of a splendid collection of treatises, journals and English nominate law reports. Many books now on the shelves in the Crocker Collection are those of Lord Beaverbrook's donation.

This present law library building opened nearly 50 years ago now. In a sense, what we do here today is, at last, to put the finishing touch on this law library: We add a gracious and inspiring room to house so much of importance to New Brunswick and to the University of New Brunswick.