JUDAH BENJAMIN LECTURE AT LOYOLA

by Georgia Chadwick

The Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Society and Loyola University New Orleans College of Law sponsored a mid-day lecture by Ms. Catharine MacMillan on Thursday, August 23, 2012, at Loyola.

Ms. MacMillan, Reader in Legal History at Queen Mary, University of London, travelled to New Orleans to continue her research on Judah P. Benjamin's legal career. She recently published *Mistakes in Contract Law* (Hart Publishing), a history of the doctrine of contractual mistake in English law, in which Benjamin's contributions to this development are examined. The lecture, entitled “Judah P. Benjamin: the Early English Career of an American Political Exile,” was attended by law students, law librarians, members of the bar, Historical Society members, and faculty from both Loyola and Tulane law schools. Ben Janke, Historical Society Treasurer, shared with the audience the Society's interest in sponsoring programs exploring Louisiana legal figures. He was followed by Loyola Associate Dean John Lovett, who introduced Ms. MacMillan.

Judah P. Benjamin was born in what is now the Virgin Islands in 1811 and immigrated with his parents to Savannah, Georgia, in 1816. Benjamin spent his childhood in Charleston, South Carolina. He attended Yale College, although he did not obtain a degree, and subsequently moved to New Orleans. After teaching school and studying law, he was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1832. In addition to being a very successful attorney specializing in civil and commercial law, Benjamin was elected to the lower house of the state legislature and served from 1842 to 1844. He was a member of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1844 to draft Louisiana's second constitution, approved in 1845. In 1853 Benjamin was elected as a Whig to the United States Senate, and was reelected as a Democrat in 1859. He resigned his Senate seat on February 4, 1861, after Louisiana seceded from the Union. Jefferson Davis offered Benjamin an appointment as the Confederate's first attorney general. Benjamin then served as Secretary of War in the Davis Cabinet and finally as Secretary of State until the close of the war. Although he evacuated Richmond with Davis's official party in April 1865, he separated from the group and eventually made his way to the Bahamas, Cuba, and finally to Great Britain.

Ms. MacMillan's lecture began with Benjamin's arrival in Great Britain. She
WELCOME JUDGES!

by Georgia Chadwick

New Orleans will be hosting four judges’ conferences this fall. The Southern Region High Court Conference meets at the end of September. The Fall Judges’ Conference is meeting concurrently with the American Judges Association the first week of October, and the Appellate Judges Education Institute Summit will be held the week before Thanksgiving.

We wish for the attendees to have good meetings and a pleasant visit to New Orleans. Below is background information that attendees will find useful during their visit.

It is almost impossible to visit the Crescent City and not be on hand during a celebration or two. This year Louisiana is celebrating 200 years of statehood. Early in 2012, the city commemorated the January 10, 1812 arrival of the first steamboat, the New Orleans.

Louisiana Supreme Court’s bicentennial is next year, but celebrations are ongoing. Although the Louisiana Constitution of 1812 provided for the judiciary, it wasn’t until February 1813 that the Legislature passed an act organizing the Supreme Court and courts of inferior jurisdiction. The Court started its bicentennial celebration on May 7, 2012, when the Justices heard oral arguments at the Cabildo’s Sala Capitular, the Court’s home from 1853-1910. The year-long celebration will conclude in a ceremony at the Royal Street courthouse on March 1, 2013, exactly 200 years after the Louisiana Supreme Court first convened. One hundred years ago, a similar Centennial Celebration was held in the courtroom on March 1, 1913.

While you are in New Orleans, we invite you to visit our 103-year-old courthouse at 400 Royal Street. The courthouse was the location of the Supreme Court from 1910 to 1958, and sat vacant for many years afterwards. After extensive renovations, the Court returned to 400 Royal Street in 2004. The Beaux Arts-style building, completed in 1909, also houses the Law Library of Louisiana, the Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeal, and the Louisiana Supreme Court Museum. A bronze statue of Edward Douglass White, by sculptor Bryant Baker, stands at the front of the building, facing Royal Street. White is the only U.S. Supreme Court Justice from Louisiana. He served as associate justice from 1894 to 1910 and as Chief Justice from 1910 until his death in 1921.

The courtroom of the Louisiana Supreme Court is on the fourth floor of the building. Busts of Francois-Xavier Martin, who served on the Court from 1815-1846, and of lawyer Henry P. Dart are outside the courtroom. Dart was an important member of the team of lawyers who led the movement to have a courthouse for New Orleans built. Dart also wrote a history entitled The Celebration of the Centenary of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, which was published in 1913 to commemorate the centennial. While on the bench, the justices of the Supreme Court enjoy a view of the Mississippi River. One of the early plans for the building would have resulted in a building looking inward to a courtyard. Instead, the final plan featured large windows looking out on the Vieux Carré (French Quarter) and the Mississippi River. The river and the Port of New Orleans were the main reasons Thomas Jefferson was motivated to acquire the vast area of land involved in the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1910 the Law Library of Louisiana, then known as the Louisiana State Library, was housed on the fourth floor in what is now the Clerk’s Office. The Law Library now occupies most of the second floor of the building. We have a number of beautiful maps on public display, showing Louisiana and New Orleans from the mid-1700’s until the late 1800’s. Our Rare Book Room is open by appointment. In it you will find old Spanish codes, which were the basis of our unique Digest of 1808 and the Code Napoléon, which was an important influence on the Louisiana Civil Code of 1825. Our Diderot Encyclopedia was the world’s first encyclopedia, published in France from 1765 to 1772. Diderot’s work was criticized by religious leaders because it supported the value of science and industry. A new addition to the rare book collection is a copy of the Louisiana Constitution of 1812 and the Acts of the Legislature from 1812-1814, owned by Louisiana’s first governor, William C. C. Claiborne.

The Supreme Court’s portrait collection is on display throughout the building. Included in the collection are Louisiana judges, lawyers and other important legal figures. The Supreme Court Museum contains portraits of all of Louisiana’s chief justices and a timeline highlighting events in Louisiana law. Several exhibit cases tell the story of the Plessy v. Ferguson case. The case, decided by the United States Supreme Court in 1896, established the “separate but equal” doctrine. An exhibit focusing on the life of civil rights pioneer and lawyer A. P. Tureaud contains images of his life and work. Tureaud returned to New Orleans after attending law school at Howard University to work towards equality for all in the areas of public accommodations, schools, and compensation. A statue of Tureaud stands in the A. P. Tureaud Civil Rights Memorial Park, just a few minutes away from the French Quarter.

We hope you will stop by to visit our library and the Supreme Court – we have lots to celebrate!
HOMER A. PLESSY DAY

by Jennifer Creevy

On June 7, 2012, the Plessy and Ferguson Foundation and the Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Society co-sponsored a program to honor Homer A. Plessy Day, which was established in 2005 and marks the anniversary of his 1892 arrest. The program was held at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and was kickstarted by Carl LeBlanc and the Big Easy Street Team Band. Attendees were welcomed by Keith Weldon Medley, author of We As Freemen – Plessy v. Ferguson – the Fight Against Legal Segregation. He then introduced the evening’s speaker, Dr. Blair L.M. Kelley, the author of Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson.

Dr. Kelley began by explaining her interest in the people who lived and suffered in the era of Jim Crow and whether or not the African Americans at the time accepted the status quo of segregation. She outlined her belief that the activists in the 1900’s were brave in the face of violent white supremacists and resisted the Jim Crow laws in several ways. The African American community at the time was divided by class and gender, but the activism of that time became an unacknowledged template for the activism of the Montgomery bus boycotts in the 1950’s. Dr. Kelley’s discussion was followed by readings from five students from Students at the Center. The students discussed different elements and outcomes of Homer Plessy’s influence with a modern day outlook.

Homer Plessy was a shoemaker and a member of the Citizens’ Committee, a group of Creole men who banded together to challenge the segregated rail system in New Orleans. Mr. Plessy was chosen to intentionally violate the Separate Car Act of Louisiana by sitting in the “whites only” section of a New Orleans streetcar. He was arrested on June 7, 1892 and was found guilty by Criminal District Court Judge John Howard Ferguson. The ensuing court battle was fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court which upheld the Plessy v. Ferguson verdict, thus establishing the “separate but equal” doctrine. This decision enabled many states to enact Jim Crow laws that were not overturned until the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954.

The Plessy and Ferguson Foundation was started by the descendants of the named figures in the “separate but equal” decision. Keith Plessy and Phoebe Ferguson created the Foundation to educate the public about civil rights, to preserve historic sites in Louisiana, and to provide outreach projects to facilitate communication and knowledge about civil rights.

I would encourage anyone who is interested in the Plessy v. Ferguson case to visit the location where Homer Plessy was arrested, at the corner of Press and Royal Streets. This is where the Press Street Railroad Yards stood and is marked by a plaque explaining the events surrounding the arrest. After you have visited the historic site, please visit the Law Library to read both Mr. Medley and Dr. Kelley’s thorough histories of the era.

Plaque on the side of Plessy’s tomb in St. Louis No. 1 Cemetery.
WESTLAW NEXT AT THE LAW LIBRARY

by Katie Nachod

Eight years ago, there appeared in an issue of this newsletter (Volume 3, Issue 2, Winter 2004), an article announcing the addition of Patron Access Westlaw to the library’s free research databases. This proved to be a very popular service, and library users, attorneys as well as non-attorneys, have conducted thousands of no-cost searches in this excellent resource, which provides access to primary federal and state law, selected secondary sources, and Louisiana-specific legal material. Results can be printed in the library for a very reasonable fee of $.15 per page. The reference librarians also offer mediated searches in Westlaw for $25.00 each and can e-mail or fax the results for $1.55 per page. (All these prices are the same as they were in 2004, so you can get a real bargain here.)

A couple of years ago, Thomson Reuters, the parent company of West, unveiled with much fanfare a new legal research system, WestlawNext, that was reportedly the result of five years of product development at a cost of more than $1 billion. According to the company’s promotional material, this new product was created for legal professionals by legal professionals.

It features many of the strengths of traditional Westlaw (now referred to as Westlaw Classic), such as market-leading content, a tradition of editorial excellence, and a commitment to accuracy. The Law Library of Louisiana is very proud to announce that WestlawNext has now been added as a database free to the public on three of the library’s public computer terminals. Please come by and give it a test run. We are maintaining our subscription to Westlaw Classic on the same three terminals, so you can compare and contrast results in the two databases for the same search.

According to Thomson Reuters, WestlawNext is easier to use than Westlaw Classic or their competitors, offering an intuitive interface that will enable you to quickly navigate the system to complete your research. A study commissioned by the company but conducted by the Legal Research Center in early 2010 found that research that took almost eleven minutes using Westlaw Classic was completed successfully in less than four minutes using WestlawNext, which is a productivity gain of 64%. You can search in plain English, using simple descriptive terms, without having to choose a particular database.

This paradigm, more like Google, Yahoo, or other basic search engines, allows you to access all content and leads to dramatically improved searching, so that even inexperienced users will find what they need. Just type your search terms or search string into the single search box, and WestlawNext figures out by context where to find what you need by using an algorithm that combines the frequency with which cases are cited and the depth in which they are discussed. You may also retrieve cases that don’t contain your search terms, but that are coded to the same Key Number as cases with your terms. West attorney-editors index cases under more than 400 topics and 98,000 points of law, allowing you to retrieve other cases that address your exact issue in any jurisdiction.

If you prefer, you can enter a particular citation, or choose a search category like federal materials, state materials, topics, or tools. Setup based on authenticated IP addresses provides quick access that doesn’t require a user name or password. Each search is supported by Westlaw’s editorial analysis, featuring Key Number taxonomy and state-of-the-art technologies, and results are ranked by relevance so the most significant documents will come first in the results list. WestlawNext also has several tools and features customized for multiple users in a library setting. Session-based tools such as search history and preferences are wiped clean after sign-out, thus ensuring privacy.

The components of WestlawNext include: federal and state primary case law with KeyCite, federal and state statutes and court rules, including the United States Code Annotated and the industry’s only annotated Code of Federal Regulations; federal and state briefs; trial court orders and documents; West treatises like Couch on Insurance, Fletcher Cyclopedia of Corporations with Forms, Wright & Miller Federal Practice & Procedure, and other secondary sources like the complete American Jurisprudence (AmJur) library, American Law Reports (ALR), Causes of Action (COA), and Restatements of the Law); legal forms; legislative history; and topics like arbitration, employment, employment discrimination, insurance, personal injury damages, and real property.

WestlawNext and Westlaw Classic are available on three of the library’s public computer terminals near the Information Desk, and library staff members will be more than happy to assist you in formulating your search strategy for maximum results.
THE LIBRARY’S BICENTENNIAL ACQUISITIONS

by Miriam Childs

In commemoration of the Louisiana Supreme Court’s bicentennial, the Law Library recently acquired three books of relevance to Louisiana’s rich legal history. The library’s feather-in-the-cap acquisition—though not nearly the national treasure as George Washington’s recently sold volume—is a book owned by the state’s first governor, William C. C. Claiborne. Claiborne’s book contains the state constitution in English and acts passed at the 1st–3rd sessions of the 1st Louisiana Legislature and the 1st session of the 2nd Legislature. The dates of printing range from 1812-1815. The volume appears to be ceremonial, meant to memorialize the legislative achievements during his administration. Claiborne’s ownership signature is found on the pastedown (the inside cover) and the title page.

William C. C. Claiborne, a native of Virginia, began his political career as a congressman from Tennessee. President Jefferson appointed him governor of the Mississippi Territory in 1801. In 1803 Jefferson sent Claiborne to supervise the transfer of Louisiana to the United States under the terms of the Louisiana Purchase. Claiborne was appointed governor of the Orleans Territory in 1804, becoming the state’s first elected governor in 1812. Claiborne’s early years in Louisiana were marked by strife and division. As an outsider, he didn’t understand the continental customs of native New Orleanians, and he didn’t speak French or Spanish, but eventually he was accepted by the community. It was under his governorship that Louisiana played its outstanding role in the War of 1812.

The known provenance of the volume is as follows. Claiborne presented the volume to his father-in-law, Martin Duralde. Duralde then presented the book to Benjamin Winchester, a Louisiana circuit court judge. The book eventually came into the possession of Joachim Bermudez, distinguished New Orleans lawyer and judge, and father of Edward Bermudez, a Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice who served on the Court from 1880-1892.

The two other acquisitions are directly related to Louisiana’s historical legal education requirements. In 1840 the Louisiana Supreme Court released a rule listing specific books for study by potential applicants to the bar. An oral examination determined whether the applicant sufficiently mastered the material for bar admittance. The rule’s promulgation brought an end to the time-consuming and inconsistent procedures of examination that had become untenable by the 1830s. François Xavier Martin and Henry Adams Bullard led the way in reforming the Court’s control of the bar. Martin and Bullard were influenced by the writings of David Hoffman, an American professor of law who published a book in 1817 outlining a course of legal study.

Sources consulted:

FRENCH LAW RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARY PART II

by Tara Lombardi

In Part I, I discussed some of the Law Library’s 200 titles in our French law collection, which include historical French primary sources like the Code Civil des Français (1804), Le Code Noir (1767) and Domat’s Les Loix Civiles Dans Leur Ordre Naturel (1777) in both English and French. Our commentaries on the Coutumes of Normandy date back to the late 1600's, and we possess the Journal des Audiences de la Cour de Cassation (1806), rare volumes of French Supreme Court cases.

In Part II, I have focused on titles that describe the origins of French law, the French laws in effect in Louisiana when it was under French rule, the French laws that influenced our civil code, and the analytical works discussing Napoleon’s Code Civil.

French Law in the Middle Ages
French law in the Middle Ages was derived from the coutumes, which represent France’s earliest efforts to document regional customary laws and practices, Roman law, canon law, les ordonnances royales (royal ordinances) and arrêts du parlement (decrees of Parlement).

Charles Du Moulin (1500-1566) was the earliest French jurisconsult of note. Famous for his commentaries on the coutumes, especially the Coutume de Paris. Du-Moulin’s Caroli Molinaei (full title Caroli Molinaei Franciae et Germaniae celeberrimi jurisconsulti et in Supremo Parisiorum senatu antiqui advocati : omnia quae extant opera, ex variis librorum apothecis, in quibus latebant, nunc primum eruta, & simul typis commissa, permutatisque mendis, quibus sensim scatebant, ad exemplaria tum ab authore recognita, tiam a viris doctissimis, jurisque peritissimis inter legendum notata, & quam fieri potuit diligentissìme purgata, 1681) is a collection of French, Roman and canon law in 5 volumes. Our set is oversized and bound in faded red buckram.

History of French Law in Louisiana
These books were the chief sources of information relied upon by Louisiana legal historians for a description and extent of the French laws in effect in Louisiana at the time of the cession to the United States (1803).

Franklin, Benjamin. Historical collections of Louisiana, embracing translations of many rare and valuable documents relating to the natural, civil and political history of the state. 1846-1853.


Analytical studies of the Code Civil

Commentary on the Code Civil.

Maleville, Jacques de. Analyse raisonnée de la discussion du Code civil au Conseil d’État : contenant le texte des lois, le précis des observations faites sur chaque article, et les motifs de la décision du Conseil; l’indication de la conformité et de l’opposition
then set the stage by explaining the unique circumstances allowing Benjamin to quickly win unprecedented admission as a barrister in Lincoln’s Inn after only five months of study. Below is a summary written by Ms. MacMillan of her discussion of the early cases handled by Benjamin while he was ascending to the first rank of England’s lawyers.

Judah P. Benjamin, former Louisiana senator and Confederate Secretary of State, arrived in Southampton, England in August, 1865. In England, Benjamin was to describe himself as ‘a Political Exile, proscribed for my loyalty to my own State’. Benjamin appeared to have resolved prior to his arrival to resume the practise of law in England as a barrister. The odds seemed against success in such an endeavour. Benjamin was then 54 years old, Jewish in an anti-Semitic era, and not only American but also a prominent Confederate. As a contemporary observed, ‘it is difficult to imagine a position more apparently hopeless than his’.

It may be, though, that previous biographers have overlooked certain important aspects of English law and society in the mid-to-late 1860s in their examinations of Benjamin’s early English career. His entry into professional life was smoothed by powerful figures. Vice Chancellor Page Wood promoted Benjamin’s early call to the English Bar because of Benjamin’s Judaism. Chief Baron Pollock was instrumental in organising a position for Benjamin in the chambers of his son. It is clear that former Confederates and sympathizers provided succour in his hour of distress. Most intriguingly of all, though, is Benjamin’s involvement in a series of cases in which he defended two prominent Confederate agents in suits brought by the United States government to gain control over alleged Confederate assets.

The lawsuits were brought in the courts of Chancery and Admiralty. Benjamin appears to have held an important role in the defense of both Charles Kuhn Prioleau (of Fraser, Trenholm & Co, Liverpool) and Colin McRae. Benjamin’s involvement in these cases undoubtedly assisted him in beginning his English practise. Not only was it business, it was a business of which he had a considerable knowledge and it acted to bring him to the favourable attention of prominent London solicitors. Some of the decisions were reported, and the curious may wish to read the reports:

The United States of America v Prioleau (1865) 2 H & M 559; 71 ER 580; Prioleau v The United States of America (1866-67) L.R. 3 Eq. 724; 36 LJ Eq 624, on appeal at (1866-67) L.R. 2 Ch. App. 582; 36 L.J. Eq 628; The Mary or Alexandra (1867) L.R. 1 A. & E. 335; The Mary or Alexandra (1868) L.R. 2 A. & E. 319; The United States v McRae (1867) L.R. 4 Eq. 327, on appeal, (1867-68) L.R. 3 Ch. App. 79; 37 LJ Eq 129; and ‘The United States v McRae, (1869) L.R. 8 Eq. 69, 38 LJ Ch 406. The United States eventually settled the lawsuits in the early 1870s following the resolution of the Alabama claims. And by then, Judah Benjamin was well on his way to becoming England’s leading commercial barrister.”

An important part of Ms. MacMillan’s trip to New Orleans was to learn more about Louisiana laws during Benjamin’s time, slavery in the Deep South (particularly in Louisiana), and the Civil War and Reconstruction. Her interest in Benjamin’s distinguished legal career in New Orleans took her to the New Orleans Public Library, which proved to be a valuable resource for cases Benjamin handled in the Orleans Parish Court, the First Judicial District Court, and the Commercial Court.

Although her visit was cut short by Hurricane Isaac, Ms. MacMillan spent some time in the Rare Book Room of the Law Library to see Benjamin & Slidell’s Digest of the Reported Decisions of the Superior Court of the Late Territory of Orleans and the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana (1834). She also took a look at the Law Library’s copies of the first (1875) and third (1881) American Editions of Benjamin’s Treatise on the Sale of Personal Property; with references to the American Decisions and to the French Code and Civil Law. Certainly not as exciting as a rare 1868 first British edition of Benjamin on Sales, but as is stated in the introduction of the advertisement to the First American Edition: “There can be no question of the transcendent utility of Mr. Benjamin’s work, either in a didactic or practical sense, as a book of instruction for students, or of ready reference for practitioners.”

Several biographies of Benjamin have been written over the years, but, as Michael Chesson states in the entry he authored on Benjamin in American National Biography, Benjamin was an enigma even to his closest associates. Most of his papers were destroyed, although there are letters and some papers which have survived. Ms. MacMillan’s biography of Benjamin will be written from a different approach through her examination of the cases handled by Benjamin, primary documents which survive, many untouched, except by dust, for years.
FRENCH LAW RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARY PART II

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de ces articles aux lois an-
ciennes; les arrêts rendus
par la Cour de cassation,
pour en fixer le sens; et les
observations particulières
de l'auteur, pour concilier
et rectifier quelques-
uns de ces articles, et
faciliter l'intelligence
des autres. 1822. Commentary on the
Code Civil.

Duranton, M. A. Cours de
droit français : suivant le
Code civil. 1830.
Commentary explaining
the workings of the Code
Civil in twenty volumes.

Emerigon, Balthazard-
Marie. Traité des assur-
ances et des contrats a la
grosse. 1783.
This 2-volume work fo-
cuses on two types of mari-
time contracts: insurance
and high-rise ventures. May
have been used to elaborate
the role of law in trade in
Louisiana.

Persil, M. Questions sur les
privilèges et hypothèques,
saisies immobilières, et ordres.
1820.
French law relating to
mortgages, attachments
and garnishments.

Some of the sources used in this ar-
ticle were Kate Wallach's Research in
Louisiana Law (1958), and Robert
Karachuck's article, "A Workman's
Tools: The Library of Henry Adams
Bullard" (42 Am. J. Legal Hist. 160
(1998)).

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