

Audio Transcript, Stop 5: 1926-1979

Hello. My name is George, and I'm the director of the Pritzker Legal Research Center here at Northwestern Law. I've been at Northwestern Law for over ten years, and to me, Northwestern Law is all about excellence, excellence in faculty excellence and students and excellence in the staff and of working towards a mission of educating excellent students to be excellent lawyers.

So you're standing in the Elbert H. Gary Library. The building was built in 1926, and as an aside, Elbert Gary was a Northwestern Law grad and the first chairman of the United States Steel. And if you're familiar with Gary, Indiana, it's that Gary.

This spot the students refer to, and have for a long time, as the Hall of Heads.

As you're looking down, you'll see a number of busts overhead along a series of platforms. Now, a bust is kind of unique. It's a sculpture of a person's head, shoulders, and chest. These busts depict famous orators such as Cicero, Charlotte, Socrates, Daniel Webster and others.

Now they're made of plaster and originally hung in the Tremont House. Now they were also originally white, but were brushed with a bronze toned patina prior to 1949. We don't know exactly when.

School officials intended the bust to typify, for the aspiring student, the function of the lawyer as a persuader in addition to the lawyer's role as a scholar and a jurist.

Right now, the Hall of Heads serves as a corridor for faculty offices. Originally it was part of the library, and it was a very elegant part of the library. What are now faculty offices were areas where tables were, and students would study dispersed between very ornate bookshelves. So it had a very classic library look. And the busts did exist in that environment.

When the building was renovated in the 1980s, this became a series of faculty offices, but the busts were retained.

A library is a critical part of any educational environment, but a particularly a legal education environment. Lawyers use information as tools. We use cases, we use statutes, we use regulations, to craft our arguments and libraries, traditionally in the print world and now in the electronic world, those are the sources of those information.

So that's why the library has always been a central physical as well as intellectual part in the life of the law school.

And why the Hall of Heads kind of maintains that tradition.

Now, as you look at these busts, these heads, consider that they do only include representations of men. What might you think this exclusivity suggests about the historical values and priorities of the institution?

Now think of yourself as a student or faculty member walking down this hallway when it's served as part of the library. Maybe you were inspired by that original intention to aspire the student in the function of a lawyer as persuader? Maybe now you're thinking, you know, that's a lot of dead old men standing up there. How might you think about that? And how might that identity and background influence your perception of this representation?

And what impact do the continued display of these books have on our efforts to promote diversity inequality?

One thing I observed when I was walking down the corridor is the corridor is twice as long as the Hall of Heads section. There was a second renovation or second construction that created the Coon Library, adjacent to the Gary Library, that continued the original design of tables and bookcases, but didn't continue the Hall of Heads.

So interesting backstory about the Gary and Coon Library. Originally, the Gary Library took all three floors of what's now the Hall of Heads and the floors below. And then in 1959, late 50s, the McCormick building was built, and the Coon Library was created to connect with the Gary Library and created again all three floors of that particular space.

Now in the mid 80s, when the Rubloff building was built and the library shifted into our current space here in the Rubloff library, it was decided to remodel the original spaces into what are now faculty and administrative offices and hallways.

Interesting side note we are, of course, the Pritzker Legal Research Center, not the Pritzker Law Library, so that we could preserve those original names of the Gary and Coon Law Library.

And a little-known fact, there is a remnant of the Gary Library and the Coon Library in the basement of that space. It's off limits to the public, but it is down there.

Before navigating on to stop number six on your tour, consider stopping to visit the sponsored stops of the Black Law Students Association.

Thank you.