LAW LIBRARIANS' SOCIETY
OF WASHINGTON, DC

LAW LIBRARY LIGHTS

Volume 65, Number I | Winter 2025

LAW LIBRARIANS' SOCIETY
OF WASHINGTON, DC

Table of Contents

President's Message

Law Librarians' Society of Washington, DC

From the President

I am thrilled to help relaunch **Law Library Lights** and deeply appreciate the hard work of Sharon Beth Bronheim and Sabrina Zator in bringing this publication back to life! Their dedication reflects the resilience and creativity of our community. I am also delighted to welcome our newest members from across all sectors, and to thank our long-time LLSDC colleagues for your continued commitment. You are what makes this organization vibrant.

It has now been five years since the pandemic abruptly reshaped our profession and our daily lives. When I left D.C. in 2014, most of us were still commuting into physical libraries, turning on desktop computers, and navigating a profession that, while always evolving, felt familiar. Print collections were beginning to contract, digital platforms were maturing, and "ChatGPT" was not yet a phrase any of us would have recognized.

Returning to D.C. in 2022, I found a city and an organization transformed. Remote and hybrid work changed how we connected with colleagues, with our institutions, and with LLSDC. Events that once filled lunch hours and evening schedules moved to virtual platforms. Downtown's rhythm shifted.

And yet, slowly and surely, the energy is returning as many government and private law colleagues come back into the office.

To all of you we have not seen in some time: **we've missed you.**

That's why the enthusiasm at our recent receptions has been so heartening. It has been wonderful to reconnect with familiar faces and welcome new ones.

Looking ahead to 2026, we have exciting programs on the horizon: honoring Sandy Peterson in the upcoming lecture, hosting a AALL Town Hall, and exploring initiatives focused on mentoring, early-career librarians, and technology and innovation. These conversations reflect our shared commitment to a profession in motion.

The return of Law Library Lights itself signals an important step forward. Strengthening communication, expanding outreach, and reaffirming our relevance in a rapidly changing legal-information landscape remain central to our mission.

LLSDC thrives when members contribute ideas, expertise, and curiosity—and this publication is one of the ways we showcase that collective strength.

If you are thinking about New Year's resolutions or simply seeking new ways to connect, I encourage you to consider volunteering with LLSDC.

We have several open opportunities: chairing the Private Law Libraries SIS, coordinating the Managers Roundtable, and Chair of Scholarships and Grants.

Whether you are early in your career or a seasoned professional, the time you invest will be returned tenfold through new skills, expanded networks, and lasting relationships.

Amid all the change, one thing remains constant: the friendships and professional bonds that form the backbone of LLSDC. Our workplaces may look different today—some fully remote, some hybrid, some buzzing once again with in-person energy—but we are united by our dedication to legal information, service, and community

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to our past presidents, whose leadership positioned us for this moment of renewal and growth. I am honored to build on their work and excited for what we will achieve together in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Justine Morgan

LIGHTS CO-EDITORS

SHARON BETH BRONHEIM

SABRINA ZATOR

THE RETURN OF *LIGHTS*

Editors' Column

Sharon Beth Bronheim
Content Acquisitions Librarian
University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

Welcome back to ***LLSDC Law Library Lights***! The last issue was published in summer of 2020, and there have been many changes to the law library landscape in the intervening years. The pandemic changed life drastically, as we shifted to more virtual and fewer physical resources, with a subsequent shrinkage of physical space. How many more meetings do you find yourself attending, now that they can be done virtually?

For many of you who are newly minted librarians, or (relatively) new to the DC area, you may not have realized LLSDC even had a newsletter. After many false starts, it's about time for it to be revived!

Speaking of time, we have an article from Andrew Martin, head of the Federal SIS, talking about the connection of time and navigation. He arranged an amazing tour for LLSDC to go to the US Naval Observatory where time is officially kept.

Abigail Ross of RoFinCo, LLC, has graciously taken over as our Tech Columnist, introducing LegAI Stacks: Everyday Artificial Intelligence for Law Librarians. In this issue, she discusses Notebook LM and how it can be used, especially for 50-state surveys.

Yasmin Morais, an LLSDC member for many years before moving out of the area, talks about what can happen when law librarians collaborate to create content, in this case filling the gap on how to conduct research in the English speaking Caribbean.

As part of the LLSDC Lights re-launch, you'll get to meet half of the Board, learn more about two of our Committees, and hear from three of our SIS's. We hope to continue to provide updates about their activities, and introduce you to more of our Board, Committees and SIS's in coming issues.

Also in upcoming issues, we plan to highlight LLSDC in the wild–the contributions our members are making on a larger scale than merely within our chapter. Expanding to within the AALL universe, we are committee members, caucus and SIS leadership, published in AALL Spectrum or the Law Library Journal. That's before you factor in the work we do outside AALL, such as writing chapters for a recent Bloomsbury release on Law Librarianship. We are an active group, and everyone should know it.

Finally, I'd like to thank my co-editor Sabrina Zator, without whom this entire publication would be still either a Word or Google doc.

LLSDC Opening Ceremony

Over two dozen LLSDC Members from government, academic, private, and public law libraries attended this year's **Opening Ceremony for LLSDC** at the Lincoln on September 17, 2025.

Many thanks to our sponsor **vLex**, as a good time was had by all!

Meet the LLSDC Board

The Law Library Society of Washington, DC is pleased to welcome its newly elected Board members, each bringing a wealth of experience and a strong commitment to advancing access to legal information.

Their diverse backgrounds in librarianship, research, and public service will help guide the Society's initiatives in the year ahead.

We look forward to their leadership and the fresh perspectives they will bring to our community.

Justine Morgan, *President*

Justine Morgan is the Director of Research and Knowledge Services at Venable LLP, with over a decade of experience in legal research management and information strategy.

She focuses on blending traditional library services with emerging research technologies to drive efficiency and insight across the firm.

Justine holds an MLIS from the University of Maryland and lives in Falls Church with her partner and 7-year-old son; when she's not thinking about research or AI, she enjoys running with friends and cooking.

Andrew Martin, *Vice President*

Andrew Martin is delighted to begin his second tour through the LLSDC leadership cycle and hopes to use his title to gain access to otherwise off-limits libraries and museums around DC.

After studying Medieval History, Egyptology, and eventually library science at the University of Maryland, Andrew found his true calling as a reference librarian—where he has thrived for more than 25 years.

He is, by his own account, the loudest librarian in the world.

Brandi Osborne, *Corresponding Secretary*

Brandi Taylor Osborne is a Research Librarian at Cleary Gottlieb, providing legal, legislative, and business research support across a wide range of practice areas.

She earned her MLS from North Carolina Central University and her BA in Political Science from Hollins University.

Outside of work, Brandi enjoys spending time with her family, cooking, and collecting books.

Karen Stephanites, *Recording Secretary*

Karen Stephanites (stephan-EYE-dess) has been a Research Analyst at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP since 2022.

She began her career in journalism after earning her degree from Marquette University, later transitioning into librarianship through work at media companies including CNN, Discovery Communications, and USA Today.

Most recently, she co-presented on business research across academic, government, and private libraries at the 2025 SLA Annual Conference.

Mary Kate Hunter, *Board Member*

Mary Kate Hunter has spent the past 16 years at the GW Law Library and currently serves as Head of Reference and Government Procurement Law Librarian.

A longtime LLSDC leader and past president, she is thrilled to return to the Board as an At-Large Member.

Outside of work, Mary Kate enjoys needlepoint, adventurous travel (including Greenland and Svalbard), classic films, and fondly remembers the legendary 2015 LLSDC holiday party at CoCo. Sala. If you were there... you know!

Sue Ann Orsini, *Board Member*

Sue Ann Orsini is the Legislative Research Attorney at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP, where she has worked for 19 years.

After studying everything from film theory to piano performance to law, she ultimately realized her true home was in the library rather than legal practice.

Sue Ann enjoys teaching lawyers about the legislative process and, in her free time, reading, writing, sewing, and spending time outdoors with her family.

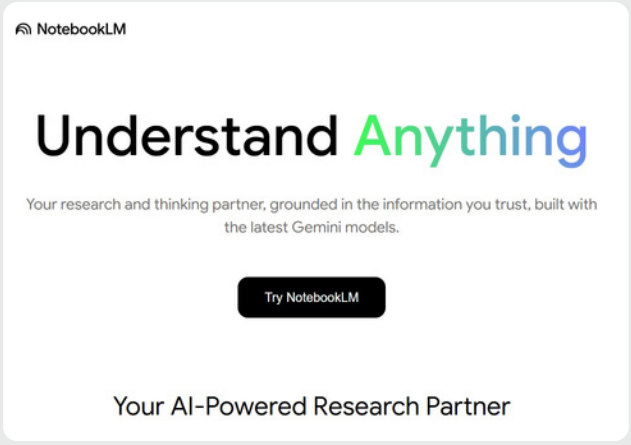
LegAI Stacks: Everyday Artificial Intelligence for Law Librarians

Abigail Ross
Principal
RoFinCo, LLC

> Welcome to what I hope will become a regular column exploring practical ways to use AI in law libraries. AI is clearly here to stay, and while caution is warranted, this column will focus on its positive and workable applications.

These regular tips may not always be flashy, but each installment will offer straightforward tips law librarians can put to use immediately, without the hype and with a clear-eyed view of the pros and cons.

Our inaugural tip will be exploring a use for **NotebookLM** (Google's AI-powered research assistant) and a tool many of you may already be familiar with. A free account gives you limited access and is enough to set up a small number of notebooks (collection of sources or research spaces) and limited chat queries. Upgrading to a paid subscription provides additional notebooks and more features. Either way, NotebookLM can serve as a research catalogue.



I use it to create Notebooks for individual projects, then populate it with PDFs, websites, random notes and whatever else I need to keep track of. I can then access these documents from any device and interact with those sources as needed, either via chatting or their various studio applications (mind maps, reports, flashcards, video summaries, etc.).

At the moment, my own notebooks range from tracking news sources about the scrolls discovered at the ancient site of Herculaneum so I can see the advancements over time (purely for fun) to one that compiles shopping lists for my school bake sale recipes (semi-fun) to one housing all current U.S. executive orders (definitely less fun).

> Where I really see potential, though, is using NotebookLM to help compile 50 state surveys.

Parsing statutory language to create a comparison chart takes a great deal of time and while there are third-party vendors that sell ready-made surveys, inevitably there comes a subject matter that isn't covered and therefore must be built from scratch.

One recent request, for instance, asked for a chart showing the legal requirements for a new driver to obtain a driver's license in all states – an ideal use case for NotebookLM. (A small side note on this: I tried this same exercise with a rather esoteric requirement in state tax codes and it did not go well at all as those statutes had too many references to other subsections elsewhere in the codes. This still works best with a straight-forward subject matter).

The initial legwork of compiling sources remains unchanged here. NotebookLM cannot go out and find the correct statutes and regulations – the user has to feed all useful data in (yay job security for law librarians!). I tracked down the statutes for each state (which wasn't too difficult given the subject matter) and uploaded them all into a new notebook.

I found that asking it to compare all 50 at once produced less than ideal results (it got very confused).

However, asking it to analyze a handful of states at a time, *"Put together a chart comparing what is needed for a new driver to get a driver's license in Maryland, Virginia, Georgia and Delaware,"* worked better.

I combined all of these together and dropped them into Excel and tidied it up. Then, *just as I would with a draft created by a human being*, I reviewed each state to confirm the requirements, the information breakdown and citations. See Figure 1 for a sample of one of the smaller batches.

To be clear: this does **NOT** replace a human being reading through the statutes and regulations – it's just a way to kick-start the process.

Once I had that initial draft, I used it to spot patterns across jurisdictions: What do they all require? Where do they differ? What themes or terminology repeat? Does anything odd jump out for any jurisdiction?

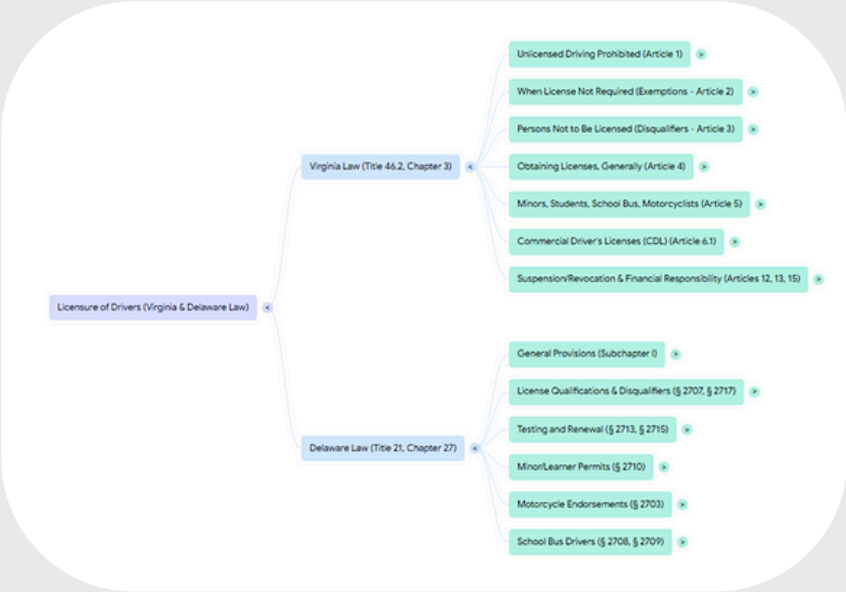
I also asked NotebookLM to create a mind map so I could visualize how each statute is structured and organized by subsection, again looking for patterns or themes I might want to delve deeper into or highlight in the executive summary. See Figure 2.

As with any AI tool, uploading sensitive or proprietary documents is not recommended. Be sure you understand and follow your institution's AI policies. While NotebookLM is designed as a "closed" system, meaning the notebooks you create aren't accessible to anyone unless you choose to share them, it's important to be mindful about what you store, especially with client materials or confidential information, as there is no guarantee of complete privacy or security.

Figure 1

Requirement	Maryland (MD)	Virginia (VA)	Delaware (DE)	Georgia (GA)
Initial Permit Type	**Learner's Instructional Permit** [1]	**Learner's Permit** or Motorcycle Learner's Permit [2]	**Level 1 Learner's Permit** (Ages 16–18, or up to 22 with IEP) [3] [4]	**Instructional Permit** (Not explicitly detailed for Class D, but required for Class M (MP) permit for minors) [5]
Minimum Age to Obtain Permit	If under 16, applicant must present a school attendance record [1].	**15 years and six months** [2].	**16 years old** [3].	**15 years or over** for actual in-car training [6]. Requirements for applicants **under 18** apply [5].
Mandatory Driver Education	**Required** for applicants under age 25 [7] [8]. Must include at least **30 hours of classroom instruction** and at least **6 hours of highway driving instruction** [7] [...].	**Required** for applicants under 18 [11]. Applicants **18 and older** who have never been licensed must complete a course or hold a learner's permit for at least **60 days** before the first behind-the-wheel exam [12].	**Required** for persons under 18 [13]. Must successfully complete a driver education training program approved by the Delaware Department of Education [4].	For Class D or Class M permits at age 16 or 17, applicants must prove completion of a **DDS approved driver education program** [5].

Figure 2



If you're new to AI research assistants, don't be afraid to start small. Experiment with a single notebook focused on a low-stakes project to get comfortable with the interface and features before diving into larger, more complex research tasks.

As this column continues, I'll keep sharing AI tools that have proven genuinely useful in daily library work, and if you've come across an AI tool that has made your work easier or even just more interesting, let me know.

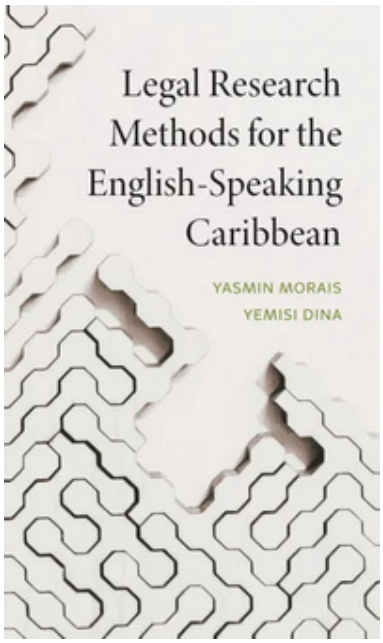
I'd love to hear what tools you're experimenting with or what AI challenges you'd like to see covered next.

Drop me a note, and let's keep learning together!

Filling the Gap

LAW LIBRARIANS COLLABORATING AND CREATING NEW CONTENT

Yasmin Morais
Foreign, Comparative, & International Collection Development Librarian at Harvard Law School Library



When we think of law librarians, the main duties that come to mind include reference, teaching, access services, procurement, or metadata management. While there are some of us who undertake extensive research and writing for publication, there is usually truly little time to undertake this research and publishing aspect of librarianship. This is true if our institutions do not require publishing as a part of the tenure process. In this article, I would like to share my experience of a very meaningful cross-border collaboration with another librarian, which has resulted in the recent publication of a resource that will fill the knowledge gap, and hopefully be useful for librarians who focus on Foreign, Comparative and International Law (FCIL) research related to the Caribbean.

The idea of creating a resource that would facilitate Caribbean legal research came to me when I was asked to contribute two blog posts to the project Monitoring the Legal Responses to Covid-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean. While conducting research for these posts, I noticed that there were no comprehensive resources for Caribbean legal research. I realized that **filling this gap was important**; however, with a region this diverse and spread over a dispersed region, it seemed a daunting task. I knew that I could not undertake a project this large while dealing with my regular librarian duties. A project of this magnitude would require a co-author or co-authors. I also thought about which of my colleagues would even have an interest in collaborating on this topic.

I decided to reach out to my colleague, Yemisi Dina, Chief Law Librarian at the Osgoode Hall Law Library at York University in Toronto, Canada. I had met Yemisi at a previous AALL conference, but I already knew of her work on Caribbean research guides. I pitched the idea to her, and without hesitation, she agreed to be my co-author.

This collaborative effort was initially quite daunting, but nonetheless interesting, since we were working in two different countries and researching the laws of Caribbean states that were a mixture of independent states and British Overseas Territories. We decided to narrow our focus to just the English-speaking Caribbean. The road to publication was also a rocky one, since we had to part ways with the initial publisher that had expressed interest in the project. Along the way, we enhanced our legal research, project management, editing, indexing, time management, and negotiating skills.

Through dogged determination to see the project through to the end, we finally completed the manuscript during the summer of 2023. Carolina Academic Press accepted our manuscript Legal Research Methods for the English-Speaking Caribbean and it was released in March 2024. The hope is that it adequately fills the gap and will be a useful resource for librarians, law students, and faculty interested in the states in this region. This collaboration with another librarian turned out to be a truly meaningful one which resulted in a timely and new resource.

SPOTLIGHT ON SIS

In this issue we are spotlighting **three of our Special Interest Sections (SIS)**, which are always looking for new members. Feel free to contact the chairs for more information, and keep an eye for emails about upcoming events!

FEDERAL SIS

The Federal SIS is active again after a long pandemic pause. We kicked off with a roundtable on how federal law libraries are navigating recent Executive Orders, staffing changes, and resource challenges, and we elected **Andrew Martin as our returning chair**. Our library tour series is back as well, beginning with the U.S. Naval Observatory Library on May 16 (see the article in this issue).

We also plan upcoming discussions on using generative AI in legal research. All are welcome—federal or not, member or not. Join our events, share ideas, or get involved by contacting **FLL SIS Chair Andrew Martin** at Andrew.martin@nlrb.gov

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SIS

The Legislative Research SIS, **chaired by Brent Burton** and active since the late '80s, provides LLSDC members with a long-standing forum for sharing information on federal and state legislative activity. We support communication about legislative sources, promote the work of legislative librarians, and assist all members who use legislative documents or track Congress.

We recently hosted a successful virtual roundtable with Law Revision Counsel Brian Lindsay on the history and maintenance of the U.S. Code.

We hope you'll join us at an upcoming meeting!

PRIVATE LAW LIBRARIES SIS

Since reorganizing in May 2024, the Private Law Libraries SIS has held **14 meetings** on topics ranging from staffing and training to generative AI, intranets, and Summer Associates.

Many thanks to Carrie Ansell for her leadership; **Ann Green** and **Karen Stephanites** will begin **co-chairing** in January 2026.

Questions about the SIS may be directed to Karen Stephanites at ksaren.stephanites@weil.com or to Ann Green at ann.green@hugheshubbard.com.

LLSDC FIELD TRIP

Exploring the Library that Keeps the World on Time

Hidden from view, guarded by fencing topped with barbed wire and soldiers armed with machine guns, one of the most fascinating yet inaccessible Libraries in Washington, DC, performs a function that is secretly vital to all of human civilization, from navigating with Google maps to trading stocks to landing planes or dropping cruise missiles on target.

On May 16th, the Law Librarians' Society of DC took a field trip to the United States Naval Observatory to explore its unique and spectacular Library.

Highlights of the Observatory's Collection

Tucked beneath the Observatory's iconic dome is one of Washington's most remarkable—and least accessible—collections. The USNO Library houses centuries of astronomical knowledge, from exquisitely detailed Apollo-era lunar charts to foundational works by Newton, Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler.

Visitors are surrounded by antique clocks, brass instruments, and rare volumes that chart humanity's long effort to understand time and navigate the globe. Among the most extraordinary treasures is an original treatise by John Harrison describing his revolutionary marine chronometer—the invention that solved the problem of determining longitude at sea.

With its domed reading room, cast-iron staircases, and quietly bubbling fountain, the Library is as breathtaking as the collection it protects.

Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

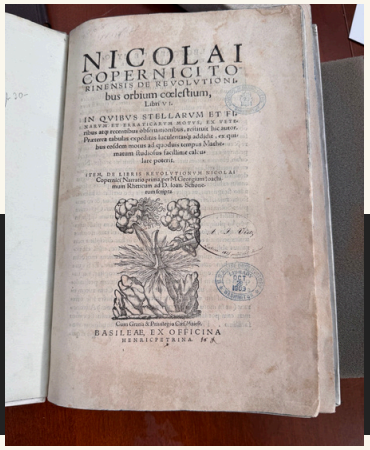


Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

Federal SIS Chair Andrew Martin reached out to Morgan Black, the head of the USNO Library, and bartered a climb of the towers of the Washington National Cathedral, where he is a docent, for a tour of the USNO facilities.

We saw not just the Library, but also the USNO's telescopes, historic buildings, and even the atomic clocks which power the time displays that you see outside Observatory Circle on Massachusetts Avenue.

But why is there even such a thing as a Naval Observatory, which provides books and star charts and telescopes?

It's a fascinating story that goes back to the age of sail and even before.

Getting lost at sea is a serious problem, especially once you sail out of sight of land. If you don't know where you are, you can't get where you're going, and you run a serious risk of running out of food and water, hitting a bunch of unexpected rocks and sinking, or dying in any one of a number of unpleasant manners.

Ancient mariners would usually hug the coastlines on their trips to keep from getting lost. This works well in the Mediterranean, where you can always go in one direction and hit land before TOO long, even if you then go, "Oh crap, Carthaginians."

But once we started trying to sail across the Atlantic or Pacific, it got more complicated. Out of sight of land, you were devoid of fixed points and could only sail based on the positions of the sun and stars.

The ancient Greeks (among others) learned that you could measure the angle from the horizon to the sun at noon, or the North Star if you were in the northern hemisphere, and figure out your latitude, or how far north or south you were. But the struggle to determine longitude, or your east-west location, was much harder to solve.

Sailors would navigate by dead reckoning, where they would plot a course with their compass and then keep track of how many miles they sailed each day. This method involved a lot of prayer, and an excessive number of catastrophic shipwrecks.

Painting credit: courtesy Rob Kattenburg.

In 1707, **Admiral Cloudesley Shovell** ran his *entire fleet* onto some rocks off the Scilly Isles, with the loss between 1,400 and 2000 men, including himself.

Parliament was so aghast that they offered a **prize of £20,000** (equivalent to £3.65 million in 2023) for anyone who could figure out a reliable way of determining longitude at sea.

Painting credit: Royal Museums Greenwich.

Truly goony ideas were proposed and tested.

Some, like looking at the moons of Venus, were technically feasible but impractical from a ship swaying at sea.

Others, like the "*powder of sympathy*," a seventeenth-century theory that effects could be transmitted instantaneously across distance through a sympathetic connection between objects proved entirely impractical.

Captain Cook's famous voyage to the South Seas put several of these methods to the test in parallel, carrying them to Australia and Tahiti to see whether any of them actually worked - they did not.

Eventually it came down to an idea that was simple in concept and complicated in execution: **TIME**

We've all traveled and had to reset our watches to match the local time zone. If you know the exact time of a fixed point on the globe, and then the exact time where you are, you can figure out what time zone you are in down to the minute and the second. The you can extrapolate out exactly how far east or west you are of that fixed point. If you've ever heard coordinates described as "So many degrees, this many minutes, that many seconds," that's why.

Time is literally distance.

The tricky part was getting hyper-accurate clocks that would work at sea.

The best and most accurate clocks of the day were long-case pendulum clocks, the kind we call Grandfather clocks. But at sea, a boat sways back and forth, it messes with the swing of the pendulum.

Every minute your clock was fast or slow resulted in a difference of over a mile in location, and over a voyage of months at sea those errors would compound to hundreds of miles and disaster.

The longitude prize was eventually won by amateur clockmaker John Harrison who started off building clocks out of wood. Over several decades, he refined his designs, created some truly beautiful clocks, and eventually produced a reliable marine chronometer that would lose only a couple seconds per week.

The clocks were set according to that most accurate of timekeepers... the heavens.

The British had set up a Royal Observatory right across the Thames from London, on the site of the old Royal Palace of Greenwich. Their transit telescopes were mounted on fixed locations, and when a particular star crossed a line on the scope, the astronomers knew the precise time. To this day, we designate time zones as a certain number of hours plus or minus "*Greenwich Mean Time*," referring to the Royal Observatory at Greenwich.

A view of the Royal Observatory around 1830

In those days, all the ships of the world all came to London. The Royal Observatory perched on a hill overlooking the Thames. On its roof was a tall mast, with an enormous red ball.

At precisely 1pm every day, the ball would drop down the mast, and when it hit the bottom, the ships captains would hit reset on their chronometers so that they had the most accurate time, and thus the most accurate navigation.

They still drop the time ball every day at the Royal Observatory to this very day. And it's why we drop a ball down a mast in Times Square to mark the new year.

Photo Credit: Julian Herzog

After the American Revolution, we decided we didn't want anything to do with that British time, that smelled like fish and chips. We'd get our **OWN** navigational infrastructure, thankyouverymuch.

John Quincy Adams appropriated the money for a Naval Observatory, built on some bluffs in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of DC. In those days, the Potomac came right up to the base of the spot where the Washington Monument would eventually rise. A river called the Tiber Creek, which was really just an open sewer, flowed down what we now call Constitution Avenue.

All the land where the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the cherry blossoms stand was formed later by dredging the Potomac. So initially it was possible to sail right up to Georgetown and easily see the Old Naval Observatory. So they installed their very own time ball.

Unfortunately, you don't want astronomers working in places called either "Foggy" or "Bottom." Astronomical sightings were impaired by the thick mists and the light pollution from the expanding city. Also, the astronomers kept dying of malaria.

Eventually, in 1893, they moved the Observatory WAY outside the city to a high point that they dubbed "**Astronomy Hill.**" They set up a library for all the star charts and navigational maps they were producing, and built a nice fancy house for the Superintendent of the Naval Observatory.

The U.S. Naval Observatory's Georgetown Heights Headquarters. Richard Morris Hunt, Architect. Geoff Chester, Photographer.

The dignified limestone building was designed by Richard Morris Hunt, a Gilded Age architect who also designed mansions for Astors and Vanderbilts and the facade of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Until the 1970s, while the President lived in the White House, the Vice President had no official residence and could live wherever he chose. Gerald Ford, for example, lived across the river in Alexandria.

Over time, the Secret Service grew concerned about protecting such high-value officials in open neighborhoods and apartment buildings, and the decision was made to convert the *Superintendent's house into a dedicated residence for the Vice President*. At the time, however, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller—who already owned a far grander home—declined to move in. As a result, Walter Mondale, serving under President Carter, became the first vice president to reside there.

Hence, security at the USNO is tight. We had to submit a list of attendees in advance to be cleared by the Secret Service. We met **Librarian Morgan Black** at the entrance, and she escorted us through security and to the main building of the Naval Observatory.

In a room filled with antique clocks **USNO Public Affairs Officer**, **Kim Rupley**, told us about the mission of the Observatory and the technology they use today.

Star sightings are no longer the primary method of keeping accurate time. Instead, the U.S. Naval Observatory relies on a pair of *cesium maser fountain atomic clocks*.

Averaged together every 100 seconds, these clocks produce exceptionally accurate and reliable time. Collectively, they form the USNO Master Clock, which serves as the time standard for the U.S. military and much of the world.

It is INCREDIBLY accurate, gaining or losing no more than 100 picoseconds (0.000,000,000,1 seconds) per day. **This means that the clock will be off by about one second every 20 million years.**

"A man who has one clock knows what time it is. A man with two clocks is never sure."

The time from these clocks is transmitted to the network of GPS satellites developed by the US military and now made available to civilians all over the world.

It powers the Waze or Google Maps you use to find your way through traffic. It also provides location information to a bewildering array of military applications, from the original use of helping ships navigate at sea to dropping Tomahawk missiles on targets to an accuracy measured in meters rather than miles.

Traders on Wall Street rely on atomic clocks at the U.S. Naval Observatory (USNO) to time modern, algorithm-driven stock trading.

Today, millions of computer-executed transactions occur each second, where even tiny timing differences can mean enormous gains or losses. To prevent discrepancies, trading floors are connected to the USNO Master Clock by cables of identical length, ensuring perfectly synchronized time stamps for every trade.

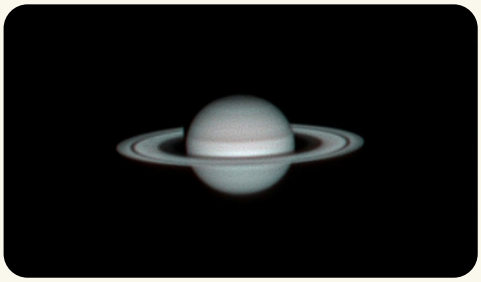
Next, Kim and Morgan took a rapt group of Librarians up to the roof of the observatory. Most of us took the elevator, but a couple of us jumped at the chance to go up the spiral staircase.

Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

Next to the telescope dome we could see a gold ball on a mast. It's the original time ball from the Old Naval Observatory, though since it's no longer visible from the street, let alone from the Potomac, it is no longer hoisted and dropped to mark the time.

Looking in the other direction, we could see the National Cathedral looming over the USNO from the only higher point in the District of Colombia. Inside the telescope dome, Kim and Morgan showed us the 12 inch telescope, mounted on a motorized gimbal that can keep it looking at a fixed point in the vault of heavens.

Since the sky moves, if you point your telescope at, say Saturn, in about a minute it will have moved out of your field of vision.



Saturn, imaged Sept. 21, 2023, 01:14 UT at the U.S. Naval Observatory, Washington, DC with the historic 30.5-cm (12-inch) f/15 Clark/Seagmüller refractor and a ZWO ASI183MC CMOS color imager. USNO image.

We then followed our guides to a free-standing telescope dome which houses the huge, 26 inch **Great Equatorial Telescope**.

Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

Built in 1872, this was once the largest telescope in the world, and in 1877 it was the first to see the moons of Mars, which the astronomer Asaph Hall named Phobos and Demos.

This telescope is so large that the entire 73 foot diameter floor of the astronomy dome raises and lowers 10 feet to allow astronomers to look through the eyepiece and, more critically, remove the lens cap.

Our next stop was an unassuming building chilled to near-meat locker temperatures—a welcome relief on a sweltering, oppressive D.C. summer day.

Photography was strictly prohibited. Inside, behind thick glass windows, sat several large, light-blinking crates that looked like props from a 1980s sci-fi movie about rogue computers. These were the famed atomic clocks themselves, responsible for setting the time for the world.

Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

From the super modern and high tech, we next traveled back in time. We moved to the Library itself, located at the opposite end of the Main Building from the telescope dome.

The Library feels otherworldly, like something out of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The room is round and domed, evoking the telescope dome at the opposite end of the building. Cast iron spiral staircases rise to a second level lined with bookshelves.

Oil paintings of previous astronomers gaze down at us. Everywhere we look there are ticking clocks, brass astronomical instruments, and curious relics of bygone eras.

It had a distinctly steampunk, or more specifically, clockpunk feel. And in the center of the room, an improbable fountain burbled quietly, looking like it had been misplaced from some manicured English garden.

"We have to keep it turned all the way down," Morgan Black told us. "It can spray MUCH higher than you see now, but at this level it doesn't add enough moisture to the air to damage the books."

Photo Credit: Andrew Martin

Morgan and her team had generously pulled out a selection of their greatest treasures. From one box they unrolled the star charts and detailed tracks of lunar craters that the Apollo astronauts used for lining up their final approaches to landing. They also had ancient treasures. My mind boggled to be allowed to hold a copy of Newton's Principia Mathematica.

We also saw—and were allowed to handle—works by Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler, but the most breathtaking piece was John Harrison's own treatise describing the construction and operation of his H4 marine chronometer, which won the longitude prize.

After several hours of exploring the grounds, examining the treasures, and taking pictures in the gorgeous library, we reluctantly made our way out of the Naval Observatory.

The USNO is a unique facility, a truly hidden treasure of the Nation's Capital. Its library holds wonderful treasures and is a work of art in itself. We are exceptionally grateful to Morgan Black, Kim Rupley, and the whole USNO team for being so generous with their time and allowing us to ramble all over their facility.

Andrew Martin
Chief Librarian
National Labor Relations Board

LLSDC COMMITTEE UPDATES

Education Committee

The 2025 LLSDC Legal Research Institutes were a resounding success! For over 40 years, the Institutes have been an LLSDC mainstay for training new librarians, paralegals, and researchers in the essential skills of legal research. This year's program, held virtually during six lunchtime sessions in March, featured LLSDC member-led instruction on statutes, administrative law, case law, secondary sources, legislative history, and cost-effective research strategies.

The Education Committee would like to extend our thanks to our outstanding LRI presenters—Susan Ryan, Tomasz Kolodziej, Carrie Ansell, Ann Hemmens, and Barbara Bavis. Each year, they graciously share their time and expertise, playing a vital role in the ongoing success of the Institutes.

Be sure to keep an eye on the LLSDC listserv this spring for information about the 2026 Legal Research Institutes.

Pamela Lipscomb, Mary Kate Hunter & Brent Burton
LLSDC Education Committee

Placement Committee

The Placement Committee's primary responsibility is maintaining the LLSDC Jobline, currently the sole effort of retired librarian Allison Fentress. Typically posting job ads the same day the committee receives them, Allison has posted 52 jobs from May 2024-May 2025. LLSDC does not charge for this service.

Have an opening? Guidance on what and how to submit can be found at https://www.llsdc.org/Jobline-listing. Looking for a job? The Jobline can be found at https://www.llsdc.org/llsdc-jobline .

Allison Fentress
LLSDC Placement

PIPELINE TO PROFESSION

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Catholic University's Department of Information Sciences is looking for Practicum Hosts for the summer and fall. The practicum is designed to be a **three-credit course**, where students work for **120 hours** for the host organization within a single semester on a project or projects which "*expose the student to professional experiences and challenges*." These must be unpaid while the students are earning academic credit.

Descriptions of jobs are sent from the department to students directly, who can then decide whether or not they wish to apply for a position.

A host can decide whether the position is only available for a specific semester, or is an ongoing one. Students begin registering for the summer session in mid-March, and for the fall in early April, so it is recommended that if you are posting for just a single semester, you submit your description before then.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

https://lis.catholic.edu/academics/courses/practicum/practicumhostletter.pdf

Contact Department Chair **Dr. Sue Yeon Syn** at syn@cua.edu.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

If you are interested in writing an article for LLSDC Lights, please email your submission to **lights@llsdc.org**.

Thank you!


HAPPY
Holidays!
Cheers to magical moments and cherished memories this holiday!