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Boston College Law School

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Casebook Exhibit on Display in Rare Book Room

6/21/01-This summer, an exhibition on the history of the law school casebook is being featured in the Law Library's Daniel R. Coquillette Rare Book Room. Instantly familiar to today's law student, the casebook has evolved over the centuries and has served a variety of functions in the law school classroom.

"That most familiar of sights in the law school classroom - the casebook - has a most interesting history," said Director and Associate Dean of Library & Computing Services Sharon O'Connor. "These materials from the Boston College Law School collection illustrate the past and the present of this essential component of legal education."

The exhibition begins with a look at the precursors to the casebook, the Year Books and the Reports. Over time, legal scholars distilled their readings of the cases from the Year Books and Reports into legal treatises: scholarly discourses on discrete areas of the law that formed the basis of early American legal education methods. This trend later was supplanted by a full-scale return to close readings of cases, accompanied by the casebook that remains a mainstay of legal education today. The exhibition closes with a look at the role of the casebook at Boston College Law School.

Composed primarily of old and rare materials from the Law Library's permanent collection, this exhibition is one of several that explore different aspects of the history of American legal education. It was prepared by Karen Beck, Legal Reference Librarian/Curator of Rare Books, and Susan Sullivan, Public Services Librarian.

The Daniel R. Coquillette Rare Book Room was given in honor of Dan Coquillette, former Dean and current faculty member, by four BCLS alumni: Bruce R. Balter, '62; Edward T. Bigham, '53; Anne P. Jones, '58, '61; and Arthur O. Stern, '74. The room has hosted such past exhibitions as The Papers of Jane Jacobs (Fall 2000) and Jesuits and the Law (Spring 1999). Future exhibits include A Symposium on Francis Bacon (Spring 2003) and The American Lawyer's Library (Spring 2004).

The Book Room is open during the summer Monday through Thursday from 9 to 5, and Friday from 9 to 3.

Story by Karen Beck, Legal Reference Librarian/Curator of Rare Books