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## Foreword

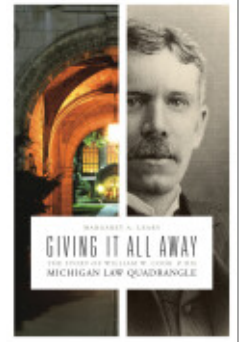
## Published by

Leary, Margaret A.

Giving It All Away: The Story of William W. Cook and His Michigan Law Quadrangle.

University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.10315>.



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# FOREWORD

EIGHTY YEARS AFTER WILLIAM W. COOK'S DEATH, most of us at the University of Michigan Law School know Cook as a name etched on a limestone building, an echo from another time and place. That is to say, we know what Cook did, but we know very little about who Cook was. In writing this biography, Margaret Leary has sought to illuminate both the Cook we know and the one who has remained hidden from us for all these years. She has succeeded beautifully.

The evidence of what Cook did for Michigan Law surrounds me as I write. Since its completion in 1933, the William W. Cook Law Quadrangle has been the architectural highlight of the University of Michigan campus, a tourist magnet for all seasons and a powerful draw for scholars seeking a gracious setting in which to study law. Many are the prospective law students who have traveled to Ann Arbor, gotten a glimpse of the Law Quad, and instantly decided that this was the school for them. We have Cook, who both funded the complex and guided its design, to thank for that. He decreed that the Collegiate Gothic design of these beautiful buildings would reflect the architecture of England, wherein the common law developed, and he created memorable spaces that still encourage thoughtful reading and discussion among our students and faculty. When alumni of all ages reminisce about law school, they invariably allude to some special place in the Quad.

We know too that Cook's gifts to his alma mater arose from his lofty aspirations for Michigan Law, for legal education, and for the profession of law. His will declares, in ringing tones, that the character of law schools is necessarily linked to the character of the legal profession, and more than that, forecasts the future of America. (Quotes from Cook's will to this effect are carved into stone at two entrances to the Law Quad.) By improving legal education at Michigan, therefore, Cook determined to improve the legal profession and preserve the American institutions that meant so much to him—so much, indeed, that he wrote a book titled *American Institutions and Their Preservation*.

We sense that Cook was also a visionary. He foresaw that the law books of the future would be written not by practitioners, as in his day, but by law professors like those he hoped to fund at Michigan. He perceived the crying need among practitioners for encyclopedic summaries of cases—what we now know as restatements of the law. Cook also envisioned the law as a global profession, as seen in his use of symbols of different legal systems in the stonework of the Law Quad and of seals from universities worldwide in the stained glass windows of our beautiful Reading Room. He was right on all these counts.

He was just as prescient on the significance of philanthropy to public institutions like the University of Michigan. As early as 1909, Cook wrote in a letter to a member of the university's Board of Regents that "the University has become too great for one state to support." A century later, that is truer than ever. We are incredibly fortunate that Cook was a man who led by example, bequeathing the Law School a handsome sum that became the core of our endowment and remains an important source of support for faculty research today.

But Will, as he was known, was also a living, breathing, complicated human being. In uncovering the personal history that informed his actions, Ms. Leary has done us a great service. Cook was in many ways a man of his times, reflecting the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century trend for Americans to pursue higher education, enter the professions, and move from small towns to big cities. He was a consummate corporate lawyer, expert at working with business clients—a skill set we are much concerned with imparting to our current students. Some of the issues he dealt with, as Ms. Leary observes, are just as alive today as they were a century ago. He was a prolific legal scholar whose magnum opus on corporations became a landmark of its kind; he was compulsively detail-oriented, yet he never lost sight of the big picture.

Cook was, for nine years, a married man. This created no end of consternation on our campus when the ex-wife he had divorced thirty-two years before decided to sue for what she claimed was her share of his estate. Today the fascinating, unhappy story about Will, Ida, and the money would be red-hot fodder for bloggers and tabloid journalists. In Ms. Leary's sympathetic hands, their story is recounted with dignity. We even learn that in her last years Ida lived within shouting distance of the Law Quad, a nugget of irony that is surely stranger than fiction.

Though the author clearly admires her subject, she doesn't spare us his warts: his pickiness; his prejudices; his dour notions about political, social, and ethnic groups who defied the status quo, whether through their deeds or the simple fact of their existence. These beliefs reached their fullest expression in Cook's *American Institutions*, which Ms. Leary calls "an irritating mix of bad writing and outrageous,

outdated ideas.” But she generously warns us against judging Cook through a twenty-first-century lens, and she goes on to note, importantly, that he never sought to impose his restrictive views on Michigan Law. (And what are we to think of Cook convincing young Ellin Mackay, the daughter of his Catholic boss, to follow her heart and marry songwriter Irving Berlin, despite his Jewish faith, thus being indirectly responsible for “Always,” Berlin’s wedding gift to his bride.)

For us at Michigan Law, there is particular delight in reading “our story.” We can only be thrilled to read of the moment on September 8, 1921, when Cook’s vision of what he wanted to do for Michigan Law morphed from a men’s dormitory to a four-building quadrangle. Yes, we think, *that’s it!* Even as we anticipate the conclusion, an aura of suspense hangs over events as they play out. We eagerly follow the volleying between Ann Arbor and New York, between university officials and Cook, and, finally, between university officials and Cook’s lawyer.

The author’s enthusiasm for her subject is boundless. During the writing of this book, Ms. Leary gave several talks on Cook to alumni groups and others. Those of us who were privileged to hear her speak on these occasions have been treated to an experience akin to time travel. She transported us back to the Gilded Age and the early twentieth century, imagining for us the sights, sounds, and smells that surrounded Will Cook. She has become imbued with Cook’s life and times, and her book brims over with her discoveries.

All this would not surprise anyone who knows Ms. Leary and her dedicated work in building and maintaining the University of Michigan Law Library as a world-renowned resource, due in no small part to her contributions. She is as much a treasure of our institution as the library she directs and guides. I wish Will Cook could visit our library today; I know he would be proud.

In the end, Ms. Leary writes, her book is a story about the University of Michigan and luck. This is true in the sense that any historical event as protracted, uncertain, and pivotal as the making of Cook’s gifts to our Law School must include a heavy dose of good fortune. It was an equally serendipitous day when Margaret Leary came to the house that Cook built to head up our library. We are lucky beyond measure that she has done so for thirty-eight years, and that she has brought Cook’s story to life.

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 November 2010

