William Blackstone’s Enduring Legacy

By Ann Kitchel

The four-volume set sold on a subscription in quantities. Before 1771, 1,000 sets had crossed the ocean and copies were imported at a time in America when there were very few lawyers and virtually no law schools or law libraries. Blackstone’s fame spread across the ocean and copies were imported in quantities. Before 1771, 1,000 sets had been shipped to the colonies. This led to the printing of the first American edition in 1771-1772 by Robert Bell of Philadelphia. The four-volume set sold on a subscription basis at three pounds per set. Over 1,400 sets were ordered and the list of subscribers included many prominent figures in American history. Sixteen subscribers later signed the Declaration of Independence, six were members of the Constitutional Convention, and one became president of the United States.

The structure and form of the Commentaries served a framework for early legal education in the new country. At the College of William and Mary in 1790, George St. Tucker offered some of the first American lectures in the law. The Commentaries was the basis for his lectures. Finding some principles in the English version ill-suited to this country, Tucker published an “American Blackstone” in 1803 complete with annotations and notes about unique aspects of American law. Many editions of Blackstone’s Commentaries have been published. Creighton Law Library is proud to own over 40 English, Irish and American editions, including the rare first American edition and the first edition of Tucker’s “American Blackstone.” These editions are on display at the Law Library’s Venteicher Rare Book Room. In addition, a virtual exhibit of the Law Library’s Blackstone Collection is available at law.creighton.edu/library/rarebooks/blackstone.

An Opportunity of a Lifetime

By Patrick Borchers, J.D.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Creighton University

The first time I visited Omaha to interview for the position of dean of the Creighton University School of Law was in late October of 1997. It was an inauspicious beginning. An early snowstorm had hit when the leaves were still on the trees and power was knocked out in some areas for weeks.

From that low point, however, began a journey that has been satisfying both personally and professionally. Those of you who have moved families know how difficult emotionally that process can be. After nearly a decade in upstate New York, we had put down roots that were not directly extracted.

Moving to Omaha was the opportunity of a lifetime. No place my family and I have ever lived has been as welcoming as this city. It’s no wonder that some of the biggest advocates for Omaha and its surrounding regions are transplants like me.

But if moving to Omaha was the opportunity of a lifetime, taking over as dean of your school was the opportunity of a thousand lifetimes. Before coming here, I only faintly appreciated the potential presented by this school and this University. Together we have been able to accomplish a tremendous amount. And by “we” I don’t mean “I.” Everything good is accomplished together. The progress we’ve made has been possible only because of the faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the School of Law. So to you, the reader, allow me to say a big “thank you” for all the support you’ve given to your school.

Now just a few words on my new position as vice president for Academic Affairs at Creighton. It’s not often that one person gets two huge opportunities at the same institution, but that has been my great fortune. I hope to serve the law school as well as the broader University for many years to come.