



*Image Credit:  
Brad Angelini*



*Image Credit:  
Martin Schwartz*

# University of Michigan Law School

625 SOUTH STATE STREET

## ARCHITECTS:

York & Sawyer, 1924-33  
Hartman Cox, 2012

### *Grace Shackman*

The University of Michigan Law School looks like it belongs in medieval England, not the twenty-first century American Midwest. Using British universities Cambridge and Oxford as inspiration, New York architects Edward York and Philip Sawyer designed the four buildings that make up the quadrangle, between 1924 and 1933.

The project was dreamed up and funded by successful New York lawyer, William W. Cook, an 1882 graduate of the UM Law School. He worked closely with York and Sawyer, reviewing the details as each building was designed. Only the finest of fine materials, Weymouth granite, quarried in Massachusetts, trimmed with Indiana limestone, were used to create the look of medieval stonework.

The Law Club (1924) that faces South University was built as living quarters for law students. An archway that leads to the grassy interior court was decorated with gargoyles of past university presidents. It was followed in 1930 by the John P. Cook Residence Hall, named after William Cook's father.

The gem of the project was the 1931 Cook Legal Research Building, a library built in the shape of a cathedral, but with the entrance on the side. The cathedral motif continues inside with a high coffered ceiling, oak paneling, and cork floors. Rather than saints, the large stained-glass windows depict the coats of arms of other law schools.

The last of the group, the 1933 Hutchins Hall, is named after the then-president

of the university Henry Burns Hutchins, also a law school graduate. It replaced the original law building on the northwest corner of the original 40-acre campus, containing classrooms, seminar space, and offices. Its most interesting feature is tinted glass windows with scenes satirizing legal terminology. It was a fairly modest building as the 1930s Depression was making even Cook's financial assets less lucrative.

In the 1970s, when the Law School needed more library space, it hired Gunnar Birkerts to design an addition. When other plans were rejected, Birkerts realized that they didn't want an above-ground building and instead designed it underground, but with light wells that brought light from above. Officially named after former UM president Allen Smith and his wife Alene Smith, it is more commonly called the Underground Library. (The design process for this structure is described in the next essay.)

The most recent building in the Law School complex is across Monroe Steet from the original quadrangle. Designed in 2012 by Hartman Cox of Washington, D.C., it was first known as South Quad but renamed Jeffries Hall in 2018 to honor major donors, Lisa and Christopher Jeffries. Designed to emulate the forms and materials of the original Law School buildings, it is clearly newer than the others but is expected to fit in better as it ages. ■

*Grace Shackman is a writer and local advocate for architecture.*



*Image Credit:  
Martin Schwartz*

## **University of Michigan Law Library Addition**

801 MONROE STREET

**ARCHITECT:**

Gunnar Birkerts and Associates, 1981

*Anthony C Gholz Jr.*

### **The Design Process: 1974-1981**

Fifty years ago, as a recent graduate of Syracuse University, I started working with Gunnar Birkerts in Birmingham, Michigan. My initial assignment was as part of the design team for a new museum for the Corning Glass Company (New York), a project that took the better part of six years. Overlapping this project was the design for the underground library addition for the Law School, begun in 1974 and completed in 1981.

The Law Library Addition was unique in many ways: it was on a historical site and expanded the existing facility fifty feet below grade. It required maintaining a quasi-religious, collegiate gothic building—the original Law Library—from collapse during construction, and connecting the new library structurally with neighboring buildings, all with different foundation types. Because of the importance of the project and community fondness for the Law School building, the client—the University of Michigan—charged us to prepare several different designs, not multiple designs for the same site, but for multiple sites and their potential relationship to the main Law Quadrangle.

As part of the design team, one of my roles was to design a freestanding library across Monroe Street on the block sided by State and Monroe Streets and Oakland Ave. (where Jeffries Hall stands today). The four-story building design, matching the height of Hutchins Hall, was an opaque square with a quarter circle cut out for light. The square was crossed diagonally at 45 degrees by a path from State thru to the Law Quad and the main campus beyond. The design included elements from Le Corbusier, I.M. Pei, and Louis Kahn, leading architectural icons of the time. I also developed a second design which

used the block south of Monroe for book stacks, but then extended diagonally northwest over Monroe to the north end of the reading room. The upper floor of this building contained the people spaces, offices, and study carrels. At the north end of the reading room the building became earthbound and connected to the underground spaces being developed by Gunnar.

While I was working on these designs and their requisite cardboard models, Gunnar was developing both the underground concept that was eventually built, as well as a double story “halo” scheme of office spaces that would float three stories in the air and frame the existing Reading Room on three sides. Clad entirely in reflective glass, the “halo” eased out on the quad side at both the north and south ends of the Reading Room and continually reflected the gothic detail of the original building.

These designs were a year in development and critiqued by the client during multiple evening meetings in our basement “war room” in Birmingham. These meetings were attended by the dean of the law school, the law librarian, and most of the faculty. Try convincing 20-30 lawyers of anything after dinner. The log jam of architectural ideas and lawyer opinions was finally resolved when the Law School leadership determined that it wanted all the functions located on the quadrangle block. They also didn’t want any modern development that would block the view of the Reading Room from the ground level to the towers. Today, you’ll notice that even the guard rails around the library lightwells are glass to let that view take place. ■

*Anthony C. Gholz, Jr. is an architect and former senior associate with Gunnar Birkerts and Associates.*