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A Workman's Tools: The Law Library of Henry Adams Bullard

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A Workman's Tools: The Law Library of Henry Adams Bullard

by ROBERT FEIKEMA KARACHUK*

Lawyers and judges in antebellum Louisiana, like their counterparts throughout the western world before and since, relied on the printed word. Books were the specialized instruments of the legal profession. They contained the precious ores of knowledge and wisdom, which advocates and adjudicators mined and refined into ornamented arguments and opinions. The Supreme Court of Louisiana recognized the fundamental importance of books to the practice of law in 1840, when it decreed that prospective attorneys, to gain admission to the state's bar, must demonstrate mastery of a series of assigned texts. Intimacy with those works was indispensable to practitioners in mid-nineteenth-century Louisiana, not merely for certification but for success. Indeed, lawyering in all of antebellum America revolved around books. A jurist bereft of his tomes, like a farmer robbed of his hoe or a blacksmith deprived of his hammer, simply could not have pursued his calling. As Thomas Jefferson had observed decades earlier, "a lawyer without books would be like a workman without tools."¹

Henry Adams Bullard, a lawyer, a judge, and a law professor in antebellum Louisiana, played a key role in shaping the legal culture of the

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This article is dedicated to Denise Karachuk Feikema.

1. Erwin C. Surrency, *A History of American Law Publishing* (New York, London, and Rome: Oceana Publications, 1990), 1, 58, 211; Rule of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, *Rules of Court*, 25 November 1840, in 15 La. [iii-iv] (1840); Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Turpin, 5 February 1769, in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), 24.

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