



Kurt Schwerin

Kurt Schwerin was born April 17, 1902 in Beuthen, Upper Silesia - then Germany but now part of Poland. He attended Jewish primary and secondary schools and studied at the University of Breslau from 1930 until forced to cease attending by the Nazi government in 1934. He taught at a Jewish secondary school from 1934 to 1938, marrying Herta Bernstein in 1937. In 1938, Schwerin and his wife came to the United States on travelers' visas; he managed to stay in the U.S. permanently, though she was deported back to Germany, eventually dying in the Lublin concentration camp.

Schwerin enrolled at the New School for Social Research in New York, a school directed at European émigrés, earning a Master of Social Science in 1940. As his degree from this relatively unknown school did not provide much help in gaining long-term employment, he entered the Columbia University School of Library Service. In 1944, he earned his Bachelor of Science in Library Science, though he had already been working as an assistant librarian at Columbia since 1942. In 1946, Schwerin finished the residence requirements for a Ph.D. in history from Columbia, as well as becoming an American citizen in November of that same year. He would eventually receive his Ph.D. in 1955, after having written his dissertation on the historiography of the German Revolution of 1848.

In 1946, Schwerin took a position at the University of Virginia Law Library. While there, in 1948, he wrote *Classification for International Law*, a book very well respected among librarians and that established Schwerin as a leading figure among American law librarians. In 1948, he came to the Northwestern University Law Library to help develop the foreign law collection. Under his supervision, the foreign law collection would become one of the leading collections of its kind in the country. In 1950, Schwerin married Gertrude Dosenheimer, a fellow Jew who had fled Germany in 1937. In 1953, Schwerin was

promoted to the position of assistant librarian and in 1958 became an associate professor. Head librarian William Roalfe retired in 1964, leaving Schwerin as his successor. Though it was unusual that a head librarian be chosen from among Northwestern's own staff, Schwerin served successfully from 1964 to 1970. Also in that time, despite never having gone to law school, Schwerin served as a professor of law. In 1970, Schwerin retired as a professor, becoming a Professor Emeritus, and as a librarian - though he would return as an interim librarian from 1972 to 1973 after his successor, Igor Kavass, left the University.

Schwerin was very active outside of the University environment. He worked extensively on the issue of compensation for Holocaust survivors and others hurt by the Nazi regime, including writing *German Compensation for Victims of Nazi Persecution* in 1972. He received the Officer's Cross, Order of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany in 1965 for his efforts. Schwerin was a prolific writer, writing several books both concerning library matters and his own interests, as well as writing many articles and book reviews for scholarly periodicals. He co-authored, with James Rahl, *Northwestern University School of Law - A Short History, 1859-1959*. Schwerin was an active member of the Leo Baeck Institute, a society devoted to the study of the history of Germany Jewry. He also served in a leadership position in Self help of Chicago, an organization originally created in 1935 to assist recent European refugees but that later focused on assisting elderly European immigrants.

In 1993, Schwerin's wife, Gertrude, passed away. They had no children. He died December 21, 1995.