

Remembering

Louis Sohn, professor and eminent international law scholar

“Throughout his life he won wide respect as a voice of reason and source of wisdom, and was a firm believer in the importance of the United Nations and of the rule of law in settling international disputes.”

- Then-U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan

In June 2006, Georgia Law mourned the death of emeritus professor and renowned international law scholar Louis B. Sohn. He was 92 years old.

Widely considered a premier scholar in international law, Sohn joined Georgia Law in 1981 as the school's first holder of the Woodruff Chair in International Law, following a teaching career of more than 30 years at the Harvard Law School.

A former counselor to the U.S. Department of State and delegate to numerous international treaty and policy making conventions over the years, Sohn earned his high profile reputation for his roles in international policy analysis and interpretation.

Sohn helped draft parts of the United Nations charter in 1945 and was a legal officer to the U.N. Secretariat during its formative years in the 1950s. He was a participant in the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and, from 1974 to 1982, he was involved with a U.N.-sponsored conference that shaped the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Sohn wrote extensively on legal matters, including numerous books and articles on international organizations, disarmament and guns control, international tribunals, human rights, environment and the law of the sea.

Upon learning of Sohn's death, then-U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan issued the statement, “Throughout his life he won wide respect as a voice of reason and source of wis-



dom, and was a firm believer in the importance of the United Nations and of the rule of law in settling international disputes.”

In addition to teaching at Georgia Law, Sohn also donated a large portion of his personal library collection to the law school, including original drafts of the U.N. charter. In 1997, Georgia Law dedicated the holdings as the Louis B. Sohn Library on International Relations. Originally housed in Rusk Hall, the Sohn Library is now located on the balcony level of the Alexander Campbell King Law Library.

The collection reflects his involvement in the formation of the U.N., his work in

the law of the sea and his interests in global peace, international relations and human rights. As such, the grouping of nearly 5,300 titles serves as an outstanding resource for specialized research.

According to Betty Mayo Sohn, his wife of 65 years, Sohn truly cared about books and said himself that “he learned the most [about a particular subject] when he looked up a book on the library shelf and then took down the two books on either side of that one.”

Sohn was born on March 1, 1914, in Lwów, Poland, which is now the Ukrainian city of Lviv. He earned his science and law degrees from John Casimir University.

Sohn left Poland only two weeks before the Nazi invasion at the invitation of a Harvard law professor to work as a research assistant and study for his LL.M. degree. Sohn earned this degree in 1940 and a doctoral degree in law in 1961, also from Harvard University. In 1941, he married his wife, Betty, who is his only survivor.

While at Harvard, Sohn became an assistant to Manley O. Hudson, a judge on the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague, as well as the Bemis Professor of International Law at Harvard. Sohn stepped into the Bemis professorship in 1961 and held it until he retired in 1981.

Sohn served on the Georgia Law faculty for more than a decade before becoming a distinguished research professor at the George Washington University Law School.

- Kerri Wilson