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Book Review: The North Carolina Legal Deskbook

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The North Carolina Legal Deskbook

Reviewed by Timothy L. Coggins

The *North Carolina Legal Deskbook: The Common Sense Approach 1992-93*¹ may be useful to lay users of public, academic, and special libraries with less experience using legal materials, but the book is less useful for attorneys and law librarians. The book's primary focus, a "common sense index" to the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, has limited value to attorneys and law libraries. Five other sections of the book deal with "all aspects of traffic in North Carolina,"² criminal issues, civil issues, court personnel and fees, and directory information. A similar book, *Virginia Legal Deskbook: The Common Sense Approach*, has reportedly been very useful in public and general libraries, but less useful to attorneys and in law libraries.

The "common sense index" to the *General Statutes of North Carolina* is described by the author as the "only index that uses common sense terms to help you find the section you're looking for fast"³ and was produced to make it easy to find relevant sections quickly by using "normal terms" and by cutting down on "superfluous information."⁴ The author believes that the two-volume index to the *General Statutes of North Carolina* [hereinafter cited as *Michie Index*] is not the best source to use for locating relevant chapters and sections of the statutes. The *Michie Index* may be difficult for lay users who are unfamiliar with and do not use the statutes often, but attorneys and others in the legal profession use the *General Statutes* enough to be familiar with the index entries. The entries used in the *Michie Index* are "derived from the language of the General Statutes, from the phraseology commonly used in the courts of North Carolina or from terminology commonly used in the legal profession . . . phrases and terms commonly applied to *General Statutes* sections, such as frequently used nonlegal terms."⁵ Both indexes include "see" and "see also" references to help users locate appropriate chapters and sections. A comparison of some entries in the 183-page *Deskbook* index and the two-volume *Michie Index* reveals several interesting results.

The *Deskbook* index includes some terms that are not included as entries in the *Michie Index*, such as "abandoned property" and "degrees of kinship." The *Michie Index* has an entry for "acquired immunity deficiency syndrome," but the *Deskbook* index uses

neither that term nor "AIDS." Information about "child abuse" statutes in North Carolina is under "child abuse" in the *Michie Index*, but under "children and minors — abuse and neglect" in the *Deskbook* index. There is no entry in the *Deskbook* index for "felonies," although there is an entry in the *Michie Index* for this term. The *Deskbook* index lists each felony alphabetically by name. The *Deskbook* index has no entry for "holographic will," nor is there an entry for this term under "wills." The *Michie Index* provides these entries in both sections.

In many cases, the *Deskbook* index uses more specific terms, such as "in rem jurisdiction," while the *Michie Index* provides a see reference from "in rem jurisdiction" to "jurisdiction." In other cases, the *Michie Index* includes the more specific term, such as "school buses," while the *Deskbook* index entry is broader, "schools and education-transportation."

There are a number of similar terms used in the two indexes. Information about gun permits is found under the entry "weapons" in both indexes. The *Michie Index* provides see references from "guns" to "weapons" and "firearms." The *Deskbook* index has no entry under "guns." The terms "living will" and "natural death" are used in both indexes. Both indexes have entries for "lemon law," and both handle "intestate succession" the same. The *Michie Index*, however, provides more detailed subheadings under "intestate succession."

It is unlikely that a busy attorney would use both indexes to locate appropriate chapters and sections of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, or that a person familiar with the *General Statutes* would choose to use the *Deskbook* index rather than the *Michie Index*. The *Deskbook* index is simply not designed for persons who use the statutes regularly, but rather appears to be more valuable to the seldom user.

The other materials in the book, although compiled in easy to use charts and tables, are similar to the index: they are more valuable to the lay public than to attorneys and law librarians. Section II of the book includes a listing of traffic points, traffic offenses where court appearance is mandatory, waivable/prepayable traffic offenses, and a special six-page section on the Driving While Intoxicated penalties and restoration procedures. Section III includes information on waivable/prepayable criminal offenses (ABC, hunting and fishing, and boating and maritime), a chart of felony punishment, an alphabetical list of criminal offenses with references to the *General Stat-*

"Five other sections of the book deal with 'all aspects of traffic in North Carolina,' criminal issues, civil issues, court personnel and fees, and directory information."

utes of North Carolina chapters and sections. This portion of the book also includes a list of correctional centers with addresses and telephone numbers.

Section IV of the *Deskbook* includes four parts that were taken out of the statutes (Annuities, Child Support, Life Expectancy, and Workers' Compensation).⁶ The child support section includes a worksheet with basic child support obligations. The other two items in this section, a statutes of limitations table and procedural time limits chart, are valuable and are not published in this format in any other resources. The author compiled the limitations table and the time limits from research throughout the *General Statutes* and the rules volumes.⁷ Users must be cognizant that legislative and other changes might occur between various editions of the *Deskbook*. Searching in the supplements to the *General Statutes* is necessary to guarantee that the information in the *Deskbook* is accurate and up-to-date. [The similar title published for Virginia has been updated recently; therefore, users can assume that new editions of the *North Carolina Legal Deskbook* will appear as necessary.]

Section V ("Courts") and section VI ("Directories") include information that can be found in many directories commonly found in law, public, special and academic libraries. The list of court costs and fees is compiled from the *General Statutes*. The list of North Carolina courts with judges' names and addresses also includes clerks and court reporters. The list of N.C. Supreme Court and Court of Appeals judges with addresses and telephone numbers can be found in many resources, as can the names and addresses of contact persons at state government agencies. The author concludes with a list of law libraries in North Carolina, but the list does not include the Institute of Government Library at the University of North Carolina. This list would be more valuable if the author had included direct telephone numbers for reference and/or research departments, rather than general numbers. Also, in one instance the author lists the home telephone number of a reference librarian, rather than the number for the library. Careful preparation would have corrected these problems.

There are other choices for the directory information included in this book. The *North Carolina Legal Directory*⁸ costs approximately \$47.00, \$15.00 less than this title, and includes substantially more information, including a directory of law firms and attorneys in North Carolina. This directory does not, however, include a common sense index to the statutes, nor does it include sections about traffic, criminal and civil issues.

Should lawyers buy this book? Probably not. The book simply offers very little to lawyers and law library collections. The "common sense index" is not

significantly better than the *Michie Index* to justify the expense. There are concerns also about the currency and updating of the information. The directory information is available in other sources. Overall, the book is best suited for public and general library users. It provides some helpful information in chart and table format, and many lay users may find the "common sense index" to the *General Statutes* easier to use. ▲

Endnotes

1. James J. Benehan. *North Carolina Legal Deskbook: The Common Sense Approach 1992-93*. Raleigh, NC: N.C. Lawyers' Weekly, 1992 [hereinafter *Deskbook*]. (Developed by Common Sense Inc., a Virginia Corporation. 403 pages, \$53.30. 800-876-5297, .)
2. *Id.* at 185.
3. *Id.* at 1.
4. *Id.* at Author's Note.
5. "Foreword to the Index," 22 N.C. GEN. STAT. iii (1991).
6. *Deskbook*, *supra* note 1, at 245.
7. *Id.*
8. Published by Legal Directories Publishing Company, Inc., Dallas, Texas.

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In Memoriam

Dixie L. Atwater
Washington, DC (1948-1992)

Alan Berman
Durham (1949-1992)

William H. Bobbitt
Raleigh (Deceased 1992)

Fred Butner
Boone (1950-1992)

Julian E. Carnes, Jr.
Charlotte (1924-1992)

Harry E. Dyer
Matthews (1913-1992)

Luther Joseph Eubank, Jr.
New Bern (1932-1992)

Tom S. Garrison, Jr.
Weaverville (1921-1992)

Howard E. Hill
Raleigh (Deceased 1992)

Weldon A. Hollowell
Edenton (Deceased 1992)

Jerry L. Jarvis
Durham (1930-

Charles S. Mill
Aiken, SC (Dec

Douglas P. Mu
Charlotte (1958

Marshall L. Pe
Browns Summi

Clyde A. Shrev
Greensboro (De

James B. Swail
Wilmington (19

Richard M. To
Asheboro (1957

P. Peyton War
Charlotte (1934

William C. We
Siler City (Dec

Charles H. Yo
Raleigh (1947-