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# A Property Law Reader: Cases, Questions and Commentary, 4th Edition, Preface and Table of Contents

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CARSWELL

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**A PROPERTY LAW READER**

*CASES, QUESTIONS, & COMMENTARY*

**FOURTH EDITION**

Bruce Ziff

Jeremy de Beer

Douglas C. Harris

Margaret E. McCallum



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## PREFACE

Property law—that body of rules which describes and defines relationships between people with respect to things—involves many choices. The choices include determining when it is appropriate and desirable to label something as property or, more accurately, as subject to a relationship between people based in the rules of property law. The choices involve asking questions, including why it is that we create relationships based in property and who should benefit from them. The rules of property law are notoriously difficult and complex, and they frequently appear disjointed and unconnected, but they are not arbitrary. They are based on choices, sometimes made explicitly, other times implicitly, about what is important.

One of our principal goals in this collection of property law materials is to emphasize that the making of choices is a necessary, although commonly under-acknowledged, element in creating a regime of property law. We have made a choice to highlight what Margaret Davies has described as “asking the why question”. This involves using materials that prompt not only an investigation of the rules of property law but also the justifications for those rules.

Another choice we have made in compiling this material is to highlight the disparate sources of property law. Excerpts from the decisions of common law courts dominate the page count, and learning to derive the principles and the rules from these decisions is a core element in a common law legal education, but there is much else besides. We have chosen to emphasize Indigenous legal traditions as one of the sources of Canadian property law alongside the civil law tradition in Quebec and the common law tradition (including principles of equity) in the rest of the country. This presents challenges, not the least because the concept or category of property, as it has developed in western legal traditions, sits uneasily with many Indigenous legal traditions. But it is also a useful reminder that the rules governing human relationships with respect to things are not only jurisdictionally, but also culturally and historically specific.

The law of property is also to be found in a great diversity of legislative instruments, ranging from city by-laws, through provincial and federal statutes and regulations, to international agreements. These sources are scattered throughout the volume, but using them presents other challenges. Within the Canadian federation, property is primarily a matter of provincial jurisdiction, and the diversity of property regimes among the provinces limits our capacity to delve into the particular statutory framework of any one jurisdiction when producing a set of materials that is relevant across Canadian common law jurisdictions. As a result, we include examples from different jurisdictions and leave it to course instructors to add as much or as little of what is particular to their jurisdictions as they think desirable.

Although this volume includes a great deal more than excerpts from judicial decisions, it retains the “casebook” form. Casebooks are to a law course what a collection of primary documents is to a history course or a poetry anthology is to a course in literature. They are not intended as expositions of doctrine, but rather

to provide students the raw material from which to derive the law, learn the conventions of interpretation, and make normative judgments. As a result, the cases, statutory instruments, academic articles, and other material in this volume are intended to help students recognize the issues that property law addresses and to develop a basic understanding of the framework that structures property relationships. As a casebook, the *Reader* is designed to help students ask good questions as much as it is to provide answers.

It may be helpful to think about the *Reader* as containing the material to create a series of maps. Imagine the kind of information that enables one to navigate an urban setting. The topic headings in the casebook are like the names of neighbourhoods, the names of the cases and statutes like the names of streets, the statutory provisions the addresses. Lists of neighbourhoods, streets, or addresses would not be of much use in navigating a city, or at least not nearly so helpful as a map that revealed how the neighbourhoods and streets fit together, and perhaps some indication of the local topography. Learning property law requires maps at various scales to understand its scope and detail.

The processes of legal reasoning, argumentation, and decision-making may be understood as an exercise in winnowing. From the enormous complexity of human relations, the law of property attempts to isolate one subset of relationships: those between people with respect to things. This narrowing involves a great many choices about what is relevant and irrelevant, about what is appropriately within the law of property or beyond it. The judicial decision-making process on which the common law is built involves a further narrowing of focus in an effort to isolate “the issue”. Cases are often won or lost based on which characterization of “the issue” a court accepts.

We have compounded this process of narrowing in compiling the casebook. In most instances the materials are extracts from longer texts. Those texts, simplifications themselves of the human experience, usually consider a number of issues, but we have edited many of them to eliminate discussion of facts, legal principles, or authorities that are not necessary to understand the resolution of the property issues that matter for the purposes of this casebook. What one gains in focused analysis, one loses in context. We have used three dots to indicate where text has been omitted, square brackets to enclose added text.

Full texts of the material reproduced here are available in public or commercial databases or in courthouse and university libraries. In addition, law reports—compilations of cases—commonly provide a summary of the facts and the outcome (a headnote), a list of cases, statutes and academic authorities cited in the reasons for decision, the names of the lawyers representing the parties, and sometimes even a comment on the case. However, if you need to step back from a particular case or other source, to discover where it fits within the larger regime of property law, then textbooks are a useful reference.

Generally speaking, the *Reader* adopts the structure and tracks the contents of Bruce Ziff’s *Principles of Property Law* 6th ed. (Toronto: Carswell, 2014). That book, a property law textbook, is intended as an exposition of property law rather than a collection of teaching materials. This casebook may be used in conjunction with that textbook or as a stand-alone reader.

PREFACE v

Many people assisted with this project. We are grateful for the permission to reproduce previously published works. These are listed in the opening pages. We thank UBC Allard School of Law JD graduate Kaitlin Green who gathered syllabi from the instructors who have used earlier editions of the *Reader* and who created tables to help us learn what parts of the book were most useful to them. Andrew Pilliar, a law student in UBC's graduate program, helped with the editing process. Steve Hostetter provided superb production assistance at Carswell. Sarah Bourne and Erin Gwynne helped on the management side. We thank our property law colleagues from across Canada and beyond for generously sharing ideas about the teaching of property law. Finally, we thank our students for generously accommodating the fact that they landed in the classrooms of property enthusiasts and for providing the inspiration to find better ways to communicate that enthusiasm.

In this revised edition Jeremy de Beer assumed primary responsibility for chapters 3, 4, and 5, Douglas Harris for chapters 2, 9, and 12, Margaret McCallum for chapters 6, 7, and 10, and Bruce Ziff, for chapters 1, 8, and 11. Bruce also retained final editorial control over all the chapters.

The general cut-off date for the law is January 1, 2016.

Bruce Ziff  
Jeremy de Beer  
Douglas Harris  
Margaret McCallum  
May 25, 2016

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER 1: THE NATURE OF PROPERTY

1. Introduction .....	1
2. The “Properties” of Property .....	2
(a) the meanings of property.....	2
CB MacPherson, “The Meaning of Property”.....	2
(b) the right to exclude .....	6
TW Merrill, “Property and the Right to Exclude” .....	6
Questions.....	11
<i>Yanner v Eaton</i> .....	12
Note .....	19
Questions.....	19
<i>Harrison v Carswell</i> .....	19
Note .....	27
Questions and Comments .....	27
3. The Case for Private Property.....	29
C Lewis, “The Right to Private Property in a New Political Dispensation in South Africa” .....	29
Questions and Comments .....	36
4. Novel Claims.....	41
(a) judicial approaches to novel property claims .....	41
<i>International News Service v Associated Press</i> .....	41
Note .....	48
Questions and Comment.....	48
<i>Victoria Park Racing and Recreation Grounds Ltd v Taylor</i> .....	49
Note .....	53
Questions.....	53
<i>Moore v The Regents of the University of California</i> .....	54
Note .....	70
Questions.....	70
(b) restrictions on the recognition of new property interests .....	71
B Ziff, “The Irreversibility of Commodification” .....	71
Questions.....	73
Review Question.....	74

### CHAPTER 2: PROPERTY IN PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction .....	75
2. The Sources of Canadian Property Law.....	77
(a) Aboriginal legal traditions .....	77
J Borrows, <i>Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law</i> .....	77
R Overstall, “Encountering the Spirit in the Land: ‘Property’ in a Kinship-Based Legal Order” .....	80
Questions.....	95
(b) English common law .....	96
P Butt, <i>Land Law</i> , 6th ed.....	96

xii A PROPERTY LAW READER

B Ziff, “Warm Reception in a Cold Climate: English Property Law and the Suppression of the Canadian Legal Identity” .....	106
R Chambers, <i>An Introduction to Property Law in Australia</i> .....	110
Questions and Comments .....	114
3. Property, Class, and Poverty .....	115
J Waldron, “Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom” .....	116
Questions .....	119
RC Ellickson, “Controlling Chronic Misconduct in City Spaces: Of Panhandlers, Skid Rows, and Public-Space Zoning” .....	119
Questions .....	126
<i>Victoria (City) v Adams</i> .....	126
Questions and Comments .....	134
4. Protections for Property .....	137
(a) introduction .....	137
B Ziff, “ ‘Taking’ Liberties: Protections for Private Property in Canada” .....	137
(b) constitutional protections for property .....	140
Questions .....	142
(c) constructive expropriation or regulatory takings .....	142
B Ziff, “ ‘Taking’ Liberties: Protections for Private Property in Canada” .....	143
<i>Pennsylvania Coal Co v Mahon</i> .....	145
<i>Lucas v South Carolina Coastal Council</i> .....	146
Note .....	149
<i>Mariner Real Estate Ltd v Nova Scotia (AG)</i> .....	149
Note .....	157
Questions and Comments .....	157
<i>Canadian Pacific Railway Co v Vancouver (City)</i> .....	157
DC Harris, “A Railway, a City, and the Public Regulation of Private Property: <i>CPR v City of Vancouver</i> ” .....	160
Questions .....	162
(d) expropriation provisions in free trade and international investment agreements .....	162
North American Free Trade Agreement Between the Government of Canada, the Government of Mexico and the Government of the United States .....	162
B Ziff, “ ‘Taking’ Liberties: Protections for Private Property in Canada” .....	163
<i>Metalclad Corp v United Mexican States</i> .....	166
UNCTAD, World Investment Report 2015: Reforming International Investment Governance .....	168
Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the People’s Republic of China for the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments .....	170
Questions and Comments .....	171

**CHAPTER 3: BOUNDARIES**

1. Introduction .....	173
-----------------------	-----



TABLE OF CONTENTS xiii

2. Land: Airspace and Subsurface Rights.....	174
<b>(a)</b> above the surface .....	174
<i>Didow v Alberta Power Ltd</i> .....	174
Note .....	180
Questions.....	180
Comment.....	180
<b>(b)</b> below the surface.....	181
<i>Edwards v Sims</i> .....	181
Questions.....	185
Comment.....	186
B Ziff, “The Great Onyx Cave Cases — A Micro-History” .....	188
Note .....	194
Questions.....	196
BJ Barton, <i>Canadian Law of Mining</i> .....	196
Note .....	199
3. Lateral Boundaries.....	201
<b>(a)</b> the right of support .....	201
<i>Blewman v Wilkinson</i> .....	202
Note .....	205
Questions and Comments .....	205
<b>(b)</b> land bounded by land .....	207
<i>Robertson v Wallace</i> .....	210
Questions.....	212
<b>(c)</b> water boundaries .....	213
<i>R v Nikal</i> .....	213
Note .....	219
Questions.....	219
Review Questions .....	222
4. Fixtures .....	222
<i>La Salle Recreations Ltd v Canadian Camdex Investments Ltd</i> .....	222
Questions.....	225
<i>Diamond Neon (Manufacturing) Ltd v Toronto-Dominion Realty Co</i> ....	227
Questions.....	230
5. The Transformation of Chattel Ownership.....	231
<i>Glencore International AG v Metro Trading International Inc</i> .....	231
<i>McKeown v Cavalier Yachts Pty Ltd</i> .....	237
Questions and Comments .....	242
<i>Gidney v Shank</i> .....	243
Questions and Comments .....	245
6. The Boundaries of Intangible Resources .....	246
<b>(a)</b> copyrights .....	246
<i>Theberge v Galerie d’Art du Petit Champlain inc</i> .....	246
Note .....	252
Questions.....	252
<b>(b)</b> patents .....	253
<i>Monsanto Canada Inc v Schmeiser</i> .....	253
Notes.....	261
Questions.....	261

(c) trade-marks .....	262
<i>Mattel, Inc v 3894207 Canada Inc</i> .....	262
Note .....	268
Questions and Comments .....	268
<i>Intel v Hamidi</i> .....	272
Note .....	280
Questions .....	280
Comment .....	281

**CHAPTER 4: THE CONCEPT OF POSSESSION**

1. Introduction .....	283
2. Some Basic Definitions .....	283
<i>Popov v Hayashi</i> .....	283
Note .....	291
Questions and Comments .....	291
3. Acquisition of Title by Possession: Squatters .....	295
<i>Keefe v Arillotta</i> .....	295
Note .....	302
Questions and Comments .....	302
<i>Teis v Ancaster (Town)</i> .....	304
Questions and Comments .....	312
4. The Relative Nature of Title: Finders .....	316
<i>Trachuk v Olinek</i> .....	316
Questions and Comments .....	325
<i>Charrier v Bell</i> .....	328
Questions and Comments .....	331
5. Transfer of Title Through Delivery: Gifts .....	332
JB Baron, “Gifts, Bargains, and Form” .....	332
<i>Nolan v Nolan &amp; Anor</i> .....	336
Note .....	344
<i>Re Bayoff Estate</i> .....	344
Questions and Comments .....	350

**CHAPTER 5: COMMON LAW ESTATES AND ABORIGINAL TITLE**

1. Introduction .....	353
K Gray & SF Gray, <i>Elements of Land Law</i> .....	354
Comment .....	358
2. The Estate in Fee Simple .....	359
RC Ellickson, “Property in Land” .....	359
Question .....	360
<i>Thomas v Murphy</i> .....	361
Questions and Comments .....	363
3. The Life Estate .....	365
(a) introduction .....	365
(b) creation .....	366
<i>Re Walker</i> .....	366
Questions .....	368
<i>Re Taylor</i> .....	368

<i>Christensen v Martini Estate</i> .....	375
Questions and Comments .....	378
(c) powers and obligations.....	380
Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of</i>	
<i>Land Law</i> .....	380
Questions.....	382
<i>Powers v Powers Estate</i> .....	382
Questions.....	388
(d) life estates arising by operation of law.....	389
W Renke, “Homestead Legislation in the Four Western Provinces”.....	389
4. Aboriginal Rights in Land .....	391
(a) introduction .....	391
(b) Aboriginal title.....	396
<i>Delgamuukw v British Columbia</i> .....	396
Note.....	415
<i>Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia</i> .....	415
J Borrows, “Aboriginal Title in <i>Tsilhqot’in v British Columbia</i> ” .....	434
Questions.....	436
<i>Haida Nation v British Columbia (Minister of Forests)</i> .....	440
(c) Aboriginal land rights on reserves .....	446
<i>Indian Act</i> .....	446
Questions and Comments .....	449
S Graben, “Lessons for Indigenous Property Reform: From	
Membership to Ownership On Nisga’a Lands” .....	449
Questions.....	459

## CHAPTER 6: THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF EQUITABLE INTERESTS

1. Introduction .....	461
2. The Origins of Equity.....	461
P Butt, <i>Land Law</i> , 6th ed.....	461
Questions and Comments .....	468
M Conway, “Equity’s Darling?” .....	470
3. Resulting Trusts.....	476
Question .....	477
<i>Pecore v Pecore</i> .....	478
Note.....	485
Questions and Comments .....	485
4. Constructive Trusts.....	487
<i>Kerr v Baranow; Vanasse v Seguin</i> .....	489
Note.....	509
Comment.....	509
<i>Soulos v Korkontzilas</i> .....	510
Note.....	516
<i>Bulun Bulun v R &amp; T Textiles Pty Ltd</i> .....	518
Questions.....	526

**CHAPTER 7: QUALIFIED TRANSFERS AND FUTURE INTERESTS**

1. Introduction .....	527
2. Basic Concepts.....	528
<i>Stuartburn (Municipality) v Kiansky</i> .....	528
Comments .....	530
<i>McKeen Estate v McKeen Estate</i> .....	531
Comments .....	535
<i>Caroline (Village) v Roper</i> .....	535
Questions and Comments .....	538
3. State Limitations on Private Power.....	539
(a) introduction .....	539
<i>Unger v Gossen</i> .....	540
Questions and Comments .....	543
(b) public policy as a ground for declaring stipulations to be invalid.....	543
<i>Re Leonard Foundation Trust</i> .....	544
Note .....	553
Questions and Comments .....	553
B Ziff, “Welcome the Newest Unworthy Heir” .....	555
(c) uncertainty .....	560
<i>HJ Hayes Co v Meade</i> .....	561
<i>Fennell v Fennell</i> .....	563
Questions and Comments .....	565
(d) restraints on alienation .....	566
<i>Trinity College School v Lyons</i> .....	567
Questions and Comments .....	571
4. The Legal Remainder Rules.....	572
Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of</i>	
<i>Land Law</i> .....	572
Questions and Comments .....	575
<i>Re Crow</i> .....	576
Questions and Comments .....	578
5. The Rule Against Perpetuities .....	579
LA McCrimmon, “Understanding the Rule Against Perpetuities:	
Adopting a Five-Step Approach to a Perpetuities Problem” .....	579
Comments and Questions .....	589
<i>Scurry-Rainbow Oil (Sask) Ltd v Taylor</i> .....	591
Note .....	597
Questions and Comments .....	598
<i>Perpetuities Act</i> .....	600
Questions.....	604

**CHAPTER 8: LEASES, LICENCES, AND BAILMENTS**

1. Introduction .....	605
2. The Nature of a Lease .....	605
<i>Fatac Ltd (in liquidation) v Commissioner of Inland Revenue</i> .....	606
Question and Comment .....	612
3. The Nature of the Landlord’s and Tenant’s Interests .....	615
<i>Merger Restaurants v DME Foods Ltd</i> .....	616

TABLE OF CONTENTS xvii

Note .....	619
Question and Comment .....	619
<i>Sundance Investment Corp v Richfield Properties Ltd</i> .....	620
Questions and Comments .....	626
4. Obligations of Landlords and Tenants .....	628
<i>Southwark LBC v Tanner</i> .....	628
Note .....	631
Comments .....	631
<i>Petra Investments Ltd v Jeffrey Rogers plc</i> .....	634
Comment .....	639
5. Termination and Remedies .....	639
<i>Highway Properties Ltd v Kelly, Douglas &amp; Co Ltd</i> .....	640
JW Lem, “Annotation: <i>Unisys Canada Inc v York Three Associates Inc</i> ” .....	646
Questions and Comments .....	647
6. The Proprietary Status of Licences .....	648
<i>Stiles v Tod Mountain Development Ltd</i> .....	651
Questions and Comments .....	658
7. Residential Tenancy Reform .....	659
8. Bailment .....	661
<i>Mercer v Craven Grain Storage Ltd</i> .....	662
Note .....	666
Questions and Comments .....	666
<i>Letourneau v Otto Mobiles Edmonton (1984) Ltd</i> .....	667
Questions and Comments .....	675
<i>Miller (Next Friend of) v Sinclair</i> .....	678
Question .....	680
<i>Punch v Savoy’s Jewellers Ltd</i> .....	680
Questions .....	689

**CHAPTER 9: SHARED OWNERSHIP**

1. Introduction .....	691
GS Alexander, “Governance Property” .....	692
2. Basic Concepts .....	694
Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of Land Law</i> .....	694
Question .....	695
3. Methods of Creation .....	696
Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of Land Law</i> .....	696
<i>Re Bancroft Estate</i> .....	697
Questions .....	700
4. Severance of Joint Tenancies .....	701
<i>Sorensen Estate v Sorensen</i> .....	701
Note .....	707
Questions and Comments .....	707
5. Resolving Concurrent Ownership Disputes .....	709
(a) rights and responsibilities of co-owners .....	709

Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of Land Law</i> .....	710
Question .....	714
(b) terminating co-ownership .....	714
JW Lem & BG Clark, “Annotation” .....	715
Question .....	718
6. Shared Ownership of Personalty .....	718
<i>Frosch v Dadd</i> .....	718
Questions and Comments .....	722
7. Co-Ownership Through Family Property Law .....	723
8. Ownership Within Condominium .....	726
DC Harris, “Condominium and the City: The Rise of Property in Vancouver” .....	727
<i>Metropolitan Toronto Condominium Corporation No 747 v Korolekh</i> .....	731
Questions and Comments .....	734
9. Alternative Conceptions of Shared Ownership .....	735
<i>Hofer v Hofer</i> .....	736
Note .....	740
JS Youngblood Henderson, “Mikmaw Tenure in Atlantic Canada” .....	740
<i>GNU General Public License</i> .....	743
Question .....	749

## CHAPTER 10: SERVITUDES OVER PROPERTY

1. Introduction .....	751
2. The Nature of Easements .....	752
Ontario Law Reform Commission, <i>Report on Basic Principles of Land Law</i> .....	752
Questions and Comments .....	753
3. Creation of Easements .....	755
<i>Nelson v 1153696 Alberta Ltd.</i> .....	760
Notes .....	768
Questions .....	769
4. Scope, Location, and Termination .....	769
<i>Laurie v Winch</i> .....	769
<i>Malden Farms Ltd v Nicholson</i> .....	774
Questions and Comments .....	777
5. Other Servitudes and Servitude-Type Rights .....	778
<i>R v Tener</i> .....	778
<i>Bank of Montreal v Dynex Petroleum Ltd</i> .....	779
Questions .....	782
6. Access to Public and Private Property .....	783
<i>Batty v Toronto (City)</i> .....	786
<i>Sky City Auckland Ltd v Wu</i> .....	791
Question .....	794
7. Covenants Running With Property .....	794
<i>Tulk v Moxhay</i> .....	794
B Ziff, “Restrictive Covenants: The Basic Ingredients” .....	796
<i>Berry v Indian Park Association</i> .....	804

Questions.....	812
B Ziff & K Jiang, “Scorched Earth: The Use of Restrictive Covenants to Stifle Competition” .....	812
8. Positive Covenants.....	818
<i>Amberwood Investments Ltd v Durham Condominium Corp No 123</i> .....	818
Note.....	834
Questions.....	834
9. Invalidity and Termination .....	837
B Ziff, “Restrictive Covenants: The Basic Ingredients” .....	837
10. Conservation and Heritage Servitudes .....	839
Questions.....	842

## CHAPTER 11: MORTGAGES AND OTHER SECURITY INTERESTS

1. Introduction .....	843
2. The Origins of the Mortgage.....	844
WS Holdsworth, <i>An Historical Introduction to the Land Law</i> .....	844
D Sugarman & R Warrington, “Land law, citizenship, and the invention of ‘Englishness’: The strange world of the equity of redemption” .....	845
3. The Contributions of Law and Equity .....	849
<i>Athabasca Realty Ltd v Lee</i> .....	849
Questions and Comments .....	854
<i>Dical Investments Ltd v Morrison</i> .....	856
Notes.....	859
4. Remedies and Related Matters.....	859
(a) introduction .....	859
(b) the personal covenant.....	859
<i>Reliant Capital Ltd v Silverdale Development Corp</i> .....	860
(c) taking possession or appointing a receiver .....	865
<i>Capsule Investments Ltd v Heck</i> .....	865
<i>Medforth v Blake</i> .....	865
(d) foreclosure (and redemption).....	866
Questions and Comments .....	867
(e) sale.....	868
<i>Manufacturers Life Insurance Co v Huang &amp; Danczkay Properties</i> .....	869
Questions and Comments .....	870
5. Other Security Interests: An Overview .....	871
B Ziff, <i>Principles of Property Law</i> .....	871
Comment and Question .....	873

## CHAPTER 12: PRIORITIES AND REGISTRATION

1. Introduction .....	875
2. Priorities at Common Law and in Equity.....	876
S Levmore, “Variety and Uniformity in the Treatment of the Good-Faith Purchaser” .....	876
Comments .....	878
<i>Northern Counties of England Fire Insurance v Whipp</i> .....	879
Questions and Comments .....	881

PA O'Connor, "Security of Property Rights and Land Title Registration Systems" .....	882
<i>Chippewas of Sarnia Band v Canada (AG)</i> .....	883
Note .....	893
J Reynolds, "Aboriginal Title: The Chippewas of Sarnia" .....	893
Questions .....	894
<i>Rice v Rice</i> .....	894
<b>3. The Advent of Registration</b> .....	896
TG Youdan, "The Length of a Title Search in Ontario" .....	896
Comment .....	898
<i>Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce v Rockway Holdings Ltd.</i> .....	899
Note .....	902
Question .....	902
<b>4. Title Registration</b> .....	902
<b>(a)</b> history of title registration in Canada .....	902
DC Harris, Book Review of <i>The Law of the Land: The Advent of the Torrens System in Canada</i> by Greg Taylor .....	902
<b>(b)</b> the curtain — indefeasible title .....	905
DC Harris, "Indefeasible Title in British Columbia: A Comment on the November 2005 Amendments to the <i>Land Title Act</i> " .....	905
<i>Lawrence v Wright</i> .....	906
Questions and Comments .....	913
<b>(c)</b> the mirror — title registration and prior unregistered interests .....	915
DC Harris & M Au, "Title Registration and the Abolition of Notice in British Columbia" .....	915
<i>Holt Renfrew &amp; Co v Henry Singer Ltd.</i> .....	917
Notes .....	926
<i>Alberta (Ministry of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife) v McCulloch.</i> .....	926
Questions and Comments .....	931
<b>(d)</b> the "in personam" exception .....	931
B Ziff, "Resulting Trusts and Torrens Title" .....	932
<b>(e)</b> the net — assurance funds in title registration .....	934
<b>(f)</b> title registration and Aboriginal title .....	936
N Bankes, S Mascher & J Watson Hamilton, "The Recognition of Aboriginal Title and Its Relationship with Settler State Land Titles Systems" .....	936
<b>(g)</b> other features of title registration .....	938
<b>5. Title Insurance</b> .....	942
B Ziff, "Title Insurance: The Big Print Giveth, But Does the Small Print Taketh Away?" .....	942
Review Question .....	950