AALL ARCHIVES EXHIBIT, 1988
SPECIAL INTEREST SECTIONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

As its membership grew substantially in the 1960s and 1970s, the American Association of Law Libraries faced a new challenge. With expansion, the organization found it increasingly difficult to address the widely-divergent interests of its general membership while remaining attentive and responsive to the needs of individual members. This problem was not entirely new. As early as 1954, the AALL’s Special Panel on New Horizons considered revamping the existing committee structure to induce more participation by individual members. The committee structure was then the only vehicle for subject interests in the Association, and it had been criticized as being rigid and often inaccessible to new members. Although the problem was acknowledged by the Special Panel, no formal steps were taken to change the subject and special interest structure of the organization until the mid-1970s.

At the 1973 Annual Meeting in Seattle, the AALL passed a resolution establishing the Task Force to Investigate the Special Interests of the Association. In its original report, the Task Force recommended dividing the Association into three large sub-groups, representing the interests of private, academic, and state and county law librarians. A majority of AALL members opposed this division and the idea was later abandoned. At the same time, however, the Task Force recommended the adoption of Special Interest Sections, so that members with common interests could formally pursue those interests within the Association.

Not all AALL members supported the creation of Special Interest Sections. Arguments against the SIS included: that the SISs would drain funds from the central organization and cause planning conflicts at Annual Meetings; that organizations larger than the AALL existed without such complicated internal structures; and that the proposed specialization would only hamper AALL’s effectiveness. Despite these criticisms, there was sufficient support for the Special Interest Sections, and the membership voted to amend AALL’s constitution in 1975 to provide for the creation of SISs. Bylaws governing the Special Interest Sections were adopted the following year. Today, AALL’s twelve Special Interest Sections represent a wide range of interests dealing with the nature of law library materials, technical processes, and the role of law librarianship in society.

Special Interest Sections can be created with relative ease. Any group of 25 voting members of the AALL may sign a written petition setting forth the objectives of a proposed SIS. After the petition has been approved by the AALL Executive Board the SIS can adopt its own governing Bylaws.

AALL members may join as many Special Interest Sections as they wish. Half of the Special Interest Sections’ financial support comes from SIS membership fees and half from the AALL. At the end of the year, each SIS submits an annual report to the Association’s Executive Board. An SIS may be dissolved when, in the opinion of SIS officers and the Executive Board, it no longer serves a useful purpose.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Item 1

In the Association’s early days, interest in many subject areas now associated with Special Interest Sections was channeled through the committee structure. At the 1906 Narragansett Pier meeting, the Association’s founding members established four committees to deal with issues then of great concern to law librarians. Two of the committees were liaisons to the American Bar Association and National Association of State Libraries meetings. The other two investigated the possibility of a supplement to Jones’ Index to Legal Periodical Literature and a program for interlibrary exchange of duplicates.

Item 2

Twenty years later, the number of committees had doubled, although most addressed the same types of issues as the original four. Because of the early Association’s small size and relative homogeneity of interests, committees addressed the special interests of the Association, while also focusing on specific issues and projects. By the 1960s, the need for more attention to special interests resulted in the creation of committees such as the Committee on Automation and Scientific Development, the Committee on Audio-Visuials, and the Committee on Cataloging and Classification.
Item 3  The 1973 Annual Meeting passed a resolution to establish a Task Force to investigate Special Interests. J. Myron Jacobstein chaired the Task Force, which included Carol M. Bratton, Anita K. Head, Roger F. Jacobs, Payton R. Neal, and Mary K. Sanders.

Item 4  AALL member J.S. Ellenberger expressed his support for Special Interest Sections in a letter to J. Myron Jacobstein, dated June 5, 1975.

Item 5  The March 4, 1976, Special Interest Sections Bylaw underwent several revisions and mark-ups.

AUTOMATION AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT SIS
(1976)

Item 6  Automation triggered new issues and concerns for law librarians. Founded in 1976, the Automation and Scientific Development SIS educates and informs the general AALL membership concerning technical advances in law librarianship and promotes standards for technological development.

In 1982, the Automation and Scientific Development SIS proposed this resolution concerning computer systems for small law libraries.

PRIVATE LAW LIBRARIES SIS
(1976)

Item 7  Private law librarians, traditionally one of the largest groups in the AALL, published their own newsletter prior to being formally organized as an SIS. An October, 1976 issue of the Newsletter of the Private Law Libraries Section of the AALL included a comprehensive survey of the use of LEXIS in private law libraries. Formally organized in 1976, the Private Law Libraries SIS exists to improve the quality and service of private law libraries by emphasizing their goals, needs, and special interests.

Special Interest Sections routinely sponsor educational programs and workshops at the annual meetings. At the 1985 Annual Meeting the Private Law Libraries SIS sponsored a program concerning business skills for law librarians.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS SIS
(1977)

Item 8  Organized in 1977 to induce AALL members to be more responsive to current social needs, the Contemporary Social Problems Special Interest Section has been particularly active. Its formal roots go back to 1971, when a group of AALL members founded the Conference of Concerned Law Librarians. Issues of social concern have long been of interest to librarians in general, and the focus of the AALL's Contemporary Social Problems SIS closely parallels that of the American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Roundtable founded in 1966.

In recent years, the Contemporary Social Problems SIS has been instrumental in promoting the AALL's adoption of resolutions on issues such as comparable worth, gay rights, and the nuclear freeze movement.

Item 9  In 1981, the Contemporary Social Problems SIS merged with the now defunct Law Library Service to Institutional Residents SIS. With that merger, the Contemporary Social Problems SIS took on the additional responsibility of ensuring that institutionalized persons would have access to law library materials. In 1986, after receiving grants from the AALL and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Contemporary Social Problems SIS distributed copies of the ACLU National Prison Project's Prisoners' Self-Help Litigation Manual to prison law libraries throughout the nation.

Item 10  Providing prisoners access to library materials has been a traditional concern of librarians. In 1930, the Institutional Libraries Committee of the American Library Association distributed this pamphlet on the prison library. It advocated the organization of a collection to meet prisoners' recreational, educational, and inspirational needs. (Document from the American Library Association Archives.)
GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS SIS  
(1977)

Item 11  Similar to the ALA's GODORT, the AALL's Government Documents Special Interest Section, one of the original SISs, disseminates information concerning government documents to AALL members. The SIS also sponsors resolutions concerning important issues such as access to government documents.

Item 12  Interest in government documents dates to the early days of the organization. In 1916, an AALL and National Association of State Libraries Joint Committee on National Legislative Information Service wrote to law librarians urging them to support an "Official Index to State Legislation".

STATE, COURT AND COUNTY LAW LIBRARIES SIS  
(1977)

Item 13  Organized in 1977, the State, Court and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section exists to improve the quality of services and to promote the mutual interests of libraries represented in its membership.

Item 14  In 1978, the State, Court and County Law Libraries SIS developed standards for Supreme Court Law Libraries and presented those standards to the general membership at its annual meeting.

Item 15  Former AALL Vice-President and State Librarian of Georgia, Maud B. Cobb, published an article in the 1917 issue of the Law Library Journal concerning the unique reference needs of state law libraries. In the same issue, AALL member Sumner York Wheeler discussed county law libraries. Both articles illustrate the historical concerns of county and state law librarians.

TECHNICAL SERVICES SIS (1978)  
AND  
ONLINE BIBLIOGRAPHIC SERVICES SIS (1980)

Item 16  Founded in 1978, the Technical Services Special Interest Section represents the interests of law catalogers and librarians involved in non-public service aspects of the profession. The Technical Services SIS promotes the communication of ideas, interests, and research concerning acquisitions, cataloging, and serials control. The "Petition for Formation of a Technical Services SIS" listed its aims and goals.

Item 17  Today, the Technical Services Law Librarian newsletter addresses issues of interest to the Technical Services SIS as well as the Online Bibliographic Services SIS. The Online Bibliographic Services SIS was formed in 1980 with the merger of the OCLC SIS and LAWBUG, the association of RLIN and BALLOTS users. The Special Interest Sections' former newsletter was known as The Law Cataloger.

Item 18  At the second meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries in 1907, members debated an item then of great interest to law librarians in general, and catalogers in particular—the proposal to classify legal materials according to subject content rather than author. In this 1908 letter to George Wire, Arthur Small described the proposed debate. This early interest in subject cataloging developed into what would become one of the central issues for law librarians, the formulation of the Subject K classification.

READERS' SERVICES SIS  
(1979)

Item 19  Founded in 1979, the Readers' Services SIS focuses on issues concerning reference and circulation services in law libraries.

Item 20  Providing efficient reference service to law library users has been a primary concern of law librarians throughout the Association's existence. The 1953 AALL Annual Meeting Program provides an excellent illustration of the kinds of educational sessions then offered to help members improve reference services.

Item 21  This photograph (circa 1907) shows AALL founding member Arthur Small. In this early draft of a speech for the 1915 AALL meeting in Berkeley, Small discussed the importance of reference work to law librarianship.
Item 22  Academic law librarians comprise another large AALL Special Interest Section. Organized in 1979, the Academic Law Libraries SIS provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on academic law libraries. In the past, the Academic Law Libraries SIS has addressed issues such as bibliographic instruction and faculty status for law librarians.

In 1986, the SIS sponsored a Mentor Project, in which seasoned AALL members met with new AALL members at the Annual Meeting to provide advice about law librarianship.

AUDIO-VISUAL AND MICROGRAPHICS SIS  
(1980)

Item 23  In 1980, a group of AALL members saw a need for a forum for discussion of audio-visual materials, and petitioned to establish the Audio-Visual and Micrographics Special Interest Section. This SIS acts as an information clearinghouse and attempts to promote the effective use of micrographic and audio-visual materials in law libraries.

Item 24  The AV/Micrographics SIS hoped to overcome some of the reluctance on the part of librarians to use microforms. This reluctance is not new, as illustrated by a 1939 letter from Layton B. Register, law librarian at the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Register foresaw a bleak future for micrographics use.

FOREIGN, COMPARATIVE, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW SIS  
(1985)

Item 25  The AALL membership's interest in international law is long-standing. A formal structure for this interest existed as early as 1947, when the Association created the Committee on Cooperation with Latin American Law Libraries. In 1950, the Committee changed its name to the Committee on Foreign Law, and, in 1966, it became the Foreign and International Law Committee. In 1985, it reorganized as the Foreign, Comparative and International Law SIS. Its goal is to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on foreign, comparative and international law.

LEGAL INFORMATION SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC SIS  
(1989)

Item 26  At its January meeting, the AALL Executive Board approved a proposal to create a Special Interest Section for Legal Information Service to the Public. This new SIS will convene for the first time during this year's Annual Meeting in Atlanta.

Like many other Special Interest Sections, the Legal Information Service to the Public SIS formerly operated as a committee. Among its activities, the committee sponsored a 1986 Annapolis, Maryland conference on publications for self-help law.

This exhibit was prepared by Kim Dulin under the direction of Maynard Brichford and William Maher at the University of Illinois Archives. The photographs and documents are from the AALL Archives administered by the University of Illinois Archives. The Archives welcomes additional AALL records and information concerning the papers of law librarians. Send materials and research inquiries to:

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