THE ANNUAL MEETING:
A BRIDGE TO AALL'S PAST AND FUTURE

Bridges connect two points that have something in common but otherwise lack a means of communication. Since its inception, the American Association of Law Libraries has sought to build bridges to link individual members, as well as to provide a channel for professional communication. Planning and constructing such bridges have been key elements in the continued success of AALL, but the bridges would not exist without the extensive personal contacts that culminate in the AALL annual meeting.

AALL derives its vitality from the formal and informal linkages made during the annual conference. Since the early twentieth century, the association has seen the meetings grow from a small gathering that lasted a single day to a major educational, organizational, and social event that extends nearly one week, but which continues the initial purpose of providing building blocks for the profession. The annual meeting provides a forum for revitalizing the association, launching AALL programs, and illustrating the importance of law librarians to the rest of the world.

Since its first meeting in 1906, at the annual conference of the American Library Association, AALL has met every year, except for 1943 and 1944, when World War II travel restrictions forced cancellation. Beginning at that first meeting, AALL provided a means to forge links among law librarians, lawyers, publishers, librarians, and students. The meeting's bridge-building role is still important today, as it enables members to gain new information and establish networks to allow for communication of professional information during the balance of the year. The meeting unites the association, supports professional development, fosters ties among its members, supports links to allied professions, and engenders a sense of the wholeness of law librarianship. In addition, it makes law librarians as a group more visible and identifiable to the rest of the world.

A BRIDGE TO OUR PAST

The goal of the first meeting's organizers was to form an association that would convene regularly to advance the profession of law librarianship. Since then, AALL has grown because it has attracted the interest and involvement of law librarians in the organization and the profession. The annual meeting has grown from the initial gathering of 24 to last year's attendance of 2,700, including 800 guests and exhibitors. Paralleling this growth has been a similar expansion in the complexity and number of program offerings and type of activities.

AALL's constant interest in its history is evident in the many occasions during which members have reflected on the organization's past. An early example of this was A. J. Small's speech at the 25th annual meeting in 1930, when he fondly recalled the first meetings of AALL and the dreams of its founders. A more recent example is "Overheard at the Bar," a discussion hosted by Frank Houdek highlighting the social aspects of the annual meeting. Presented in 1989, this discussion generated enough interest to prompt a second installment, "Return to the Bar," the following year (Item 1).

In the spirit of late nineteenth century progressivism, the goal of AALL's founders was to create an organization that would increase the prestige, importance, and skill of law librarians while also providing a countervailing force for the then common practice of appointing persons to posts in law libraries as political favors. Through its annual meeting, AALL was able to illustrate that law librarianship was a profession that superseded the interests of politics and the narrowness of local practices. The survival and growth of AALL would not have been possible without the dedication of its early members, such as A. J. Small, who was president at AALL's inception in 1906 and remained active until his death in 1937 (Item 2).
The growth of the annual meeting is evident in changes in the program brochures. The program of the second meeting in 1907 (Item 3), showed a modest schedule with only two sessions. Even though the schedule was brief, many of the events that are now fixtures of the annual meeting were already evident, including committee meetings and presentations of papers dealing with issues of the day and practical matters of librarianship. By 1976, the program itself took on an expanded and specialized appearance, but major functions remained much the same, including committee meetings followed by panels and papers, with timely sessions on bicentennial law publishing, influences of civil law, and information exchange (Item 4).

**PLANNING THE MEETING**

A major, though often overlooked, benefit of the annual meeting is the opportunity it provides to strengthen the organizational structure of AALL. As those involved in planning a meeting work to ensure its success, they have a chance to build relationships with those who share common interests and goals. Through these ties, the association stimulates the growth of professional identity, as well as the identification of AALL with the concerns of law librarians.

Location is a central factor in the success of a meeting. AALL has met in a wide variety of cities and resorts in the United States and Canada (See map). Until 1935, the location and date of the annual meeting were determined by the American Library Association, since the two associations held a joint conference. The small size of AALL, evident in a group photo from 1908 (Item 5), made assistance from a larger association necessary to support the meeting. While this arrangement made planning the meeting simpler, relations with ALA became a problem as AALL grew. A major point of contention in the 1930s, highlighted by Franklin O. Poole in a letter to Helen Newman, was the date of the ALA meeting, which was too close to the normal date of law school graduation to allow for attendance by a significant group of law librarians (Item 6).

Once AALL began to plan its own meetings, new problems arose. Now AALL organizers had to contend with many solicitations from hotels, cities, states, and visitors' bureaus. The AALL meeting was courted by those looking for a chance to gain local revenue, although such solicitations were not always successful. For instance, the association has never met in "Canada's Ocean Playground," despite the 1936 encouragements of the Halifax Tourist and Convention Bureau (Item 7).

Although AALL meetings no longer coincided with ALA's, the association's meetings did not become completely independent. They were still held jointly with other organizations, including the National Association of State Libraries and the American Bar Association. There were good reasons for this, including overlapping membership in NASL and a professional relationship to ABA, as illustrated in Margaret Cross Norton's 1935 correspondence with Helen Newman (Item 8).

In the first years after separation from the ALA meeting, site selection was relatively casual, as evident from Layton B. Register's 1941 letter to Helen Newman—a member simply suggested a site that sounded interesting (Item 9). If the leaders agreed, they would make brief inquiries about hotels and convention facilities, and plans would be made to hold the next convention at the suggested location. This was practical but unsystematic and resulted in neglect of certain areas of the country.

Today, convention planning is much more complex. Announcements of site selection, made only months in advance in the early years, are now made years in advance. (The site and date of the 1995 meeting have already been set.) Efforts have also been made to make site selection more systematic and to assure that meetings are spread throughout the nation, as can be seen in the 1975 memorandum from the Convention Planning Committee, which divided the nation into regions and proposed a sequence for moving from region to region (Item 10).

Transportation has been another important aspect of organizing the meetings. During the 1930s, trains were the favored method of travel. Many times, AALL negotiated for reduced rates for its members, but it sometimes ran into bureaucratic difficulties. A 1936 letter from Charles F. McNeil of Harvard, for instance, shows that Interstate Commerce Commission policies made reduced fares highly unlikely (Item 11).

The 1950 badge from Helen Newman, and a book of tickets from the 1990 convention, are examples of details needed in planning a meeting so that attendees can be identified and directed (Items 12 and 13).
Not only do the annual meetings give AALL a chance to convene, plan, and govern, but they also allow
groups within law librarianship to develop their own specialized fields. The annual conference provides a
forum for meetings of committees, special interest sections, and chapters. The importance of the AALL
conference to these groups is clear in the plea from Barbara Bintliff, president of the Southwestern Association
of Law Libraries in 1987: "If you will be attending AALL, please come to the breakfast. SWALL can only be
as strong as its membership--if you don't participate, who will?" (Item 14)

The conference also provides a venue for meetings of other organizations, such as the 1962 Mid-Pacific
Conference that met in Hawaii after the close of the annual meeting in San Francisco (Items 15 and 16).

THE BRIDGE TO KNOWLEDGE

Information transfer is a central purpose of the annual meeting. In AALL's history, many issues have
been discussed and debated, and many methods have been used for disseminating information. Issues can be
divided into two major types: the technical aspects of librarianship, such as book binding and cataloging; and
the relationship of law librarianship to broader national issues and social problems, such as war, the economy,
and the environment.

One of the early examples of interest in technical issues can be seen in the 1909 reprint on book making
(a topic frequently discussed at annual meetings) by A. J. Small, from the Index to Legal Periodicals and Law
Library Journal (Item 17). Another major issue central to law librarianship is automation, which made its debut
at the 1956 meeting with a panel discussion on "Implications of Automation for Lawyers" (Item 18).

Social and political issues also have become the center of attention at meetings in the past few decades.
For example, the transcript of the Proceedings of the 64th Annual Meeting (1971) describes heated discussions
and multiple motions on issues relating to the role of women and minorities, the Vietnam War, and the
propriety of AALL addressing these issues (Item 19).

Annual meetings are central to the process of professional communication because they offer a means to
deliver information in a public forum, and they permit follow-ups on presentations. Through published
proceedings and taped reproductions, members are able to refresh their memories about information they
heard, and allow those who were unable to attend to profit from the knowledge as well. To this day, the
proceedings of the meetings are reproduced in the Law Library Journal, just as they were in the beginning.
In 1980, technology provided another opportunity for members in the form of audio tapes (Item 20), which
provide ready and comprehensive recordings and quick availability, as well as sales revenue for AALL.

The annual meeting also allows members to learn about the organization itself. As AALL grew more
complex, many newcomers were unaware of the wealth of its activities and opportunities. To address these
concerns, Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL) was formed in 1970. It serves as an introduction
for new members, and educates them on the nature of AALL and the annual meeting (Item 21).

RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENCE

Awards and grants are important educational facets of the association and often are the high point of
meetings. They allow the work done by members in isolation to be praised before all those who benefit.
Awards are given to recognize achievements and contributions to the organization. Scholarships and grants
have been given to support educational pursuits, and to help finance attendance at the meeting. The first
grant to finance attendance was given in 1953 by the Matthew Bender Co. By 1976, ten companies, one AALL
chapter, and the Bureau of National Affairs provided grants to fifty people. Criteria for grants and scholarships
include proven potential, financial need, and relevance to the person's future career.

Awards serve as incentives to the educational development of the membership. They have been presented
for commendable papers and for lifetime achievement. The annual meeting allows AALL to visibly honor
members who have had a lasting impact on the profession, such as Julius J. Marke, who received the
Distinguished Service Award in 1986 (Item 22). Awards given to newer members to recognize the writing of
papers on subjects such as legal bibliography can be seen in Alan Holoch's presentation of the Andrews' Award
to Lynn Foster and Carol Boast in 1982 (Item 23).
ENTERTAINMENT AND SOCIAL ROLE OF THE MEETING

AALL meetings would be rather dull and certainly less educational if they consisted solely of panel sessions and speeches. It should not be surprising, then, that the most memorable aspects of the annual meeting are often the social functions and contacts that occur alongside the sessions and addresses. AALL has recognized the importance of these aspects and has used several means to facilitate them. The most prominent social gathering is the Annual Banquet, a favorite occasion for group photographs as in 1955 at Chicago’s Drake Hotel (Item 24).

The first banquet was held in 1935, and has been a regular feature of the annual meeting since. Reading the banquet menus, however, suggests the "creativity" of hoteliers as they transform modest fare into gourmet offerings, such as Philadelphia Snapper Soup with Sherry, and Vanilla Ice Cream Bombe, offered in 1956 (Item 25). Not only does the banquet serve as a social gathering point, but also as a means to increase the visibility and prestige of the organization. Selection of a prominent speaker helps promote AALL, as was recognized by Sidney Hill in 1942 when he argued for a "speaker big enough to arrange an outlet over the radio" (Item 26).

AALL has sponsored other social events, including movies, luncheons, concerts (Item 27), receptions (Item 28), and dances (Item 29), along with smaller gatherings in hotel suites and bars (Item 30). These forms of entertainment have all been popular, but professional standards and decorum have precluded consideration of some other suggestions of entertainment providers, including "tap dancers and nudists shows" mentioned in Robert Owens’ 1939 letter to Helen Newman (Item 31).

Also popular have been the many excursions made in connection with the convention. Trips have been offered to popular tourist sites as well as landmarks of law librarianship located near the convention city. Boat rides have been particularly popular. While these are intended as pleasurable outings, events do not always go as planned. The pictures of the 1961 excursion on the Charles River suggest a pleasant trip (Item 32), but the Boston boat trip ten years earlier was accompanied by cold weather and choppy waters, causing sea-sickness for several, including the Fred Rothman family (Item 33).

All of these leisurely activities have been important, but add to the meeting’s cost. To defray the expense, AALL has accepted donations and hospitality from vendors, providing another type of bridge-building (Item 34). Occasionally, doubt has been expressed about the propriety of these relations, but the consensus found in the documents is that vendor contributions do not exercise undue influence in favor of particular products. Vendor support has been important for the continued success of meetings as suggested by the fact that the 1987 meeting had sponsorship from twenty vendors, along with the twenty-eight contributors of scholarships and grants (Item 35).

WEIGHING COSTS AND BENEFITS

An annual meeting can be an expensive endeavor, both for the individual and the association, and many have asked: "Is it worth the money?" While the ultimate answer to this question can only be determined by the individual, there are aspects of the annual meeting that suggest its value, not only for formal transfer of knowledge, but also for more abstract informal benefits. In 1958, Hibernia Turbeville noted, "The most valuable benefit of attending a national convention is the contacts made, thereby changing signatures of letters and names read in the Law Library Journal into friends." In addition, annual meetings help provide a group identity for the association through sessions, meetings, and social contacts that help foster working relationships. In fact, AALL is very much defined by the annual meeting. Its work would be much more difficult, if not impossible, without the annual opportunity to obtain and disseminate professional, organizational, and personal information, and to make the association more visible to the rest of the world.

This exhibit was prepared by Jerome Waltner under the direction of William Maher at the University of Illinois Archives at Urbana-Champaign. 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. Potential future exhibit topics include AALL and World War II, and career of A. Mercer Daniel. If you have any material relating to these subjects, or would like to suggest future topics, please contact the Archives. Send materials and inquiries to:

AALL Archives, Room 19, Library, 1408 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL 61801 (217) 333-0798.