SITTING IN THE PRESIDENT'S CHAIR

The Honor and Challenge of the AALL Presidency

During the eighty-seven years from the inaugural term of A. J. Small (1906-08) to the current term of Mark E. Estes, seventy-five men and women have enjoyed the presidential honors and confronted the challenges voted to them by their colleagues in the AALL. Each president brings a unique perspective to the duties of the office, but each also shares the common goal of advancing and promoting the profession of law librarianship. Some have approached this goal with circumspection—A. J. Small warned against rapid radical change, and 50 years later, Dillard Gardner advocated "normal" growth. (Items 1-3) Others have proffered uncannily accurate predictions about issues that might influence the pursuit of that goal—in 1915, E. J. Lien foretold of escalating demands for legal information and five years later Frederick Hicks foresaw the importance of specialized training for law librarians. (Items 4-5) Yet despite differences in style and outlook, the comments of Arthur Beardsley (1940), Earl Borgeson (1969), and Kathleen Price (1983) reveal the deep concern that every president holds for the future of the AALL. (Items 6-10)

A commitment to the long-range goals of the AALL does not avert more immediate concerns. Hopes and plans for the future all too frequently collide with the more pressing obligations and concerns of the day. Frederick C. Hicks spoke powerfully to the 1921 AALL membership about his objectives for the future yet he strongly advised that "we must deal with the problems of the present." Almost a half century later, William B. Stern (1969-70) ruefully observed that "a president starts out the year with many ideas, is impatient, and finds that a year, as strenuous as it may be, leaves many tasks unfinished...." Perhaps Arthur Charpentier (1965-66) expressed the burdens of office best: "I wish all of you sat in my chair for a while. It's a revealing experience."

This exhibit, designed to highlight materials in the presidential papers of the AALL Archives, affords us the opportunity to sit—at least for a brief time—in the president's chair. By examining the evolution of the office, the processes involved in gaining the office, and the duties and obligations inherent in the office, one can gain a clearer understanding of the important challenges faced by those men and women who have held the presidency.

CONSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE AALL PRESIDENCY

The officers shall consist of a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and an executive committee, all of whom shall be elected by ballot at the annual meeting and serve until their successors are qualified.

AALL Constitution, 1906

At its genesis, these few parameters defining the AALL presidency reflected the general simplicity which characterized the entire organization, which was then only a small assemblage of two dozen law libraries. No term limits were placed upon the president and no official duties were set forth; the president was not even officially charged with advancing the organization's initial objective of increasing "the usefulness and efficiency of the several law libraries." In fact, the only constitutional obligation was to serve on the Executive Committee.

Early AALL presidents addressed several difficult problems associated with the profession: binding, cataloging, librarian training, and standards. More importantly, they gradually established a sound organizational foundation upon which their successors could build. In 1922, Gilson G. Glasier paid tribute to these early leaders: "I want to congrat[ute] the Association further on the splendid leadership it has had in the past. There is not a single administration but that has enriched the experience, the history and the record of the Association...."
As the AALL matured, its continued growth depended in part upon the implementation of constitutional revisions. The 1930s were an especially critical era in this respect. The organization had expanded its activities and its membership and a simple constitution no longer addressed its increasingly complex needs. In 1931, President Rosamond Parma called for the adoption of the Roalfe Plan for the expansion of the AALL, and two years later the Committee on an Expansion Plan advised that the president and Executive Committee should receive authorization to proceed "by sound administrative policy" with that Plan. Indeed, throughout the decade the Association's leadership devoted great efforts to its implementation.

It was also during this time that the presidency underwent an important modification. Since the tenure of A. J. Small, most AALL presidents had served two consecutive one-year terms. However, the escalating duties charged to the president discouraged already over-burdened law librarians from accepting a two-year commitment. In addition, a one-year term limit would allow more AALL members to participate in the governance of the Association. Thus, after the tenure of Rosamond Parma, consecutive terms were forbidden by Section 9 of the AALL Constitution—an action heartily approved by William Roalfe. On 9 August 1935, AALL Secretary, Helen Newman, advised Roalfe that the sentence prohibiting consecutive presidential terms had been omitted from a proposed amendment to Section 9. Roalfe quickly replied that not only should the term limitation be included but that he would accept responsibility for the decision. (Items 11-12)

In 1950, AALL further refined the rules governing the presidency. By this time, the vice-presidency, as outlined by the 1906 constitution, had become the office of president-elect, yet the constitution still called for an annual presidential election. This posed a constitutional dilemma: did a president-elect have to be elected president? In an effort to clarify the confusion, the Committee on the Revision of the Constitution and By-Laws ruled that the president-elect automatically assumed the presidency. (Item 13)

In 1962, Julius J. Marke observed that the "position of President of the AALL is a most trying one, beset as it is by many problems and vicissitudes." As the Association grew, presidential responsibilities became overwhelming. Despite the appointment of an Administrative Secretary in 1964, the demands of the executive office continued to increase. In early 1980, 15 past AALL presidents, ranging from Forrest Drummond (1952-53) to Al Coco (1977-78), submitted a proposal to the Executive Board calling for the creation of an Executive Director to manage the day-to-day operations of the Association. It was their hope that such a step might enable future presidents to devote greater consideration to "the larger concerns" of the AALL such as long-ranging planning and program development. (Item 14)

BECOMING PRESIDENT

*It may even happen that he [the President] has been elected for no better reason than that no one else was willing to accept the honor...*

E. A. Feazel, AALL President, 1908-10

The AALL constitution stipulates that the president-elect shall be chosen from a slate of no more than two candidates. While the slate is determined by the Nominating Committee and occasionally by a petition from the membership, many factors can influence the selection of candidates. Prominent individuals within the AALL often actively promote the nomination of certain individuals and lobby on their behalfs. (Item 15) Occasionally a nominee many even question the wisdom behind his nomination as did • George Johnston (1951-52) in February 1950: "I don't know why the Committee has chosen me..." (Items 16-17) Ultimately, a roster of candidates is set, and the secretary mails ballots to all qualified AALL members. (Item 18) The candidate with the greatest number of votes is declared the winner, with victory bringing the hearty congratulations of supporters as shown in this 1949 telegram received by Helen Newman. (Item 19)

Ideally, a term as president-elect is preparation for the rigors of the presidency because it provides experience in the operational intricacies of the AALL. This "Presidential Agenda" taken from the 1963 Headquarter's Handbook, illustrates some of the official tasks facing new presidents as they make the transition between administrations. (Item 20) Of course, a smooth transition involves many other tasks. This 1972 letter from Viola Bird to Mary Oliver shows that not only must the past president's files be transferred to the new president but the past president's name must be removed from the official AALL letterhead. (Items 21-22)
OFFICIAL OBLIGATIONS

The President shall appoint all members of committees and other organizations unless the association shall otherwise direct.

AALL Constitution, Article 4, Section 4

While not always specified in the Constitution or Bylaws, one of the most immediately pressing of all presidential obligations is the appointment of committee chairs and members. As early as 1921, Gilson G. Glasier recognized the importance of committees and of finding a chair "who will push the work." In a 9 July 1945 letter, Miles O. Price discussed appointments to a particularly sensitive committee: "I have therefore given a great deal of thought to the composition of the new committee [on the Revision of the Constitution], so as to make it representative...." In 1951, Jean Ashman clearly stated that the "President is responsible for the appointment of committee members, and the success of the year's activities depends in large measure on the wisdom of the selections." Ervin H. Pollack (1958-59) agreed saying: "committees are what's important." Thus every AALL president has faced the very difficult task of matching individuals to committees ranging from binding and membership to civil service positions and long-range planning. (Items 23-27)

The president has always been directed by the Constitution to serve on the Executive Board/Committee. Like the other committees, this body too plays a key role. Helen Hargrave (1957-58), in assessing her term of office, claimed that "few decisions and no individual accomplishments can be claimed as those of your President...all problems were submitted to the members of the Board who gave astute advice and suggestions." Indeed a glance at the Board Agenda for January 1983 reveals the extent of business conducted under its auspices. (Items 28-29)

OTHER OBLIGATIONS

Daily attention to the trees left little chance to tend to the health of the forest.

Past Presidents, AALL Newsletter, 1980 (See Item 14)

In arguing for the creation of an executive director, 15 past AALL presidents complained that the day to day operations of the association so monopolized their time and efforts that they could not adequately attend to the higher goals of the organization—promotion, development, and cultivation of professional law librarianship. What are some of the trees which have demanded so much of their attention? Since 1906, presidents have overseen the arrangements for the annual meetings or conventions. Although the executive officers receive valuable help, from such quarters as the Local Arrangements Committee or the Program Chair, they cannot escape involvement in the meeting preparations. Until the 1960s, presidents developed meeting programs, debated the price for registration, and even mediated disagreements over menu items, but most often their roles have centered on issuing personal invitations to solicit papers or speakers. (Items 30-33)

Of course, the executive officer also plays an important and multi-faceted leadership role in AALL. In the summer of 1934, John Vance inaugurated a membership drive in which he personally vowed to bring five new members into the organization and called on all members to follow his example by recruiting two. (Item 34) In 1932, S. D. Klapp, alarmed at the imminent demise of the privately published Law Library News, accepted personal financial responsibility for its continued publication until the AALL could decide whether or not to assume publication responsibilities. (Item 35) Finally, William Roalfe found himself in the somewhat awkward position of prodding a former president and charter AALL member—and quiescent committee chair—Franklin O. Poole, into greater activity. (Item 36)
The President also encourages and recognizes the work of the membership. In 1969, for example, Earl Borgeson acknowledged the outstanding services of Viola Bird in reviewing the Piacenza Fund. (Item 37) Similarly, Helen Hargrave (1957-58) dispatched a note to Adolf Sprudz, who was responsible for the AALL's public relations, praising him as "a thoughtful, wise, young man." Furthermore, as the executive officer of a very well-known organization, the president is frequently asked to attend public functions—some only tangentially related to AALL. In 1936, William Roalfe received an invitation to attend a dinner honoring Mrs. Roosevelt, an invitation which he unfortunately was forced to decline. Similarly it is sometimes necessary to dispatch others as official AALL representatives. (Items 38)

Finally, a great variety of unforeseen problems invariably arise to demand presidential attention and to test presidential patience. In 1964, for example, Louis Piacenza battled equipment shortages, and a decade later Jane Hammond contested the appointment of Daniel Boorstin as the Librarian of Congress. (Items 39-40)

Having briefly sat in the president's chair, it is apparent that the job is demanding and frustrating but also very rewarding. The work accomplished by the AALL presidents and, indeed, all its officers and committee members has, as was hoped in 1906, made law librarianship a valued profession and the AALL a key player in it.

Note: Space constraints and availability of documents have limited the number of AALL presidents represented in this retrospective. If you have or know of collections of AALL presidential files, please contact the AALL Archives to arrange for transfer of the files or inform us of the availability of finding aids to materials held at other archives.

This exhibit was prepared by Patricia Wenzel under the direction of William Maker 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. Send materials and inquiries to:

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COMING ATTRACTION: For 1994, the Archives is considering an exhibit examining the historical development of law library buildings. If your library has photographs, architectural planning documents, or other information about the relationship between space and library functions, we would appreciate receiving copies to use in preparation of the exhibit. Documents or inquiries can be sent to the above address.