60 Years of Service to the Profession

As the natural and, in fact, inevitable result of the development of law library work as a distinct field of service, law librarians are finding that mutually beneficial results can in some instances be obtained through the creation of local and regional organizations....” —Report of Committee on Expansion Plan, Law Library Journal, V.32 January, 1939

History of Early AALL Chapters

Although local and state groups of law libraries certainly were working together in the first quarter century of AALL’s existence, it was not until the 1930s when AALL Chapters began to emerge. The Law Library Association of Greater New York, one of the earliest chapters, was organized on November 17, 1938, for the purpose of promoting mutual acquaintance and helpfulness among the law librarians in the area (Item 1). Actually, in the mid-1930s, several AALL members were already pushing forwarding the idea of forming state or regional chapters of AALL. As Miss Lucile Elliott stated in her letter to Helen Newman, AALL Secretary in 1936, "I am wondering if it would be wise or possible for each state to develop separate units called State Law Library Association, which would be parts of the AALL. I believe we could get together in this state once or twice a year and have discussions that would increase the efficiency of each individual library and engender interest and enthusiasm for the national association...." Newman (Item 2) was deeply impressed by these ideas and showed her support by writing her suggestions as to their establishment (Item 3). In fact, in 1936 Newman had been an active organizer and founder of the Law Librarians Society of Washington, D.C (Item 4).

In response to members’ suggestions and the growing formation of groups, such as the Law Library Association of Greater New York, AALL began to set a priority on creating a mechanism for the affiliation of such existing groups with AALL, as well as establishing a definite procedure for the creation of new chapters from time to time. At AALL’s 1939 annual meeting in San Francisco, California, William Roalfe (Item 5), Chairman of Committee on the Expansion Plan, presented amendments to the Constitution and By-laws to implement his committee’s report regarding chapters. The new amendments were approved at the meeting (Item 6). Immediately following its approval, the Carolinas Association of Law Librarians voted to join with AALL under the new chapter plan (Item 7). Since then, AALL Chapters began to develop gradually and became mature and stable such that by 1980s there were over 25 chapters.
Almost all current AALL chapters were in existence by 1988 (Item 8). With the growth and maturity of chapters, there was an increasing need to have channels of communication among the AALL chapters and the desire to have a method to relay chapter concerns to the AALL leadership. To accomplish these goals, the Council of Chapter Presidents was initiated at an informal meeting organized by Alan Holoch (Item 9) at the 1980 conference in St. Louis (Item 10). This group's major effort was to improve chapter representation at the national level. The first official meeting of the Council, at which the name Council of Chapter Presidents was adopted, was 1981 at the AALL meeting in Washington, D.C. Frank Houdek, the moving force behind this meeting, was elected first Coordinator of the Council.

Two primary goals of the Council were identified: 1) to improve communication among chapters, thereby facilitating idea-sharing on problems common to all; and 2) to provide a mechanism for the expression of chapter concerns and opinions to the national leadership of AALL. Since neither of these aims required the status of an AALL committee for their achievement, the less formal "Council" approach was chosen to reduce bureaucratic requirements that might otherwise delay the activities of the group. The method of communication instituted was a quarterly newsletter titled Council News (Item 11), but for the first two years of its existence, there were only three issues per year.

The Council of Chapter Presidents began to cooperate with AALL on a number of issues (Item 12). With the continuing growth of law librarianship all across the country, this tie will no doubt be strengthened and enhanced, and the development of future chapters seems likely to lead to increasingly active groups of state and local law librarians.

The rich diversity of programs and educational offerings provided by the current AALL chapters can be seen in their publications, meeting programs, newsletters, and photographs (Items 13-26). These documents show the strength of the organizations and their effectiveness in realizing the promise envisaged in the Roalfe Expansion Plan over 60 years ago.

This exhibit was prepared by Chen Le under the direction of William Maher at the University of Illinois Archives. The photographs and documents are from the AALL Archives administered by the University of Illinois Archives and from George Washington University Archives, Northwestern University Archives, and Dayton Law Library Association. The Archives welcomes additional AALL records and information concerning AALL's development of, and relations to, chapters, both past and present. Send materials and inquiries to:

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