INDEXING LEGAL PERIODICALS: AALL’S CENTURY OF INNOVATION

Indexing legal periodicals was a concern from the very beginning of the AALL, and has continued to be a major program area for the AALL to the present day. This exhibit examines AALL’s efforts in this area within the changing context of law librarianship over the past century.

1. THE EARLY YEARS
The beginnings of the Index to Legal Periodicals

At AALL’s first meeting in July 1906, held at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, four committees were established: drafting a constitution for the new organization, legal bibliography, exchange of legal works, and, last but not least, indexing legal periodicals (Item 7). Law librarians' need for an index at the time was substantial. There were two principal precursors to the Index to Legal Periodicals but neither continued publication into the 20th century. Poole's Index, a general periodical index, included a small number of legal publications—too small a number to be a fully adequate tool for law librarians and other legal researchers. Jones Index to Legal Periodical Literature covered a broad array of legal materials, including law reviews, bar association publications, law related articles in non-legal journals, and even some foreign materials, but it had ceased publication in 1899.

Not only were the available indices inadequate for law librarians' needs, but the number of legal publications was steadily on the rise. Compilation of an index was thus understandably an early priority on AALL's agenda. In addition, such indexing fit within the broader aspects of AALL's foundation—a spirit of increased cooperation between law librarians nationwide, a growth of self-awareness among law librarians as professionals, and advocacy for the profession.

Initially, AALL sought to continue the indexing in Jones, both retrospectively, by indexing journals down to 1899, the last year covered in Jones, and continuously into the future. AALL never succeeded in achieving the former, and could not reach the scope of coverage of Jones's Index for some time. However, within two years of its founding, AALL had successfully established the Index to Legal Periodicals.

Publishing begins

The ILP's first issue appeared in 1908 when it was published together with the Law Library Journal, as it would continue to be until 1936. Trial and error characterized the first few years. The spirit of experimentation can be seen by the experience of scope notes and collective indexing. Gilson Glasier, who later became managing editor in 1909, described the use of extensive annotations in the first issue:

*[The scope notes] were explanatory notes, enclosed in brackets after the title, and were intended to give a clearer idea of the various phases of the subject covered by the article indexed. This made some of the entries quite long, some as many as 15 or 16 lines. Since they were repeated in two or more places in the subject index it could be seen that this would add considerably to the number of pages and printing costs, to say nothing of the added labor required in analyzing each article. Many of us thought there was opportunity here for substantial saving. I shudder to think what the bulk of the present index would be if that policy had been continued.*

Collaborative indexing was another experiment that AALL attempted but chose not to continue. For the second 1908 issue a number of interested AALL members met in the Minnesota State Law Library to work through the task of indexing together (Items 2 and 3). That this method was not without its problems was made clear by Glasier:

*Steinmetz [then acting as business manager for the Index] wrote me on the same
date, saying that the last galley of proof for the July number had been struck by
the linotype compositor; that the copy was so difficult and various that there
were multitudes of errors; not the fault of the compositor, but every editor
seemed to have used a different system of abbreviations.

Tensions ran high among the collaborators and morale and efficiency were not aided by the fact
that chief editor Fredrick W. Schenk had embarked on a four month cruise to Europe on the S.S. Sicilian
during pre-publication, having neither completed proof-reading for the impending issue nor made
arrangements for the following issue. After the storm and stress of the second issue, AALL settled on
employing a professional indexer.

As a routine developed and as decisions were made regarding basic matters such as staffing,
chain of command, and methods of indexing, tensions tended to diminish. By 1910, editor Gilson
Glasier could look back at substantial accomplishments.

Transferring publication to H.W. Wilson in 1912 also encouraged stability. From 1912 until
the 1930s, the *ILP* entered a relatively quiet period in its history. In 1921, the American Bar
Association expressed interest in AALL joining it as an affiliated organization. Among other
considerations, ABA was keen to take on the publication of the *ILP*. While AALL decided against this
affiliation, the proposal demonstrated the growing value of the *ILP* to the legal community.

In 1921, Eldon James, law librarian at Harvard, became editor of the *ILP*, a position he
continued to hold until 1942. Not only did his editorship usher in a long term relationship between the
*ILP* and Harvard, which provided both staffing and funding for some time to come, but the years in which
he served as editor were ones of much expansion for the *ILP*.

2. EXPANSION AND NEW AMBITIONS

The Roalfe Plan

The depression did not slow or stop AALL's growth; in fact, the early 1930s heralded the
appearance of the ambitious proposal of William R. Roalfe for expansion of AALL's activities and
programs. The Roalfe Plan covered a broad swath of AALL's activities, including the *ILP*.

In the coming years, AALL grew into the Roalfe Plan. Although some aspects, such as
establishment of a headquarters, took decades, the *ILP* saw immediate benefits. Roalfe envisaged the
separation of the *ILP* from the *Law Library Journal*, so that each publication could best grow and
flourish as a separate entity. This separation occurred in 1936, only two years after AALL voted to
implement Roalfe's proposals. Further steps forward towards the full implementation of
Roalfe's vision were made with the activities of the Policy Committee, an ad hoc committee composed
of former AALL presidents established to look at AALL's large-scale issues and goals.

The Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals

In a 1957 letter to a scholar of international law, William Stern wrote of the relationship between
the *ILP* and the *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals*:

The American Association of Law Libraries has had considerable experience in
publishing an Index to (Anglo-American) Legal Periodicals in a financially
self-supporting manner and it seems that the technical knowhow so acquired can
well be adapted to the publication of an Index to Legal Periodicals which are
published in other countries.

The *IFLP* was rooted in the AALL's past experience with the *ILP*, as Stern suggested. However,
in the early years when the *IFLP* was not yet a reality, one plan for the developing index that gained
some currency was that the *ILP* might be expanded to cover foreign materials, rather than, as eventually
occurred, that an entirely new publication commence.

The indexing of foreign legal periodicals was debated by AALL from time to time. The issue
was brought up at the first meeting in 1906, but of course the first issues of the *ILP* were not only purely
domestic, but they were substantially restricted in scope even among the U.S. journals. The question of foreign legal periodicals was again raised in the 1930s at the time of the Roalfe plan. However, concerted action did not commence until 1954 with the work of the Policy Committee. The activities of the Policy Committee led to the establishment of the Foreign Law Committee, which began in-depth investigation into the issues involved in such indexing.

In 1955, the question remained open as to whether the ILP would be expanded to include foreign materials, or whether a separate publication should be produced. The question of whether the new index should be part of the ILP or a distinct entity had implications for the very nature of the work itself, as Stern wrote in a 1957 report describing the challenges facing the developers of the IFLP:

In compiling a list of periodicals to be indexed, the first question is whether the index is to be an international index to legal periodicals which would be used by legal scholars and practitioners all over the world or an index to foreign legal periodicals which would form a supplement (and perhaps part substitute) to the Index to Legal Periodicals... and would primarily be used in the United States and only to a minor extent in foreign countries.

The Ford Foundation's preference for a new, separate publication may have tipped the scales in its favor (Item 13). The efforts of the Foreign Law Committee and its chair William B. Stern at last led to the award of a Ford Foundation grant. This funding allowed the IFLP to commence publication in 1960, and Ford Foundation support continued until 1971 (Items 15-17).

The task facing the Committee was vast. Stern described the complexity of the project in a 1958 progress report:

In as much as there are more than 1,000 legal periodicals in the world outside of the Anglo-American sphere, it is necessary to select the most important periodicals for the projected indexing. Periodicals were selected on the basis of the following policy principles: (a) the projected index should give an adequate picture of legal efforts in as many countries as possible; (b) national preferences for certain periodicals should be respected; (c) but objective standards concerning the international usefulness of certain periodicals should be applied.

In order to obtain such objectivity, Stern and others on the Foreign Law Committee consulted scholars and other potential users of the index both at home and overseas. Such interinstitutional cooperation was essential not only at the birth of the IFLP, but continued and continues to play an important role. Until 1984, the IFLP was published in cooperation with the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London; since then, publication has been based in the law library of Boalt Hall, the law school of the University of California at Berkeley (Items 18-19).

The IFLP was part of a general growth in international perspective in the AALL during the post-WWII period. A growing internationalism was seen in bibliographical efforts, such as the 1971 Union List of Basic Latin American Legal Materials and increased coverage of foreign bibliography in the Law Library Journal, as well as in the heightened interest in cataloging and classification as well as selection and acquisition of foreign materials.

3. CHALLENGES AND GROWTH

Changing Times

Growth of the ILP caused complications. AALL wanted to preserve the high quality of the ILP and also to be able to increase and improve its coverage and features. Understanding that such expansion of its activities was beyond the abilities of the AALL, and that new plans could be implemented better by a publishing firm, AALL sold the ILP to H.W. Wilson in 1961. Now Wilson, long the ILP’s publisher, took on full production of the index. AALL continued to guide the spirit of the ILP, acting in an advisory capacity on matters such as subject headings, and additions or subtractions...
from the list of journals to be indexed (Item 20).

The sale to Wilson solved the immediate problems facing the ILP, but in the 1970s growing discontent with the ILP and with Wilson became apparent. AALL leadership, members of AALL, and other users of the ILP felt that the ILP must continue to grow while Wilson balked at any further expansion. Carefully negotiating the issues at hand in order to maintain its indexing tradition and while proceeding in a new direction, AALL decided to cease its relationship with Wilson and to transfer its endorsement to a new product (Items 21-22).

Once the decision to separate from Wilson had been made, there was, of course, need to search for a new publisher. Thorough research of potential publishers was conducted and publishers' proposals were solicited and compared. In 1979, Information Access Corporation was chosen and publication began of the Current Law Index and the Legal Resources Index. The new products were published in three forms: traditional print (the CLI), Computer Output Microform, and an online database. New formats meant new research power. J. Myron Jacobstein, AALL president in 1977-78 and a leader in the switch to IAC, commented in a press account of the time "This is really a breakthrough in information retrieval... This is something law librarians have been dreaming about for years," noting that "until this new Legal Resources Index came along... law was the only discipline that did not have its periodical literature in machine searchable form." (Los Angeles Daily Journal, Sept. 2, 1980) (Item 23).

Work Continues

The IFLP and the CLI, the latter now produced by Gale Group, continue to this day to provide invaluable reference tools for the legal community; information abounds, but high quality access tools are always very scarce. Work continues by the Committee on Indexing Legal Periodicals and the Committee on Indexing Foreign Legal Periodicals to ensure that the CLI and the IFLP are high-quality, useable research tools for law librarians and the rest of the legal community. As throughout its history, AALL members devote considerable time and hard work to fundamental activities involved in refining these research tools, such as developing optimal subject headings and revising the roster of periodicals indexed (Items 24 and 25).


This exhibit was prepared by Anna Ezergailis 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-related records and information. Send materials and inquiries to:
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