Advancing the profession of law librarianship and promoting the usefulness of law libraries to society both require the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) to have an effective means to deliver its message to its audiences, including its members, the legal and library professions, and the public at large. Over the past fifty years, AALL has utilized a variety of public relations devices to promote itself, its members, law libraries, and the legal library profession. A major area of emphasis has been the organization’s annual meetings, where the AALL has developed exhibits highlighting law librarianship and itself, the personal and professional advantages of membership in the organization, and general societal benefits of law librarianship. This exhibit explores the public relations activities of the AALL historically as well as the organizational structure that has supported them.

From its earliest years, AALL was engaged in these efforts using various types of media, including newspaper and magazine columns and advertisements, member newsletters, and colorful brochures. Although the media have changed over time, the message has remained the same: the importance of professional management of legal information resources and the centrality of the AALL to this goal.

ORIGINS

For the first four decades after AALL’s 1906 founding, activities we now recognize as the public relations committee’s charge were the responsibility of AALL officers and committee chairs as they dealt with governance, annual meeting promotion, standards development, and publications especially the *Law Library Journal*. Perhaps no one realized the importance of organizational publicity more than longtime Secretary Helen Newman (1904-65) (see Item 1). In a September 27, 1937- letter to Mitchell Dawson of the American Bar Association responding to a public relations questionnaire, Newman articulated how her experience in AALL and other organizations demonstrated that magazines were one of the best publicity mediums. In June 1940, Arie Poldervaart of the AALL Committee on Local Law Library Service presented to Newman a report calling for an educational publicity campaign to develop public interest in improving local law library service through state bar associations and bar societies. It is not surprising that after Newman became AALL president in 1949, she wrote to Cyril McDermott (the new chair of the Committee on Public Relations and a former newspaper man), expressing her conviction that both a committee on publicity and efforts for publicity for the AALL and the law profession were needed (Item 2). Thus, the founding of the Public Relations Committee in 1949 can be traced directly to Newman’s efforts to institutionalize the functions that AALL would need to prosper, demonstrating yet again that Newman was at the center of what AALL has become in its second half-century.
PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Annual Meetings

The most persistent focus of AALL publicity for law librarianship has been the organization’s annual meeting. Although the archival record is regrettably thin on the earliest efforts, publicity through brochures and local promotion has survived from Newman’s period and beyond, such as the 1950 brochure for the annual convention in Seattle, Washington (Item 3). Other more recent items include colorful memorabilia such as the trivia card “Millennium Moments” (Item 4) and the “Gateways to Leadership” flyer (Item 5) for the 2000 conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Throughout, the Public Relations Committee’s emphases have been where the meeting is held, who will be on the program, the program’s theme, and features of the meeting site. The evolution from a single sheet, one- or two-fold flyer to today’s 100-page plus annual meeting program reflects the growing sophistication of the profession. The committee also has relied on legal newspapers and professional publications to announce its meetings.

The increasing collaborative nature of professional organizations can be seen in how the AALL has advanced its publicity work in the past quarter-century. At the annual meetings, both of AALL and other organizations’ exhibits and public displays have been an important publicity tool. In 1978 the Public Relations Committee presented an exhibit at the LAWYER’S EXPO during the Centennial Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in New York, focusing on an awareness of the AALL organization, membership, and activities (Item 6). In a September 1979 letter to Executive Director Millard H. Ruud of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS), Alice J. Murray of the Public Relations Committee indicated plans for one such exhibit at the Dallas AALS meeting in 1980 to “advertise” the advantages of membership in the AALL (Item 7). In her 1980 letter to fellow Public Relations Committee members, committee chair Diane Witkowski emphasized how the exhibits revealed a “market” of people needing to know what the AALL is and does (Item 8). The committee posted its first exhibit at the American Bar Association (ABA) conference in San Francisco in 1980.

Membership

AALL publicity has also targeted individual membership in the organization, at least as early as Helen Newman’s term as president. In a 1949 letter to Cyril McDermott (the new chair of the Committee on Public Relations), she asked him if he would be willing to create descriptive literature to attract members (Item 9). In 1950, a draft of the pamphlet “Guessing Doesn’t Pay. Especially for a Librarian” was prepared by the Public Relations Committee under Newman’s guidance. It touted the benefits of AALL membership through opportunities for mutual assistance with other librarians, discussing and formulating a “standards and operational program” integrating ABA and AALS and working with other librarians through round table discussions and joint committee work, and subscription to the professional quarterly Law Library Journal (Item 10). While this pamphlet stressed networking among librarians, a later brochure emphasized not only subscriptions to the Law Library Journal, Directory of Law Libraries, and AALL Newsletter, but also the annual meetings, member composition, and purpose of developing the usefulness of law libraries for the legal profession and creating cooperation among its members (Item 11).
**General Social/Public Benefit**

As important as membership is to AALL, so too is the promotion of the general social and public benefit of law librarianship. The brochure title “Law Librarianship: a profession with a future” accurately expressed these sentiments. This brochure (ca. 1962-63) promoted law librarianship by detailing the personal satisfaction, the tasks, and emphasized salary as “more than the general librarian.” It also listed the education necessary for the profession (Item 12). One notice from the Recruitment Committee in September, 1977 touted similar personal benefits, stating: “Law librarianship combines the satisfaction of a research career with the excitement inherent in working with the legal profession” (Item 13).

The Public Relations Committee has also posted notices in publications such as the *AALL Newsletter* stressing the societal benefit of law librarianship. For example, in this draft column written in April 1987 (apparently never published), Hazel Johnson pointed out that law librarians can educate the public by volunteering in public services such as National Library Week and library school career days. She recommended interaction with other libraries to provide opportunities for raising the consciousness of other professionals on legal libraries’ abilities and collections. She also emphasized that these activities could also serve as a recruiting function to attract new librarians to law librarianship (Item 14).

**Cooperative Public Relations:**

“As Law Librarians, we frequently find ourselves so caught up within our own professional organization that we forget the old adage of there being ‘strength in numbers.’ While the number of law librarians in an area is often very small, the number of all professional librarians may be quite large. Cooperative public relations efforts with other library related or law-related organizations can often provide the bodies and finances needed to mount a full-scale public relations campaign.”

Hazel L. Johnson, Committee on Public Relations, 1987

**Structural**

The Public Relations Committee has been traditionally in charge of AALL publicity, but its role and charge have not always been clear. In a January 5, 1970 letter to committee chair Alfred J. (Al) Coco (pictured in Item 15), AALL President William Stern spelled out the committee’s duties of providing public relations and his recommendation that publicity must be directed at specific audiences (Item 16). However, the committee’s role has not always been undisputed. In a 1971 letter to Morris L. Cohen at the University of Pennsylvania, incoming Publicity Committee chair Elizabeth H. Poe agreed with Coco’s proposal to eliminate the committee from the AALL committee structure, claiming, “the Committee has no real purpose” due to delays in releasing publicity and that many libraries offer their own publicity services (Item 17). The Public Relations Committee is still here today, but concerns about creating greater efficiency and effectiveness have continued.

Other efforts to restructure or retarget AALL publicity have taken place in recent years. For example, in 1984, the Public Relations Committee arranged to do systematic publicity for winners of AALL grants and scholarships for the first time. In 1985-86, the committee recommended providing each AALL chapter with information on public relations and surveying the chapters to determine their needs. The next year, the committee unsuccessfully recommended that a paid public relations professional be hired by the AALL to maintain a variety of public relations tools.
The Public Relations Advisory Committee first met in 1992 under the chair of Donald J. Dunn. The committee’s purpose was “to assist the Public Relations Coordinator in the development and implementation of a long range strategy and a continuing public relations program for the Association and its members and to advise the Public Relations Coordinator and the Executive Board concerning budget and personnel that will successfully accomplish the public relations strategy and program” (Item 18). More changes came in 1995 when the Executive Board eliminated the staff position of Public Relations Coordinator and changed the status of the Public Relations Advisory Committee to a standing committee (Item 19). When assessing publicity, efforts outside of the committee or coordinator should not be discounted, such as when the AALL Spectrum changed its publication format to color in 1997 (Item 20). In an era when multiple media compete for the attention of law librarians, the reformatting positioned AALL to reach its audience more effectively and better achieve the public relations goals of the organization.

“Law librarianship combines the satisfaction of a research career with the excitement surrounding the work of the legal profession. To the qualified person, it offers a challenging future in a rapidly expanding field.

This is a youthful profession, born of the growing accumulation of court decisions so important to Anglo-American lawyers, the rapid expansion of government regulation at all levels, and the creation of new legal problems through social change, have produced a need for specialization, both in the practice of law and in the knowledge and management of the materials which are the lawyers’ tools.” Law Librarianship: A Profession with a Future, ca. 1957.

This exhibit was prepared by Thomas Schmidt under the direction of William Maher at the University of Illinois Archives at Urbana-Champaign. The documents and photographs 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:

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

Special note: As the AALL and the Archives approach 2006, we ask that all current members from institutions which served as home to early, especially pre 1940, leaders of AALL search their own archives and records storage areas for any photographs or other AALL materials which may be of use in the centennial celebration.