AALL ARCHIVES 2005 EXHIBIT
State, Court, and County Law Libraries:
Founders’ Interests, Enduring Agenda

When the AALL was founded in 1906 it was closely allied with state librarians, but, as it grew, its members’ interests broadened. Now, state, court and county law librarians compose just over 10 percent of the membership, and AALL’s Special Interest Sections provide an opportunity for many other types of law librarians to address diverse concerns. Yet, the state, court, and county law librarians played a key role in accelerating the reorganization of the AALL and the very creation of the SIS as an organizational unit. SISs illustrate the diversity of the AALL and allow groups to flourish. This year’s AALL Archives exhibit (the 24th) attests to the vitality of the AALL for state, court and county law libraries.

State, Court and County Libraries of the United States and Canada

In 1973, at the 66th AALL Annual Meeting in Seattle, a group of state and court librarians decided that they needed their own group to address their issues (Item 1). As Raymond Taylor explained in 1994, “SCCLL was conceived as an opportunity for law librarians in government to exchange ideas and provide mutual support in aspects of law librarianship not shared by academic and law firm librarians. As pragmatists who had come to our positions by routes other than schools of library science, we necessarily had to practice survival in what essentially was a political arena, and our quests for funds and personnel were not bolstered by minimum standards and risks of loss of accreditation that had been the salvation of academic law libraries.”

The SCLL began with a discussion over breakfast by Taylor, Marcia Koslov and Margaret Setliff, and by the end the 1973 AALL General Business meeting, Taylor announced that those interested in state and court libraries should meet over lunch. Setliff’s minutes noted “that the meeting was open to all court librarians and was called for the purpose of establishing an informal organization, in cooperation with the AALL, to exchange ideas and information among libraries that serve courts. It was the group’s consensus that such an organization was needed.” (Item 2)

Twenty-three law librarians attended this first impromptu meeting (Item 3). The next day (July 4) Taylor, chairman of the new organization, wrote to the AALL Executive Board requesting that the board recognize the existence of the “State and Court Law Libraries of the United States and Canada.” The SCLL was born, but its relationship with the AALL was still to be defined.

1973-76: “Operating on the fringe”

In a September 28, 1973 letter to J. Myron Jacobstein, chairman of the AALL Task Force on Reorganization, Taylor said, “Perhaps it is appropriate to point out in connection with the work of the Task Force that I have found that many people feel that AALL long has neglected the mutual interests and needs of the increasingly important law libraries that serve state government and courts. My hope, therefore, is that this particular segment of law librarians ultimately will be given an important place within the organizational structure of AALL.” (Item 4)

Prior to the 1976 reorganization of AALL, becoming an “informal group” was one of SCLL’s few options. In an October 9, 1973 letter to Taylor, Elizabeth H. Poe, an SCLL member, stated concern over “interest groups operating on the fringe of AALL and collecting additional funds for expenses... I believe the group should be a part of AALL and not an independent one.” (Item 5) Being on the fringe complicated arrangements for SCLL’s first formal meeting at the 1974 AALL Annual Meeting. In a February 5, 1974 letter, AALL President Erwin C. Surrency explained that the SCLL would not be guaranteed hotel space for its events. “If your group wishes to correspond with the hotel and make their own arrangements, this will be perfectly agreeable with the Local Arrangements Committee. I do not feel that this already overworked Committee should undertake to arrange one more event.” (Item 6)

In spite of these problems SCLL managed to arrange for a Saturday meeting on June 22, 1974, the day before the AALL Annual Meeting began. Two of the main concerns for state and court librarians
that Taylor had spoken of were addressed during this first meeting: funding (covered in Margaret Setliff’s workshop “How to Obtain and Use LEAA Funds for Law Library Improvements,”) and creating ties with the political arena (addressed by a panel on “The National Center for State Courts and Its Law Library Interests and Activities”). Before the closing business meeting, there was a reception and dinner for the SCLL that was attended by AALL President Surrency and his wife.

To make SCLL a “permanent organizational unit” of the AALL, a resolution was submitted to the Executive Board at the 1974 Annual Meeting. However, the resolution was not passed because the AALL constitution lacked provisions to support such an affiliation. (Item 7) After the 1974 Annual Meeting, SCLL explored options for affiliating with AALL. An August 15, 1974 letter from William C. Younger, SCLL Board Member, to Margaret Setliff, SCLL Chairperson, outlined the options for the SCLL: committee status (which limited the size of the group and prohibited collecting dues); chapter status (which allowed dues to be collected and sessions at the annual meeting); or an affiliation with AALL. Affiliation carried all of the benefits of being a chapter except SCLL would not have tax-exempt status and would remain independent. On December 5, 1974, Setliff petitioned for affiliation with AALL, but the January 1975 Executive Board declined the petition, stating that only local and regional groups qualified for such status and instead referred the petition to the Task Force on Reorganization.

**Task Force on Reorganization**

“The most pernicious moment I have seen in my years of association with the AALL was when we almost split the organization in parts. Luckily, we were saved by the SIS concept.” From “Dyspeptic Ramblings of a Retired Past President” in the 1987 *Law Library Journal* by former AALL President Robert C. Berring who thought the leadership of the AALL was too unbalanced among types of libraries.

The resolution to form the Task Force on Reorganization of the AALL was adopted at the annual meeting in 1973, the year of SCLL’s formation. The Task Force’s 1974 Report suggested further investigation into “special interests” because “of the identified need for a more responsive vehicle to provide leadership, coordination and education within the context of the Firm, County-Court and Law School interest groups.” (Item 8) Its 1975 Report proposed a four way division of AALL by type of library: 1) private; 2) law schools; 3) government; and 4) bar association and county libraries. Although state and court libraries did not appear by name, the assumption was that they were government libraries. However, a note in the report states “We found the classification of law libraries more difficult than originally anticipated, especially categories 3 and 4.” (Item 9)

The 1975 Report recommended 3 divisions: Academic Law Libraries; Private Law Libraries; and County, Bar and Government Law Libraries. These divisions would be the primary structure for AALL, with additional special interest sections within the divisions. The division structure required that AALL members belong to only one division. While they may participate in other divisions, they would only have voting rights in their division. Yet, at the annual meeting in June 1975, the Executive Board adopted the SIS concept, not the division concept. In December 1976, the State, Court and County Law Library Special Interest Section became one of the first seven SISs.

Since the SCLL had been a free-standing organization it had to take action as well. When it came to a vote from the membership of the SCLL, approval of merging with AALL was overwhelming. 101 of 109 voted “yes,” (Item 10) but a few transitional issues remained before SCLL could become a SIS. (Item 11) Interest in the SCLL reached beyond the membership of the AALL. In reality though not all state and court librarians involved in the SCLL had been law librarians. SCCLL SIS membership would be limited to AALL members. As the August 1977 newsletter of the Council of California County Law Librarians, *For Your Information*, urged: “If you are not a member of the AALL, join! If you are, be sure to add your name to the rank of SCCLL!” (Item 12)

**AALL and the National Association of States Libraries**

That the SCLL should return to the AALL is fitting since the interests of state law libraries are in part why the AALL broke from the American Library Association in 1906. One of the AALL’s core founders, A.J. Small of the Iowa State Law Library, saw a need for a separate organization in part to aid law librarians in dealing with the growing amount of legal publications, which was an issue that involved
funding and political affiliation. From the beginning of AALL in 1906 until 1928, seven of twelve AALL presidents were from county or state law libraries. Over the next 30 years, the AALL worked closely with the National Association of State Libraries (NASL).

In 1907, the one-year-old AALL joined forces with NASL to create the Joint Committee on National Legislative Information Service. At the 1909 annual meeting a joint AALL-NASL session on “The Legislative Reference Movement;” was chaired by Connecticut State Librarian George S. Godard who was president of both AALL (1910-12) and NASL. The joint session included papers on “A National Legislative Reference Service” and “The Legislative Reference of the Future.” (Item 13)

By 1915, the AALL-NASL Joint Committee on National Legislative Information Service began to publish the Official Index of State Legislation, which was offered at no cost to state libraries and operated at a loss for two years. When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, the Index was forced to restrict its work. After the war, the work was carried on irregularly by various private and public organizations. Because AALL was unable to guarantee the funds to continue publication of the Official Index to State Legislation, in 1923, AALL and NASL urged their memberships to lobby Congress to fund the Library of Congress to publish an index of current laws. (Item 14) In 1927, an Act of Congress approved a plan for the Library of Congress to biennially publish indexes to legislation, which resulted in the State Law Index.

From 1941-42 until 1955-56, AALL’s Standing Committee on Cooperation with State Libraries kept the organizations in contact. As a joint project with NASL, this committee surveyed state libraries about their holdings of other states’ publications to aid states lacking complete sets of their own to obtain the missing items. The survey was completed in 1952, detailing the process for securing state publications required for law libraries throughout the country for the first time in one place.

Meanwhile, AALL and NASL continued to hold joint meetings or joint banquets at every annual meeting until 1936 when AALL stopped meeting in conjunction with ALA and instead that year held its annual meeting in conjunction with the American Bar Association. The AALL held joint sessions with the NASL again in 1937, 1942 and 1949. The groups tried to hold a joint conference in 1950, but NASL’s constitution dictated that its conferences be held in conjunction with the ALA annual meeting. (Item 15) Although their joint efforts were a success, NASL disbanded in 1958 after the creation of the American Association of State Libraries as a division of ALA.

The diminishing connection with the state libraries was reflected in the leadership of AALL. Twenty-four of the forty AALL presidents who served from 1934 to 1974 were academic law librarians, but there was not a single state librarian who served as AALL president during this time.

SCLL Accomplishments

The shift in AALL leadership over the years was not for lack of issues in the state, court and county law librarian community as reflected in the newsletter that the SCLL began publishing in March 1974. It not only addressed important state, court and county law library issues such as LEAA funding, but attempted to infuse a little humor. (Item 16)

Since its organization pre-dates other SISs, the SCLL had a head-start providing services to its membership. In addition to its newsletter, the SCLL also created "Standards for State Supreme Court Law Libraries" and conducted a survey of 52 State and Court Libraries throughout the U.S. (Item 17) From AALL’s beginning, standards have been created for many aspects of the law librarianship. In 1917, an article entitled “County Law Libraries and Their Services to the Community” appeared in Law Library Journal examining the role of county librarians and distinguished their services from those of other law libraries. It looked, for example, at collection development. “While private [law] libraries might be justified in purchasing volumes of a quasi-legal character, such volumes as are often found in other libraries, we public law librarians feel that taxpayers’ money should not be spent to duplicate books which one can readily secure in other public libraries in the same locality.” In 1938, something closer to the modern standards was published in the Law Library Journal under the title “Recommendations for a County Law Library of 30,000 Volumes.”
Under the auspices of the AALL, SCCLL was able to publish more standards and continually update them. The May 1985 issue of the SCCLL Newsletter included both “Appellate Court Library Standards” and “County Law Library Standards.” (Item 18) In 2004, SCCLL published “How to Hire a State, Court or County Law Librarian” as the first of their SCCLL Resource Guides, also available online. A second published guide followed: “The Value of a Public Law Library.” (Item 19) As Taylor had noted, state, court and county law libraries were not guaranteed funding on the basis of accreditation of their affiliated institution. These guides served to justify the expense of public law libraries.

In 1971, only a few years before the SCLL, judges and court administrators formed the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The SCLL had tried to form an alliance with the new organization, and in 1973 Raymond Taylor initially proposed his SCLL standards as a “study of standards for law research facilities” for publication by the NCSC. The NCSC showed interest in Taylor’s research and the SCLL but never formally allied with the group. (Item 20)

In 1992, under the direction of Paul Fu, an original SCLL member, the SCCLL SIS organized the National Conference on State Court Libraries. The 1993 SCCLL SIS Mid-Year Report described this conference: “This watershed event is the start, finally, of a true dialogue between librarians and court administrators, judges and our board of trustees. The role of standards within the profession, and putting ‘teeth’ into those standards, was the foremost consideration.” However, it took a 1998-99 AALL Task Force to develop official ties to NCSC, and in 2001, AALL appointed an official representative to NCSC.

In the area of continuing education, an AALL Winter Institute dedicated to SCCLL issues was held in Williamsburg, VA. The 1991 institute looked at funding issues and how to serve a broad clientele. “Serving the Needs of the Bench and Bar” was the first panel discussion of the meeting, moderated by future AALL President and SCCLL SIS member Carol D. Billings. (Item 21) According to the brochure for the Institute, how public policy affects the Law Library of Congress and the Government Printing Office was to be “illuminated by faculty members who are prominent on the Washington scene.”

The SCCLL SIS’s 20th anniversary booklet detailed accomplishments of the section and its individual members. In “Where Are They Now?” Judy Meadows related some individual stories such as receiving funding by obtaining federal depository status and an incident when a staff left after a non-librarian was appointed to be state librarian. (Item 22,23,24) Since 1994, the SCCLL SIS has continued to advocate for higher standards and better funding. Today, the job descriptions for state, court and county law librarians, which help to standardize the profession, are listed with private and academic law librarian job descriptions on AALL’s website.

Just as the AALL was founded to serve the special needs of law librarians that the ALA had not addressed, the SCLL saw a need for even more specialized service within the AALL; since the need for standards, and thus funding for state, court and county librarians was not being met. Working with the AALL, however, the SCCLL-SIS was able to give a stronger voice to its concerns than it could as the SCLL. AALL Institutes, Annual Meetings, and the Law Library Journal provide national and influential forums for discussion of SCCLL SIS issues. While the AALL has expanded its constituency since the early days when it meet with the NASL, the organization has shown that there is room for all law libraries and that it is strong enough to address all of their concerns through structures akin to SCCLL.

This exhibit was prepared by Allison Feist 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:

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