Could A. J. Small (Item 1) have imagined all that he was starting when he called for a special meeting of law librarians at the ALA conference at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, on July 2, 1906? Answering that original call were 25 librarians, representing 24 institutions from the northeastern and midwestern U.S. along with Toronto and Montréal in Canada. With Small of Iowa State Law Library as President, the original officers were Andrew H. Mettee (Baltimore Bar) as Vice-President and Franklin O. Poole (New York City Bar) as Secretary-Treasurer. Together they began the American Association of Law Libraries.

These early officers focused carefully on their mission. A very short time after that initial meeting, the organization had its own letterhead, perhaps not so ornate as that of the Iowa State Library on which Small had contacted G. E. Wire (Item 2) to discuss the progress of the organization, but functional nonetheless. Soon, in 1908, the Index to Legal Periodicals and Law Library Journal appeared (Item 3). Though they eventually became separate publications in 1936, both are still published to this day, the Journal in its 98th volume and the Index in its 99th.

A few years later, AALL’s then-president George S. Godard (Connecticut State Library) commented on the usefulness of annual meetings:

National conventions are here to stay. They are necessary to the proper understanding and development of any line of work which extends throughout the length and breadth of our land and where the perfection of the entire work depends upon the efficiency and faithfulness of each individual official connected therewith. (5 LLJ, 1912-1913, p. 9)

The fledgling AALL began its meetings in more rustic locations, initially convening in concert with ALA’s annual meetings as seen in advertisements and programs from early meetings (Item 4). By the mid-1910s, however, the organization was beginning to meet in more urban locations, at prices sure to be the envy of every current convention-goer (Item 5). In the 1930s AALL began to meet separately from ALA, and in 1945 AALL permanently struck out on its own with independent annual meetings.

Originally the idea was to rotate the conference locations so they could be evenly distributed around the country and never too far from too many members for too long. However, over time the annual conferences became concentrated in certain major metropolitan areas, with the heaviest emphasis on the Northeast. This served many of its long-standing members, such as F. O. Poole, Helen Newman, and A. Mercer Daniel, all of whom hailed from the Northeast, but it may have led to the domination of members from that area of the country. Still, those from other parts of America, especially the Midwest, held their own, with E. J. Lein from Minnesota and Gilson G. Glasier of Wisconsin serving early presidential terms. Then, in 1930, Rosamond Parma of California became not only the first president from the West, but also the first female president of AALL.

AALL’s early days reflect the contemporaneous influence of the suffragist movement in England and the U.S. In responding to the question “What should be [law librarians’] training in business efficiency, knowledge of library science and of law?” Miss E. M. H. Fleming of Fort Wayne, Indiana, pronounced, “Everybody talks about feminism or efficiency today. No matter what subject may head the talk these two topics are reached somewhere on the course. The fact [is] that our profession eliminated male and female minds and substituted the human sort many years ago. . . .” As Fleming continued, “[C]ontrary to usual belief, I, at least, feel our profession should not be a stepping-stone to the law. The time is here when we must vaunt law librarianship as a permanent profession” (7 LLJ, 1914-1915, pp. 42-43). Her words suggest the progressivist influence prevalent at the time of AALL’s founding.
Soon enough AALL’s tenth anniversary arrived, and those present at its 1915 Annual Meeting heard then-president E. J. Lien of the Minnesota State Library observe,

Ten years is but a short time. It is, however, long enough to furnish a criterion of the usefulness of an organization. Is the American Association of Law Libraries worth while? Has it accomplished anything worth while? . . . Are we, as librarians, more efficient as a result of this organization and of its work? . . . I feel safe in saying that all the questions, as propounded, may truthfully be answered with an emphatic “Yes.” (8 LLJ, 1915-1916, p. 11)

Those involved were starting to realize what a massive undertaking they had accomplished, and such strong self-awareness has served AALL since its early days. Then-president Luther E. Hewitt continued the trend in speaking to the 12th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries in 1917:

It is appropriate at this time to pay a tribute to its earliest days when we started in fear and trembling. I remember the faithful and earnest work done by Messrs. Schenk, Glasier, Steinmetz, Poole and Small, and I could name others who, in the days of its formative period, helped to put the Index and Journal on the strong foundation they enjoy today. (10 LLJ, 1917-1918, p. 32)

By 1927 Law Library News (Item 6) began to appear, complimenting the more formal Law Library Journal. The Law Library Journal continued to serve as the document of record, however. In a 1928 piece with a rather grandiloquent title (“Is There an Excuse for the Association’s Existence or The Spirit of Yesterday Contrasted with the Spirit of Today”), A. J. Small himself weighed in:

Almost a generation has passed since its beginning; a few of the first members are yet living and active. The association is still going strong and never during its existence has there been a chronic state of uncertainty nor even a “flat tire.” (21 LLJ, 1928, p. 56)

It was substantially Small, of course, who had established such a strong foundation for the AALL, and on the occasion of AALL’s 25th anniversary in 1931 (Item 7), Small published his noteworthy “Reflections” (Item 8). “How well,” he wrote, “some of us recall that first meeting in which we sat together in the lobby and parlors of the Hotel Mathewson, with a single purpose in view – that of making librarianship a profession rather than simply holding a job and the betterment of the institutions which we represented” (24 LLJ, 1931, p. 12). As we read his words, we are reminded of his foresight in having convened that fateful first meeting.

Foresight indeed seems to be a common trait among law librarians. The comments of George S. Godard, Connecticut State Librarian, another past president and early pioneer, seem particularly prescient to today’s Internet-savvy law library denizens:

It should be possible, and I believe sometime will be, for anyone who really has a real need to consult any particular book, to be able to do so practically in his own home. (24 LLJ, 1931, p. 18)

On the horizon was also what became known as the Roalfe Plan, which further institutionalized the AALL. In her remembrance of Helen Newman, Bernita J. Davies recalled the origins of the Roalfe plan in a
September 11, 1930, letter from William Roalfe to then-president Rosamond Parma and Newman’s fierce defense of this plan (59 LLJ, 1966, pp. 155-56). The plan’s importance was not lost on external organizations, and in 1934 the Roalfe Plan was also approved by the American Association of Law Schools (28 LLJ, 1935, p. 3) (Item 9). Roalfe’s extensive papers today serve as an important cornerstone of the AALL Archives collection (Items 10 and 11).

Helen Newman (Item 12) is undoubtedly one of the most important links from AALL’s early days to the modern era, having been involved in AALL from 1931 to 1965. Her name first appeared in the Law Library Journal in 1931 on a list of Committee on Regional Cooperation members. A 1938 letter she received from founder Franklin O. Poole (Items 13 and 14) illustrates their warm working and personal relationship. By the 1940s much of the old guard was passing (Item 15), but Helen Newman continued to serve the AALL in substantial capacities till her death on July 21, 1965.

A. Mercer Daniel (Item 16), from Howard University, was another valuable long-time member. The first African-American in AALL, his name first appeared in Law Library Journal on a list of new members in 1933 (26 LLJ, p. 69). Daniel compiled extensive scrapbooks (exemplified by Item 17) of his AALL sojourns from 1933 to 1968, and these scrapbooks provide priceless documentation of the more informal side of AALL (including Helen Newman relaxing with a cigarette in a wicker chair outside the conference hotel in St. Paul). In a variety of ways, his images reflect how much times changed during his membership.

Over time the structure of AALL evolved to meet the new needs and expanding interests of the members. Committees had always been in existence, but by 1939 procedures for establishing chapters were developed, and the Carolina Law Library Association (later SEAALL) became the first chapter in 1940.

Because of the War, AALL did not hold annual meetings in 1943 and 1944 since the meetings were considered nonessential to the war effort. Doing their part on the home front, however, did not dampen law librarians’ dutiful spirit toward their professional organization, and contacts and responsibilities were maintained. The Law Library Journal continued to be published with its articles, reviews, lists, and other regular features, though of course the “Current Comments” sections were replete with news of members serving in uniform. The 1944 Law Library Journal also made note of two AALL members who were “appointed as consultants to the State Department at the suggestion of the Joint Committee on Books for Devastated Libraries [as part of] . . . the rebuilding of libraries in war areas” (37 LLJ, p. 114).

In the post-war era the work of the AALL continued in earnest. In 1954 the President’s Newsletter (Item 18) was established, and not long afterward it was time for AALL’s 50th anniversary celebration in 1956 (Item 19). At its half-century mark the organization had grown to 689 members, with 176 registering in advance to attend the annual conference.

 Contributing to AALL’s growth was certainly an awareness that the activities of AALL were not all work and no play. Indeed, a high point of the annual meeting was when “the play [became] the thing.” AALL regularly adapted the popular entertainment of the day to fit the foibles of law librarians (Item 20). However, the 1960s to the 1980s was also a period of serious development. AALL headquarters were formally established in Chicago in 1964, and the President’s Newsletter became the AALL Newsletter (Item 21) in 1969, a year which also saw the publication of the Recruitment Checklist (Item 22). Special Interest Sections (SISs) were established in the mid-1970s, beginning with Government Documents (GD-

As resources grew and the 75th anniversary approached, it became more and more evident that a formal arrangement was needed to house the historical records of AALL. Eventually, Roger Jacobs provided impetus for the founding of the AALL Archives (Item 23), and by 1980 a deposit agreement (Item 24) was signed with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Soon the stacks (Item 25) began to grow into the current archives of over 254 cubic feet. Along with papers, the AALL Archives contain other documentary records, such as tapes and microforms (Items 26, 27, and 28), as well as various artifacts that have represented AALL’s activities over the years (Items 29, 30, and 31).

The 1980s also saw the establishment of an Executive Director for AALL. Said then-president Connie E. Bolden, writing in the Winter 1980 WPLLN Newsletter [Vol. 2 (1)], “. . . is the singularly most important administrative action recommended to the membership of AALL since the establishment of headquarters in 1964. . . .” William H. Jepson thus became AALL’s first Executive Director in 1981, shortly after AALL’s 75th anniversary celebration (Item 32). Jepson served until just before the retirement of long-time Administrative Secretary Antoinette “Babe” Russo in the late 1980s. William Murphy (in an acting capacity), Judith Genesen, Roger Parent, and Susan Fox have served in the Executive Director role since then.

In 1996 the AALL Newsletter became Spectrum (Item 33). AALL now has 13 Special Interest Sections and 31 chapters, the most recent being San Diego Area Law Libraries (SANDALL), established July 14, 1998. Caucuses include the Asian-American Law Librarians Caucus, the Black Caucus of the American Association of Law Libraries, the Latino Caucus, the Native Peoples Law Caucus, the Gen X/Gen Y Caucus, and the Student Caucus along with the Document Delivery and Publishing Initiatives Caucuses. The AALL Directory and Handbook, 2005-06 (Item 34) now contains almost 5100 members. AALL certainly has much to celebrate!
Figure 1: A Century of Growth in AALL Membership*

*For the years represented, figures were compiled as follows: When actual numbers were found, those were used. When only ballpark figures were found, the next whole number was used (e.g., "over 2400" became 2401). Where conflicting figures were found, those numbers were averaged to provide an estimate for the given year. When no information was found, numbers for the previous and subsequent years were averaged and that estimate was used. A trend line was used when there were substantial amounts of missing data.

Figure 2: A Century of AALL Annual Meeting Attendance*

*For the years represented, figures were compiled as follows: When actual numbers were found, those were used. When only ballpark figures were found, the next whole number was used (e.g., "over 2400" became 2401). Where conflicting figures were found, those numbers were averaged to provide an estimate for the given year. When no information was found, numbers for the previous and subsequent years were averaged and that estimate was used. A trend line was used when there were substantial amounts of missing data.