

SLA at 100: Chapter 3 1910-1919 Early Achievements

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The formation of the Special Libraries Association was a landmark event in American librarianship. Establishing that there were in fact two separate branches of the profession (separate but connected by their common heritage), SLA took on its role with enthusiasm and no small level of promise. Understanding that SLA now had the responsibility to raise awareness, as it were, about specialized librarianship, the members of the new organization set forth to ensure that those who required practical information were able to acquire it through the expertise and commitment of SLA members. While medical librarians and law librarians had slightly earlier come together to do the same for their particular constituencies, they were, by definition, limited to their constituencies. What the founders of SLA had in mind was painting with a larger brush, to establish that there were common methodologies and practices that would benefit all who practiced specialized librarianship. These specialist librarians, while interested in supporting their employing organizations with the materials and information relating to their specific subject areas, were also aware that a wider reach would enable them all to benefit from the common techniques that were applied in the broader special libraries environment.

The effort began almost immediately, and the pages of the association's journal are replete with papers and commentary that were published with that purpose, to enable specialist librarians to have access to information about the best way to deliver services to their established clientele. No longer were librarians to attempt to be all things to all people. Such overarching and inclusive collecting and service delivery simply did not work with the people who required the services of the specialized library. Their brief was more specific, and the leaders of the special libraries movement were very aware that if they tried to do too much, they would be unable to provide the level of services that their users demanded.

Describing specialized librarianship from the perspective of nearly ninety years of its existence, Fred Lerner reflected the observation Melvil Dewey made when he was thinking about the role of the "new" reference librarian in 1903. Dewey had noted that the public sometimes desired information rather than books. Writing about the primary role of the specialist librarian, Lerner observed:

It is one thing to assemble a library; it is another to provide intellectual access to its contents. In public and academic libraries the patron is expected to perform much of the intellectual labor of locating precisely the material he needs. But the special library user is expected to spend the minimum amount of time on searching the literature. It is the job of the library, and of the librarian, to do the searching: special librarians

spend much of their time keeping up with new information services and new ways of using existing ones.

It was that “keeping up” that drove the new discipline, and which particularly characterized its early years. The first issue of *Special Libraries*, published in January, 1910, described what the journal expected to be. In addition to its coverage of the first meetings of the new association, that first issue began with a clear statement of its purpose:

Special Libraries is published by the Special Libraries Association as a means of furthering effective cooperation. It will serve as a medium of intercommunication and to a certain extent will be a clearing house of notes and news of special interest to the members of the association. It will publish a limited number of papers and short reference lists. It will devote special attention, however, to listing the more important current literature and especially those books, official reports, pamphlets, and periodical articles that are not included in the general book lists and periodical indexes. Conforming to the needs of libraries represented, these current lists will relate chiefly to public affairs, social problems, public utilities, technology, insurance, and finance. It is believed that such information will be very useful not only to special libraries but to a very large number of general and public libraries. ... It is expected that the members of the Association will communicate to the secretary for notice in *Special Libraries* news, items, and references to important publications. Short notes in relation to new methods of work will be particularly helpful. Send to the secretary also a copy of each reference list prepared, whether printed or in manuscript, and state how additional copies may be obtained by librarians desiring them. Put your ideas and work at the disposal of others and you will help build up a clearing house of ideas and information that will repay you seven fold. *A Directory of Special Libraries* will be published in our next issue....

Such lofty goals were realized immediately, for even in its first issue, papers representing the aspirations of four of the association’s first committees (Legislative and Municipal Reference Libraries, Public Utility Libraries, Technology Libraries, and Insurance Libraries) were included. Demonstrating that these particular subject fields and the libraries which supported them were prepared to take the lead in promoting the larger collaborative efforts that were the association’s fundamental purpose, John A. Lapp, George W. Lee, Joseph L. Wheeler, and D.N. Handy, respectively, put forward their ideas about what the association’s members could expect from their committees. For example, Lapp wrote that “The legislative and municipal reference are the most general libraries of the Special Libraries Association. Their purpose is to have close cooperation not only among themselves, but with all the libraries in the association in so far as those libraries touch matters which become in any way subjects of public interest or action.” And Lapp was not shy about listing the

committee's ambitions: the "interchange of references," the "preparation of bibliographies," the "interchange of want lists," the publication (in *Special Libraries*) of "selected lists and references," and the "promotion of plans for the development eventually of a central clearing house of information and material through the Library of Congress, the Special Libraries Association, or the American Library Association."

The aforementioned publication of a directory of special libraries—that desired (and very ambitious) undertaking—did not make it into the second issue, and would not come out until April, two months later. Nevertheless, the second issue continued to establish the goals of the new association and of its founders. In an unsigned article on "Business Libraries" (probably by John Cotton Dana, since it seems to represent the way he thought about these matters), the comment was made that, with respect to these libraries, "the development of the special office or business library is simply another step in the scientific organization of industry. As such it is now receiving the careful attention of many practical men interested solely in making their business organization more efficient." Other articles in that second issue included "Bibliography of Public Utility Valuations," by Robert H. Whitten; "Public Affairs, Notes and References," by John A. Lapp; "Insurance Notes and References," by D.N. Handy; "Technology Notes and References," by Joseph L. Wheeler (including "Selected References on Industrial Libraries" and "Trade School and Library in England"), and lists of articles and pamphlets from other sources. One of these articles was "Methods of filing and indexing," by G.W. Lee, in *Elect. Trac. Wkly.* It was noted that the article had been incorporated into Mr. Lee's pamphlet on "The library and the business man (engineering)," which had been issued by Stone & Webster in Boston in 1907.

That reference to a Boston effort was a precursor to an article in the following issue, "Special Library Union," which described how "librarians in charge of special libraries in Boston effected the organization of a Boston branch of the Special Libraries Association at a meeting held at the Boston Public Library, March 15." That Boston would be an early center of interest for the special libraries movement soon became apparent, with many activities taking place there in the association's early days. By 1917, Boston was the subject of what was perhaps the first book on specialized libraries, Ralph Lester Power's *Boston's Special Libraries*. Published by Prentice-Hall and including much that was also published in *The Library Journal*, this 138-page work by the twenty-three year old Power included as well an eight-page "bibliography or reading list of library economy for business librarians."

The *Special Libraries* directory of special libraries was published in the April, 1910, issue of the journal. It was prepared by Anna Sears, Librarian at the Merchants' Association of New York and Herbert Olin Brigham, State Librarian of Rhode Island, and was introduced to readers by the editor of *Special Libraries*:

This list includes about one hundred special libraries devoted to twenty-three general fields. Some of these fields may be further subdivided, so that it is probable that this list includes many more lines of activity or of research than appears. It is hoped that this list will be

supplemented by members of the association, to the end that an accurate directory of special phases of library development may be made.

Special Libraries will publish each month a description of the work and methods of representative libraries in each group. It will be the design of these articles to explain the objects, material and user of the library and the methods of collection, classification and preservation of material....

This first directory was in two parts, "an alphabetical list of libraries and a subject list containing information relating to the scope of each individual library." The subjects listed (together with the number of libraries associated with those subjects) were:

Accounting (1)	Geography and Travel (1)
Agriculture (3)	Geology (1)
Art (4)	Horticulture (2)
Banking and Finance (2)	Insurance (5)
Bibliography (3)	Legislative Reference (20)
Botany (3)	Municipal (10)
Chemistry (1)	Natural History and Science (6)
Commerce and Labor (4)	Public Utilities (7)
Editorial (1)	Social Problems (6)
Education (1)	Taxation (2)
Engineering (5)	Technology (8)
Furniture and Decoration (1)	

By summer, SLA was ready to have its second annual conference, scheduled to be held in connection with the meeting of the American Library Association in July. This "annual meeting" (as it was called) with Dana presiding, was held in the Casino of the Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island, Michigan. There were some 100-150 people present, "many of them members of the association" with, apparently, many visitors spilling over from the ALA meeting as well (we have to assume that many of SLA's members held dual memberships in both organizations, since they were meeting together).

Specialized librarianship, advocating as it does the utilization of management concepts practiced in the larger management community, and connected from its very beginnings to the management of information for business and industry, chose early on to apply some of those concepts to its own operational management. So it is not surprising that shortly after SLA began, Dana and others were drawn to measuring their success, seeking to establish how well their new venture was doing. In the lead article in the January, 1911, issue of *Special Libraries*, Dana proudly described the organization's success to date:

...It has been the announced purpose of the association from the beginning to promote cooperation among libraries doing special work.
... During the first year the chief aim has been to put special libraries in

touch with each other by the description of the form, methods, work and facilities of typical libraries. In looking back over the year's work this seems to be the best claim which the association has for credit—that an unknown field of library and semi-library work has been discovered and, to a certain extent, surveyed and platted.

The future looks even brighter than the record of the first year and a half. Special libraries are just coming into a vigorous life. Their value is established. They are a business asset to any private or public organization. They are not established and maintained as a matter of sentiment, but as a cold proposition of dollars and cents. They must be useful in every-day practical problems. They have become indispensable to the progressive business houses, administrative offices, legislatures and city councils, which have already established them. Their spread is rapid, although as yet there is but a small portion of their possibilities, both extensively and intensively, developed.

The crystallization of our knowledge of the movement through the Special Libraries Association is doing much to further the rapid growth of these libraries.

That "crystallization of knowledge" still had some barriers to overcome, not the least of which was the continuing acrimony between specialist librarians and the leadership of the American Library Association. By January, 1911, matters had come to a head. The ALA Council was meeting in Chicago, and a petition affiliating the Special Libraries Association with ALA was to be put forward to the council. On January 5, the night before the council meeting, SLA had had its second "section" meeting, in the rooms of the Chicago Historical Society, following up on the first "section" meeting held in Boston earlier. We can only imagine how lively the conversation at that meeting must have been, with the affiliation petition on the council's agenda for the next day.

At some time prior to January (probably following the conference at Mackinac Island), a special committee of the American Library Association had been appointed to report upon the affiliation of SLA with ALA, and in its report, the committee had recommended that affiliation be undertaken:

On general principles, the committee would, as a rule, prefer the formation of a section of the American Library Association, rather than of a separate organization, when it is a question of one or the other.

But in this particular instance the committee is inclined to think that the formation of the Special Libraries Association has been justified by results; that the separate organization has been able to accomplish more in its own behalf than it could have done as a section of the American Library Association.

Further, that its affiliation would tend to attract to the annual conference of the American Library Association a number of very

desirable members who otherwise might not attend these conferences at all. That such members, bringing with them, as they would, a point of view new to most members of the American Library Association, could hardly fail to impart fresh interest to the discussion of familiar topics, and to suggest fresh topics worthy of investigation.

On the other hand, since there is necessarily much common ground in the field occupied by the two associations, the younger of the two ought to profit largely by the experience of members of the senior organization.

The committee recommended the affiliation, stating that “the committee believes that the advantages enumerated more than offset the admitted drawback of increasing the complexity of future American Library Association programs, and of the rather vague scope of the Special Libraries Association, vagueness however, which will doubtless be remedied as time goes on.” The council did not act on the petition, choosing to defer action until its next meeting.

In the *Special Libraries* article describing the effort, it was noted that three courses “have been open” for SLA: “the formation of a section of A.L.A. [as the acronym was printed in those days], entire independence of that body, or affiliation.” Describing the situation, the article (which was unsigned but was probably written by either President Dana or *Special Libraries* Editor John A. Lapp) set forth some of the same types of arguments, based on some of the same ideas and concepts, that have characterized the continuing tension between ALA and SLA ever since:

As a section the members would be able to meet and harmlessly discuss mutual problems. The general sessions would be of some interest and there would be a valuable interchange of ideas. But the question arises: What can the A.L.A. do for the special libraries if they should become a section? What can they do, for example, for the legislative or municipal reference librarians? Such librarians have only this in common with the general librarians, that they deal with printed material. They are not merely librarians, though they have charge of a library. They are statisticians and legal assistants as well. Now it is obvious that the A.L.A. cannot provide any facilities or publications worthwhile to such libraries; nor can the needs of the other special libraries be met except by sacrificing the bulk of the proper clientele of the A.L.A. If some such means could be devised there would be no serious objection to becoming a section.

The second possibility, independence, is not advisable from the many points of view, chiefly because there is a large number of librarians on the borderland between the fields which are distinctly general and special. These can be benefited best by close cooperation of the two associations.

The third possibility, affiliation, is the one which has been decided upon by the Special Libraries Association and has been requested of the A.L.A.

The arguments previously expressed against the other two possibilities, argue strongly for affiliation. The advantages set forth in the report of the committee are evident and should weigh heavily for favorable action by the council.

There is a definite field for the Special Libraries Association, which from the very nature of the vast majority of libraries, the A.L.A. is prevented from filling. The Special Libraries Association is asking only for a free hand to develop the possibilities for cooperation among the special libraries, and for furthering of special library methods in general library work.

With success, obviously, had come confidence, for when the special libraries movement had been undertaken and began to form into some sort of viable arrangement in the waning years of the nineteenth century, the effort had seemed to be one for applying the methods and procedures of general library work to the specific needs of those who were providing library services for a particular clientele, the specialist librarians. Now, as indicated in that last sentence, the cooperative efforts of specialist librarians were meeting with such success that (with characteristic optimism among SLA's leaders and members) these were now being offered for librarianship at large.

Thus the role of SLA in modern American librarianship was finally being recognized, for at the June meeting of the American Library Association, "The council of the A.L.A. passed favorably upon the request of the Special Libraries Association with the A.L.A."

Those "special library methods" were now becoming better well known and well codified all the time. A year later, in the association's journal in June, 1912, an article entitled "The Scope and Purposes of Special Libraries," by M.S. Dudgeon, Secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, was published. Noting that "the special library is, of course, related to and a development of the general reference library," and that while "it is impossible to fix a boundary between the fields occupied by the two," the author suggested that it would be fruitful to speak of "the typical reference library as compared with the typical special library." In the article, Dudgeon makes the salient point that the special library arose to meet a definite demand, and that the function of the special library is "to deliver to the busy worker, ready for his use, the records of other men's thought and work and experience, in order that there may be no duplication of experimental effort and no repetition of errors." Dudgeon then came up with three criteria for success in a special library:

1. The material required in the special library differs from that found in a general reference library

2. The special librarian must have special knowledge as well as library technique
3. The special librarian must have prophetic vision (that is, “it is not enough to be strictly up to date... the special librarian must sense the probable demand.... He must intuitively foresee what subjects are to be investigated, which means he must be a high-grade specialist”)

The discussions did not stop, and certainly the 1912 conference—held in Ottawa—was an enlightening one for the attendees, for their enthusiasm for the special libraries movement continued unabated. Perhaps the jovial atmosphere had some influence, as an early announcement had indicated the availability of special travel arrangements “to accommodate those desiring to travel together and have all arrangements for their comfort made.” Three special excursions from Boston (\$19.40 round trip fare, with lower berth \$2.50), from New York (\$22.00 “which includes stateroom berth on boat and parlor-car seat going”), and from Chicago (a special Pullman train will run from Chicago to Ottawa without change.... Round trip fare ... will be \$20.00 lower berth \$5.00 one way).

Just how important these discussions about the nature of specialized libraries were was evident in the September, 1912, issue of *Special Libraries*, reporting on the Ottawa meeting. Recorded there were long comments on Dudgeon’s paper, with many of the association’s leaders taking part (and it is obvious that someone with particular expertise in shorthand was in attendance, for even the most innocuous and conversational phrases are reprinted). Dr. Lapp, especially, was taken with the idea of conveying for all in attendance the importance of the specialist librarian in the parent organization: “The special library meets a very special need,” he said. “That has been pointed out many times. We deal with material that is not in print. We manufacture it. We many times must color it with our own opinions.”

Having begun his discourse, Lapp continued:

... If I have knowledge which to me seems certain, if I know a certain fact and have the information right at hand, I cannot refrain from telling the person who ought to know that fact. I cannot refrain from telling him that a certain thing is right, or a certain thing is wrong. ... The special library was very well described by Mr. Cutter when he said it was a library for those who do things, while the reference library is for those people who think things. This is the age of efficiency. I believe that the librarian is the efficiency engineer, or ought to be, of the educational world. I think the general reference librarian ought to be that, and I think the librarian of the special library, particularly of the manufacturing and industrial library, can be to a large degree the efficiency expert of such a concern.

The discussion of the specialist librarian’s role with respect to organizational efficiency would continue. Even two years later, at the association’s annual meeting

in Washington, DC, in June, 1914, the topic was still being discussed, and Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Executive Secretary, Committee on Practical Training for Public Service of the American Political Science Association, presented a paper on “The Special Library and Public Efficiency,” with such subheadings as “The Efficiency Movement as Applied to the Special Library,” “Typewritten Material,” “The Future of the Service,” “The Test of a Special Library,” “The Special Library in an Efficient Organization,” and “An Efficiency Organization for Modern Society.” These were large issues, intended to be discussed in a far-ranging forum. It is obvious that by this time the association’s leaders—while giving some attention to day-to-day concerns in the functioning of the specialized library—were also not reluctant to take on bigger issues, and to attempt to influence the larger operations of the organizations where they were employed.

It was in Fitzpatrick’s description of the efficient organization for modern society, the last section of his discourse, that the qualifications of specialist librarians and the training of the specialized library’s personnel were brought forward. Fitzpatrick was seeking leadership in society with “the Sophoclean capacity” to see these larger societal issues and to be able to relate them to specialized librarianship. These concerns with qualifications had been simmering throughout the association’s early days and by the time of the 1914 Washington conference, the issues were being discussed openly. With the association’s membership now up to 354 members, SLA had an influential role to play. The management of qualifications for practitioners was an area where that influence would be established, and would continue throughout the association’s history.

There were reasons why leaders in the field were concerned. Just a few years earlier, some had been worried that the special libraries movement might attract unqualified people. In April, 1911, a “warning” from Dr. Charles McCarthy of the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Department noted that some governing agencies were seeking to create “legislative reference departments or municipal reference departments.” McCarthy commented that he was continually receiving letters from people on this subject, and his “warning” was published:

These letters show me that there is a widespread movement in this country for the establishment of such departments, but they also show me that there are self-seeking people who are trying to establish these departments for the purpose of giving themselves jobs. One-half the letters received are in earnest and from able people. About one-quarter are plainly letters of people who are trying to get some kind of political job. Another quarter is, perhaps, made up of earnest people who have no idea about the work and who are probably totally unfit to manage such work.

Now I think the [special libraries] movement in this country is in a dangerous situation because of this. I think that every librarian in this work should do his best to stop the formation of departments when it is found that there are no trained people who can take charge of them.

The work cannot be done by people who have no training or experience in it. It will be a failure and we ought to be frank with the legislature if trained people are not secured in these places.

I think that your publication, *Special Libraries*, ought to issue this warning. A great harm can be done to a good movement by rushing into it or by allowing politicians or people totally unfit to work in such departments to have charge of them. You know and I know that there are no experts in this work, so difficult is the work, and a great deal of training and experience in political science and in law and in the technical details of statute law is necessary before any such work can be undertaken by anybody. The same thing is true in the cataloging and classification work connected with it.

I hope you and your association will discourage the building of departments where it is found that they are to come in under political conditions or from some other pretext to furnish jobs for somebody.

Lapp, the journal's editor, responded:

...the National Municipal League committee's report on municipal reference libraries declares that the qualifications of the head of a library should be "a liberal education, with special training in political science, economics, municipal government and methods of organization and administration, and he should be selected for merit alone." The editor wishes to commend these statements to everyone who is interested in this progressive movement. A department in politics is practically useless; a department in charge of persons who do not have the necessary training and the proper outlook is sure to be a disappointment. No person should be considered for such a place unless he has training and ability, and extraordinary zeal for progressive service.

Yet as SLA moved forward, its leaders were not concentrating solely on issues like management, professional qualifications, efficiency, and the like. They were very concerned, it should be remembered, that the new special libraries movement be able to support specialist librarians—and others in the library field—as they attempted to provide the best library service that could be provided. The association's leaders were seeking to play a larger role in the betterment of specialized librarianship as it was being practiced. One area that was very appealing to all the early members was its role as a clearinghouse for information that would be of use not only to its own members, but to colleagues in the larger profession as well. Consequently, as promised in its first issue, early issues of *Special Libraries* are full of lists, bibliographies, resources guides, and the like.

By 1914, one specific option was falling into place. Lapp, who, as noted in the previous chapter had had the editorship of *Special Libraries* left on his doorstep (as

he so charmingly put it), was one of the strongest supporters of the concept of SLA as a clearinghouse of information. As it turned out, through the efforts of the association, the subject of information sharing in public affairs came also to be left on Dr. Lapp's doorstep, a story he tells in the symposium (published in 1932) that asked the association's founders to describe their distinctive contributions. Begun in 1914, *PAIS*, the Public Affairs Information Service (now *OCLC Public Affairs Information Service*) was created to provide better access to the literature of public affairs:

Perhaps I can say with truth that the one contribution for which I was more responsible than anyone else was the creation of the Public Affairs Information Service, a child of the Special Libraries Association. We had talked for years of a clearing bureau to enable us to help each other in the municipal and legislative field, and finally at an informal group of the "standbys" I repeated the old slogan: "The way to resumption is to resume." Offering my services if each would contribute twenty-five dollars, we soon had fifty-five contributors. The service in mimeographed form was sent out from the Indiana Bureau of Legislative Information for the first year. Needless to say it could not have been done without the cooperation of the board in charge of the Bureau.

At the close of the first year the H.W. Wilson Company offered to put its magnificent facilities at our disposal on a cooperative basis and print a cumulative index. My part in the new plan consisted in making the preliminary canvass for cooperators. This was successful, and over sixty institutions joined at one hundred dollars a year. The first numbers were published under my immediate supervision.

While much of this kind of work was accomplished in the association's first decade, there were difficult times as well, not made any easier by the concerns of members about the war in Europe and their interest in doing their part to alleviate the suffering that the war was causing. Sadly, the war also provided yet one more instance of discord between the members of SLA and those of the American Library Association.

ALA had formed a War Service Committee with the highest of intentions: to aid in the war effort in any way it could. And it was tremendously successful. The committee had official relations with the War Department, had headquarters at the Library of Congress, and its work was remarkable. The War Services Committee collected several million volumes of books and magazines for soldiers, it raised over a million dollars to finance its operation (with over 700 people employed at one point), and it built libraries and library buildings in hospitals, camps, prisons, and on ships.

SLA's members, too, had wanted to do war work, and following the example of the

ALA War Service Committee, attempted to establish a War Service Committee for SLA as well, just two months after the ALA committee was formed. But, sadly, SLA's effort was taken to be in direct competition with that of ALA. Robert V. Williams and Martha Jane Zachert describe the situation in their study, "Crisis and Growth: SLA 1918-1919".

The SLA committee outlined the purpose and plan of its work to "...cooperate closely with the American Library Association committee, preferably working as a sub-committee..." by the following means: 1) "Reach special classes out of the scope of the general [ALA] committee," 2) "...assist and advise ... with reference to the choice of books on technical and specialized subjects and class periodicals to be installed in cantonments and in camp libraries," and 3) "...prepare a descriptive pamphlet ... calling attention ... to the proposed distribution of books on technical and specialized subjects."

In his 1978 history of the American Library Association, Dennis Thomison notes that ALA's committee took a "selfish attitude" about SLA's effort, and when the SLA committee attempted to coordinate its work with that of the ALA committee, it was told that its services were not needed. As Thomison describes the incident, the members of ALA's committee believed that any technical library materials that soldiers and other military personnel might wish to obtain through a military camp library could best be met by ordinary public library methods: "there simply was no need for SLA to become involved." It was a serious and hurtful rebuff, so hurtful that SLA's War Service Committee was dissolved at the next annual conference, in 1918. Not coincidentally, due to this unhappiness, there was much talk about having SLA's next conference for the first time take place separately from ALA's conference, but that did not happen. The 1919 conference did, however, produce a strongly worded resolution critical of ALA and its attitude towards specialist librarians, to be sent to the ALA Council. By a very narrow margin, the drafted resolution did not make it through voting process. Instead a committee was appointed to study the matter of official relations with ALA.

That there were tensions in this immediate postwar period is not difficult to understand, for as SLA's leaders were attempting to advance the association at a continuously developing level, they were not always supported with the required enthusiasm and commitment. And even the leaders themselves were sometimes not up to the tasks they had taken on. With the combination of an uncertain international situation, tensions within the library profession itself, and organizational problems at hand, it is not surprising that things took a brief turn for the worse. For one thing, the

* As it turned out, the two organizations did meet separately in 1920, but Williams and Zachert make a good case that the decision was made for the convenience of SLA members, since the ALA conference was being held in Colorado Springs. Williams and Zachert write that "the SLA Executive Board felt that more special librarians would attend a meeting on the East Coast," so SLA's meeting was held in New York. Meetings of the two organizations have been held separately ever since.

numbers weren't there: membership was decreasing, the association's financial strength was ebbing (and at its lowest point in the association's brief history), and, probably worst of all, the association's activities had gone into a decline.

Leadership for the association was also part of the problem. Dr. Charles C. Williamson had been elected to succeed F.N. Morton, who had resigned because of ill health. Dr. Williamson was well-qualified to be SLA's president. He had been a Vice-President of the association, President of the New York Special Libraries Association (another of the "sections" or "responsibility districts" that had sprung up in various parts of the country), and he was employed as the director of the Economics Division of the New York Public Library. So he had considerable experience as a specialist librarian, and should have been a fine president.

It did not work out that way. For whatever reasons (records are incomplete, and Williams and Zachert speculate only that "it may have been that war conditions did not lend themselves to any great improvement in the status of library associations... or perhaps he did not have the cooperation of his fellow officers and SLA members generally"), Dr. Williamson resigned after eighteen months as president. Oddly, the SLA's Executive Board did not replace him immediately, and the association's most senior leadership post was empty for several months.

Yet the decline was short-lived, as noted by Williams and Zachert. They identified five major changes in SLA's life in 1918-1919 that turned things around for the association:

- The syndrome of war economy, with its characteristics of narrow focus, disruptions, and dislocation was followed by a renewed outpouring of money, people, technology, and information into the national economy at the end of 1918
- The loss of active leadership in the association early in 1918 was followed by the infusion of a new, more dynamic leadership on almost every level by the end of the year
- The lack of a specific communication pathway to respond quickly to the needs of the SLA membership was remedied by the provision of a forum for this specific purpose
- The deterioration of SLA's ability to attract new members encouraged the association to initiate an enthusiastic and successful membership drive
- The intensification of SLA's estrangement from the American Library Association provided the justification to hold separate annual meetings and to develop autonomous SLA programs

As Williams and Zachert put it, "Whereas the combination of negative factors had resulted in a passive organization during 1918, by midyear 1919 the positive factors were in the ascendancy, enabling the organization to again become dynamic and effective."

Fortunately, after the 1918 annual conference at Saratoga Springs, Guy E. Marion was elected president of the association. One of SLA's founders, Marion had been business manager for *Special Libraries* and then the association's secretary-treasurer for nearly five years. Marion has been characterized as "a keen advocate of special libraries and an acknowledged practitioner of the concept. It has been further noted that "when he assumed office as President of SLA at the age of 36, he spoke with the driving enthusiasm of youth...."

With that youthful enthusiasm, plus his experience in the association and in his work, Guy E. Marion was able to persuade members to recruit new members ("You must enlist the support, active, not passive, of every Special Librarian with whom you come in contact") and to establish a desire for more open communications among the membership, and, particularly, between the members and the association's leaders:

Your new president is undoubtedly favored with the unusual background which comes from years of service as Secretary-Treasurer... but those were days of beginning and construction only. The association is now coming into its own, and its fortunes can no longer be guided by a select few. We have, without warning (as it were), passed a time when a small gathering around the dinner table could solve the problems of this organization. The association from now forward must stand or fall upon the loyal support of its members everywhere.

Working with fellow Executive Board members Edward D. Redstone, Massachusetts State Librarian; Caroline E. Williams of E.I. Dupont de Nemours; Edith Phail of Waterbury, CT; and J.H. Friedel of the National Industrial Conference Board, the association as a corporate body was able to clear up its financial problems, establish clearer communication between the members and the association's leaders, and to strengthen the role of the SLA Advisory Council, a group of "district heads" of the fourteen "responsibility districts" into which the United States had been divided in early 1912. Much like today's geographic chapters, the leaders of each of these districts made up the Advisory Board.

In addition to Marion's excellent leadership and the support and enthusiasm of his fellow Executive Board members, much of the success of this work—according to Williams and Zachert—was due to Friedel's editorship of *Special Libraries*. Friedel was characterized by them as perhaps the first "militant" advocate for the special libraries movement. His issues of *Special Libraries* (and his letters and articles for *Library Journal*) paint a colorful picture of a man driven to establish specialized librarianship as the future of librarianship.

All of these combined efforts worked to insure the future of SLA, but it must have been a frenetic time for the people involved. With ongoing publicity efforts, making use of new communication techniques, preparing presentations, publishing articles, distributing questionnaires, we can only imagine that some of these people stayed

up very late some nights, doing all this work in addition to their regular employment as specialized librarians in the companies and organizations that employed them. Their efforts paid off. Membership went up to exceed 400, money was collected and the deficit disposed of. Perhaps most remarkable of all, the average attendance at sessions of the annual conference, under 40 at the 1918 conference, rose to over 250 for the 1919 conference.

It had been a brief turn for the worse, but only a brief turn. Thankfully, under the leadership of Marion and his “remarkable” colleagues, the association turned itself around, and as the new decade beckoned, the four hundred-plus members of the Special Libraries Association were looking forward—with renewed vigor—to taking their special libraries movement further into the mainstream of American society.