

## *SLA at 100: Chapter 5 1930-1939 New Challenges*

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It is nearly impossible to tell the story of the decade of the 1930s. People born after that exceptional period of history have great difficulty imagining the hardship and fear that characterized society, both in North America and globally. Those writing about the decade who did not experience it firsthand must rely on others' experiences. All we have is what's been preserved, what's floated to the surface, so to speak, and we have no perception at all of what's submerged, what's disappeared into those famous mists of time we ponder every now and again.

Those who lived through the decade—even those who were children at the time—do not remember the nineteen-thirties with fondness. Despite the romantic aura attached later to the period, through stories, through reconstructions of events or revivals of plays, through “retro” fashions, and the like, there was an unpleasant undercurrent during the decade that seemed to eat into every person's daily life. People were frightened, and it is truly remarkable that a professional association, just turning twenty-one years old, could not only survive under such tough conditions, but would prevail, grow, and at the end of the decade, emerge stronger than it had ever been. SLA's leaders in those days were people of outstanding ability, personality, and enthusiasm. How we would like to have known them!

If anyone wonders just how bad the times were, a quick description of the decade's events will provide an overview that, if nothing else, makes the contemporary reader distinctly uncomfortable and—unless he or she is totally unfeeling—very grateful to be living in another time. In 1930, just as the decade began, Hitler's stormtroopers took their hate campaign to a new level by attacking Jewish civilians in Berlin, killing eight Jews and randomly targeting others throughout the year, attacking ordinary citizens as they went about their daily lives. The stock market crash of the previous October had literally devastated the economy, with bank failures throughout America and millions of people losing their savings. Before the first year of the decade was over, some seven million people in the United States were unemployed.

In the next year, unemployment rose to 11,000,000 people (out of a total work force of 58,000,000 – an amazing unemployment rate of nearly 20%). By the time Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated in March, 1933, it was clear that something had to be done. The new president declared a national bank holiday and, with the utmost control, pushed his New Deal through Congress in his first 100 days. In Germany, things went from bad to worse, as Hitler become Chancellor in 1933 and, in 1934, assumed the title of Führer on the death of German President Paul von Hindenburg. In the next year, 1935, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act, and by 1938, his and his advisors' efforts were beginning to look like they might work. Things were improving, and although some 23 million people were continuing to receive some form of public help, more than a million people who had been unemployed were able to find work.

But as war clouds loomed throughout the second half of the decade, the future did not look good, and the national recovery effort, in America at least, was overshadowed by Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Although the United States did not go to war immediately, the "war footing" on which its citizens found themselves proved to be the lifeline that pulled them out of the Great Depression, at a painful and nearly unbearable cost.

Within the Special Libraries Association, the decade began with a burst of professional enthusiasm as the idea of specialized librarianship, so dear to the organization's founders and its leaders and members during the first twenty-one years, continued to be a focus for their collegial work together. Wanting greatly to carry that idea—their "movement," they often called it—beyond their profession, these people were continually looking about for concepts and "hooks" that could attract attention in the management offices of organizations that employed specialist librarians (or which *should* be employing them). Almost immediately, as the decade began (and in a presentation that clearly anticipates the entrepreneurial/intrapreneurial management direction that became so popular in specialized library management some sixty years later), Ruth Canavan laid out guidelines for how specialist librarians could make the specialized research library a "profitable" department in the organization. Beginning with the theory that the library serves the organization both "as its memory and as it forgettory," and functions "as a headquarters to which questions throughout the entire organization can be referred," she went on to note that "it coordinates departmental activities and avoids the duplication, delay, and expense of reproducing data already available," thus saving time and money. But these efforts, Canavan suggested, while not revenue-producing, could be operated along with services that can produce revenue for the host organizations. She offered translation services, the producing of bibliographies, "literary researches," and the editing of technical manuscripts as tasks which could be undertaken, at a profit, by the staff of the specialized library.

Canavan's article was typical of one of the most successful efforts of the association at the time, to provide practical information ("methods" was the term usually applied) that specialist librarians could read, discuss with colleagues, and put to use in their own libraries for the benefit of their employers. Other titles, such as the "Methods Series" published in *Special Libraries*, offered advice and guidelines for such subjects as "Staff Organization and Administration of a Special Library," "Clipping Files," "The Care of Pamphlets in a Business Library," and "Reference Work." Other theme issues of the magazine were published, including several devoted to newspaper libraries, both in America and in Great Britain. And the fairly recent tradition of publishing articles on business libraries was continued, including special issues on business libraries affiliated with local public libraries in various parts of the United States. Libraries in Indianapolis, Savannah, Boston, San Francisco, and Providence were described, and articles with titles such as "Business Idea in Libraries" and "Publicity for Public Business Libraries" were published, to give specialist librarians in public libraries the opportunity to share in the findings of those in the corporate and research communities.

Many such efforts were undertaken, and while *Special Libraries*, as the organization's journal, was the primary medium for distributing this information, the SLA publishing program overall was exceptionally successful. In November, 1931, a "Historical Review" of association publications was undertaken, and among the remarkable facts presented was that the magazine itself, started in January, 1910, with eight pages (and no advertising) had, by Volume 22, Number 6, the Convention Issue of July-August, 1931, grown to 101 pages, including paid advertisements. Paid advertising, in annual pages, had grown from six to 81 in just the six short years between 1923 and 1929, as new emphasis was put on the value of attracting advertising income to the association.

In a review of the association's publishing activities, it was noted that "The influence of the Special Libraries Association has made itself felt in two ways—by publications outside of the association that grew from ideas within the membership and promoted by them, and by those aids printed by the Special Libraries Association. The association can well be proud of its accomplishments."

Noting that specialist librarians need "special tools," the association undertook to work with commercial publishers—with, especially, "that good friend of the profession" the H.W. Wilson Company—with *Industrial Arts Index* being one of its first successes. In 1910, as noted earlier, the genesis of *Public Affairs Information Service* had been fostered by the association, and a great many timely articles and reprints of articles were furnished for members through the SLA publishing program. In 1921, the first volume to bear the imprint of the association, a *Directory of Special Libraries*, edited by the then president, Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr., was published, and from then on all presidents of the association encouraged publishing activities, including, in 1937, President Harold L. Stebbins's proud announcement that the new *Technical Book Review Index* had been launched with great success.

The nascent interest of specialist librarians in the value of technology in their professional lives came forward in a number of published articles that let the readers of the association's publications know that this was not a subject being neglected. In the earliest instances, the technology being described was microphotography, a precursor of what became known as microfilm, microfiche (or simply "fiche"), and, later, more generically simply as microforms. The first article on the subject, "Microphotography for the Special Library" by Vernon D. Tate, Chief, Division of Photographic Reproduction and Research, National Archives, was so well received that several articles on microphotography followed it.

In the aforementioned review of the association's publications program, the chronological list of titles (many of them available at the SLA office) included nearly seventy-five published works. But the association was not simply looking back when it came to its publishing activities. Another issue of *Special Libraries* at that time included the article, "What Shall Special Libraries Association Publish? Present Activities and Future Projects," which stated the purpose of the effort, "to compile and print professional tools, valuable primarily to our members, which cannot be put out by commercial publishers because of the slight prospect of profit," and "to

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· An earlier article on barometers had been published in the March, 1925, issue, but its relevance to the management of a specialized library was not made particularly clear.

prepare and issue publications useful to our members but also useful to many persons and organizations outside of the Special Libraries Association, the larger sale of which will cover losses on the first group, and thus balance our budget.” It was, all things considered, an ambitious and far-reaching goal and it established the framework for what would become for the remaining years of the twentieth century one of the association’s primary services, both to its members and to the larger professional community.

The publications program was only one of several issues that claimed the attention of the association’s members and leadership in the decade of the thirties. Naturally there was great interest in growing the association, not only to increase its ability to provide resources and to speak for and represent specialized librarianship, but to continue its efforts in strengthening the special libraries movement in the larger profession and to advance that movement in the marketplace which would benefit from employing specialist librarians. Enlarging the association’s membership rolls was a goal, and it was a successful one (the membership advanced from 1,250 members in 1930 to over 1,700 in 1935). Other activities included the specially focused efforts of SLA’s officers and leaders in bringing its many far-flung “Associate” members into “Active” membership. These people paid slightly lower dues to be affiliated with local chapters throughout the United States but they were not members of the association as a whole, and the arrangement naturally impeded SLA’s efforts to speak “with one voice” for all specialist librarians. As a result, some chapters (notably the San Francisco Bay Region, New York, and New Jersey) voted not to accept local members but, as was stated in one presidential report, “to limit their numbers to those who are certified to them by the national association.”

The development of a national viewpoint became a subject for much discussion in the mid-thirties, but as early as February, 1930 President William Alcott, in speaking about the death of John Cotton Dana the previous summer, remarked that the association had grown to more than 1,200 members, “distributed in most States of the Union, in Canada, Mexico, and 16 other foreign countries.” In his comments about the association’s founder, Alcott alluded to his wide-reaching view of his professional life and his wider view of the role and impact of specialized librarianship: “He had a national view of professional and business life, he had an international view in the library world, and he transmitted those ideas to the Special Libraries Association.”

That “national view of professional and business life” became something of a rallying cry for the association for the decade of the nineteen-thirties. From it came a course of action that flowed over into their efforts to take the specialized librarianship movement into the business and research world, beyond the profession itself and to the very people who would most benefit from the services provided by the profession. As he made his final presidential address to the association, at its conference in San Francisco in 1930, President Alcott chose to frame his remarks around the association’s achieving its majority, as it became twenty-one years old, and in doing so, he reviewed its accomplishments with a long list of achievements, concluding that “to those of us who are engaged in this great field of services a new day has dawned, and the prospect is full of promise.”

In 1935, President Ruth Savord designated three specific goals for the association. Noting that with over 1,700 members working in fifteen chapters, ten groups, and eight national committees, SLA could point with pride to its many accomplishments. But President Savord wanted more: First of all, she wanted all members—and particularly the leadership—to be able to have “knowledge of the abilities of our entire membership.” She wanted members to let the leadership know what their talents and skills were, and to make them available for the association and for specialized librarianship. This was to connect with her second goal, the promotion of membership. It was with her third goal that Savord made her strongest appeal, the “development of a national viewpoint.”

In a national association serving members distributed far and wide as ours are, a great deal depends on the operation of our local Chapters, if the best interests of our organization are to be realized. The Chapters are intended to function not only for the purpose of satisfying local needs, but they also have the responsibility, too little realized, of developing a National feeling and spirit. ... In carrying out Chapter projects and in trying to meet local requirements, too often the National objectives are obscured and those who *could*, fail to bestir themselves to spread national inspiration....

Despite that strong and typically inspirational admonition, just how this goal was to be accomplished was not specifically spelled out, although it is evident that these objectives became something of an understood incentive that would motivate the association’s leaders for some years. Some steps had already been taken. In 1931-32, the name of the association had been registered with the U.S. Patent Office, and the association’s first recruitment document, “Putting Knowledge to Work—Special Librarianship as a Career” (written by Ruth Savord), had been published. Not long after (in October, 1934) a special issue of the SLA magazine devoted to careers in specialized librarianship was published.

That the association’s leadership was committed to the cause—to moving the special libraries movement forward—cannot be doubted, and later generations must be grateful that they made the sacrifices they made, to bring themselves and their organization closer to their objectives. During the decade, several presidents (Mary Louise Alexander, 1932-34; Howard L. Stebbins, 1935-37; Alma C. Mitchell, 1938-40) served two successive terms, a practice which continued into the years of World War II with Laura A. Woodward in 1940-42 and Eleanor S. Cavanaugh in 1942-44. The effort to maintain stability and continue to move the association forward, both during the Great Depression and in the Second World War required such commitment, and the association was fortunate that people willing to undertake such responsibility were to be found.

But there were more immediate organizational crises as well and, not surprisingly, one of them, toward the end of the decade, once again involved the association’s relationship with the American Library Association. That organization was to be reorganized, and many members of SLA were concerned about how ALA’s reorganization might affect the work of the Special Libraries Association. SLA was one of six library associations “independent of but affiliated with ALA.” According to

Marian C. Manley, the editor of *Special Libraries* (and also a member of ALA's "Third Activities Committee" which had been charged with coming up with a plan for making ALA more responsive to its members), "The affiliation of SLA with ALA has heretofore meant little to either association. It was proposed by the members of SLA in the early days of that association because it seemed appropriate for all library associations to be united in some general way. Unfortunately, there has been evidence of no reciprocal spirit of affiliation on the part of ALA. SLA has been required to pay dues for its members who are not members of ALA. The president of the SLA has been, by right of affiliation, a member of the ALA Council. It is doubtful if any of the recent presidents of SLA have felt that this responsibility was more than an empty honor."

Apparently the purpose of the reorganization was to have ALA "representative of all the librarians in the country," and with the reorganization, SLA's name would be changed to "The Special Libraries Association, a Division of the ALA." There was to be a new financial arrangement, and a portion of members' dues would revert back to SLA, increasing SLA's revenue line. Much debate took place, and many letters were published on the subject, but in the end the reorganized affiliation did not take place and SLA was able to continue as the independent organization it had been, with limited affiliation with ALA. Still, it was clear that the association would have to continue its efforts to establish its own national voice and to take the specialized libraries perspective into the larger profession and into the business, research, and scientific communities where specialized librarianship contributed to the broader effort of the specialized libraries' parent organizations. An essential element in this progress would relate directly to the cooperation and collaboration that had been so much a part of the association's early decades. Surely these were not new elements for SLA, where cooperation and collaboration had always been evident. What does seem new was an apparent interest—perhaps as relief from the Depression—in just "having fun."

At the start the decade, for example, the association's leaders decided to offer "The 1930 Gold Rush!" The first annual conference on the West Coast was scheduled for San Francisco for June 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, and these people were going to go in style. A notice to members, mailed early in the year, pointed out that "Each day brings the name of another special librarian who is going to the annual convention.... We already have enough people to secure the first private car. We want at least two more filled up when the SLA Special pulls out of Chicago." There followed a list of companies which had already committed to sending their librarians to the conference, and the itinerary was outlined:

- The official party leaves New York at 5:30 PM June 12 on the New York Central. They will be joined by the Boston party and others at Chicago.
- Leave Chicago in special cars via the Santa Fe, June 13 at 10:15 PM
- Allowing one day at the Grand Canyon, we arrive at San Francisco June 18 at 8:20 AM

- After the convention everyone will be free to choose any side trips that appeal, and to leave the official party at any point. However, many of us are planning this return schedule: Leave San Francisco Saturday, June 21, for a two days' trip through the Yosemite.
- Arrive Los Angeles Monday, leaving again Wednesday night for trip home via the Canadian Rockies. This trip will include the boat ride up Puget Sound, a visit to Victoria and Vancouver, and one day each at Lake Louise and Banff.
- Arrive New York City July 5.

Anyone who cannot spare all this time, can take in the convention in a fortnight at an expenditure of less than \$300.

With the approximate total cost for the longer trip being less than \$400, the journey was obviously a success, for the next year's conference, planned for Cleveland, also offered excursions, with special pricing from many different parts of the country. The association's travel committee—made up of travel enthusiasts certainly—were having a good time arranging for their colleagues to have fun.

Much of the fun wasn't just for conferences, though. Perhaps as a sign of the times, since these kinds of activities were evident in other situations as well, amateur dramatics provided much entertainment. The record of one "original fantasy with music" has survived, perhaps because it was offered on more than one occasion. A production of the New York Chapter, the play "Rather Special" was presented first at the Federal Reserve Bank Theatre in Manhattan on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1932, and then again, in a slightly revised version (this time including one gentleman in the cast—the previous production had been all women), at the Lake Placid Club in June, at the association's conference.

We have no idea what the play was about. In the Federal Reserve version, it is listed as having been written by Aina Ebbesen and Marjorie Church Burbank, so we have to presume that when it is described as "original," it used their words and music. The Prologue was made up of songs sung by Mrs. Thomas Hindle, with Mrs. Elnora Frantz "At the Piano." Scene One had seven ladies singing and dancing (we know they were dancing because the program is illustrated with stick figures doing so) to "We Are Gallant Specials." Scene Two, "Ladies and Gentlemen..." featured Isabella Cooper as the Master of Ceremonies. Scene Three, full of crowd scenes and "big" numbers, was introduced as depicting "The Future State" and included such musical numbers as "We're Special Librarians" (with a cast of 14), "I Am the Most Exalted Keeper," featuring past-president Rebecca B. Rankin as Peterette, Keeper of the Gate, and "Bow, Bow, Ye Little Groups and Sections," with a cast of four representing the "Executive Board" Continuing to the grand finale, Alice Bunting, as "Publica, Not a Special," sang "I'm a Weary Little Public," followed by Marjorie Burbank, appearing as Mr. Dives, President of the Croesus National Bank, singing "Yes, Little Publica."

Apparently performed with much gusto and delighting the audiences (and, from the titles of the songs, apparently taking a few swipes at those who worked in public libraries), it is interesting to note that the leaders of the association were not shy

about appearing in public. In addition to past-president Rankin, Alma C. Mitchell, who would be president in 1938-40 appeared in the revised version at Lake Placid, singing in something called "The 1932 Sextet" (which had been preceded by "The 1909 Sextet"). Future president Eleanor Cavanaugh (1942-44) appeared as the Mistress of Ceremonies. And it was in "The Future State" that we find the sole male performer, Mr. James Katsoros, playing Mr. Dives, the bank president.

Jolly times for all.

Still, there were serious issues as well. In its efforts to establish a national voice for specialized librarianship, one of the association's most specific undertakings was the monitoring of training for librarianship, and, especially, training for specialist librarians. As early as April of 1930 Miss Linda H. Morley, who taught the Special Libraries course at the Columbia School of Library Service, wrote in an article entitled "Courses for Special Libraries" that her course "aims to present the purpose and point of view of a special library and to discuss the technical methods adapted to such a library." Clearly still "adapting" classical library methodologies instead of developing and implementing new programs, specialized librarianship was continuing in an adjunct role to the larger profession. Just two years later, a special issue of *Special Libraries* was offered as a sort of "textbook" for the subject, and included articles such as "Selection and Ordering of Material for the Special Library Collection," "How Shall We Classify the Special Library?" and "Does the Special Library Need Specialized Cataloging?"

This interest in training for specialist librarians continued, and another "textbook" issue was published two years later. A pattern seemed to be developing. In another two years, in September, 1936, Margaret S. Smith, Chairman, Committee on Training and Recruiting drew a line in the sand by asking in the title of her essay, "Just What is 'Training for Special Libraries Work'?" Another article in that issue described some of the responses to a questionnaire on "Training Desired by Special Librarians," by the Committee on Training and Recruitment. A typical comment from one respondent expressed a desire to have "...learned a little earlier how to work efficiently alone, how to analyze rapidly, and how to go about research methodically." Obviously, by the time one-person librarianship was identified as a sub-group of specialized librarianship in the 1970s (later to be referred to as "solo librarianship"), a long history of concern and interest in the subject had been in place.

Whether there would be more study of training for specialized librarianship became the subject of a classic debate within the organization. To bring some perspective to the matter, Jesse H. Shera, then a 34-year-old bibliographer at the Scripps Foundation at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, prepared two essays for *Special Libraries*. Shera, later to be one of the great leaders of American librarianship (and to become famous as an early pioneer in the electronic organization of information and library catalog automation) picked up on the term that was sometimes used to describe specialist librarians (and which is still used in some parts of the world, especially in Australia and New Zealand). He put forth his first reactions in "Training for 'Specials': A Prologue to Revision," and later in "Training for 'Specials': The Status of the Library Schools." In his comments describing Smith's survey, Shera

points out that “one fact ... stands out from these questionnaires with startling uniformity. Of all the case histories before us, only two mention specifically the library school as a definite guiding force in encouraging their entrance into special library work, ....” Shera then goes on to make a bold suggestion:

It may be that special librarians, in urging the extension of the library school curriculum to cover training for special library work have been doing an excellent job of barking up the wrong scholastic tree. It is far from impossible that more efficacious results would be obtained from urging the introduction of courses in library training into the graduate schools dealing with engineering, social science, economics, and the like. Thus training for special librarianship would develop, not as a variation or extension of the library school’s basic curriculum, but rather as an addition of an abbreviated library school program to other graduate work.

Did Shera’s bold analysis make any difference? It seems not, for specialized librarianship—as a subject for study in most library school programs—continued as an adjunct or affiliated course of study, subsumed in programs that particularly emphasized public and, to a lesser extent at that time, academic librarianship, as it does to this day. The shortcomings of existing library training programs vis-à-vis specialized librarianship lead to the appearance in *Special Libraries* of many articles and special issues on the subject. The association made special effort to take steps to work with specialist librarians as they pursued more training. One notable venture was reported in September, 1938, when Rose Boots described in “SLA Takes Action for Professional Training” that an SLA Student Loan Fund had been established and that the association itself would be working with specialist librarians in helping them with their education and training.

IF SLA’s efforts to raise awareness of specialized librarianship in the library education community were not as successful as might have been hoped, the same cannot be said for the association’s efforts to raise awareness among those who were—or might become—employers of specialist librarians. For example, exhibitions at trade shows and conferences were common during the decade. These were not simple tabletop presentations presided over by a group of willing volunteers. Elaborate, almost stage-set physical arrangements were installed, such as that organized by the Financial Group (as divisions were then called) for the American Bankers Association Convention in Atlantic City in 1931. Attractive furniture, sturdy bookshelves full of reference books, and desks for the librarians are all in place, together with a sign offering that “The Financial Librarians will do limited research” for convention-goers.

Another suggestion was made by no less a personage than Beaumont Newhall, the librarian of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. In 1938, in an article confirming that the special library idea was well established and that modern librarianship in America truly had moved into the realm of the practical (and, not so incidentally, also confirming what specialist librarians have since recognized, that their work should not be strictly limited to research- and information-focused operations), Newhall wrote:

The motto of the Special Libraries Association is “Putting Knowledge to Work.” In this simple phrase lies the whole philosophy of modern library practice. Its implications are great, its responsibilities large. It means that it is our duty to do more than collect literary and pictorial data, store it safely, and catalog it so that it is readily accessible to all comers. It means that we should take a militant offensive, and *present* the specialized knowledge stored up in our specialized libraries. ...

In our hands we have the power to de-specialize, to a degree, today’s knowledge. We can Put Knowledge to Work for other than those specialists that we immediately serve. By cooperating with the advertising office, the publicity department, or the instruction division of our respective businesses or institutions, we can spread abroad that special knowledge of which we are the physical custodians.

Not content to suggest that specialist librarians merely “preach to the converted,” Newhall also felt that the specialized library motto could be brought to the attention of the public at large:

Nor should we neglect our own publications. Interesting as *Special Libraries* is to the members of the SLA, it would be rash to say that it has any popular appeal. Yet it could. By means of pictures, by articles of an informative nature, by literary roadmaps, it could become a magazine which would reach outside of the association. By dramatizing our motto people would learn that we talk of other things than imprints, collation, analytics, and corporate bodies as authors.

All of these efforts at moving specialized librarianship forward (with the exception of Mr. Newhall’s suggestion that the association’s magazine “go public”) were undertaken in a society that was constantly being subjected to external forces that could not help but influence their success. That the Great Depression was occurring while the association’s members and leadership were seeking to move specialized librarianship into the mainstream was a constant worry. As early as July, 1931, Mr. Whiting Williams, personnel and public relations consultant speaking at the annual conference, was reporting optimistically that his research showed that the wage earner was somewhat cushioned during the economic downturn. For many, though, the reality was far different.

A few months later, a piece in *Special Libraries* describes “emergency exchanges for unemployment relief,” and notes that “economists are advocating the exchange of goods produced by and for the unemployed as a means of alleviating unemployment.” Because so many people were destitute, and because there simply was not any money with which to buy anything, “Barter Exchanges” (as they were called) were eventually organized in more than 500 communities. SLA recognized that in addition to the barter of actual goods and services, there was a need for an exchange of information and knowledge for those wishing to establish such exchanges. A brief article in *Special Libraries* noted that at that time (April, 1933), exchanges had been established in 29 states. Considerable attention was given, as would be expected, to printed material available on the subject, including “a detailed plan for a nation-wide exchange system.” Articles about the exchange movement

were listed, and bibliographies from the Library of the U.S. Department of Agriculture were noted. A list of barter exchanges was described as having been made available by the Emergency Exchange Association, a New York-based organization promoting exchanges throughout the New York area and acting as “a national clearing house of information on developments.”

Unemployment was the greatest fear, and past-president Rebecca B. Rankin took on the chairmanship of the association’s Employment Committee. For many on the committee, though, as Rankin said in 1935, “in the past five years of depression we have been inclined to consider and call it an Unemployment Committee. We have been pressed into service for the unemployed in our profession and we have been glad to give them our first consideration in this emergency. However, we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that the profession will gain if the Employment Committee maintains its ideal of placing in a new position the best qualified special librarian, whether at the time employed or unemployed.” The committee took upon itself the task of registering all special librarians, so that when an opening occurred “we are enabled to select the person in the whole profession who is best qualified for that particular type of work.” The committee reported that employers were coming to it for suggestions for candidates for position (fifteen in the first two months of 1935), and expectations were high that the committee would provide a vital service for the members of the association.

There was, as would be expected in this particularly volatile period of history, some discussion about unions and the unionization of specialist librarians, but despite several rather lukewarm attempts to build interest, there wasn’t much enthusiasm in moving in this direction. Interest in salaries, though, was a different matter. Marian C. Manley listed in “The Special Library Profession and What it Offers” salaries that might be expected by specialist librarians working in different cities, and in doing so demonstrated how the Depression was affecting the profession. In Boston, for example, average annual salaries in 1929 were \$1,846, but by 1933 had dropped back to \$1,300. So, too, in Hartford, where the 1929 average salary was listed as \$1,710 but by 1933 had gone down to \$1,578, and in South Bend, where the average salaries listed were \$1,800 and \$1,500, respectively. Oddly enough, in Indianapolis the salaries stayed the same (at \$1,440), indicating that dismal economic conditions were not uniform.

In addition to knowing about salaries, specialist librarians also needed to know just how they should react to the emergency situation they found themselves in, and it was not unusual for them to be offered (sometimes in cloyingly cheerful or perky language) encouraging and inspirational presentations about how they could get through the rough spots. For example, Mary Bostwick Day gave an address called “Special Libraries in Time of Depression” that described several techniques that would be helpful to specialist librarians: the elimination of all luxury and waste, working harder to keep libraries “on the map,” adapting continually “to a rapidly changing world,” and, above all, “speed in execution.” This “last watchword,” as Day called it, is required because “this is what the business man wants. If you can deliver the goods, if your library is organized for quick availability, you are then an active branch of the organization and not a mere literary morgue. Get the thing across in a

thorough manner at the right time, and if possible in advance of the demand, and the special library is then a dynamic factor in the organization.”

With respect to the war clouds hanging over Europe and the Pacific, the association was less actively involved, although that involvement would, naturally enough, grow and become all-consuming in just a few short years. Nevertheless, there were hints that the members of the association were very aware of what was taking place beyond the confines of their professional endeavors. Later generations are rightly distressed to see, among the advertisements in *Special Libraries* in the later years of the decade, a notice seeking subscriptions for a monthly magazine called *The Aryan Path*, a “non-political, international journal, mainly devoted to the dissemination of spiritual, idealistic, and humanitarian principles.” Describing itself as “a symposium of what the leading minds of one race—who have freed themselves from the shackles of orthodoxy and dogmatism—really think,” the magazine’s advertisement listed some twenty-seven contributors (“and others”), including such well-known intellectual leaders of the day as James Truslow Adams, Arthur Christy, Claude Houghton, John Middleton Murry, Max Plowman, John Cowper Powys, and H.G. Rawlinson. It was, perhaps, a sign of the times that *The Aryan Path* was published, but it is nevertheless worrisome to recognize that professional journals such as *Special Libraries* were used by these magazines for seeking subscribers.

Association meetings were also forums for discussing the threatening global situation. At the SLA conference in Montréal in 1936, Brooke Claxton of Stairs, Dixon, and Claxton, a local firm, spoke to the attendees, asking “Is There a Common North American Outlook on World Affairs?” The subject of the speech was political isolation, and the apparent fear of other countries that the United States was going to remain isolated and neutral as they went to war. Asking the United States to reconsider its isolationist stance, Claxton pleaded for his country’s southern neighbor to lead as—in the court of world opinion—it was expected to lead:

Civilization is challenged as never before and there is only one cause for hope, and that is that people like yourselves and ourselves are thinking about this as they have never done before. In all countries of the world movements are going on, the ferment of intelligence is working like yeast in the minds of masses of people, and we may hope that that peace which we really know will come in time—will come “in our time.”

That “ferment of intelligence” continued to grow, as we now know, and specialist librarians, like other professional people, found themselves debating the rights and wrongs of the dangers before them. The American role in the face of these dangers and its isolationist/non-isolationist stance was a constant struggle.

Speaking before the association at Baltimore on May 24, 1939, while the leaders of Europe were negotiating and re-negotiating with Hitler and his country’s other leaders, Sir Willmott Lewis, the Washington Correspondent of *The Times* (London) turned to libraries to review “Phases of Democracy.” He began by noting that “our idea of liberty—the liberty which brings assurance that a man may be protected in doing what he believes to be his duty against the influence of authority and majorities, custom and opinion—is at least 2500 years old.” Bringing his review of

those “phases” to the modern crisis, Sir Willmott put forward his understanding of the situation, that the “challenge to that form of free government which we call Democracy is the greatest fact of our time.”

How did the members of the Special Libraries Association react to these presentations? Did their thinking change? Did they, as professional colleagues and intellectual compatriots, open themselves to discussing these important subjects? We will never know, because their public reactions and their personal thoughts are not recorded, but we do know—simply because the association as an organization was willing to provide a forum for such thinking—that SLA’s members and leadership were as concerned as other citizens (perhaps, we would like to think, more so). They wanted to hear what the opinion makers of the day had to say to them. It was a remarkable time for the association, and one that, as the next several months, stretching into years, would demonstrate, a time in which they would need all their intellectual, professional, and personal strength. They would all be put to the test.

Perhaps that test was anticipated. Beginning in 1935, there appeared in the association’s magazine occasional overviews, essays in which the association was “looking at itself.” Among these was one by Marian C. Manley, who was currently President of the New Jersey Chapter, as well as the current Chair of the Committee on Training and Recruiting. Manley saw value in not only taking pride in the accomplishments of the association in the past, but “as a prelude to self-examination in the present.”

Like many writing about SLA at the time, Manley makes much of the association’s youth, about how it has always had a “fresh, progressive point of view” and that its activities are approached with “the zest and initiative that are part of youthful enterprise.” As she describes the association as it matured, she records how it changed, with its members benefiting from development with what she called “three-way contacts: through the local chapters, through the groups of special interests, and through the national committees devoted to broad general activities or policies of value to local chapters, groups, and the national organization alike.” Noting that SLA “has always been conspicuous for the zeal and enthusiasm of its members,” Manley points out with pride that the members are willing to provide financial support to enable the association to accomplish the things its sets out to accomplish. Concluding her comments about SLA looking at itself, Manley writes: “It is obvious from the record that SLA has the power of stimulating growth among its members and of attracting to itself people with fresh, independent, and constructive views, who are able to devote their zeal to the association’s welfare. The association’s great asset from its inception has been a tremendous interest and enthusiasm, and its members have had reason to experience the satisfaction that comes from a good job well done. Perhaps this ardor is due to the fact that the enterprise of its members has gone into its work, that its members have known of its progress every step of the way, and have contributed from their own energy and their own funds to the welfare of the association.”

As the decade came to a close, Manley went even further with her “looking back” explorations, this time in an essay that reviewed the entire decade, now coming to a

close. In “SLA—1929-1939—A Decade of Transition,” Manley asserts that the association had found the national voice it had been seeking during those ten years. She begins by asking, “What is the element in SLA that has led to this new spirit?” Her answer comes quickly: “First, and foremost, undoubtedly, is the growing realization that members are not only chapter or group members, but are individuals in a national association with personal responsibilities and opportunities in connection with the policies and the practices of that national association. This trend is one that has become more marked in the latter half of the decade and the creative contributions from individuals, the freedom of comment by individuals, the direct contact with the officers by individuals throughout the country, all reflect this growing sense of responsibility. No longer can it be said that a few carry the work of the association when the records of the past few years are examined and the range in age, interest, and location of various constructive workers is given due thought. That this major shift in organization feeling is responsible for the progressive growth of SLA can hardly be questioned, when the individual reactions of its members are contrasted with the reactions of individuals in other associations.” Motivated by the difficulties of the times, the association had, as Manley recorded in a section of the paper entitled “Personnel Problems and the SLA” encouraged a “marked increase in the attention given to the development of the individual.” This was new ground for a professional association, indeed, for any organization of the day and time, and SLA’s efforts to help people identify and enhance their personal and professional strengths played a great role in attracting specialist librarians to the organization.

Finding its national voice and identifying its philosophy and its values positioned the association for remarkable leadership in the profession. Now specialized librarianship, as a practical and useful support activity for the parent or host organizations in the workplace, was enabled to work for, as Manley characterized it, “broader understanding”:

The realization of the need for more consistent effort towards promoting recognition of the value of special libraries in a program of “Putting Knowledge to Work” has led to a marked increase in cooperative activities. ... Through these contacts and through even broader efforts SLA’s program will continue to be one of enlightened activity tending more than ever to maintaining its stand of “Putting Knowledge to Work.” Even as in its first twenty years, the last decade has shown SLA’s capacity for constructive progress. The next two will bring the association to its half century mark. What will be the record for the coming twenty years?

The time was right for the procedures and practices of specialized librarianship to enter into a new stage of maturity, and Manley’s exhortation was just the tone that was needed as specialist librarians looked to embrace their fourth decade together. The world, particularly in terms of the global economy and the international political environment, was more unstable than it had ever been, and people were frightened. Business, research, manufacturing, and almost every other element of society were all in a fight for survival, a fight that would only become more brutal before conditions improved. At no time were the talents, skills, abilities, and intellectual strengths of specialized librarians more needed. Now, with the Great Depression about to be

banished in the wartime economy, and with the worst, most horrible conflagration in history on the horizon, modern American librarianship, with its two branches, was to be called upon as it had never been called upon before. The practical side of "information-getting," as the real work of specialist librarians was occasionally and charmingly described, would now be forced to prove its validity and its viability. It would be a hard, tough battle, but it was a battle that the members of the Special Libraries Association were eminently qualified to win.