

SLA at 100: Chapter 7 1950-1959 Quiet Growth

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Some might take issue with a description of SLA during the decade of the 1950s that refers to the period as one of “quiet growth.” For one thing, membership during the decade (despite a five-year recruitment program planned and initiated in the 1953-1954 association year) did not increase. In fact, SLA’s membership shrunk, from 5,443 members in May, 1949 to 5,063 members in May, 1959. In other areas, the association grew, becoming more of an influence in the world of research and subsequently in the lives of its members. There was significant development of the special libraries movement. Attention to training and education for specialist librarians stimulated much discussion, and a restructuring of the organization became an important focus. All of these efforts combined to contribute to the evolution of SLA’s prominence in the library and information management field.

With respect to the concept of specialized libraries and the association’s role in taking the movement forward, there were significant developments. Recognizing that specialized librarianship is that branch of librarianship concerned with the delivery of practical and utilitarian information, many people in the decade spoke or wrote about why, in the post-war era, such information was being recognized as an essential and critical element in social progress. Early in the decade, Elizabeth Ferguson (to be the association’s president in 1952-1953 and at the time serving as Chairman of SLA’s Public Relations Committee) provided her own working definition of the special library and at the same time offered her understanding of the concept of specialized librarianship and how the association could lead the movement SLA’s original founders had identified. Writing in *Special Libraries*, Ferguson defined a special library as a library “identified with an individual enterprise or research program [whose] task is to assemble a comprehensive collection of information in some one field.”

Ferguson’s definition continued:

It has in addition the obligation to make this information readily available to the organization of which it is a part, and maybe also to make it available to other users. In this concentration of effort a special library differs from a public library which serves a whole community in a broader way.

The special library functions as a clearing-house not only of specialized books but also of the knowledge of experts in the particular field. Without such a central clearing-house much time and effort is often lost in seeking needed information. ...

Ferguson goes on to make a firm connection between specialized librarianship and SLA:

In much the same way that a library within an organization can coordinate information resources, the Special Libraries Association acts as a clearing-house for the hundreds of establishments all over the country where access to information is of paramount importance. Its motto is "Putting Knowledge to Work." It represents, in its membership, organizations and individuals who are authorities in practically all fields of knowledge. Through the medium of the Association this great pool of knowledge can be tapped at will.

Turning the page of that issue of *Special Libraries*, the reader could then learn of George E. Gibson's rationale for why—in 1951—the time was right for specialist librarians to take the lead in bringing their movement forward into the larger management community and also why, perhaps inspired by Ferguson's leadership in the association's public relations efforts, a strong public relations role was necessary. Gibson, Assistant Librarian at Brown & Bigelow in St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote that "At no previous time in industrial history have conditions been so compatible to the healthy growth of special libraries. Sales are high, profits are great, and corporations have become increasingly research minded as the need for product diversification increases. ...the continuing prosperity of industry has had and will continue to have a stimulating effect on the arts, the sciences, and any other cultural pursuits which serve as focal points in the activities of special libraries not a part of industry. In a 'seller's market' of this kind no sizeable cultural or industrial organization should be without the services of a special librarian and library."

Gibson then throws down the gauntlet to the specialized library community, urging its professional practitioners to put themselves forward as the very specialists modern society needs:

...even the best, most efficient producer of a special product such as ours will not do volume business as long as the product is unknown to potential users. ... To "come of age" we must constantly reach for higher standards in efficiency and the improvement of our "product." Yet, the extra effort put forth in striving for these higher standards must also offer personal benefits to justify the effort. The jobs that will provide these benefits are dependent on the demand for our product. The demand for our product is premised on awareness of its superiority by the potential customer. Awareness of our product's superiority can only be brought about by active public relations. Each of these factors is an integral function of the other. Together they can provide the chain reaction necessary to propel the Special Libraries Association to the top of the library world.

The time has come for us to measure ourselves against the standards of modern industry. Either we are a professional organization or we are not. Now is the time for us to stand up and be counted.

Just two months later, Grieg Aspnes, in his inaugural address as president of the association, took up the challenge and offered his own advice to the association's members: "Look at business. Look at the thousands of firms which are still operating by 'rule of thumb'; who still founder for lack of information that any qualified librarian could get for them in an instant. ... There is the future for us as librarians. But it is up to us to make that future come true. It is up to us to show the world how it benefits from more and better library service. It is up to us to go forth, like Paul, and preach the gospel of better library service. It is also up to us to practice what we preach, to make library service work. There is our challenge and there is our opportunity."

The challenges from the association's leaders continued, and throughout the decade they were not shy about telling the world—by telling their own members—that specialized librarianship could provide the information that industry, cultural, political, and societal leaders needed to answer the questions that continually confronted them. In a very particular way, the "missionary zeal" of 19th century librarianship transitioned in specialized librarianship into a "missionary" role that looked not at the world at large but to bringing the maximum benefits of specialized libraries to the organizations where specialist librarians worked. As the decade progressed and the special libraries movement advanced, practitioners were very enthusiastic about their role. Gould H. Cloud, Librarian at the Houston Research Library of Humble Oil & Refining Company, predicted a rosy future for specialized librarianship. Using strong research about the growth of science and technology, the concomitant growth of technical literature, the "problem of handling the literature, and the role of specialist librarians as part of research teams," Cloud concluded:

According to our crystal ball there is "gold in them thar hills" for those who equip themselves and go after it. Industrial management is fast recognizing the importance of the technical and scientific literature and is establishing many special libraries. The super abundance of the literature has its users "on the ropes" crying for help. The special librarian is an important factor in the solution of the literature problem. He is being promoted from "waterboy" to a member of the team. The possibilities for job variety and responsibilities are excellent. Opportunity is knocking at the door!

So loud was the knocking that, in the same year, 1955, the association's leadership accepted a new definition for the discipline, provided by the Committee to Formulate Definitions on the Fundamental Characteristics of Special Librarianship: "The profession of special librarianship and documentation is the science of selecting, evaluating, organizing, and disseminating information in special fields of knowledge and the art of integrating and adapting information resources to the needs of a particular institution or clientele." It was a new way of describing the profession. For the first time in SLA's ongoing efforts to define its discipline, the specific concept of

documentation—the bringing together of useful information on a particular subject (*i.e.*, documenting a subject) without regard to the form or format of that information—was attached to specialized librarianship.

It was an important connection, as historian Robert V. Williams has written, convincingly describing specialist librarians as the first American documentalists. From its earliest days, Williams writes, “SLA was dominated by an activist group whose interests were only minimally concerned with traditional library materials and their service orientation to users was determinedly proactive.” As early as 1912, Williams notes that Aksel G. S. Josephson, of the Crerar Library in Chicago had written that a specialized library must “make much more use of what has come to be known as documentation than the general library.” By way of describing the concept, Williams provides another comment from Josephson, who had said that “We might come to the point where special libraries will not even have whole books, but only such parts of many books as it needs, treating books as well as periodicals on the principle of documentation.”

Williams offers that this description was Josephson’s version of Paul Otlet’s terminology, noting that Otlet, of the International Institute of Bibliography in Brussels, “had coined the term early in 1903 to describe a new field of study ... concerned with any records and objects that had the potential of providing useful information, and that offices of documentation should be created to carry out this work.”

Despite this 1955 approach toward a new definition for their work, the linking of specialized librarianship and documentation did not turn out to be a comfortable fit. As Williams notes, “the term did not seem to appeal to these special librarians and they continued to use special, despite their uneasiness with the word and despite the continuing need to reply to the general librarians retort that ‘all libraries are special.’” Yet his case that specialist librarians were, even reluctantly, the first American documentalists is a good one: “It is quite clear from the variety of definitions offered, their explanations of what they were doing, and how they served their users, that they were the first American documentalists.” In his study Williams even went on to state that for American specialist librarians, “their complaints about American librarianship were similar to those that the European documentalists had about librarians in Europe.”

Williams credits W.B. Rayward with identifying why this was the case, as Rayward had established that Paul Otlet had been “critical of librarians for their timidity towards technology, their unwillingness to include a wide variety of types of materials in their libraries, and the limited services they provided.” Such shortcomings (that is, shortcomings as seen from the perspective of the information customer) would provide an opportunity for specialist librarians, as Williams concluded: “The focus of the American special librarians was on the whole information process within the organization, with particular attention to the needs of the user.”

Williams continues the historical connection, referring to Ethel Johnson, an active member of SLA, who had summarized the view of the special librarians as early as 1915 by noting, 'Before everything else, it [the special library] is an information bureau. The main function of the general library is to make books available. The function of the special library is to make information available.'"

As it turned out, the documentation vs. librarianship issue became an important one for SLA and was the focus of much attention for several decades, probably having begun with the organization of the American Documentation Institute (ADI) established by Watson Davies in 1937. Seeking to improve the delivery of scientific and technical information to information customers, Davies had advocated that, as in Europe, "all kinds of people (librarians, archivists, scientists, engineers, educators, and many more)" were involved in documentation and had led the development of ADI, which became ASIS, the American Society for Information Science in 1963 (re-named the American Society for Information Science and Technology in 1990).

In all the discussions about specialized librarianship and documentation, it seems readily apparent that the service delivery model that drove the documentalists was very close to the work that specialized librarians did for their parent organizations. For a while it seemed as if SLA and its members would lean in the direction of re-defining their work as documentation (or at least including attention to documentation as a parallel discipline) but it did not happen. Nevertheless, this attempt to seek a new way of thinking about their work, together with their many efforts at establishing their role—both with the general public and with those who managed the parent organizations where they were employed—combined to give the proponents of the special library idea a strong basis from which to continue sending forth their statement that their mission was to meet the specific practical and utilitarian information, knowledge, and learning needs of their parent organizations.

As it turned out, the specialist librarians themselves were not the only people involved in bringing their message to a larger public. For the larger profession of librarianship, and certainly for specialized librarianship, one of the most effective public relations vehicles turned out to be a Broadway play. William Marchant's *The Desk Set* opened in New York in the mid-1950s, with Shirley Booth in the role of Bunny Woods, the head librarian whose knowledge and corporate memory are challenged by an electronic "brain." The theme of the play and the later film connected—probably unintentionally—to the librarianship vs. documentation issue that was being talked about within the profession. Indeed, one film historian described *The Desk Set* as "one of the first films to follow the advent of computers into the workplace."

The comedy was a great success, and it did much to enlighten the public about the role of the specialist librarian. Not surprisingly, the play's influence was recognized within the association itself. An article published in *Special Libraries* in February, 1956, quoted several association members, all of whom were delighted to see the play come to its conclusion, with, as one member commented, "the world at large shown that there is no substitute for a good librarian." When the play went on tour,

Booth herself was honored by the association's Southern California Chapter at a reception attended by more than 350 Southern California members at the Cathay Circle Theater in Los Angeles. Wearing the new "demure" party dress which figured prominently in her role, but which the delightful story line prevented her from wearing onstage, Booth was presented with an honorary membership in the association. Recognizing Booth for "her portrayal of a special librarian" in *The Desk Set*, the event was duly reported in the Los Angeles *Times*, with the writer describing the role of specialized librarians in business, industry, science, and entertainment and observing that "management people who had seen *The Desk Set* identified their own libraries and personnel problems with the play."

There is no way of measuring the impact of such a public depiction of specialized librarianship as that created by William Marchant and Shirley Booth (and later and more famously, of course, by Katherine Hepburn in the 1957 film). Nevertheless, there is no question but that the concepts built into the special libraries movement were being recognized. Jesse H. Shera, by now Dean of the School of Library Science at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, in his keynote address at the association's 1956 convention in Pittsburgh, took the occasion of the association's approaching fiftieth anniversary to propose a "reaffirmation of a credo; a rededication to the faith" [of] Putting Knowledge to Work." Like many of his colleagues Shera, who for some twenty years had been one of the association's strongest advocates for specialized training for people who planned to work in the field, recognized that changes in technology, the growth of technical literature, and different research methodologies were affecting librarianship. He felt strongly that a theory of librarianship that relates the discipline to "the total communication process by which society achieves and disseminates knowledge" was called for. Therefore, Shera proposed, if librarians are to be true to the SLA motto and put knowledge to work, they must ask themselves two "fundamental" questions:

1. What is knowledge, or, more specifically, what are the characteristics of recorded knowledge?
2. How is it put to work? It is this relationship between recorded knowledge on the one hand, and man as the user of it, that is the true core of librarianship.

Like any careful theorist, Shera had his own answers to these questions: The task of putting knowledge to work rests upon a "bipartite theoretical, or fundamental, structure":

1. An understanding of language and the communication process itself and its role in the transmission of knowledge

· Not all specialist librarians recognized at the time for their invaluable role in their organizations were of the fictional variety. In March, 1955, *Special Libraries* profiled a librarian identified as "The Answer Woman." Serving as librarian for an advertising agency, Miss Treat (no first name given) was characterized as not only running the agency's library "but" the piece concludes, "Miss Treat *is* the library."

2. A comprehension of human thought patterns so expressed that patterns of recourse to recorded knowledge can be derived from them

It was Shera's belief that "upon such a theoretical foundation, a technological superstructure may be erected with confidence that the needs of society for adequate library service will be met." These were ambitious, formidable aspirations, anticipating specialized librarianship's embrace of the precepts of knowledge services some fifty years later. Yet these aspirations were—without question—only appropriate in their relationship to what specialized librarianship could truly become, in terms of what the discipline's contribution to society could be:

On our ability to put knowledge to work may hinge the very future of our civilization and the perpetuation of our cherished way of life. Let us promote a truly unified attack upon these obstacles to the fullest possible utilization of recorded knowledge. Let us reaffirm the faith of the founding fathers. Let us solemnly rededicate ourselves to the credo of "Putting Knowledge to Work."

So the role of the specialist librarian was becoming more distinct as society progressed, a role that had been not only sincerely wished for by the association's founders, but had been expected by them. While they themselves had not lived to see its realization, there is no question but that Dana, Marion, Whitten, Lee, Handy, and SLA's other founders would have been very comfortable with a press release put out by Columbia University in March, 1958:

The rise of a "specialist's specialist" is one inevitable result of the increasing specialization that marks our age. Brought into being by the vast accumulation of detailed information accompanying the spiraling growth of man's knowledge, he has finally come into his own as the "necessary assistant" to other specialists and researchers in practically every field of endeavor.

Known professionally by such labels as "research specialist," "information officer," and "documentalist," among others, he is most accurately called the "special librarian." His services, only recently recognized for what they are, have come now into great demand by government, industry, communications, and business, to name but a few of his employers.

According to Dr. Robert D. Leigh, dean of Columbia University's School of Library Service, the special librarian is the "reflection of advancing scholarship and technology" in "combining familiarity with a special subject, a wide knowledge of information and research materials within the field, and the librarian's techniques of organizing materials so that they are quickly and fully available to the user...."

The press release (with the provocative and attention-getting title "The Significance of Special Librarianship") was presumably an effort by the Special Programs unit of

Columbia University's School of Library Service to attract people who otherwise would not normally consider graduate education in library science. It was a noble effort, and well-timed. Just as in later years, during the 1950s there were many leaders in the field who were concerned that specialized librarianship was not being given the attention it deserved in library education programs. This was not a new issue. It had been a concern since the earliest days of the association, but when education for librarianship was more informally handled, there had somehow not been the concern that began to manifest itself in the 1940s and 1950s. With librarianship evolving into a graduate and more learned discipline, the exclusion of specialized librarianship in graduate education took on a more urgent tone. In the previous decade, in November, 1948, a special issue of *Special Libraries* had been devoted to training and education for specialized librarianship. Walter A. Southern, Librarian, Commercial Research Division, United States Steel Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had prepared an article describing how such education had changed over the years: "In the fall of 1947," Southern wrote, "when the thirty-four accredited library schools in the United States began classes, twenty-two of the schools were offering fifty-three courses specifically or very closely related to the field of special librarianship. The library schools of the country had come a long way since the first formal course in special librarianship was offered by the Riverside, California, Library Service School in 1919, but even with this apparent progress those persons interested in education for special librarianship were not entirely satisfied."

Southern continued in his essay (which was essentially a history of training and education for specialized librarianship up to the time of his writing), offering cogent reasons why some of those concerned would not be "entirely satisfied":

Education for special librarianship has been a lively topic for discussion in library literature since the early 1900s, mainly because of the many points of view on the topic. Authors have generally taken one of the following sides: those who believe that subject specialization is more important than library training, those who believe that library training is more important than subject specialization, and those who believe that library school curricula should be modified to meet the needs of special librarianship, or those who believe that a combination program of library school instruction along with subject specialization is the best method.

Throughout the association's history, this, essentially, is what the dispute has been about. It has continued long after Southern's 1948 essay, which is not to say that serious and very sincere attempts have not been made to resolve the issue. Such efforts have been made, and are in a way an ongoing theme in the history of specialized librarianship, continuing up to the present day. In 1948, there was a sense of urgency, simply because (as noted above) the management of information and research in the post-war years was bringing new demands and, it must be recognized, providing new opportunities that would not have been anticipated—or

even considered—in the past. Now specialized librarianship was being appreciated for what it was, the branch of librarianship that could help companies and organizations in their constant pursuit of order in the vast array of information that they were dealing with. So the contributors to the special issue were very aware of the challenges they were facing, recognizing that the solution to the problem would not necessarily be found within the profession. For them, the views of those who employed specialist librarians were also valid, and important, and one of the papers in the special issue was a report of a panel discussion that had taken place at the 1948 annual convention in Washington, DC. Under the chairmanship of President-Elect Ruth H. Hooker, and moderated by Verner Clapp, Assistant Librarian of Congress, the report described the discussions of a panel brought together under the rubric, “Employers’ Evaluation of Training Desirable for the Special Librarian.” It was a huge panel, for there were fifteen participants, and it must have been a remarkably ungainly event. There was one representative from each SLA group (the next year to be designated divisions), one representative-at-large, and eleven observers, all listed as “participants” and each, presumably, expected to speak to the subject. The report of the discussion as printed in the journal offers a fairly broad description of the comments of the participants but sadly the conclusions are too vague to be of much value. Later, in the new decade when he was delving into the subject of “Professional Training for Special Librarians,” John Emmett Burke, librarian, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, came up with a summary of the “highlights of training qualifications” the 1948 panel came up with:

1. Library training and knowledge of subject matter constitute the ideal.
2. A division of opinion exists as to the adequacy of in-service training as a substitute for library school or formal training.
3. A knowledge of languages, especially Latin, is desirable.
4. A realization of the importance of the public relations aspect of the library must be put to constant practice.
5. Desirable traits of personality—alert mind, attractive appearance, amiable disposition—are regarded as requisites.

Burke’s paper, in December, 1951, captured the core of the problem, which we now understand to be the great variety in the types of specialized libraries that exist, all as part of the same information management practice or profession:

Few areas of librarianship present the variety of professional occupations as does the field of special libraries. A wide range of subject areas running the whole gamut of industrial and commercial America calls for a system of libraries wherein each differs from the other in content, purpose, and service. Although special libraries may differ in book, periodical, and pamphlet resources; and specific as they

may be in the clientele they serve, they are nevertheless bound together in a common desire to perform their duties and exchange ideas for a better and more efficient service.

As he sought to demonstrate the “desirability” of balancing both the vocational and technical aspects of specialized librarianship with that of professional training, it becomes clear that—for this particular branch of the profession—Burke’s message was easy to establish. Perhaps Burke was being influenced by the work of Michael Oakeshott. One of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, Oakeshott’s 1947 essay, “Rationalism in Politics” offered the view that technical and practical knowledge are two separate and distinct types of knowledge, a distinction that would have provoked some serious conversation and perhaps even some re-thinking among specialist librarians of the day. They knew that they had the technical knowledge, “the sort that can be put into words and written down in books,” as one Oakeshott admirer has described it. And they also knew that for specialist librarians, “putting knowledge to work” entails possessing practical knowledge as well, the knowledge that enables one to take the technical knowledge and—invoking one’s experience—use it for the purpose at hand, thus creating new knowledge. But for them, they had the special task of ensuring that their managers and their users understood the distinctions and, further complicating the issue, understood that the work they did, as specialist librarians, was not the same as that performed by other knowledge workers who worked as librarians.

The training and education of specialist librarians—that “task of gigantic proportions,” as Burke called it—continued to resonate throughout the decade. Five years later, in November, 1956, two further attempts to address the situation were offered. In the first, Edward N. Waters, Assistant Chief, Music Division, Reference Department, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, and Chairman, Council of National Library Associations Joint Committee on Library Education described, in an essay entitled “Training for Special Librarianship,” how intrinsically training and professional development are linked to SLA’s very identity. Noting that he himself had referred to SLA as “eminently professional” in 1943, Waters had discovered that as he worked with certain groups studying the subject of education and training for specialized librarianship he found no committee on the subject existing within the association. That situation was changed with the first Subcommittee on Special Library Education, formed in 1950. Formulating a definition of specialized librarianship to guide practitioners, the committee quoted extensively from the work of Jesse H. Shera, referred to earlier, and his fear of damage to special libraries through “inept practices of a subject specialist turned amateur librarian.” In his report Waters noted that such “infiltration of amateurism into library practice” was exactly what he and his fellow committee members were attempting to prevent. He did go on to state, though, that “subject specialization is of paramount importance, indispensable indeed, and that extra competence in particular areas of knowledge is the first criterion by which special librarians should be judged.”

The second of the two efforts to address the training and education of specialist librarians was an essay written by Martha T. Boaz, Director of the School of Library Science at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In her paper, Boaz attempted to demonstrate that the academic education of librarians did indeed address the particular needs of specialized librarianship. Boaz described several specific efforts that, if the student already had an interest in specialized librarianship and was able to obtain appropriate advice from faculty advisors, would allow for a type of “specialization” in specialized librarianship:

Most library schools offer a basic general course consisting of the fundamentals of library work needed in any type of library. In most cases, however, the curriculum permits variations to meet special interests without sacrificing the necessary foundation of basic studies. ... In most of the schools joint programs have to be planned with other schools or departments, such as the school of music or economics or the department of chemistry. In this setup, students plan programs under the joint guidance of a faculty member in the library school and of another in the appropriate department or professional school. ...

If these practices were not good enough for that branch of librarianship represented by the SLA—now approaching its fiftieth anniversary—how should the library schools respond? Boaz addressed the problem as one which was not as serious it was being made out to be, and suggested that as far as the formal education of specialist librarians was concerned, the *status quo* was sufficient: “As long as library schools are small in relation to the number of students enrolled and in the number of faculty employed, it would seem that they may have to follow the more or less general education programs now established, with as much specialization as the budget and the teaching staff will allow.”

So if library schools were not going to alter their practices in any significant way, who was to bear the responsibility for training specialist librarians? Boaz turned that responsibility over to those who benefited from their services, the companies and organizations that employed specialist librarians:

It seems sound, too, to think that organizations, businesses, or industries which need a librarian should be willing to provide a work-study program, a scholarship or some form of subsidy which would enable one of the staff, already prepared in the field, to attend library school. ... There is need in all types of library work for scientific organization, skilled methods, and extensive service. For special library work, if the desirable were attainable and economically feasible, a student would go to his job with a well rounded academic background, a special knowledge of a particular subject field, a basic foundation in library science, and training and internship in a special library of his field.

In shifting responsibility to employers, Boaz apparently saw no need for library education to change in order to better train practitioners of specialized librarianship. In resisting this kind of change, Boaz was not alone. It was hard, in the late 1950s, to bring about substantive change, primarily because so many argued that it wasn't yet the "right" time. The societal recognition of the value of change and the larger acceptance of change within the organization—whether an organizational workplace or a professional society or other group—was far in the future. While later knowledge professionals would come to understand both the inevitability and the desirability of change, those who practiced librarianship in 1956 were not ready—or even able, considering the larger societal environment—to embrace wholesale change. It was indeed not yet time.

Yet in the management of the association, change—while not necessarily referred to as such—was ongoing. During the post-war period, it had become clear to SLA's leaders, and particularly to Kathleen Brown Stebbins, the association's Executive Secretary, that as SLA became more prominent in the profession of librarianship, a leadership role for the association *as an association*, would be required. As SLA emerged as the only professional organization representing the entire body of specialized librarians, its role as an authoritative resource for this broad-based group of knowledge workers was required to expand. Attempting to meet professional needs and to provide affiliations and networking opportunities for such a large population was a task that required formidable organizational ability, which Stebbins had brought to the association when she was hired in 1940. It was a unique management situation, for all of SLA's members, although united by being *specialized* in the larger sense of the term, were employed in a great variety of different and not always compatible subject specialties. One of the association's challenges during this period was identifying and putting before the association's leaders those issues that best supported the SLA mission. These elected leaders, who with Stebbins would play a major role in shaping the association, initiated and brought to fruition a number of important changes. At the beginning of the decade, Ruth Savord, Chairman of the Committee on Constitution and By-Laws, described how important it was to open the activities of association governance to fuller participation. In Savord's opinion, "the membership as a whole has not taken the trouble to inform itself on the democratic processes that have been provided for carrying on the work of the association but, having elected officers and directors, have then sat back and considered its duty as accomplished. But, is it? True, the Executive Board must take the final responsibility but how can eight people be expected to know the wishes of 5000 members, to decide how so large a membership wishes to allocate funds, or to meet the conflicting demands of twenty-five chapters, fourteen groups, and innumerable committees?"

Savord, president of the association in 1934-1935, obviously made her point well, for several significant changes having to do with governance were adopted. One of the most important, already alluded to, was that groups would now be known as *divisions*, thus anticipating the bicameral organizational structure that would be realized in 1974. Another major change enlarged the Executive Board to twelve

members instead of eight, with the new officers being three additional directors and an elected secretary who was to be a voting member of the board. Perhaps the most important constitutional change, from the point of view of the participation of the membership, was the change in 1950 to an election ballot with two candidates for each office of the Executive Board, a change which necessitated a strong and active nominating committee whose function was specifically to go out among the membership and identify librarians willing to serve.

It was a time of “self-evaluation for SLA,” as President Elizabeth W. Owens put it in her many presentations and writings. She identified the need for providing for changes that “made the wheels of the organization function more smoothly,” for some financial reorganization, and for continuing discussion about SLA’s collaborative role with respect to other professional library associations. Also on the agenda was a study of membership qualifications, but when completed, surveyed members expressed themselves in favor of keeping the current membership qualifications, so no change was made in this area.

A year later, President Grieg Aspnes, writing about what he called “The Real Strength of SLA,” identified the association’s strengths as the association’s local groups. Aspnes noted that there were literally scores of national, state, regional, and local library associations, but questioned their true value to the profession as a whole. He then made his own case as to why SLA was so important, and how the association served as a central focus for librarians. Quoting from a paper delivered by George Bonn, Associate Librarian at Rice University, before a meeting of the Texas Chapter of SLA, Aspnes noted that Bonn credited SLA’s strength to its organizational structure: “SLA is designed from the bottom up. The organization, for whatever need, goes from local to national. . . . Perhaps here we have the secret for any strong, active, progressive organization: Great local strength and interest. Perhaps also, we have here the start of real unity in the library profession as a whole: strong local groups organized around a common interest.”

But the good work that SLA provided for its members and for society, so enthusiastically described by President Aspnes (and Mr. Bonn), was not and would never have been achieved without much study, effort, and President Owens’ call for self-evaluation. President Aspnes was succeeded by Elizabeth Ferguson, who described in her presidential address several major problems the association was facing. These included such issues as defining what SLA’s “proper” professional activities might be, establishing a strong and viable public relations program, addressing recruitment issues, both for specialized librarianship and for the association itself, looking at administrative and long-range planning problems for chapters and divisions, and, in what seemed to be an eternal and ongoing problem, relations with other associations. All of these, President Ferguson felt, emanated from the association’s over-arching problem: the lack of a clear statement of purpose and objectives for the association, “peculiarly a president’s problem,” as she described it. “When you asked me to assume this office,” she said, “it became my duty to be your spokesman—to explain and interpret our association in all sorts of

situations to our own members and to outsiders. I had to *try* to get into words the values and ideas we all know SLA has, but which we don't state very well. Woodrow Wilson once said that you don't really have an idea until you can express it clearly. The longer I live the more I believe this. So it seemed vitally important to me to formulate a good definition of what SLA means."

This President Ferguson did. Noting that the association's organizational structure, constantly under examination and revision, had become "so complicated that we have had to be concerned about it," she continued:

All honor to the noble efforts of my predecessors to set our house in order. We needed it! The progress, from the time the association bound itself to the risky responsibility of supporting a headquarters office, through a useful period of developing directives and manuals for operation and general tightening of internal organization, has been more than satisfying.

But, in our concern about our organization, we were in danger of forgetting what the organization was for. Organization without a useful and clearly defined purpose is an empty shell.

Ferguson then presented her own definition of SLA, stating that the organization is "a membership of working librarians unswervingly devoted to the principle of service on the job no matter what the difficulties," and identifying the association as one which is "*based* solidly on the interests involved in these services rendered by our members to business, professional, governmental, and industrial organizations, and *dedicated* to these interests."

As for the association's assets—or as Ferguson asked the question: "What do we have?"—the answers to her were obvious: SLA has "a history of mutual helpfulness, of individual and joint accomplishment, and the vitality and enthusiasm generated by creative people who are literally making their own jobs." The "apparatus" of the association—its structure—is one through which any special library problems "can be tackled," and SLA is "an association of individual and institutional members in which the greater part of the creative work is carried on *not* by the officers or the Executive Board but by the members, with assistance from headquarters and editorial services."

After expressing her own ideas about the association which she knew so well, and for which she obviously had a great deal of affection, President Ferguson finished her presentation by pronouncing the "continuing objectives" the association should seek to achieve:

After all this stock-taking and analysis, can we point to objectives toward which we want to continue to work and which we can use as criteria for our decisions and activities? I think so.

- (a) We will continue to carve new trails in librarianship, both individually and collectively.

- (b) We will govern our associational decisions by keeping always in mind the end results, the useful projects, or the constructive growth for which any of our organizational units—divisions, chapters, committees—are created.

With such dynamic and progressive leadership as that provided by people like Owens, Aspnes, Ferguson, and their successors and colleagues in the decade, this “self-evaluation” would be expected to continue, and so it did. Other structural changes were undertaken during the 1950s, all stimulated by ongoing and committed concern expressed by the leadership. So carefully planned were the studies that, by the end of his presidency in 1956, Chester M. Lewis could report that the organization’s Committee on Organizational Structure had stated “that the basic philosophy behind our present organizational structure is sound and flexible enough to allow the drawing together of members with mutual interests in specialized fields.”

Not surprisingly, the effort to examine the role and operations of the association was for many of SLA’s members accompanied by similar thinking about the very profession in which they were practitioners. And as their association represented their professional interests, it seemed only natural for members to take an active interest in the contributions their specialized libraries made in the parent organizations with which they were affiliated. It was the beginning, in this first full decade after the war, of an initiation of interest in what we now refer to as ROI, or the return-on-investment, for employers. Such thinking, now standard operating procedure in any successful business or organization was, to put it mildly, very rare in the 1950s, and almost unheard of in a professional organization.

The trend began early in the decade, when the September, 1952, issue of *Special Libraries* was devoted to “administration problems” in specialized libraries. Under the general editorship of past president Eleanor S. Cavanaugh, specialist librarians with management responsibility for their facilities wrote about library administration, *per se*, about job classifications and salaries, about relations with management, about public relations, and even, although a little out of place in this particular collection, about college and library administration. Then, in a second section, managers from organizations which had specialized libraries as operational functions expressed their opinions on such subjects as “The Technical Library in the Industrial Organization,” “Do Libraries Earn Their Keep?” and “Management is Watching.” Finally, several more general essays with such titles as “The Assistant’s Role in the Library,” “Library Research Costs Less,” “Employment Techniques,” “Measure of Library Services: Statistics,” and “Preparation of a Staff Manual” concluded the collection of articles. It was obvious that specialist librarians were now ready to take on management roles in their organizations, and they were determined, through utilizing the services and offerings of their professional association, to learn what they needed to know.

But not only were the librarians and their managers heard from during this management-focused decade. Just three years later, in an article entitled “What the User Expects from the Library,” Fred L. Pundsack, Senior Research Chemist, Johns-

Manville Corporation, Manville, New Jersey, described his expectations in straightforward terms: what users wanted was “access to knowledge.”

What does the user expect of the library? The answer depends upon the problems and the general field of interest of the user. Speaking from the point of view of the researcher, I can do no better than to quote an editorial from *Endeavor* on “The Accessibility of Knowledge” which sums up the literature problems of a researcher in this way: *The first task of a scientist entering a field of research is to master the facts already discovered by earlier workers, and then to keep abreast of the discoveries of his contemporaries pursuing the same line.*

The task is becoming increasingly difficult, and failure to solve it constitutes a very real threat to the advance of science. The scientist needs all the help that he can get from the library in combating this problem. Thus the library user expects to find a comprehensive file of periodicals relating to his field of interest (we are assuming that the user’s field of interest is also the company’s field of interest—a not unlikely state of affairs). The user expects a relatively extensive holding of reference books and texts, and if necessary he expects to be able to use the books outside the library.

The problem, it soon became clear, was that the function and role of specialized librarianship had never been clearly established to the satisfaction of practitioners, organizational management, or library users. For many of the association’s leaders, the problem was very much a public relations issue, as Elizabeth Ferguson had made clear when she chaired that committee of the association (and, as noted earlier, as she had also made clear when she became president). Others who were primarily practitioners and not officers in the association, people like Samuel Sass, Librarian at The William Stanley Library at the General Electric Company in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, found themselves appalled at the common misperception of the layman. Sass abhorred, as he put it, “this anyone-who-can-read-can-be-one concept of librarianship,” and he specifically took issue with the association for not doing more to change that public perception:

It is difficult to imagine a current article defending the hiring of a chemist instead of a clerk or an engineer instead of a clerk or a teacher instead of a clerk, but in the year 1956, nearly a half century after the formation of the Special Libraries Association, it is still necessary to answer at length the question, “Why have a professional librarian instead of a clerk?”

To solve the problem, Sass had his own recommendation for the association. To achieve recognition as a profession, it would be necessary for specialized librarianship, as a profession, “to establish standards and to publicize them in every possible way. Prospective employers of librarians, particularly in the industrial field,

cannot be blamed for not knowing who or what a qualified librarian is if librarians themselves don't seem to know....”

Just five months later, Past President Ruth Savord, now Chairman of the SLA Professional Standards Committee reported that her committee had been studying three possibilities that the association might take: certification, a professional register, and qualifications for membership in the association. The subject of professionalism came up again at the next SLA Annual Convention. Keynote speaker F. J. Van Antwerpen, Executive Secretary of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers in New York City, spoke on “Professional Societies and Professional Standards” and provided a variety of definitions for the concept of professionalism. The occasion appears to be the first time (at least on record) that specialized librarianship considered the concept of professionalism as a characteristic of the work its practitioners perform, although in 1940 some attention had been directed to the recently enacted Fair Labor Standards Act in an attempt to determine if specialist librarians were exempt from the provisions of the act.

In his presentation at the annual convention in 1957, Van Antwerpen was more specific, and in his remarks shared his point of view:

Before describing the value of professional standards to a profession, I should like to clear up exactly what I mean by a profession. ... In my own field engineers subscribe to the following criteria for judging a profession:

1. It must satisfy an indispensable and beneficial social need.
2. It must require exercise of discretion and judgment.
3. It must be conducted on a high intellectual plane.
4. It must entail group consciousness.
5. It should have legal status.

Van Antwerpen then stated the definition he preferred (“the one that is simplest and that, to me, approaches most clearly the purposes of a profession”):

A profession is a group of men and women who develop conscious standards of work to which they hold themselves and one another responsible.

Seeking to establish how SLA might play a role in dealing with professional standards for specialized librarianship, a special meeting was held at the conference, resulting in “almost unanimous approval in principle of the adoption of professional standards in the form of stricter membership requirements.” The new membership requirements were drawn up in collaboration between the association’s Professional Standards Committee and the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, and at the annual meeting in 1958, the SLA Constitution and Bylaws were amended to incorporate new thinking in this direction. For the first time in its history, professional requirements were established for personal memberships in the association.

Such change led to further concern with professional issues, and it is interesting to note that the leadership of the association was now giving very serious attention to the role of the specialist librarian in the parent organization in which he or she was employed. Performance measurement and its relation to specialized library service was much discussed, and standards for specialized libraries were called for, although not specifically adopted by the association. Prominent leaders of the management community were sought out for their opinions as to the role and function of the specialized library in the corporate environment. The intrepid Elizabeth Ferguson found herself in print again, this time with an interview with William H. Whyte, the author of the best-selling *The Organization Man*. It was in that interview that Ferguson became attracted to the concept of the dual allegiance of the professional worker, a concept elaborated upon and forming the key advice she and future SLA President Emily Mobley presented in *Special Libraries at Work*, their important book of 1984.

In the interview, Whyte had discussed the “inevitable” conflict that comes up when the individual and the organization do not share the same “ends.” Ferguson had responded, “Talking about a struggle for individual control sounds to me like the struggle of any professional person. Would you say that this problem is that of a professional person working for business?”

Whyte’s response:

Very much so. I think the problem affects two kinds of people most keenly. One is the executive himself (and curiously enough the whole human relations program has had a much more profound effect on the executive than on the workers for whom the human relations were designed) because he is very beholden to the organization, even though he wishes to leave it himself one of these days.

The other group, of course, is the professional. More and more we’re finding professionals of every kind in business—social scientists, librarians of course, the list is tremendous. And now we have a further conflict—not only the simple and very important conflict I spoke of earlier but also the conflict of the professional who now has two allegiances: one to the organization and the other to his profession. Now this is a real antithesis. It sometimes can be mitigated, but there is often a parting of the ways. The question is—to which allegiance must he remain most faithful?

Certainly for the association the decade of the 1950s had by now, in 1957, established itself as the decade of self-examination, not only of the association itself, but of the work that its members were doing in the profession. With respect to the organization itself, there continued to be a strong tendency to take advantage of new technologies, particularly the new interest in “documentation” and “automation,” as well as advanced and important new methodologies for sharing resources. Among these latter, and among many other activities that seemed to define the association

in the 1940s and the 1950s, one stands out. That was the Translation Center, which had begun as a project of the Engineering-Aeronautics Section of the Science-Technology Division (then Group) in 1948. The history of this activity was described by Past President Betty Joy Cole in 1959:

The Translation Center began with a card index from which information on where a copy of a translation was located could be obtained. The information was supplied by some translation agencies, industrial librarians, and the Office of Technical Services. Interest in this project was too wide-spread for the index to remain the responsibility of a Section, and it was taken over by the [Science-Technology] Group. The project grew from a card index to a depository of translations and became a translation pool rather than an index. Later it was taken over by the Association.

After a somewhat varied career, a contract for handling the material was signed with The John Crerar Library in 1953, and all translations held by SLA were sent to Chicago. The material was thoroughly organized, translations were catalogued, current listings of translations were published regularly in *Translation Monthly* and the services to be given were established. Although housed at The John Crerar Library it is the SLA Translation Center. The value of this Center is evidenced by the fact that grants to support its activities have been received from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the American Iron and Steel Institute. In 1957 the Library of Congress contributed some 4,000 Russian translations. Since January 1959, the Center has cooperated with the Office of Technical Services by collecting unpublished translations, foreign and domestic, from non-governmental agencies. Copies of all translations received by the Center or OTS are deposited with the other and identical files and indexes are maintained by both centers. What started out as a small service to SLA members is now a national service available to everyone.

Such important contributions were due to the commitment and enthusiasm of the association's leaders, and that fact is never slighted in any reference to the association's history. At the same time, though, it became apparent during the years immediately following the Second World War that the association's staff also made important, often unsung contributions to SLA's success. The association office (which had been located in New York City since 1932) was to undergo serious

The growth of an operations office for SLA seems to have been based, generally speaking, on providing services for the association as they were needed. In 1927, the Executive Board approved a motion to employ a paid secretary, to be appointed annually by the board, and for five years, Mrs. Herbert (Mary Wallace) Brigham held this position, with her home in Providence, Rhode Island as the association's first fixed address. When she resigned in 1932, Eleanor Cavanaugh, the librarian at the Standard Statistics Company, located at 345 Hudson Street in New York City, was able to obtain rent-free office space for the association. Rebecca Rankin, one of the association's early leaders and its president in 1922-23, served as volunteer secretary, performing these duties in addition to her work as Librarian of the New York Municipal Reference

change during the decade of the 1950s. In the area of publications, for example, a decision was taken to engage a paid editor for *Special Libraries*. There was a change in the association's legal status as well. In 1959 SLA decided to dissolve the association's incorporation in Rhode Island and to incorporate the Special Libraries Association in the State of New York, a move obviously influenced by the success of the association in managing its affairs within that jurisdiction.

The crowning event of the decade was the celebration of the association's fiftieth anniversary. Several years in the planning, with a Fiftieth Anniversary Committee under the leadership of Chairman Kenneth H. Fagerhaugh, the event offered a time for reflection and for future planning. Fagerhaugh reported to the membership that "in the early stages of planning for our Golden Anniversary, it was agreed that we would dwell on the past just enough to recognize some of our stalwart 'statesmen.'"

And such recognition there was! A whole host of "stalwarts" was honored, and the celebration was full of fine praise and enthusiasm for the association's success over the fifty years. Seeking to provide "formal notice of our appreciation," President Margaret H. Fuller announced the first members of the SLA Hall of Fame. In describing the creation and development of the honor, President Fuller made it clear that it was a most appropriate event for the association's fiftieth anniversary:

The Hall of Fame was originated for the purpose of recognizing those individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the growth and development of the Special Libraries Association. With the establishment of this honor, we are offered an opportunity to acknowledge officially the diligent, untiring efforts of those members whose willing devotion of time and energy have forwarded many activities of SLA. The Hall of Fame distinction carries with it acclaim for sustained leadership and personal endeavor in the several major units of the association's organization: chapters, division, committees, and the Executive Board.

The first Hall of Fame is presented as part of our Fiftieth Anniversary celebration. On this historic occasion, it is highly appropriate that foremost recognition be granted to John Cotton Dana, founder of the Special Libraries Association and its first president, 1909-1911, and to Sarah B. Ball and Anna B. Sears who contributed in such great measure to the initial idea of an association of those interested in special libraries. ...

Library. In 1934, Elizabeth Lois Clarke was employed as National Secretary, and held the position for six years, succeeded by Kathleen Brown Stebbins in 1940. The association office had just been moved, with its three staff members, to the fifth floor of the Stechert-Hafner Building at 31 East 10th Street in New York City, where the annual rent was \$690.00. Mrs. Stebbins, too, originally held the title of "National Secretary," but this was soon changed to "Executive Secretary." After seeing the headquarters office and staff through the war years and into a period of growth and expansion, Mrs. Stebbins resigned as Executive Secretary in 1953. She was succeeded by Marian E. Lucius, who was employed in the position until 1959, when William M. Woods was named to the position.

Fuller went on to indicate that six additional people were being inducted posthumously into the SLA Hall of Fame, “their names and contributions read into the official record of this meeting with reverence and deep esteem”: Herbert O. Brigham, Charter Member, Daniel N. Handy, Charter Member, William Alcott, Eleanor S. Cavanaugh, Dorsey W. Hyde, and Laura A. Woodward.

President Fuller then presented the award to the recipients who were in Atlantic City for the convention: Dr. John A. Lapp, Charter Member, Guy E. Marion, Charter Member, Marguerite D. Burnett, Alta B. Claflin, Josephine B. Hollingsworth, Alma Clarvoe Mitchill, Linda H. Morley, Rebecca B. Rankin, Lura Shorb, Irene M. Strieby, and Marian Manley Winsler.

On this important occasion, messages of congratulation were received from statesmen and leaders from all over the world. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent his felicitations, as did Lewis L. Strauss, Secretary of Commerce. Former President Herbert Hoover wrote to the members re-stating his first message to the association, delivered some thirty-eight years before. The Honorable Robert B. Meyner, Governor, The State of New Jersey, opened SLA’s 50th Anniversary Convention with a welcoming address in which he noted how proud he and his fellow New Jersey residents were that their state, through the efforts of John Cotton Dana at the Newark Public Library, had been “the birthplace of the Special Libraries Association.”

Current interests were not neglected as the convention progressed, and even the keynote address, entitled “The Long Look” and delivered by past president Elizabeth W. Owens, brought the celebrants “back to the present” as she described the association’s role in establishing professional standards. In her address, Owens urged her fellow members not to shy away from undertaking these efforts. With the achievement of a statement of professional standards for specialist librarians, she said, “now we are ready for the Long Look Forward.”

The very first step into the next 50 years must be the achievement of the second part of our goal – work standards. ... We need work standards for ourselves; we need them to establish special librarianship as a profession. ... Many of you may be thinking that you will not be able to force work standards upon your organizations. *Force* is not the thing. Let the work standards be a guide. They can be used in establishing new libraries; they can be authoritative tools when new staff, reference sources, or equipment is needed in the established library; and they can be a very effective weapon if questions arise when evaluating the library program.

It was an honorable—and ambitious—goal for the association’s second half century, and it anticipated the important work on professional recruitment, ethics, and professional standards and the critical establishment of competencies for specialist librarians that would be undertaken later in the association’s history.