



State and Regional Library Associations

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DEVELOPMENT OF STATE LIBRARY associations began in 1890 when five states perfected state organizations. New York was the first, followed by Ohio, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Five more state organizations joined the ranks in 1891, in Connecticut, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, and Michigan. By 1905, associations had been organized in 28 states.

As in the case of earlier library development, the organizing of state library associations received encouragement from Melvil Dewey. In June 1891, we find Dewey writing,¹ "In the *Library Journal* for June 1890, I pointed out that the time had come when we needed local associations to carry on the rapidly developing modern library work . . . I write these notes in the JOURNAL to urge A.L.A. members in each State which has not yet organized to take immediate steps toward a beginning. After years of constant study of this question, I am fully convinced that as soon as there are five or more earnest library workers in any State, they ought to put their names together as a State association, which shall grow with the growth of public sentiment and keep its place on the State roll of honor."

Dewey then listed five objectives of the New York Association which included the stimulation of interest in New York by addresses, articles in the press, circulation of printed material etc.; the securing of the fullest possible cooperation with A.L.A. in promoting general library interests; the promotion among New York libraries of the exchange of duplicates, inter-library loans and other forms of cooperation; securing of adequate library legislation; and the enrolling of all interested in library development.

Subsequent issues of the library press carried accounts of activities and proceedings of A.L.A. meetings and usually included a round-up of progress of state programs under the developing state associations and library commissions.

In some cases, local library clubs preceeded the state associations

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and later contributed to their growth. In New York, the New York Library Club of New York City was founded in 1895 and enrolled a strong membership of leading librarians. W. R. Eastman in writing on *The First Ten Years of the New York Library Association*² indicates that members of the New York Library Club were at first, not enthusiastic about journeying up-state for meetings of the state association until J. H. Canfield of Columbia and Melvil Dewey established *Library Week* at Lake Placid. Quoting from Eastman's article, "New York and Brooklyn went to Lake Placid, went gladly, and with enthusiasm . . . It was a delightful week and the New York Library Association, then ten years old was born anew."

Another example was the fore-runner of the California Library Association when three librarians issued a call, inviting librarians around San Francisco Bay to meet and decide whether an association was needed. As a result, the Library Association of Central California was organized on March 8, 1895, and for the first three years, the meetings and interests were confined mainly to the district around San Francisco Bay. In March 1898, the name was changed to the Library Association of California.³

Herbert Putnam, in a paper on local library associations in the United States, given at the Second International Library Congress, held in London in 1897, lists twenty-five associations existing in that year. Of the twenty-five, sixteen were state organizations, four were city organizations, three represented certain districts of a state, one represented two cities, and one, the Massachusetts Library Club of which Putnam was then president, included libraries from two states. Putnam, computing total library activity in the United States as of 1897, reports,⁴ "If, therefore, one were to attempt an estimate of the organized effort by and in behalf of the library interests of the United States, one must add to the American Library Association, with its 750 members at its one meeting a year, these twenty-five local associations with their 1,985 members and their aggregate of ninety-two meetings a year."

Since state and local government together bear the primary responsibility for library planning and administration, the state library association has played an important part in library development. The public library is largely a municipal concern and has grown up as a local institution. There is, however, an increasing tendency for the state to supervise and assist in library development. C. B. Joeckel, in *The Government of the American Public Library*⁵ reported in 1935 that extension agencies existed in forty-four states.

Because of this dual responsibility of local and state governments

State and Regional Library Associations

for libraries, the state association has become the logical planning unit, a unit which cannot be replaced on either the regional or national level. While the A.L.A. heads up the work on library standards and library organization, the individual state associations have had to adapt these standards and their organizations to their own particular needs and often they do pioneer work through the combined resources of the state association and the state extension agency.

The type of state organization varies with the needs and strength of the state. The California Library Association might be taken as a good example of a state system which has solved its library problems so well that it has felt no need to become a part of a regional association even though California is remote from other library centers. Second only to New York in A.L.A. membership, California has been in the fore-front of library development. The association in the early days was able to take its state library out from political control and secure dynamic leadership for it. With the closest cooperation between the state library and the state association, California pioneered in the county library movement early in the century.

Because of its close cooperation between the state library and the state association, the California Library Association has been a highly effective instrument. Under the present constitution, the state is divided into seven districts through which all libraries and librarians are kept informed and active.

The organization of the regional library association in the United States, the earliest dating from 1909, is of much later date than the development of state associations. The five regional associations presently active take in 32 states and one Canadian Province. The accompanying table shows the date of organization of each, the states included and the number of A.L.A. members in each. Most of the states which have banded together to form regional associations have two characteristics in common. They are for the most part on the periphery of the United States and they are sparsely settled and include comparatively a small A.L.A. membership.

If some of the states of the Mountain-Plains Association do not conform to the first characteristic and the New England States do not conform to the second, it is still true that in the main, the states forming the regional associations are inaccessible to A.L.A. headquarters and the centers of library population and are sparsely settled. From the accompanying table (p. 322) it can be seen that two-thirds of all the states are included in the five regional associations but that to-

JOHN S. RICHARDS

TABLE 1

Development of Regional Library Associations

Regional Associations	Date	States Included	A.L.A. Membership
Pacific Northwest Library Association	1909	British Columbia	52
		Idaho	43
		Montana	64
		Oregon	231
		Washington	432
Southeastern Library Association	1920	Alabama	170
		Florida	240
		Georgia	265
		Kentucky	223
		Mississippi	134
		N. Carolina	401
		S. Carolina	150
		Tennessee	264
Virginia	317		
Southwestern Library Association	1922	Arizona	81
		Arkansas	122
		Louisiana	314
		New Mexico	80
		Oklahoma	175
		Texas	563
New England Library Association	1938	Connecticut	309
		Maine	65
		Massachusetts	858
		New Hampshire	99
		Rhode Island	77
		Vermont	58
Mountain-Plains Library Association	1948	Colorado	210
		Kansas	229
		Nebraska	181
		N. Dakota	53
		S. Dakota	57
		Utah	66
		Wyoming	39
		Montana (East)	
Total	6,622		

gether they include only about one-third of the A.L.A. membership in the continental United States.

Certainly the Pacific Northwest Library Association, the oldest of the regional associations came into being in part because of the isolation of its libraries and the feeling on the part of its librarians that there was

State and Regional Library Associations

need to pool resources. C. W. Smith in his historical sketch, *The Early Years of the P.N.L.A.*⁶ has this to say about the conditions under which the association was formed:

“Before scanning the record of the early years it may be well to consider the background and conditions under which the Association functioned. One of the important factors to be considered is the long distance separating the Pacific Northwest from the eastern and central portions of the United States. As gauged by travel time and by the length of time required to secure mail the difference then was much greater than it is today. The Pacific Northwest was in fact well isolated and largely dependent upon its own resources. The libraries were also far apart in the sparsely populated areas of British Columbia and the northwestern states. Although the future loomed large, it was a time of small beginnings—a small population, small libraries, small book appropriations, small salaries. Few of the librarians were trained and in some quarters there was a question even as to the desirability of securing professionally trained personnel.

“On the favorable side of the ledger mention should be made of the character and quality of the people. The population was made up of a vigorous, forward-looking class of citizens, all bent on improvement. This was true in all lines of endeavor and schools and libraries were no exception. Library progress was due in no small degree to the personality of the early librarians. The list includes a considerable number who entered the profession without benefit of formal training. There were, however, a fine group of young recruits from the library schools . . .”

Because of the isolation of its libraries and the need to pool resources, the PNLA perhaps more than of the other regional associations took the place of the state associations. At least three of the states had state organizations before 1909 and the meeting of the Washington Library Association in that year became the means of the organization of PNLA. This fifth annual conference of the Washington Library Association was held on the University of Washington campus with W. E. Henry, University librarian, as its president. This was during the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition and with the Exposition as an additional drawing card, librarians from Northwest states and the Province of British Columbia were invited to attend the meeting. There was a generous attendance from outside Washington and at the first session the president appointed a committee to consider a permanent organization of Pacific Northwest Librarians. This committee consisted of Franklin Hopper of Tacoma, chairman; Minnie Oakley of Seattle for Washington; Cornelia Marvin of Salem, and Mary Frances

Isom of Portland for Oregon; E. O. S. Scholefield of Victoria for British Columbia and Ellen Garfield Smith of Walla Walla for the Inland Empire, which presumably represented Idaho and Montana. At the last session of the three day meeting, the report of this committee recommending permanent organization was adopted and the Washington Library Association was, by vote of its members, merged into the PNLA with the dues already paid being paid into the PNLA treasury.⁷

Through the early years of PNLA, state business was largely conducted at regional meetings and carried on between meetings by state and provincial executive committees. In 1931, a second Washington Library Association was formed and at present, the four states and the Province of British Columbia have active state or provincial associations. While several of these state associations hold yearly meetings with programs, there has been a tendency for the state association to pay particular attention to legislative programs and other matters of special interest to the individual states and leave to PNLA the type of programming generally associated with library conferences.

PNLA has from the beginning had an active program of library cooperation for the region. *The Subscription Books Bulletin*, now an A.L.A. activity, started in the Pacific Northwest with a Subscription Book Committee and was carried on through two series from 1917 to 1929. When the number of non-regional subscribers exceeded those from PNLA territory, the A.L.A. was asked to take over the project.

The Committee on Bibliography over a thirty year period and under the chairmanship of C. W. Smith of the University of Washington library carried on a notable list of co-operative projects, many of these culminating in publications such as *Special Collections in Libraries of the Pacific Northwest* and *Manuscripts in Libraries of the Pacific Northwest*. In 1940, as a result of committee activity, the Pacific Northwest Bibliographic center was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation.

The Bibliographic Center located at the University of Washington library is a truly co-operative venture and since its inauguration its entire cost has been born by the libraries of the region. Its notable achievements have been reported by Smith in one of his reports as chairman of the Bibliography Committee: ⁸

1. "It has described and located through its Union Catalog the books owned by many of the more important libraries of the region. It has simplified and accelerated inter-library loans. Through this service the books of each library have in a very real sense become the property of all.

State and Regional Library Associations

2. "It has made and published a survey of regional library holdings. A Conference on Specialization has been held and subsequent annual specialization reports have been received. Thus the Center has become an agency to guide the direction and increase the extent of future book accumulations.

3. "It has pooled the purchasing power of a large group of libraries and through the means of a Joint Agent has saved thousands of dollars to the libraries of the region."

The association published proceedings from the beginning and in 1936, started a quarterly publication, *The PNLA Quarterly*, which has since been the official organ of the association.

This first of all regional associations is unique in that it is the only one which is international in scope. The inclusion of British Columbia librarians in the formation of this association has done much to give it color and distinction. Nine of our annual meetings have been held in British Columbia and ten Canadians have served the association as president. Librarians of British Columbia have been active participants in the joint co-operative ventures and not a little of the dynamic leadership has come from our colleagues north of the border. This practical co-operation across the international boundary has given a breadth of vision to regional planning which it might not otherwise have had.

In contrast to the tightly organized PNLA, the New England Library Association is most informal. There are no dues, and meetings are financed through conference registration fees and exhibitors fees. The purpose of the New England Library Association is to "plan and to hold regional conferences of librarians and trustees (or directors) of New England libraries for the exchange of ideas and the welfare of libraries through addresses, discussions and similar measures, directly sponsored by the several library associations of the New England states." ⁹

Officers are nominated by a committee appointed by the president and are elected at the conference business meeting. Since counter-nominations may be made from the floor, it is not technically a self-perpetuating system. The four officers and the two directors at large shall not have more than one representative of the same New England state.

Meetings may be held biennially or in any year, when in the opinion of the conference or the Executive Board, the annual conference of the A.L.A. shall be held at a point too distant to attract a considerable attendance from New England.

Since this association was not formed until 1939, it can be readily

understood why New England with its well established libraries and its long settled state pattern did not need an association pledged to regional cooperation. The need here is for library conferences, especially in those years when A.L.A. meets in places remote from New England.

The two Southern associations present still different patterns. Tommie Dora Barker in a brief historical sketch of the Southeastern Library Associations says: ¹⁰

"It began in 1920 primarily as a forum. About 100 librarians from Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee met at Signal Mountain, Tennessee to consider their common library problems in the light of Southern conditions, economic, social, and governmental, and in relation to the stage of library development in the South.

"This was the first of fourteen biennial conferences that have been held. At the second conference, in 1922, the Southeastern Library Association was formally organized to include nine states, Kentucky and Virginia being added to the original seven. Generally speaking, the pattern set at the first conference has been continued: conditions with their underlying causes have been analyzed and action recommended for their improvement.

"Development of detailed blueprints for programs of action were necessarily left to the individual states, but committees were brought into play when region-wide action was needed. The work of two committees, which operated in the late 1920's and early 1930's, may be cited as of special importance. The indefatigable efforts of the School Library committee in cooperation with similar committees from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools resulted in the adoption of standards for high school libraries and for the training of school librarians which have made for a phenomenal improvement of school library service in every Southern state. The program of the Policy Committee adopted in 1929 constituted a stirring platform for action, many parts of which were carried out in the following years."

In 1950 the Southeastern Library Association was reorganized and adopted a new constitution. Under this new organization the association now has a headquarters office, a part-time paid executive secretary, a quarterly journal and a paid membership of well over a thousand members. A study of the reports of the long list of committees of the Southeastern Library Association gives some idea of the many activities carried on by the association. Here as in PNLA there is

State and Regional Library Associations

emphasis on co-operative ventures which will raise standards and benefit the whole region.

The Southwestern Library Association was organized on October 22, 1922, at the twentieth annual meeting of the Texas Library Association. The first meeting was held in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1923. In October 1934, a joint meeting was held with the Southeast Library Association and in November 1952, the association met in Mexico City.

Membership is financed by twenty-five cents per capita of the total regular membership of each state association. Payment of these dues of representative state associations automatically makes the individual members of the state associations active members of the Southwestern Library Association. The programs are largely devoted to subjects and problems of special interest to libraries of the region.

The Mountain-Plains Library Association, youngest of the five, was organized at Estes Park, Colorado, in 1948. This first meeting was attended by two hundred individuals from an immense territory comprising seven large states. Annual meetings have been held since organization. The purpose of the Mountain-Plains Library Association as stated in their constitution is,¹¹ "The object of the Mountain-Plains Library Association is the promotion of library service in the mountain-plains area. The following states are included: Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah and part of Montana. Any person or Institution interested in this objective is eligible for membership."

About three news letters are published each year. The North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies in the North Dakota Agricultural College Library is the headquarters for all archives belonging to the association.

From this admittedly incomplete survey of state and regional associations it seems clear that both types of organization have worked together to develop libraries in the United States. While states like New York and California, to mention two of the largest on opposite sides of the country, have demonstrated their ability to solve their own problems within the framework of state organization, at least thirty-two other states have found help from regional association. As the idea of larger area service has come to the fore, regional co-operation has taken on a new meaning. At least three of the regional associations are at present working for foundation grants which will enable them to go deeper into regional co-operation for libraries than has been possible in the past. An example of this changed emphasis can be seen in the PNLA project which it is hoped will be a complete regional

survey of economic, geographic, political, human and international factors affecting library service and development in the Northwest. The Library Development Committee of PNLA, in a report on this project at the last conference envisaged the following six specific objectives which they hope to achieve: ¹²

“First, a complete analysis of the financial support necessary for adequate library service, the most efficient units of service and a practical and feasible suggestion of ways in which necessary funds may be secured and recommended service units established. Due to the great geographical, economic and political variety of the Northwest, these recommendations are expected to vary widely for the various sections of our region.

“Second, a careful consideration of how our libraries are now governed and how they can be improved and developed through the coordinated efforts of adjoining municipalities, counties, states and the province through the establishment of larger service areas. It is possible that such agreements could, in some instances, be on interstate and, conceivably, even on an inter-national basis.

“Third, an impartial and detached analysis of the place and activities of the five state and provincial library agencies in the region to the end that each of these agencies may more effectively promote the growth of libraries and the use of books in its area.

“Fourth, a further study of coordination of library growth and service in the Northwest in support of research and scholarly work. This is a field in which we have had our most conspicuous success. It is also a field where, through complete understanding of the nature and extent of the problems involved, we can, being a young region, avoid the unplanned growth and waste of funds found among scholarly libraries of older sections of the country.

“Fifth, a detailed study of school libraries of the region, their staffing, use and effectiveness. This can be an important contribution and one which would be reflected in an intelligent future use of public libraries as well as in their financial support.

“Sixth, an analysis of the education, training, aptitudes and personalities of the people who work in our libraries, including a discovery of ways in which they can be better prepared to discharge their important responsibilities.”

From this it can be seen that the regional association may do for library development what the individual states cannot do through their own resources. It would appear that the national association together with the state associations and the regional associations form a partnership, each type of organization having its special contribution to make.

State and Regional Library Associations

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