



# Associations and United States Legislation

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THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION has been somewhat reluctant to enter the field of legislative action and the accompanying political maneuvering which is its necessary accompaniment. This reluctance stems from two motives: an ideological abhorrence of the rough and tumble conflict of politics, reinforced by a feeling of weakness and insecurity, and from the traditional development of libraries as local as opposed to regional or national institutions.

Although a statement as brief as the one above cannot be comprehensive enough to present the whole complex nature of a profession's thought and attitudes, it is essentially true and will explain much of the history of A.L.A. legislative action in the last two decades. The other library associations with fewer members, less income, and being less universally representative have engaged but very little in legislative activities.

This attitude was also realistic in that the library profession has been weak in numbers as compared to other groups with legislative programs. It has been engaged in a struggle to establish itself as a profession with a large proportion of its membership not having been subjected to professional training and discipline. In addition, members of the profession have been individually engaged in a series of local struggles to maintain and advance standards of library service.

In spite of these handicaps, after an initial proposal by its Committee on Library Extension in 1929,<sup>1</sup> the pressure of events led the A.L.A., in 1934 and 1935, to embark upon an attempt to establish a national legislative program. In those years, over strenuous opposition, its Council approved the idea of federal aid for libraries.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for this action and its implications cannot be fully understood unless it is studied against the background of the entire socio-political complex of our times. The library as a social institution was caught up in the tremendous movement of which the federal government became the center. As a result of this movement many social, economic, and

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political obligations, which traditionally had been met by individuals or by local governments, were assumed by the national government, either through default, necessity, or by aggressive action. Library leaders met the situation with varied reactions. Some looked upon it as an opportunity for developing libraries into institutions of broader, more effective service. Others regarded it as destructive to the fabric of our traditional system. Still others accepted the idea that the library profession should strive for inclusion in the benefits in order to hold its relative position, if nothing more. A growing segment became convinced that library problems along with other educational and social problems had become national in scope and nature, and required action on a national basis for their solution.

The program, which was so strenuously debated and finally adopted by the association, was fourfold. It included:

1. Establishment of a federal library agency.
2. Cooperative collection of library statistics by federal and state governments and the A.L.A.
3. A study of library finance by the A.L.A.
4. Federal aid for library service.<sup>1</sup>

At this point it may be helpful to examine federal services to libraries as they existed at that time. Libraries received exemption from import duties on certain books; they received special low postal rates on books, while books for the blind were postage free. The Office of Education published library statistics biennially for colleges and universities and less frequently for other libraries. The Library of Congress sold catalog cards at the cost of printing and distribution. It furnished sixty-eight depository catalogs, it maintained a union catalog on a national basis, it provided an interlibrary loan service and a library service to the blind. The superintendent of documents distributed public documents and catalogs and lists to selected libraries. The Smithsonian Institute operated an international exchange service and an international library loan service to libraries primarily to carry out their own programs.<sup>1</sup>

It will be noted that some of these services—such as library service to the blind, and distribution of public documents—were direct services to citizens toward whom the federal government felt an obligation, with libraries chosen as instruments through which the government acted.

Other services, such as interlibrary loan, were on a reciprocal basis. Others, such as distribution of catalog cards and bibliographies, were

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residual in that they were provided by the government for its own use after which additional copies were made available to libraries at cost. Very few services were provided to libraries because the federal government felt a responsibility for developing library service in the United States.

The action of the A.L.A. Council in resolving to seek federal aid for libraries was revolutionary and far-reaching. Its results have been more significant in the development of libraries and the library profession than might be realized from a casual examination of tangible results. It aided in the coalescence of library thinking on a national basis and in a tremendous development of library planning. It furnished a focal point around which library planners could gather and work toward universally-available library service.

The first step in the program for federal aid was agreed to be the establishment of a library agency in the federal government. Although this step was much simpler than subsequent steps, it was not easy to achieve.<sup>3</sup> Only one federal agency, the Library of Congress, was primarily a library agency. Though it had gradually become recognized as the national library of the United States by all but members of the Congress, there were valid reasons for not attempting to place the federal library agency there. The most compelling of these reasons was that the Library of Congress is a part of the legislative branch of the government. To set up an agency in the legislative branch with the functions of the new library agency would do violence to the concept of separation of powers so firmly established in the constitution.

The functions of the federal library agency were considered to be within the broad scope of the responsibility allocated to the Office of Education, which was then a part of the Department of the Interior. Because of this fact enabling legislation was not required. However, it was necessary to campaign strenuously to secure an appropriation in the budget of the Office of Education for these purposes. This campaign was successful by 1936 when, on June 23rd, the President signed the Department of the Interior appropriation bill carrying an amount of \$25,000 for a Library Service Division during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1937.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this amount represented a compromise between the House and Senate reducing the Senate's appropriation from \$40,000. It was not until January 1938 that a staff was employed and the division began to function.

In the meantime, on January 26, 1937, Congressman R. A. Collins of Mississippi introduced a bill to create five regional national libraries.<sup>4</sup> This bill, although it made little progress toward enactment, did

have considerable significance in its influence on library planning. The idea of regional libraries as a second line of defense in the provision of library service on a national basis was later developed in the "*National Plan for Public Library Service.*"<sup>5</sup>

During the whole period which has been under discussion, the federal government was having a rather remarkable impact upon library programs. The relief programs, the W.P.A., N.Y.A., T.V.A., C.C.C., and others, were in some cases reluctantly and in others generously including libraries as part of their assistance and educational activities. The difficulties encountered by libraries in gaining consideration as legitimate participants in these programs and in establishing standards and securing qualified personnel for their programs when they were established, emphasized the importance of having a permanent agency in the federal government to speak for library interests.

With the establishment of the Library Service Division in the Office of Education, the way was now open for work toward securing federal aid. A great deal of study had already gone into preparation for this project. All of the arguments, pro and con, had been developed. Thorough analyses of the federal aid programs in various fields had been made. These studies were climaxed by publication of C. B. Joeckel's *Library Service* as Staff Study No. 11 for the Advisory Committee on Education in 1938.<sup>6</sup> This memorandum recommended:

1. Aid to states for public library service, especially to rural areas.
2. Aid to school libraries and to library service in the system of public higher education.
3. Aid to demonstration and experimental libraries of various types.
4. Aid to public and educational libraries for library buildings.
5. Generous support of federal library agencies.

The amount of money recommended by a special A.L.A. committee for support of library service in the various states was approximately \$17,000,000. The final report of the Advisory Committee on Education nevertheless recommended only \$2,000,000 to \$6,000,000 specifically earmarked for library service. The A.L.A. consoled itself in the belief that libraries would be able to receive assistance under numerous other special categories.

The strategy adopted by the A.L.A. for promoting legislation for federal aid to libraries was to include library aid in bills for federal aid to education. This strategy was dictated both by desire and by a feeling that federal aid to education could arouse much broader and

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stronger support than federal aid to libraries. In addition, the A.L.A. secured the help of a wide group of national organizations as well as that of its own members and library groups such as "Friends of the Library."

The recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Education were embodied in the Harrison, Thomas, Fletcher Bill which was introduced in the Senate on April 19, 1938, and in the House on April 21.<sup>4</sup> The Federal Relations Committee of the A.L.A. worked closely with the National Education Association on this and the subsequent bills. The 1938, 1939, and 1940 reports of the Federal Relations Committee tell of an active campaign both in Washington and in the country as a whole. By 1939, forty-six state library associations had endorsed the measure. Twenty-five thousand copies of a leaflet, *Federal Aid to Libraries* had been distributed. A pamphlet, *The Equal Chance*, which was originally published in 1936,<sup>7</sup> was used throughout this and subsequent campaigns. The campaign continued through the 76th Congress, but by the time the 77th Congress convened in 1941, the urgency of the defense program had eliminated any possibility of federal aid on the basis recommended by the Advisory Committee on Education.

During this time the A.L.A. had gradually widened its legislative interests until it was concerned with a full-fledged legislative program. In 1938 the President signed an Executive Order reducing the postage rates on books to the same flat rate as that applying to magazines,<sup>8</sup> for which it had actively campaigned. The A.L.A. Committee on Annuities, Pensions and Life Insurance was concerned with new social security legislation. In 1939 the Federal Relations Committee reported on attempts to increase the budget of the Library Service Division; Congressman Collins' bill to establish five national regional libraries; a proposal for a Federal Library Council; extension of the new low postal rate on books; extension of federal income tax to librarians in public and quasi-public libraries, and action by the A.L.A. in connection with the appointment of a librarian of Congress. In 1940 the chairman of the committee protested a cut in appropriations for the National Youth Administration.

In 1941 the defense program was accelerated to such an extent that library relations to the federal government were radically altered. As early as September 1940 the need of a study of the special services of public libraries in national defense was planned. In December the Council of the A.L.A. voted to authorize the Federal Relations Committee:

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1. "To recommend to the appropriate officials interpretations or rulings permitting emergency federal appropriations for education to be spent for library service
2. "To seek in future federal emergency education bills or appropriations the inclusion of specific provisions for library service
3. "To seek direct federal emergency appropriations for libraries through separate legislation, if opportunity offers."<sup>9</sup>

This action was the result of the impact of the defense program upon libraries and library services which were subjected to increasing demands especially in the fields of technology and industrial training.

From this point until the end of the war the legislative program of the A.L.A. was concerned with an effort to secure recognition of libraries as providing essential services in time of war. In 1940 an attempt was made to secure an appropriation of \$2,750,000 to be included in the budget of the Office of Education for public library service in defense areas and for library service to defense workers elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> This item was disapproved by the Bureau of the Budget and later attempts to have it included by amending the appropriations bills were unsuccessful. A similar fate met attempts to provide for library service in the Lanham Act which provided for additional community facilities in defense areas. Subsequent attempts to secure administrative interpretations which would enable libraries to obtain assistance under general provisions of this act were also rebuffed. However, by the end of the war constant effort was rewarded by establishing some priorities for library materials.

The A.L.A. continued to interest itself in legislation affecting book postage, Library of Congress appropriations, Library Service Division appropriations, etc.<sup>11</sup> There was also a great deal of effort spent upon attempts to secure favorable interpretation of law by government agencies so that libraries would not suffer from discrimination in the allocation of priorities and distribution of surplus property at the end of the war.<sup>12</sup>

By 1944 it was evident that a permanent representative in Washington was required if the A.L.A. was to make further progress on its legislative program. As current revenues were inadequate to support a Washington office an effort was made to raise a fund of \$105,000 for the following purposes:

1. To maintain a representative of libraries in Washington under direction of the A.L.A.:

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- (a) To help secure Army camp library books and equipment primarily for rural library service when no longer needed by the Army;
- (b) To help make other federally-owned surplus property, including books, available to college and university libraries, school libraries, public libraries, state library extension agencies, and other publicly supported or tax-exempt libraries.
- (c) To provide federal agencies with information concerning the nation's needs for improved and extended library service;
- (d) To help interpret to federal officials the needs and functions of libraries of all kinds.

2. To enable the A.L.A. to carry on a national public relations program directly and indirectly in support of these and related objectives.<sup>13</sup>

Although legislative action was not mentioned in this statement of objectives it was implied, and it was later stated that one of the functions of the Washington representative was to be library legislation.

The campaign for funds was officially opened in April 1945 and continued until June 1946. While only \$88,639 of the \$105,000 goal was raised,<sup>14</sup> the amount was sufficient to get started. The campaign was also successful in other ways especially in generating wide spread interest in the proposed activities. By August more than 8,100 librarians had contributed to the fund and in October 1945 an office was opened in Washington.<sup>13</sup>

With the opening of the A.L.A. National Relations Office hopes were high that the legislative program could begin to produce results. In November, a program of action was formulated and later endorsed by the Council. The first year's work of the office seemed to bear out these hopes. Libraries were specifically included among those agencies eligible to receive surplus property. The Army Map Service was distributing maps to 150 libraries. Some surplus Army camp libraries were being made available to state library agencies. Low postal rates on books had been maintained in spite of attempts to raise them. Libraries were specifically included in public works proposals and in a bill to provide federal aid to education. The Library Demonstration Bill had been introduced and approved by a Senate committee and a House subcommittee. In addition, forty-four state federal relations committees had been established to bring national support to the program.<sup>15</sup>

The Library Demonstration Bill and its successors was to prove the

focus of legislative activity for the next nine years, so it might be well to examine it in relation to former proposals. In a sense it represented a compromise with an all-out drive for federal aid though it stemmed from one of the initial recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Education for "aid to demonstration and experimental libraries of various types." It also grew out of library extension experience in various states, notably in Louisiana where state demonstrations of library service in rural areas had proved successful in establishing locally supported library service on a permanent basis.

The basic idea of the bill was simple. It sought to provide a grant of \$25,000 per year for five years to each state for the purpose of establishing demonstrations of library service primarily in rural areas. In addition, any state might receive an additional \$25,000 to \$50,000 on a matching basis for the same purpose. Provisions for reporting upon and studying the demonstrations were also included in the bill.<sup>16</sup>

The bill differed from other federal aid proposals in that it was temporary in nature—calling for five years of demonstrations. The amount of money involved was much less, ranging from \$25,000 to \$75,000 per state, whereas the amount included for libraries in bills for federal aid to education ran to \$30,000,000 annually. Finally, the bill was entirely for libraries and represented the second attempt of the A.L.A. to go-it-alone in the complicated field of national legislation.

The strategy in support of the bill was to keep it bi-partisan, to establish a broad basis of national support by establishing state committees of librarians and library trustees, and by soliciting the aid of other national organizations such as the National Education Association, farm organizations, women's clubs, and many others. In following this strategy the A.L.A. became concerned with a great deal of legislation in related fields. Since 1935 it had supported federal aid to education. It added support for educational facilities and the National Science Foundation. It took an interest in social security legislation. In 1947 the report of the National Relations Office listed eight specific pieces of national legislation on which it had assisted. Thirty national organizations cooperated in support of the library program.<sup>15</sup>

The efforts on behalf of this bill and its successors were more nearly successful than any other A.L.A. major legislative attempts except establishment of the Library Service Division. At various times the bill was approved by both Senate and House committees. At one time it passed the Senate and in March 1950 was defeated in the House by 164 to 161.<sup>17</sup> In spite of this defeat plans were immediately laid to

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carry on the program on a revised basis including legislation concerning public library development, social security extension, retention of preferred postal rates, federal aid to education, the Care/Unesco book program, labor extension service through libraries, school building construction grants, technical assistance abroad, and for increased appropriations for the Office of Education Service to Libraries Section, the Library of Congress, and the overseas library, and exchange of persons program of the Department of State.

During this period the A.L.A. was undergoing a series of crises which had an undoubted effect on its activities, including legislation. It was having increasing difficulty trying to make its income stretch to cover its program, it was in the throes of reorganization, and also changed executive secretaries. In 1949 the Library Development Fund was exhausted.

At the 1948 annual A.L.A. conference the Council unanimously adopted a resolution<sup>18</sup> to maintain an office in Washington. Plans were later proposed for another subscription campaign for this purpose. However, in June 1949 the budget committee of the A.L.A. reported that it was unable to find funds to continue the office, and its termination was planned for the end of the fiscal year. The announcement of this decision brought an insistent demand to keep the office open and in December 1949 it was announced that the Executive Board and Federal Relations Committee had agreed on a plan for supporting and maintaining the office.<sup>19-20</sup> Thus the trend for the A.L.A. to keep actively interested in national affairs and legislation was further confirmed.

During the years from 1950 to the present time the familiar pattern was repeated. There was hard work on legislation, postal rates for library books were held in line, the Korean War brought up problems of priorities and allocations, the Library Services Bill became a hardy perennial.

In 1953, a subcommittee of the Federal Relations Committee was formed to make a study of responsibility of the federal government in the development of library services. Another special Committee on Federal-State Relations was created by the A.L.A. Executive Board in June 1953, to work on the problems which fall within the agenda of the President's Commission on Federal-State Relations.<sup>21</sup> The creation of these two committees suggests a reappraisal of the library legislative program.

This history of the A.L.A. interest in federal legislation is necessarily brief and is an attempt to sketch the highlights. Since it is the descrip-

tion of a movement on a broad scale, it has not been concerned with individual contributions or work. It should be noted that the development of this movement did not occur in a vacuum, either in relation to national affairs or in relation to the work of the A.L.A. During this period the United States underwent a major economic depression, fought two wars, suffered a series of crises and achieved tremendous technological and industrial development. There were great forces in ideological conflict, not only here but throughout the world. The resolution to extend and improve library service through national action was part of a great social movement.

In the A.L.A. response to this movement was not limited to legislative action alone. The work of the various library extension organizations within A.L.A. the development of library standards and of the National Plan for Public Library Service are a few examples of ways in which the profession attempted to create a pattern for library development which both supported and profited from the legislative program.

The public relations program was closely allied to the legislative program and, in a sense, the legislative program has been the greatest of the association's public relations ventures. Perhaps it has been most successful in that respect.

All this time the library movement was developing through state and local action. Immediately after World War II there was an accelerated increase in the strength of state library extension agencies, in the development of county and regional libraries, and in the general strengthening of the library movement.<sup>22</sup> In this development the A.L.A., the state library associations, the state library agencies, and the service to libraries section of the U.S. Office of Education worked in close cooperation.

The development of A.L.A. standards, of its National Plan for Public Library Service, and its campaign to support the library services bills stimulated state planning and state campaigns for library support. The Service to Libraries Section sponsored planning conferences, gathered information and helped unify the movement. On the whole, the national program was responsible for much of the local gain.

In summary, the library profession in the United States became involved in a national legislative program through the pressure of events and the desires of its members for the development of a more effective library service. The A.L.A. and state library associations became the instruments for a nationwide program of legislative action focused on planning library development and on assistance to local and state li-

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brary agencies in implementing these plans. The A.L.A. legislative program grew broader as time passed so that now it includes not only federal aid to libraries but a number of auxiliary services and support for legislation in related fields.

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