

The Second Decade¹

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THE GOALS and objectives of A.C.R.L. have been described with clarity and understanding by chairman Carl M. White and Eugene H. Wilson of the Policy Committee, both of whom, along with earlier presidents of this association, have had highly pertinent statements to make about its future. But I do not think it superfluous to address our thoughts again to the needs and obligations of A.C.R.L., and to some of the simpler devices for strengthening the association.

Ten years ago we were in the process of becoming a division of the American Library Association. We are a division as a result of a process in the A.L.A. organization which Schlesinger has called a "splitting and splintering process." This process started almost simultaneously with the organization of A.L.A. in 1876. The parent association lacked something. Our division lacks something; it always will. When everyone is satisfied, ossification will have set in. Some want now only a framework within which librarians of similar professional interests may meet; a few want a placement bureau; others say concentrate on a research and publications program; still others want an organization flexible enough in structure to permit meeting at several levels suggested by interest, experience, and professional contributions.

Needs of this character were apparent as far back as 1876 when the A.L.A. was

organized. Old-timers like Winsor, Fletcher, Poole, Fiske, and Vinton must have separated often from the crowd at early A.L.A. conferences in order better to discuss the preservation of pamphlets (a subject incidentally on which we still need fresh advice); charging systems; seminar methods of instruction; subject headings and classification; and library philosophy generally. They surely drew Vinton out on the subject of his ultramodern circular library then completed at Princeton, a building which this summer is yielding to modern university library construction.

Of course, convention-going was fast becoming popular in that last half of the nineteenth century. Everyone who could claim a profession, had by 1875, participated in the election of national officers, was paying dues, and going once a year to conventions. Conventions since have become a part of our American system, and I suspect they have been good for us all.

There was increased interest in college and university libraries in the decade following the establishment of A.L.A. And in 1889 a meeting of the libraries representing educational institutions was called at the annual conference of A.L.A. for the purpose of discussing the organization of a section. Librarians from Amherst, Harvard, Cornell, Tulane, Oberlin and other institutions were there. The group went immediately into a discussion of the seminar system and departmental libraries. The subject was not exhausted at this first meeting, and those attending agreed that it should be continued later, preferably within the framework of a formally organized

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round table or section. So at White Mountain, in 1890, this handful reassembled, continued their discussion, and launched the College and Reference Section, predecessor of the Association of College and Reference Libraries.

The "splitting and splintering process," this time within the section, was not long in developing. The section was too general to accommodate the more restricted interests of librarians of all educational institutions. The agricultural college librarians formed a round table, and the junior college and teacher-training librarians had, by the 1930's, begun meeting alone or with other groups. The establishment of A.C.R.L. brought these various groups back under the same roof, as it were, in an organization which permits meetings at a general level and at special interest levels. In most respects the framework is eminently well fitted for the achievement of the A.C.R.L. objectives. It is disquieting, therefore, to some of you to hear that the association is not fulfilling satisfactorily all of the requirements of its members. But no professional association does. It has been suggested that we study other comparable organizations and remodel our own to embody their best features. But the plan or structure of this association will not make it strong or weak. The recommendations of the Fourth Activities Committee, or the Fifth, cannot guarantee us a strong association. This can come only with well-defined objectives, strong leadership, and active member participation from top to bottom. Perhaps we should consider here only the last. Our objectives are well-defined; when we have more active participation, perhaps the members will demand a different sort of leadership!

■ The ten-point program that the Policy Committee drew up will constitute a challenge for years. It was not meant to be

completed in a season, but something at which we can keep hammering: making the organization effective, planning meetings, initiating publications, bringing in new members, supporting *College and Research Libraries*, and bringing A.C.R.L. and other professional associations closer together. There is nothing here that we can tie up and put aside as finished.

We can, however, this year further condition the association for a continued assault on these objectives. First, by continuing the four committees President Carlson established last year. Our membership now stands at 3600, an increase of 1200 over last year. This increase can be attributed largely to the work of the Committee on Membership. In 1936 the old section had only 140 members; in 1938, 761. The committees on Recruiting and Educational Preparation and Qualifications cannot as quickly produce the same tangible results; nor can the Committee on Financial Needs. They will, however, strengthen A.C.R.L. and the library profession generally over the long haul, by giving attention to the recruiting of able people, and by studying the qualifications required in our several types of libraries.

Second, members and potential members must become better acquainted with the association. This is a job for all of us, but particularly for the section officers. News letters and bulletins to the membership are some of the elementary media that have proved effective.

One weakness of the A.C.R.L. is that many professional librarians know little about it. They read *College and Research Libraries* and regard it highly, but they do not always associate it with our division. Not long ago I heard a well-known librarian ask "What is A.C.R.L., and who belongs to it?" He is a member of A.L.A. and I have seen him at meetings of this

association. I have asked members of my own staff how much the association means to them. Many of them, although they belong to A.L.A. are vague about their relations with this division. They aren't certain that they belong, and haven't been convinced that they should. Now here's a job for me! Maybe you have a similar opportunity. The association must somehow play a more important role in the lives of professional librarians if it is to approach its objectives. It will not attract new members if they know that librarians of major institutions do not consider it important to belong.

When you become a librarian you assume an obligation to join the professional associations and to concern yourself with professional problems. If you new members do not find A.C.R.L. a satisfactory organization through which to tackle professional problems, you are obligated to help make it so. Let's employ every device we can to keep college, university, and reference librarians informed and close to the affairs of this association. By the way, as of this moment, you join by checking the division and section of your choice on the A.L.A. membership blank. And if you don't join early in the year you are likely to miss something.

Third, if the interest of new members is to be developed and maintained these people must be given something to do. Maybe those of us who have been members of the division since its organization should try looking at it through the eyes of a new member.

When I was secretary of the association a few years back, the chief complaint I received—particularly from new members—was that they had nothing to do. Some of them were bitter about the way the older members appeared to pass offices and committee assignments around among them-

selves. Too often they have had grounds for criticism. The same names appear on committee lists from year to year, and sometimes the same member is serving simultaneously on several committees. It should not be necessary to explain though that frequently it is advantageous to have on a committee the kind of experience that only a few members can bring to it. We have this year 1200 new members. They are joining because they think this is their association; here is where they can get their teeth into a job, make a professional contribution and gain some recognition—all perfectly normal objectives.

The purpose of the Junior Members Round Table, when it was organized more than fifteen years ago, was to provide a framework within which younger members of the profession could spread their wings, hold office, serve on committees, appear on programs, and air their grievances. I recall that my first participation in professional affairs was as a member of a committee of junior members. The assignment I received represented a privilege and a responsibility.

Most young librarians hesitate to request assignments. I can't promise that we can use all of you this year, but I think I can say that your name will come out of the hat sooner if it is placed with those anxious to be of service. Section officers should draft as many young members as can be used. We appreciate the association when we work for it.

Fourth, *College and Research Libraries*, the journal of the division, should have better support. It now goes to 650 individual and 850 institutional members. Your subscription is an important form of contribution. Articles describing investigations you have made—investigations designed to extend our professional knowledge—are equally important. If your investigation

appears significant enough to be preserved in an article, I hope you will not be too modest to describe and interpret it for the editor. The sections, you know, have not shared equally the space in the journal—but I think there has been no hint of discrimination. Of 409 articles appearing in *College and Research Libraries*, 242 have been general in scope; 56 concerned primarily with university libraries; 52 with college; 28 with reference; 10 each with libraries of junior colleges and teacher-training institutions; and fewer than 10 to agricultural and engineering libraries. While obviously there are differences in the amount of material available, there must be gaps in the published information about the philosophy, practices, obligations, and opportunities of some of the special interest libraries. You should not assume, however, that the paucity of articles bears any relationship to the interest of elected officers of sections. The best records of attendance at board meetings are held by representatives of those special types of libraries about which literature seems to be scarce.

Among you are many who want to receive *College and Research Libraries* in place of the *A.L.A. Bulletin*. It is obvious that

such a substitute arrangement cannot be worked out satisfactorily. However, you will remember that the Fourth Activities Committee has included in its tentative proposals a plan which will permit every member to receive the journal on his membership.

Finally, a word about the work of the executive secretary. His report covering his first year in office is evidence that in the executive secretary's office we have the connective tissue this association has needed so urgently to bring its sections and its members together: a clearing house for information, a representative who can speak to us and for us about the affairs and problems of this association, continuity, and an honest desire to be of service. While this office is already an indispensable part of A.C.R.L., its contributions may be expected to increase in importance in each of the next several years. The directors are not losing sight of the ten points in A.C.R.L.'s original program. They are still before us. But whatever the objectives of the next decade, they will be achieved only if we continue to strengthen our membership in quality as well as in numbers, and only if most of these are *interested* and *active* members.

Our Four Year Goals

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reference libraries can and will make outstanding and significant contribution. We will not, however, I sincerely believe, limit our vision and our work and efforts closely and specifically to the college field. Toward all our goals, four year or otherwise, I know I can safely pledge the college and reference librarians to work with intelligence

and good will. Our members will often be found, I am certain, working in behalf of state extension of public library service, county and other larger units of public library service, and in whatever other ways may strengthen and improve library service and help bring books to the people and understanding to the world.