

# Can the Association of College and Reference Libraries Achieve Professional Status?<sup>1</sup>

WE FIND OURSELVES at present in a world which is in a state of chaos—politically, economically, spiritually, and also educationally. For almost a quarter of a century higher education in America has been confused as to its aims and fumbling in its methods. Here and there we have colleges and universities that have the vitality and integrity to redefine their goals.

Now that the war is over it is urgent that we as librarians should put our house in order (*i.e.*, our professional organization) and come to the aid of higher education and research so that our colleges, universities, and great reference libraries may become true centers for the enlightenment of mankind through effective and inspiring instruction and productive research.

The title of this paper was chosen with deliberation. Our president suggested that I speak on the subject: "How can the A.C.R.L. become a learned society?" That would have been a difficult assignment. I am persuaded that is what we should be. It would also be gratifying if the learned societies, which we as college and reference librarians should serve, knew of our existence and looked upon us as a learned society—as one of their peers. I doubt, however, whether many of the learned societies are aware of the existence of the A.C.R.L. or think of its members as professional persons.

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the midwinter meeting, 1945, of the A.C.R.L.

And why should they? We have never had a professional organization implemented with full-time executive leadership to integrate systematically our efforts and services with their activities and programs. Moreover, in view of the politics, control, and management of our parent organization—the A.L.A.—I doubt whether the A.C.R.L. can easily become a learned society. I shall be content if in the next decade we can improve our professional status.

What I have in mind in selecting the subject of this paper can perhaps be clarified if we indicate some of the criteria of a profession. A helpful definition of professions was offered by Abraham Flexner thirty years ago. He defined professions in terms of six criteria:<sup>2</sup>

First, professions involve essentially intellectual operations accompanied by large individual responsibility. They require the application of the intelligence of a trained and informed mind to the mastery of problems and the performance of intricate and socially important services.

Second, professions are learned in nature, and their members constantly turn to the laboratory and seminar for a fresh supply of facts and the discovery of new truths. It requires a steady stream of ideas and new guiding principles emanating from research and experimentation, to keep professions from degenerating into mere routine and from los-

<sup>2</sup> Flexner, Abraham. "Is Social Work a Profession?" *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, p. 576-90, 1915.

ing their intellectual and responsible character.

Third, they derive their raw materials from science and learning, but use it for practical purposes.

Fourth, the professions possess a technique capable of communication through a highly specialized educational discipline. Through experience and research a body of funded knowledge is acquired upon which the activity rests, including specific kinds of skill that the practitioner of a profession must master through formal education and training.

Fifth, professional groups tend toward self-organization. Common interests and problems develop a group consciousness which expresses itself in an organization of the professional group for its mutual improvement and the improvement of standards and service to the public.

Sixth, professions are becoming increasingly concerned with the achievement of social ends. Their fundamental purpose is not personal profit, but public service. At their best they must become increasingly altruistic.

### *A Professional Organization*

In this paper we shall confine ourselves primarily to the fifth criterion, namely, how can the A.C.R.L. achieve a more professional organization? In what I say I have no desire to be critical or negative. However, there are some things in the past fifteen-year history of the A.C.R.L. that our younger members should know. They are matters on which all of us should do some straight thinking.

During the past fifteen years there has been voiced from time to time the need of providing at A.L.A. Headquarters a full-time paid specialist on college and university library affairs who could guide and promote the development of activities of particular interest to college, university, and reference libraries. Let us recall a few instances in which official action was taken to secure such leadership.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In preparing this summary I have found a four-page mimeographed statement on "College Library

First, in 1930 the College and Reference Section, in collaboration with the Executive Board of the A.L.A., prepared a project involving an annual budget of \$15,000 which included a full-time specialist on college library affairs at A.L.A. Headquarters. This project was approved by the A.L.A. Executive Board at the mid-winter meeting, December 1930.<sup>4</sup>

Second, in June 1931, the A.L.A. College Advisory Board was established by the Executive Board with instructions that its first duty would be to prepare a statement on college library services which might be handled at A.L.A. Headquarters.<sup>5</sup>

### *Program Approved*

Third, at the midwinter meeting, December 1931, the College Librarians of the Middle West endorsed the proposal for a college library specialist at A.L.A. Headquarters.<sup>6</sup> Also, at the same meeting the Council approved a proposed program of the A.L.A., prepared by the Executive Secretary and the Executive Board of the A.L.A. In the first part of this proposal which covers "Fields and Functions of the A.L.A.," college libraries were recognized as one of the three broad fields of work for the A.L.A. The other two were public libraries and children's work. The second part of this report outlined the financial implications in the future program of the A.L.A. It included a table showing the actual and proposed distribution of A.L.A. income funds, which was submitted to the Carnegie Corporation as a part of the endowment campaign. In this table \$15,000 of the

Advisory Service at A.L.A. Headquarters" helpful. It was compiled by Headquarters from Executive Board minutes, reports of committees and officers, *A.L.A. Bulletins, College and Research Libraries*, and files of correspondence for a meeting of A.L.A. officers and directors of A.C.R.L., June 23, 1945.

<sup>4</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 25: 59, February 1931; also *A.L.A. Bulletin* 25: 182, May 1931.

<sup>5</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 174, March 1932.

<sup>6</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 137, March 1932.

annual income from increased endowment was set up for college library service at A.L.A. Headquarters, \$35,000 for public library service, and \$15,000 for work with children.<sup>7</sup>

In October 1932 and 1933, respectively, the Carnegie Corporation turned over one half million dollars to complete its endowment gift of two million dollars to the A.L.A.<sup>8</sup>

At its Yale meeting, 1931, the A.L.A.'s President publicly promised that college and university librarians were to have a special representative at the A.L.A. Headquarters. Such an appointment was not made. This is true despite the fact that the college and university libraries contributed liberally toward the A.L.A. endowment fund before and at the Yale meeting. They have also contributed heavily toward the A.L.A. annual income through institutional membership funds before and since that date. As a further indication of obligation, it must be added that, in the representations made to the Carnegie Corporation referred to above, the implication was clear that college and university libraries would share on an equitable basis with other types of libraries in the benefits to be derived from the endowment fund. Note how the other two fields have fared as compared with college libraries.

According to the A.L.A. Comptroller's annual financial reports, the A.L.A. has spent a total of over a half million dollars (\$526,574.04)<sup>9</sup> during the past twenty years, specifically for the promotion of public library work—an average annual expenditure of \$26,328.70. In addition, the School and Children's Library Office has spent annually an average of \$8,286.38 since its establishment nine years ago. A substantial

portion of this money was spent for activities that were intended to develop children's work in public libraries.

#### *Budgets for Other Activities*

On Oct. 13, 1944, the A.L.A. Council formally approved the reorganization of the groups concerned with public library work into a Division of Public Libraries. The 1944-45 budget for the Headquarters Public Library Office was \$14,868 and for the Headquarters School and Children's Library Office it was \$7,273. These large sums apparently do not come from the 20 per cent allotment of personal memberships of public and school librarians who have expressed their desire that this portion of their dues be allotted to their division. Yet that percentage principle is strictly applied in making A.L.A. allotments to the A.C.R.L. Why should public libraries be permitted to use such a large share of the A.L.A.'s annual income before any funds are allowed for specialized paid leadership for another large segment of the A.L.A. membership—college, university, and reference libraries?

But let us return to the record again. At the New Orleans meeting of the A.L.A., in April 1932, the College and Reference Section, the A.L.A. Council, and the Executive Board approved the plan and recommendation of the College Library Advisory Board that an information and advisory service for college, university, and reference services be established at the A.L.A. Headquarters under the direction of a full-time secretary and such staff as might be necessary and possible.<sup>10</sup> In his annual report the Secretary expressed the hope that funds would be available for this new activity in 1933 or 1934.<sup>11</sup> Further, during the years 1933 to 1938 the College Library Advisory

<sup>7</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 58-62, February 1932.

<sup>8</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 335, May 1932.

<sup>9</sup> Based upon figures reported in *A.L.A. Bulletins*.

<sup>10</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 327-28, May 1932.

<sup>11</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 26: 199, April 1932.

Board made four formal but futile requests to get the project organized.

In 1938 the Association of College and Reference Libraries was organized with five subsections. That would have been the logical time to supply college and university libraries with funds to engage an able college and university library specialist to promote the professional interests represented by the A.C.R.L. This was not done.

#### *Third Activities Committee Report*

Moreover, at the A.L.A. midwinter meeting of 1939 the "Final Report of the Third Activities Committee" was adopted. This led to the reorganization of the A.L.A. based upon changes in its Constitution and By-Laws. Among other changes was a provision for graduated personal and institutional membership dues. These increased substantially the contribution of college and university librarians and of their libraries to the A.L.A. income. This, therefore, would have been another logical time to make good on the promises to provide special national leadership for college and university libraries.

In the final report of the Third Activities Committee, which was adopted at the midwinter meeting in 1939 and in the revised A.L.A. Constitution and By-Laws, it was provided that "allotments of 20 per cent of dues of institutional members shall be made to the division specified by such institutional members, beginning one year after the total receipts from all membership dues exceed the 1939 figure by a margin sufficient to cover both these allotments from institutional dues and any increase in expenditures caused by reorganization."<sup>12</sup>

The Comptroller's annual reports show that the total membership income of the A.L.A. was \$68,886.78 for 1938-39 and in

<sup>12</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 33: 788, December 1939. See also *A.L.A. Handbook*, *A.L.A. Bulletin* 38: H-15, Dec. 15, 1944.

1940-41 it was \$72,695.35. Why should the A.C.R.L. not have received 20 per cent of all of the institutional membership dues paid by the A.C.R.L. libraries since that year? A satisfactory answer to this question has not been made any easier by A.C.R.L. experience with *College and Research Libraries*. It has not only been necessary for the association to depend largely upon the institutions where the journal has been edited to meet the necessary costs of editing; even the modest proposal to permit A.C.R.L. members to substitute that journal for their copies of the A.L.A. *Proceedings* and *Handbook* was rejected.

#### *Explanation*

That is the record. How is it to be explained?

First, those who have controlled the A.L.A. purse strings have apparently not been as stoutly convinced of the leadership needs of college, university, and reference libraries as they have been of the needs of other libraries.

Second, last year's proposal to set up another "general functionary" as associate executive secretary of the A.L.A. raises some doubt as to whether the meaning of the A.L.A. reorganization was understood. It was supposed to be a recognition of the fact that the Association and its membership had grown too large and unwieldy and too heterogeneous to function efficiently as one general organization that could serve well and impartially a wide variety of library interests. Decentralization, involving organization and specialization by types of libraries and types of service, was recognized as the way to promote purposeful evolution and orderly growth of the profession. Divisions were established to which, presumably, were to be delegated responsibility and practically complete autonomy. This plan implied that instead of continuing to put large

funds into a highly centralized super-Headquarters staff, there would be introduced the principle of decentralization with appropriate delegation of authority and leadership on a functional basis.

And, third, most college and university librarians have been too hard-pressed with their individual positions to put forth enough initiative or to voice a sufficiently strong demand to influence those forces whose long-accumulated power has guided the destinies of A.L.A.

### *Outnumbered by Public Librarians*

Frankly, it may not be possible to get the treatment we had every reason to expect for fifteen years from the A.L.A. for college and university librarians, because they are now outnumbered two to one by the public librarians. In any organization in which there are competing vested interests, a project designed to benefit a minority group is not likely to fare too well when submitted to a membership vote. What worries me most is: Who controls the A.L.A. finances? Even after the Council and Executive Board have repeatedly voted for an A.C.R.L. specialist, the project seems to have been killed in the Budget Committee.

One might hope that if the A.C.R.L. had adequate representation in the Executive Board or Budget Committee we might stand a fighting chance. Such idealism, however, does not make due allowance for the possibility that political expediency may sometimes still the voices of those who are in a favorable position to serve the best interests of the A.C.R.L.

I am certain many of the members of the A.C.R.L., like myself, have been deeply disturbed by this repeated tendency on the part of those in control of the affairs of the A.L.A. to neglect the needs of college, university, and reference libraries. This neglect is inimical to the effective growth and

development of the A.C.R.L. During the war years the need of the association for a capable representative at A.L.A. Headquarters was most urgent because: (1) we now have an involved organization of seven specialized sections and (2) annual and midwinter meetings were ruled out by the war. The result has been that we now have an elaborate organization on paper of seven professionally undeveloped sections.

It is little wonder that when, in January 1945, the A.L.A. advertised for an assistant or an associate executive secretary of the A.L.A., woman preferred, salary six to seven thousand dollars, and when on Jan. 15, 1945, the President of the A.L.A. circularized libraries to raise one hundred thousand dollars (in four annual instalments) for the establishment of a special representative in Washington, many college and university librarians objected to these two proposals.

On Mar. 13, 1945, the President of the A.C.R.L., on behalf of the organization, requested the Executive Board of the A.L.A. to consider the appointment of a college and university library specialist at Headquarters.

### *1945 A.C.R.L. Project*

On June 23, 1945, the Board of Directors of the A.C.R.L. presented to the Executive Board of the A.L.A. a project to provide a college library representative at A.L.A. Headquarters for the purpose of giving advisory service to college, university, and reference librarians and to those interested in their problems. Specific fields of information about the college library that would constitute the work of a college specialist were outlined, such as administration, buildings, personnel, problems of relating the library to instructional work, and the executive administration of the affairs of the A.C.R.L. The board of the A.C.R.L. pro-

jected an annual budget of \$14,000.

Three sources of income were suggested: additional memberships, the contribution of \$1,000 from A.C.R.L. funds, and a special grant for a five-year experimental period.

This action by the A.C.R.L. board and further study of the needs of the association for a specialist at Headquarters by the A.L.A. officers, the Executive Board, and the Budget Committee resulted in the passage of the following resolutions by the Budget Committee and the Executive Board last October:

(1) VOTED, That the Executive Board instruct the Executive Secretary to combine the budgets of the Headquarters Library, the Public Library Office, School and Children's Library Office, as to total, but not as to detail, into a single budget for 1945-46 for a new department entitled Department of Information and Advisory Services; that the Secretary include provision in this proposed budget for specialists in (1) college and reference, (2) public libraries, and (3) school and children's libraries, together with a librarian and such other professional and clerical assistants as the combined budget will allow; and that the total of the budget shall not exceed \$26,384 plus salary increments.

(2) VOTED, That the Executive Board endorse the recommendation of the Budget Committee, recognizing that the promotional aspect of the Public Library Office has something withdrawn from it. . . .

(3) VOTED, That the Executive Secretary express the hope that in the development of the new Department of Information and Advisory Services consideration will be given to activities along the lines of general interest of importance to the profession, including the interests of special groups where they are of importance to the profession as a whole.

In commenting upon this action in a letter of Nov. 28, 1945, the Executive Secretary of the A.L.A. said:

The next step is for me to prepare a reorganization plan for the information and advisory services. The next step after that is for the Executive Board to discuss the plan with representatives of the various divisions at a meeting which is to be held during the Midwinter Conference.

The handicap or hurdle is that there isn't enough money to go around. Whether, if we

pool all our best ideas, we can find it, remains to be seen.

I should like to make the following comment. The third resolution above, with its emphasis upon activities of interest to the profession as a whole, seems to contradict the basic principles of the A.L.A. reorganization, as well as the major objectives of the A.C.R.L. in requesting a specialist. In both instances, the chief objective has been to secure full-time specialized leadership which would develop those activities that are of particular interest to the A.C.R.L. and its several sections.

#### *A.C.R.L. Needs Leadership*

Also, the A.C.R.L., in view of its complex organization and the type of problems it should be dealing with, needs seasoned top-flight executive and administrative leadership. As a result of experience and observation over a full decade, I should say an executive secretary of the A.C.R.L. should have the following qualifications, and I doubt whether the specifications can be filled at \$5000 per year, unless we have only a part-time appointment.

First, in selecting an executive secretary for the A.C.R.L., a university librarian should, perhaps, be given preference because in a large university he should have had experience with practically all types and levels of higher education served by the several sections of the A.C.R.L.

Second, if possible he should have the PhD. degree from an outstanding university so that he knows what higher education and research stand for. That, too, will give him confidence and recognized standing among scholars as he mingles with college and university presidents and faculty members and with the men in the learned societies.

Third, he should have a flair for administrative and executive organization work.

Fourth, he should have presence in public and should be able to address library, college, and university audiences with confidence.

Fifth, he should know what the requirements are for making the libraries concerned

with higher education real instruments of instruction.

Sixth, he should know what constitutes graduate and research work so that he will be familiar with the great movements now in the sciences, as well as the social sciences and humanities, for a different type of research from what we have had in the past.

Seventh, he no doubt should edit *College and Research Libraries*, for the planning of its content should reflect the professional growth, problems, and activities of college and university libraries.

When the divisional organization and sections within the division were provided in the A.L.A. Constitution and By-Laws, it was expected that this would improve the professional organization of the librarians in these units because it permitted a differentiation and grouping by common interests. The soundness of this principle is demonstrated by other professions. It should make it possible to specialize in each section upon problems and opportunities peculiar to libraries serving the same type of institution. This has now resulted in an elaborate A.C.R.L. with seven sections which cannot be expected to run of its own accord. Those who are elected to offices in these sections cannot be expected to give voluntarily as much time as would be needed to carry on the vast number of administrative activities essential to the effective direction of the A.C.R.L. It would be about as reasonable to try to run the A.L.A. by means of voluntary help. Yet that was considered unthinkable way back in 1880 when Melvil Dewey insisted that if the A.L.A. were to become an effective professional organization it must have a national office and a man or woman giving exclusive time and thought to library interests.

In 1939 the Third Activities Committee of the A.L.A. stressed the point that the development of an effective professional organization of librarians depended upon a strong Headquarters personnel to exert the

continued effort which demands more time than individual librarians can spare from their own duties.<sup>13</sup> This basic principle which applies to the A.L.A. applies with equal force to its large divisions, such as the A.C.R.L., once the divisional principle was adopted as the direction of growth and plan of administration.

Now that the war is over it is well for us to look forward, not backward, and to that end I propose the following as a program of action for the A.C.R.L. To implement such a program the guidance of a national office under the direction of a competent executive is urgently needed.

The following might well be the program of activities for the A.C.R.L. under his leadership. His leadership would not be a substitute for the voluntary services of individuals, committees, and sections but would serve to stimulate, guide, and integrate such services so that they would become more significant in the development of our profession.

A ten-point program is suggested:

1. Develop the A.C.R.L. as an effective professional organization to meet the specialized needs of its constituency.
2. Develop *College and Research Libraries* as a scholarly and professional journal.
3. Develop significant state, regional, and national conferences.
4. Increase the membership in the A.C.R.L. and its sections.
5. Improve the professional education and training for college and reference librarians.
6. Develop strong professional leadership in the A.C.R.L. membership.
7. Integrate A.C.R.L. librarianship with instructional and research efforts of faculties and learned societies.
8. Develop the research resources of libraries through planning and cooperation.
9. Encourage experimentation, research, and publication on problems of librarianship in college and reference libraries.
10. Establish an effective clearinghouse for college and reference libraries.

<sup>13</sup> *A.L.A. Bulletin* 33: 374, June 1939.