

My Year as “Mr. AALL”

Okay, I admit it: I am an AALL geek. I’m actually proud of my geek status. For the past 11 months I have learned an awful lot about AALL and have gotten quite good at explaining both board procedures and Association history. In fact, if the \$64,000 *Question* game show was still on (and had not been buried in the 1950s payola scandal), my category would be “AALL” (and I bet I’d do okay). My year as president is quickly coming to a close, but I’m hoping my experience will encourage others to aspire to what has to be one of the most rewarding “second jobs” for a law librarian: serving the profession as an AALL officer. It has been at times both exhilarating (such as when I made chapter visits to Houston, Chicago, and Fayetteville, and international visits to Dublin and Beijing) and frustrating (darn this economy!). It has certainly never been boring.

This is my last monthly *AALL Spectrum* column as AALL president (well, technically, next month’s column is the very last, but that will be an introduction to the *Members’ Briefing* on the new changes planned for AALLNET, so I’m not counting it). No doubt you’re expecting a rehash of my presidential initiatives throughout the year, with perhaps a final statement of thanks (think of the outgoing Miss America here) to everyone who has made the year so special. While I certainly plan to do some of that later on, I do want to take this opportunity to say what AALL means to me personally.

In many ways AALL has been an extended family to me. Ann Fessenden, 2007-2008 AALL past president, hired me my first day of law school as a library student worker. The law library director, Wes Cochran (later two-time candidate for AALL president), encouraged me to think about law librarianship as a career, so I joined AALL as a student member back in 1985, during my second year of law school. A year later I finished law school, went to library school, and joined the New Orleans Association of Law Librarians (NOALL), where I met several future AALL presidents, including Carol Billings (1994-95) and Carolyn Ahearn (1991-92), who was the AALL Executive Board visitor to NOALL in 1987.



by James E. Duggan

A wonderful library school classmate, Mary Whisner, encouraged me to apply for an AALL scholarship, which I did. I eventually received the scholarship, as well as a travel grant to attend my first AALL Annual Meeting, in Chicago in 1987. While in Chicago, I attended the Conference of Newer Law Librarians Committee meeting and spent much of the Meeting looking for a job.

Although not hired during the 1987 Annual Meeting, I made enough contacts to go on several interviews. A month after graduating from library school I was hired at Southern Illinois University by AALL historian and future AALL President (1996-97) Frank Houdek, who is the best mentor anyone could have. I then spent the next 21 years learning about, participating in, and helping to lead AALL. I became active in a number of special interest sections

(SISs) and also joined the Mid-America Association of Law Librarians (MAALL). I enjoyed editing two columns for the *AALL Newsletter* (later *AALL Spectrum*). I attended two Winter Institutes (back when AALL still hosted institutes). I had the chance to attend the AALL-co-sponsored Joint Study Institute in Cambridge in 1998.

Membership in AALL has provided me with lifelong friends. I probably know more AALL members than I did people in high school or college. It is always a pleasure when I am traveling to drop by law libraries, meet the staff, and see their collections. Not a day goes by that I don’t read an e-mail, get a phone call, or read a “tweet” from an AALL colleague.

Over the years I’ve had the distinct pleasure of meeting several past AALL presidents who helped create such a wonderful organization: Marian Gallagher (1954-55), Julius Marke (1962-63), Bill Murphy (1967-68), Erwin Surrency (1973-74), Jack Ellenberger (1976-77), Francis Gates (1980-81), Roger Jacobs (1981-82), Leah Chanin (1982-83), and every AALL president since. Each one of these outstanding law librarians left AALL a better Association, either by placing their personal stamp on the programming or activities, or by working with dedicated Headquarters staff to help grow the profession. I am honored to have had the opportunity to follow in their collective footsteps.

And now for my “Miss America” moment: despite the economy and the continued concerns over layoffs and cutbacks, my presidential year has practically flown by. My two major initiatives are progressing well: a major redevelopment of AALLNET is ongoing, thanks to the careful stewardship of AALL Executive Director Kate Hagan and the AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee chaired by Kathie Sullivan. I expect similar results from the Member Recognition Special Committee chaired by Gail Warren, which is looking at recommending additional ways to recognize and honor law librarians within the Association. The Executive Board has been an active force, approving a number of initiatives designed to help AALL members during the downturn in the economy (for example, the “member appreciation” discount for early Annual Meeting registration and a discounted membership for unemployed members). We recently hired Marian Parker as vendor liaison for AALL, and she will assist in fostering communication between the law library community and legal information vendors.

We’ve hosted an extremely successful Leadership Academy for members (and plan to repeat the academy later this year). Our sponsored Management Institute has been well received, and our continuing professional education program has offered some outstanding events this past year. We’re gearing up to develop the next iteration of our strategic directions and continue to look for ways to enhance AALL membership. Thanks to everyone who has made such success possible.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Annual Meeting next month in Washington, D.C. If you can’t attend this year, hopefully you’ll be able to come next year in Denver (or the following year in Philadelphia). Although I say I’m also happily looking forward to joining the ranks of the “purple ribbons” (past AALL presidents), and letting someone else make decisions concerning Annual Meeting themes, committees, and board policies, I’ll always celebrate my inner AALL “geekiness.” And I know there are more than a few of you out there just like me...maybe we should look into obtaining caucus status! ■

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