

Memorial: Jane Strable (1918–2002)

¶1 Jane Strable, an active member of the Chicago Association of Law Libraries (CALL) and AALL for many years, died of Parkinson’s disease on June 15th at the age of 84. Jane worked at the D’Angelo Law Library of the University of Chicago in various positions from 1969 until her retirement in 1992. Jane’s lasting contributions to the proud traditions of the D’Angelo Law Library resulted from her pursuit of professional excellence. With a lively, engaging, and energetic personality, for twenty-three years she urged change and innovation while maintaining the highest standards in bibliographic control, collection development, and reference services.

¶2 Jane received a B.A. from Cleveland College and a B.S. in library science from Western Reserve University. From an early age Jane’s ambition was to become a librarian and she struggled to combine school and work to complete her education. In 1945, with her new library degree, she decided to contribute to the war effort and became an Army librarian at Schick General Hospital in Clinton, Iowa. While working there she met her husband, Ed Strable, who had recovered from war wounds and was also working at Schick. Jane found the work at Schick rewarding, particularly working with the wounded and the Pacific Theater P.O.W. returnees. Her husband says that “the soldiers were always happy to see the beautiful redhead with the book cart, whether they needed a book to read or not.” When the hospital closed, Jane and Ed married and moved to Champaign-Urbana. While Ed was a student, Jane worked in the University of Illinois Natural History Library. With Ed’s graduation they moved to Chicago where Jane became the Circulation Librarian and Instructor in Library Science at the University of Illinois, Chicago Undergraduate Division, which was then located on Navy Pier.

¶3 Jane temporarily retired in 1957 when her daughter Jennie was born. It was not until 1969 that she decided she could combine motherhood and librarianship by working at the University of Chicago Library, where she could walk to work. The D’Angelo Law Library was the beneficiary of this decision when she accepted a position as the documents cataloger. Later she became head of cataloging and worked hard to introduce the library’s first integrated library system. During those years she faced many challenges related to introducing the first generation of computing in libraries and reclassifying a large, well-established collection from the library’s old in-house classification system to the Library of Congress Class K.

¶4 Over the years she often mentioned how much she had loved public services work at the University of Illinois, and in 1981 when the documents/reference librarian position became available, Jane accepted the position. It was a brave decision for a librarian who had been away from reference for many years. But her knowledge of documents and her cataloging and classification expertise offered a solid base from which she quickly became an excellent reference and documents librarian. Jane found both professional and personal satisfaction working directly with the faculty and students, with whom she was very popular.

¶5 Jane always said she wanted to work forever, but at seventy, though still young in spirit, energetic, and productive, she had to abide by the strictly enforced University of Chicago mandatory retirement policy. Fortunately, the university rules allowed her to work part-time and, in response to our pleas, she agreed to be the “weekend reference” librarian for the first four years after her retirement. She also worked part-time at DePaul University Rinn Law Library and at Sonnenschein, Nath and Rosenthal, a new work experience that she greatly enjoyed. Only ill health forced her from her beloved libraries.

¶6 Jane was a true professional librarian who believed that we owe service to our profession. She was an active member of CALL, AALL, the Special Libraries Association, and the ALA Governments Documents Roundtable. She was editor of the *CALL Bulletin* and chair of the CALL Constitutional and Bylaws Committee. She also served as secretary of CALL. She was a member of the AALL Constitution and Bylaws Committee and chair of the Film Committee for the 1987 Annual Meeting in Chicago. She never missed an AALL Annual Meeting even long after she retired. She always found the programs and socialization with her colleagues exciting and stimulating.

¶7 I joined the D’Angelo Law Library one year after Jane returned to work and she was a wonderful role model and mentor for a new librarian, a role that she continued to provide for beginning librarians throughout her career. Many of us remember her great kindness and support as we learned how to “be librarians.” She was committed to her work and always gracious, kind, and polite, and she inspired such behavior in others. In the 1970s no one would have dreamed of eating or drinking at their desks, and many of the staff regularly took “breaks” together. We all enjoyed the conversation and laughter of those days, when we seemed less rushed and more able to enjoy and to learn from each other.

¶8 Besides her work, Jane was a busy and active wife and mother. She cared for her elderly mother for many years; I remember her walks home each day to prepare and eat lunch with her mother and how thoughtfully she organized her time to meet her mother’s needs. Jane and her husband shared an active social life with many long-time friends. They both enjoyed their summer home in Michigan, especially walking on the beach, but each had their own interests. Jane’s passions were the opera and the Chicago League of Women Voters, where she was a long-time and committed member. She merged her personal and professional interests and used the expertise in constitutions that she developed in her work with the Chicago League of Women Voters in her work on the CALL and AALL constitution committees.

¶9 With skillful juggling of her work, family, and personal interests, Jane was able to fashion a full and engaging life. With her guidance and friendship she added to ours, and her many fond colleagues and friends will miss her.—*Judith Wright*¹

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