

AALL Centennial Feature*

The First Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries**

A. J. Small***

The following account of the founding and first Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries is extracted from an article originally published in volume 21 of the Law Library Journal. Its author, A.J. Small, was the first president of the association and the driving force behind its formation in 1906, at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island. AALL President John T. Fitzpatrick, law librarian of the New York State Law Library, had invited him to speak to the attendees of the 23rd Annual Meeting in French Lick, Indiana, about the events of 1906 and, in particular, his thoughts on the state of the association nearly twenty-five years after its organization. As we approach the centennial of that founding, it seemed appropriate to revisit Small's reflections on the first AALL Annual Meeting and the forces that led to its occurrence, as well as his assessment of progress wrought by the association during its first quarter-century.—Frank Houdek†

¶1 The topic assigned to me by the president is one that might appear as a startling challenge and from its tenor may have a questionable aspect. I view it, however, as being for the purpose of bringing out results and determining what has been accomplished. It cannot be that we are unmindful of the activities of an organization that has functioned for nearly a quarter of a century; and, in determining whether there is an excuse for its existence, we must first make a retrospective survey, that we may

* *Editor's Note:* The American Association of Law Libraries was founded on July 2, 1906, by a handful of law librarians who met during the Annual Conference of the American Library Association at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island. To commemorate the AALL Centennial that will be celebrated with a year-long series of events and activities in 2005–06, culminating at the 2006 Annual Meeting in St. Louis, *Law Library Journal* is including an "AALL Centennial Feature" article in each issue published through 2006. While the focus common to each article is the history of law libraries, law librarianship, and AALL, the specific topics vary according to the interests of authors and readers. Individuals interested in contributing a "Centennial Feature" article should contact Frank G. Houdek, Editor, *Law Library Journal*, Southern Illinois University School of Law, Lesar Law Bldg., Mail Code 6803, Carbondale, IL 62901-6803, (618) 453-8788, houdek@siu.edu.

** Extracted and retitled from A.J. Small, *Is There an Excuse for the Association's Existence, or The Spirit of Yesterday Contrasted with the Spirit of Today*, 21 *LAW LIBR. J.* 56 (1928). The language, format, and grammatical conventions of the original have been retained.

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carefully analyze and compare the purposes and aims for which it was organized with what has been accomplished since its beginning. It will be quite impossible in this necessarily short review to do more than to refer to preconvention days and to consider the problems then confronting law libraries, the necessity of improvement in library management and service, and the advisability of training law librarians for advancement and the higher standards of professional conduct.

¶2 Prior to 1906 law libraries were individual institutions, more or less secluded and segregated. So far as personal contact was concerned, law librarians had but slight opportunity to make acquaintances or acquire professional knowledge and training; contact by correspondence, if any, was more or less formal; politics reigned supreme; librarians being often chosen by political preferment or friendship rather than by training or qualification; however, most of the selections thus made were fortunate, the greatest objection to such a method being the uncertainty of tenure of office. Law research and law activities, as well as law libraries, have increased and developed; comparative study and uniformity of laws are constantly growing, and these have been enhanced by the progress and advancement of library management and librarianship.

¶3 What has been the factor or impelling influence that has brought about the progress since the days when law libraries were isolated institutions and the interest and cooperation with others more or less formal? Has it been that they, like the mythical Topsy, “jes’ grewed up” or has this “growing up” process been brought about by the influence of any one thing or persons? Sentiment for organization and cooperation began several years before its accomplishment. Something apparently inspired activity, for we have evidences of great achievements in libraries and library science within the last quarter of a century. Librarianship has improved, law libraries have grown in size and importance and have become more efficient, while interlibrary cooperation exists now as never before. In these prefatory statements some of the things incident to the past have been related in order that they may be observed in contrast with the evidences of the present. A brief glance into the early history of the association and its activities is necessary to warrant the conclusions we are seeking.

¶4 After much correspondence between several law librarians throughout the country, in regard to an organization, it was agreed to meet at the same time and place as the American Library Association when it held its conference at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, June 29–July 6, 1906. Consequently on July 1 in a quiet corner of the parlors of Hotel Mathewson at Narragansett Pier, the American Association of Law Libraries had its beginning. Unfortunately the complete records of the first meeting were not published, but a short memorandum note is found in *Public Libraries*, Vol. II, page 459, as follows: “Pursuant to a call in which twenty-four law libraries joined, there was formed at the conference of the American Library Association at Narragansett Pier, in July, 1906, the American Association of Law Libraries. The purpose of this new organization is to develop and increase the usefulness and efficiency of the law libraries of the United States

and Canada.” From personal memory many incidents and transactions that transpired of those memorable days are recalled and supplied. At the first informal meeting there were but four law librarians present, namely, Franklin O. Poole, Dr. George E. Wire, George S. Godard, and A. J. Small. Several other law librarians arrived afterwards. Preliminary matters were considered, and meetings were held during our four-day conference. The charter members in attendance at Narragansett Pier were Franklin O. Poole, librarian, Association of the Bar, New York City; Frederick W. Schenk, librarian, University of Chicago Law School; A. J. Small, state law librarian, Iowa State Library; George S. Godard, state librarian, Connecticut State Library; George E. Wire, librarian, Worcester County Law Library; Frederic B. Crossley, librarian, Northwestern University Law School Library; John H. Arnold, librarian, Harvard University Law School; Frank B. Gilbert, law librarian, New York State Library; Andrew H. Mettee, librarian, Baltimore Bar Library; and E. W. Emery, librarian, Maine State Library. Other law librarians not present but who signed the call and became charter members were: W. J. C. Berry, librarian, Mutual Life Insurance Company Library, New York City; J. Harry Bongartz, law librarian, Rhode Island State Library; Wm. G. Eakins, librarian, Osgoode Hall, Toronto; Gilson G. Glasier, librarian, Wisconsin State Library; E. A. Feazel, librarian, Cleveland Law Library Association; John E. King, librarian, Minnesota State Library; C. H. Gould, librarian, Wisconsin State Library; Thomas Hawkins, librarian, Missouri State Library; Luther E. Hewitt, librarian, Philadelphia Bar Association; William H. Holden, librarian, Chicago Law Institute; Ralph K. Jones, librarian, University of Maine Law School; Mrs. Margaret C. Klingelsmith, librarian, Biddle Law Library, Philadelphia; Omar O’Harrow, law librarian, Indiana State Library; Edward H. Ryan, librarian, St. Paul Building, New York City; and Charles P. Sherman, librarian, Yale Law School Library.

¶5 Our coming together was voluntary; there was no address of welcome, hence no response, and the meetings were informal. The organizers present were a group of enthusiastic law librarians whose sole purpose was to form an association to be mutually beneficial. After several conferences as to whether the organization should be a section of the American Library Association or an independent association, it was finally agreed that an independent organization should be formed. Difficulties arose, however, as under the then existing laws of the American Library Association it was not possible to form a separate association; but after several interviews with the executive officers of the parent organization, the laws were so amended as to comply with our wishes. The first name suggested was “Law Librarians Association,” but finally the present title was agreed upon. The preliminary meetings were presided over by A. J. Small, as chairman, and Franklin O. Poole, acting as secretary. The chair appointed a committee to prepare a constitution and bylaws of which Frank B. Gilbert was chairman. Among the various activities proposed were a supplemental volume to *Jones Index to Legal Periodicals*, the issuing of a quarterly periodical, classification of law books, the

better labeling and indexing of text books, and the adoption of buckram instead of sheep for law binding. These were mainly the big issues taken up and considered. How well we have succeeded in our hopes and aspirations, and whether our anticipations have been realized, is but to review the pages of more recent history. Succeeding administrations have faithfully carried out and enlarged upon the splendid undertakings of the founders. The result of the election of officers for the first year was as follows: President, A. J. Small, Des Moines; Vice President, Andrew H. Mettee, Baltimore; Secretary-Treasurer, Franklin O. Poole, New York City; Executive Committee, President, Vice President, and Secretary-Treasurer, ex officio, Frank B. Gilbert, Albany; Dr. G. E. Wire, Worcester, Mass.; and Frederick W. Schenk, Chicago.

¶6 The second conference was held in Asheville, North Carolina, in Battery Park Hotel at the same time and place as the parent association. We had pledged ourselves to do this in order to profit from the long experience of that institution, which also offered us an opportunity for fellowship with librarians of other branches of library work and incidentally gave us the advantage of advertising, programs, rates, etc., all of which have been of untold benefit. . . . In reviewing the minutes of the second meeting¹ we find that the plan outlined at the first conference was faithfully carried out; meetings and round tables were numerous from early morning till late at night. There were 24 present at the Asheville conference, of whom 19 were law librarians. . . . We had no special assignments, simply set our time, found a corner and proceeded. Many conferences were held. Refreshments were incidental, so busy were we. Weary at times, but always happy, we attracted the attention of the whole American Library Association and heard many comments, such as "There's that bunch of law librarians," etc. . . . It was definitely decided that the association should undertake the publication of a quarterly journal and index to legal periodicals. A committee consisting of A. J. Small, Franklin O. Poole, Frederick W. Schenk, Frank B. Gilbert, and A. H. Mettee was named by the executive committee to arrange for its publication. In December a conference was held at the office of the University of Chicago Law School Library, when it was decided to begin the publication in January, 1908, . . . the issues to appear January, April, July, and October, with the January number cumulative for the year. The price agreed upon was \$5 including the cumulative number. The justification for the issuing of the Journal and Index is too well known to need further comment, and its publication, if nothing more, warrants the existence of the association. . . .

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¶7 . . . So year after year we have met in conference from the rock-ribbed shores of the Atlantic to the Golden Gate of the Pacific. The results and accomplishments are varied and many. . . . Librarianship has been made a profession

1. *Editor's Note: Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Librarians, Held at Asheville, N.C., May 24-28, 1907*, 1 LAW LIBR. J. 1-29 (1908).

rather than an occupation, and law libraries are more than mere store houses. Contact with other librarians has become informal; cooperation and exchanges are now a matter of friendly courtesy and service. . . . We have been honored with the membership of a valiant group of law librarians whose sole purposes and aims have been to render a better public service and whose unselfish efforts have not been in vain. Our conferences have stimulated acquaintanceships which through the succeeding years have grown into lifelong friendships. . . . The success of our association is due to the untiring efforts of those members who have served so faithfully since its organization in official capacity or otherwise. . . .

¶8 The foregoing is a brief synopsis of the heretofore published and unpublished records of the first annual and subsequent conferences of an organization that has since become a permanent and well-established international association, founded and organized for the advancement of legal literature and library science and the betterment of librarianship. Progress has not ceased, activities have increased; the structure begun has continued to the present time, and now flourishes as never before under the guidance and leadership of John T. Fitzpatrick, our able president, and Miss Lucile Vernon, who has been our faithful secretary for a number of years. Almost a generation has passed since its beginning; a few of the first members are yet living and active. The association is still going strong, and never during its existence has there been a chronic state of uncertainty nor even a "flat tire."

