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MPLA Newsletter

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June 1998

MPLA

Volume 42, Number 6

MPLA - The Search for Identity

— Blaine Hall
Chair, 50th Anniversary
Commemoration Committee

This is the second of three articles on the founding and history of MPLA to be published in the MPLA Newsletter as we commemorate MPLA's 50th Anniversary.

From its birth, the officers and members of MPLA attempted to establish a logical rationale for a Mountain-Plains region and a regional library association to serve it. Early on, the probing and questioning centered on geography. The committee that wrote the temporary constitution left the geographic jurisdiction of the association in the hands of the Executive Board. In February 1949, President Esterquest suggested to the board that "for the time being" they define the MPLA area as the seven states that participated in the Estes Park meeting, but not to think in terms of hard-and-fast state boundaries and also to provide for easy withdrawal and easy joining of the association.

But was there some geographical logic that made the seven member states a defensible region? And what was a region anyway? A rural sociologist from Montana State College, Carl F. Kraenzel, a speaker at the first conference, addressed some of these issues.

"In this area we speak of the Great Plains region of America; the Northern Great Plains region, including parts of Canada; the Missouri Basin Region . . . The Department of Agriculture for many years has had regional offices for its various research and administrative services. So have many other federal agencies.

"I think of these as functional and non-exploitive forces driving toward an understanding and a building up of the area into some semblance of regional consciousness and regional dynamics. . . . [But I] reject the implications of sectionalism and provincialism that the concept might ordinarily convey."

(Continued on page 4)



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MPLA President's Note

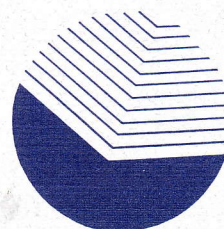
— Roann Masterson
MPLA President

How does the public perceive a "librarian?". The ordinary patron who comes into a library seems to think that a "librarian" is someone who sits behind the desk reading a book until it is time to check one out to a patron.

The reality is that a librarian is dedicated to public service. As professionals we understand the vital importance of sharing resources and information. The Mountain Plains Library Association has as its mission to further the development of librarians, library employees, and library trustees and to promote quality library service.

The theme of the 1998 ULA/MPLA Conference,

attended by over 600 library professionals, was "The Service Connection: A Vision for Tomorrow." To emphasize the issue of service, my columns this year will focus on issues of professionalism in librarianship. To that end, I have appointed a committee of my colleagues to help identify important issues regarding how we are perceived by the public and also by ourselves as professionals.



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Association members are encouraged to apply for grants, mini-grants, and international grants, all of which may be used for formal college or university classroom work, independent study programs, attendance at workshops, conferences or seminars, or participation in any other activity that will benefit libraries and the library community in our region. Members are eligible after one full year of membership.

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Geographically, he describes the region as

“a mid-continental region, conditioned by climate and resources. It is sub-humid and thinly populated. It is largely an agricultural region with little industry, financially tributary to Eastern capital. . . . The patterns of community organization suitable to the eastern part of the country fail in many respects to serve us in this region adequately. Thin population plus great distances make the costs of applying county library service, for example, prohibitive [and make] securing sufficient support for any kind of library service . . . difficult indeed.”

In a 1956 article in the *MPLA Bulletin*, Eugene Wilson, director of libraries, University of Colorado, raised again the question of region:

“Despite the ease with which [MPLA was established], certain fundamental questions deserve study by MPLA members. These questions include what is a region? Why have a regional organization? What is the nature of the region defined by the MPLA constitution? And what is its future?”

A partial answer to these questions appeared in an editorial in the *Quarterly*, following the signing by President Eisenhower of the Library Services Act on June 19, 1956, which was designed “to stimulate the states and local communities to increase library services to rural Americans.” This new federal program, observed editor Miriam McNally, is “permeating every part of the cooperative library network [through] which our profession serves the people of our seven states.” She further noted:

“The tools of this cooperation are ready for this unprecedented opportunity. The Mountain-Plains Library Association, forged out of our own human and library resources to meet our peculiar regional needs, gives strength, cohesiveness and

focus to any library project the region encompasses. The Bibliographical Center for Research, Rocky Mountain Region, sponsored by the Association, is a practical demonstration through which all types and sizes of libraries and the people they serve can share in combined library benefits not possible to any one of them alone.”

On the tenth anniversary of MPLA's founding, President Lora Crouch reported that the Executive Board had again discussed the validity of the present MPLA area as a “natural region” and wondered if the area covered by BCR would be more logical. Missouri, Arizona and Saskatchewan were suggested as possible members. She also concluded: “We reach our tenth birthday this year. We are growing up and it is time we took a long hard look at what we have done and make some decisions as to what we want to do in the future.”

By 1959, the focus of the discussion of MPLA's *raison d'être* shifted from geography to the question posed by Pres. Milton Abrams: “Why are we associated?” He wondered “if there is any justification for the association other than to provide a meeting place for the exchange of ideas, and if we do meet for this purpose do we have any problems peculiar to the area? He saw the distances, small pockets of population, lack of taxable wealth, the relative youth of some of the states and a lack of book resources as unifying elements and concluded: “A professional association ought to exist wherever a professional group has a community of problems. We have the people and the problems in the region we call the Mountain and Plains.”

This questioning led to a limited-focus annual conference in Denver in 1960. There were no programs and no exhibits. It was time to “get down to work to determine what we are, why we are, and what we might become.” “It never was intended by anyone setting up this type of meeting in Denver to overtly kill MPLA,” said an editorial in the *Quarterly*. “Every organization needs to evaluate itself from time to time. It was generally agreed

(Continued on page 19)

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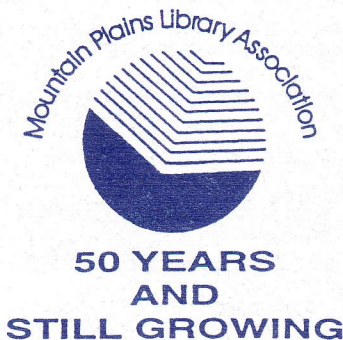
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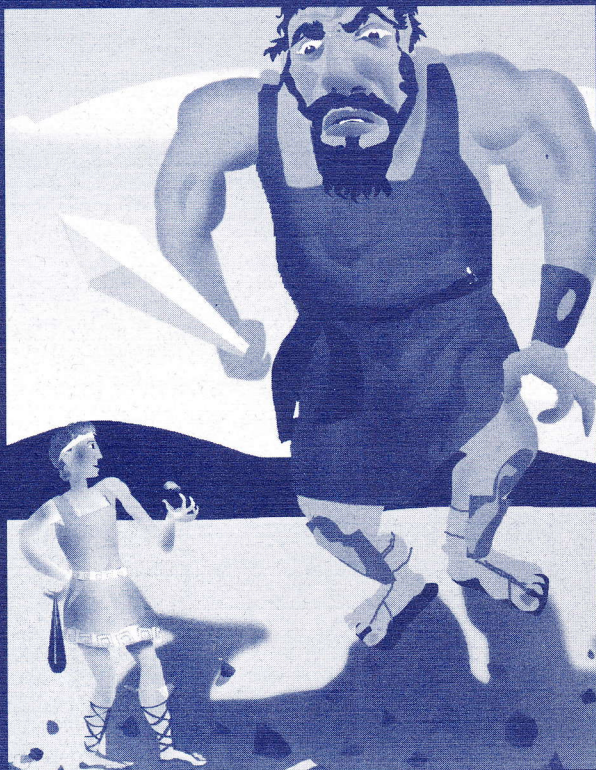
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Abstract: The Works Progress Administration's Impact on the Development of Public Libraries in the United States



— Ken Kempcke
Montana State University

Editor's Note: Ken Kempcke received the MPLA Academic Research Forum Award for his research.

In the history of the development of the public library system in the United States, two events stand out as particularly important. The first is Andrew Carnegie's library philanthropy. In the early years of this century, Carnegie donated more than \$40,000,000 for the construction of 1,679 public library buildings in communities all across the country. More recently, the Gates Library Foundation and Microsoft have donated \$200 million in cash and \$200 million in software to rural and underdeveloped public libraries. Overlooked, however, in the history of the public library, are the contributions of the Works Progress Administration's Library Assistance Program in the 1930's and 40's. While the accomplishments of the WPA program may be less glamorous and more difficult to quantify, they were every bit as important as the philanthropic deeds of Carnegie and Gates. From a humanitarian standpoint, there is little controversy over the importance of WPA programs. Yet the tremendous impact which the WPA's Library Program had on the country's library system has gone virtually unrecognized for over fifty years.

From the early days of federal emergency work relief during the depression, libraries and librarians shared in its benefits through a wide variety of library projects. This government assistance, although primarily concerned with relieving unemployment, made possible the construction and repair of hundreds of library buildings, the preparation of union catalogs and special indexes, the physical renovation of millions of dilapidated books, the expansion of existing library facilities, and the establishment of demonstration library units in areas without tax-supported public library services. From the

period 1935 to 1939, WPA project workers transcribed nearly 4,000,000 pages for Braille books for the blind. In the South, the WPA Library program led to the first direct extension service to blacks and to the first regular service to black schools. In libraries and community centers all across the country, citizenship classes, sponsored by the WPA, were held for new immigrants. Adult education and literacy classes were also held. The adult illiteracy rate decreased from 4.3 percent in 1930 to 2.9 percent in 1940, an extraordinary drop given the dire social and economic environment of the time.


Of all the WPA's Library Assistance Programs' remarkable accomplishments, perhaps the most significant was its successful achievement of its governing objective. This objective stipulated that the program would assist established library agencies in stimulating local reception of complete and permanent library service as a regular public function. The WPA not only created a consciousness for books and reading, but also was largely instrumental in raising the level of funding for materials and extension services. Citizen tax support for local libraries increased as permanent service became imperatively demanded, and well administered WPA library programs became the forerunner of county-wide library systems of immeasurable social significance.

While the states of the East and Midwest were the primary beneficiaries of WPA Library Assistance programs, the states of the Mountain Plains Library Association also profited. In 1938, Colorado public libraries employed 426 WPA staff members working in 94 centers in 31 different counties. The Greeley (Colorado) Public Library employed five WPA workers in 1935. These workers enabled the library to catch up on all of its backlog of cataloging, created a 10,000 item picture

(Continued on page 21)

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1998 MPLA Annual Conference

6 - 9 May  Salt Lake City



MPLAs Past Presidents were honored at the MPLA/ULA Birthday Party on Thursday evening.

Past MPLA Presidents: (from left) Front Row: Milton C. Abrams ('59-'60), Carol J. Connor ('97-'98), Russell L. Davis ('63-'65), Dorothy Middleton ('82-'83), Judy Zelenski ('96-'97), Dorothy Liegl ('84-'85), Donna Jones Morris ('83-'84), Jane Kolbe ('80-'82), Wilmot McFadden ('72-'73), Vince Anderson ('74-'75).

Back Row: Blaine H. Hall ('94-'96).

The 1998 MPLA Officers: (from left) Carol J. Connor, Past President; Roann Masterson, President; Marilyn Hinshaw, Vice-President/President Elect.



(Left) MPLA special guest New Mexico Library Association Vice President/President Elect Charlene Greenwood pins a New Mexico Library Association 75 year pin on Marilyn Hinshaw, MPLA Vice President.



Jean Hatfield of Kansas presents then president Carol Connor with a check for \$3200, proceeds from the MPLA 50th Anniversary Party held at PLA in March (see related photos, p. 16).

ALA President Barbara Ford during her keynote address to the MPLA and ULA memberships on Thursday.

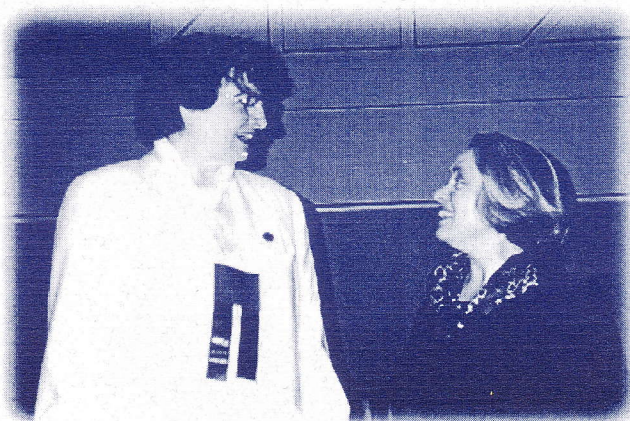


Alice Meister, 1999 Montana Library Association Conference Planning Co-Chair, made sure that everyone (in this case, Megan Millea of Nebraska) had information about next year's joint conference at Big Sky, Montana.



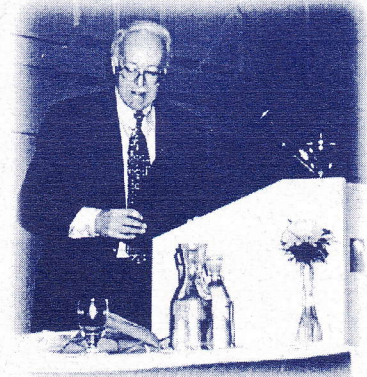
Oklahoman Peggy Cook (left) chats with representative Sydney Gruble at the University of Utah Press booth during one of the open exhibits sessions.

MPLA Past President Carol J. Connor talks with ALA President Barbara Ford after Ford's keynote address on Thursday.





Utah Poet Laureate David Lee read to a spell-bound audience from his most recent book of poetry, *Covenants: Poems*, written with William Kloefkorn, Nebraska's Poet Laureate.



Don Gale, former KSL television editorial commentator, kept the audience in stitches during his luncheon address on Thursday.



Craig Foster, a librarian at the Family History Library was one of the folks who gave an in-depth tour of the facilities and collections as one of the pre-conferences. These folks really know their stuff!



ACLU lawyer Michael Camfield entertained the audience with his "Tin Drum Boy" after his first-hand account of the Tin Drum Controversy in Oklahoma.

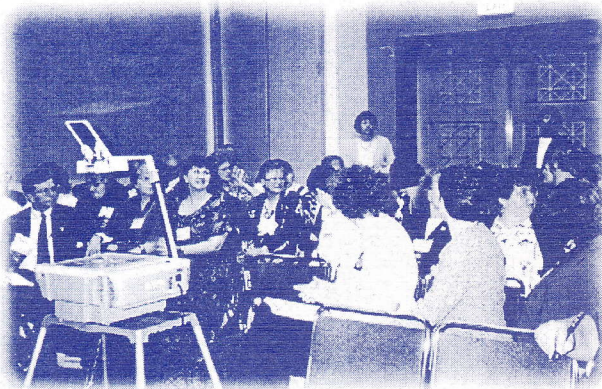


Pat Wagner of Pattern Research in Denver spoke Friday afternoon to a full house on the topic "If Change Is So Great, Why Aren't I Having Fun Yet?".



The Changing of the Guard: Roann Masterson, MPLA's President for 1998-99, accepts the president's gavel from Carol Connor, MPLA's President for 1997-98.

(below) President Roann Masterson presents Carol Connor, Past President, a plaque thanking her for her service as MPLA President during 1997-98.



From an unseen corner of the room, Brian Greene speaks to the MPLA membership during the business meeting on Friday morning.

MPLA Executive Board members Jean Anderson, Sally Dockter, Jane Hatch, and Sylvia Bartak listen intently as Alicé Meister discusses plans for the joint conference with the Montana Library Association next year at Big Sky.



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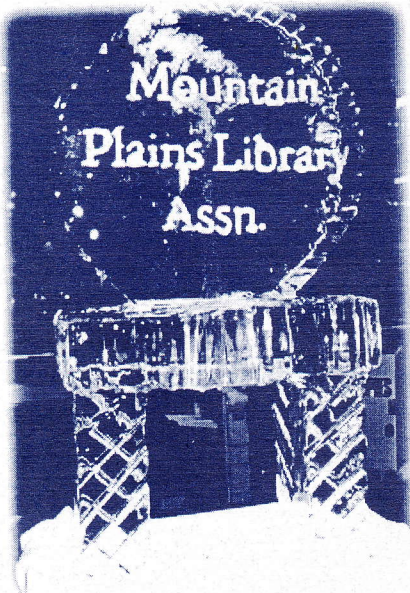


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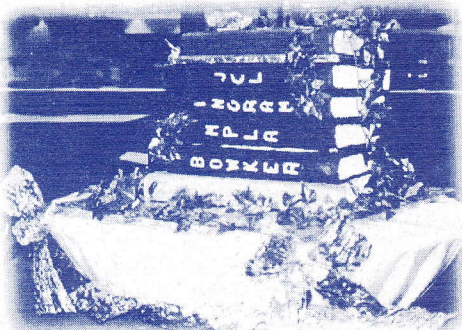
MPLA's 50th Anniversary Celebrated at PLA



Mountain Plains Library Association Ice Sculpture



Johnson County (KS) Librarian Mona Carmack cuts the cake for the 50th Anniversary of the Mountain Plains Library Association. Joining in the celebration Friay, March 13 at the Johnson County Central Resource Library were (from left) Ginny Cooper, president, Public Library Association; Carol J. Connor, president, Mountain Plains Library Association; Bill Gordon, executive director, American Library Association; John Ingram, chairman of the board, Ingram Book Group; Roger Carswell, president, Kansas Library Association; Becky Clarke, vice-president, R.R. Bowker; and Mike Lovett, president and CEO, Ingram Book Group.



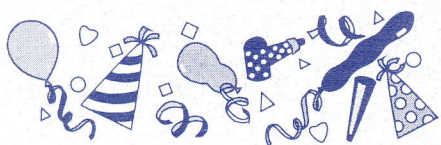
The Book Cake

Many
Thanks!

to Jean Hatfield for organizing this event and for providing photos!



Young Adult author Lois Ruby and Children's author Cheryl Harness were available for book signings.



UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

JUNE 1998

- 26-30 June — "Global Reach ... Local Touch," ALA Annual Conference, Washington, DC

SEPTEMBER 1998

- all month — Library Card Sign-Up Month
- 23-26 September — "North Dakota Libraries—Bridges to the Future," North Dakota Library Association Annual Conference, Grand Forks. www.odin.nodak.edu/ndla.htm
- 30 Sept. - 3 Oct. — South Dakota Library Association, RiverCentre, Pierre. www.sdl.net/libs/sdla/sdlahome.htm

OCTOBER 1998

- Oct. 1-4 — "Connecting for Success," Nevada Library Association, The Orleans Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas.
- Oct. 9-13 — "Who Do We Think We Are?" Colorado Library Association, Double Tree Hotel, Colorado Springs. douglas.lib.co.us/cla98/
- Oct. 28-30 — Nebraska Library Association/Nebraska Educational Media Association, Grand Island. www.nol.org/home/NLA/

NOVEMBER 1998

- Nov. 4-6 — "AzLA '98: The Creative Edge," Arizona Library Association, Phoenix Civic Plaza.

JUNE 1999

- June 13-16 — "Making Certain It Goes On," Montana Library Association/MPLA, Big Sky Resort, Big Sky, Montana. www.mtlib.org
- Nebraska Library Association/Nebraska Educational Media Association, Omaha, late October.



Future MPLA CONFERENCES

1999 — Montana Library Assoc., "Making Certain It Goes On," Big Sky Resort, June 13-16.

2000 — Nebraska Library Assoc./Nebraska Educational Media Assoc., Omaha, late October.

2001 — Arizona Library Assoc., Phoenix, November/December.

2002 — North Dakota and South Dakota Library Associations, Fargo, ND, late September.

2003 — Nevada Library Assoc., Lake Tahoe.

2004 — Colorado Library Assoc., Snow Mass.

2005 — Wyoming Library Assoc., TBA.

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Esther Dyson and the 2.0 Library

— Marilyn Hinshaw
MPLA Vice-President/President Elect

First, the review of Esther Dyson's *Release 2.0: A Design for Living in the Digital Age* (Broadway Books, New York, 1997): "Release 2.0 is . . . rich, provocative, prophetic and important. Policy makers, pundits, and thoughtful citizens, take note. You'll read (it) at least twice, and refer to it again and again".

I am always doubtful that blurbs will apply to me. In this case, I was wrong. As predicted, I have read parts at least twice. The reflections following are an amalgam of my notes from Esther Dyson's presentation at PLA in Kansas City and my follow-up reading of the book.

The Futures Group of Glastonbury, Connecticut describe the future of society in comparison to the early industrial age. In mass quantities and by mass distribution, one model T was the dream machine for every buyer. As product development moves through a four-phase change continuum the ultimate result will be one customized product per person. Here's their example: You will order exactly the automobile with the color and interior you want via your computer or interactive TV. The product will be customized, right down to the financing, and it will be delivered within days.¹ If you are not into cars, then apply the concept to a cosmetic tailored to your skin and your color preferences. From product design to sales, the prescription for success is to segment the market, customize the product at the point of sale and deliver quickly. Isn't that a library strength? Think of your days on the Reference desk, customizing the information you gather to the library user's request. Welcome to Esther Dyson's library advice column.

UNCHAIN MY HEART

Dyson says that the capability of the Internet is to unchain communication from time, place and form. The library is a physical *place*, with a typical open hour schedule (*time*), and offers content in a specific *form* of materials and information to educate, enlighten and entertain.

One example of unchaining from time, space and form is the Western Governor's University, which literally does not plan on a physical location, but on an amalgam of programs from a selection of universities. It plans to support the library needs of its long distance students with a central resource library contract with University of New Mexico General Libraries. No student is expected to physically appear at the li-

brary information desk. Instead, the support will be a suite of online products.² I would give the proverbial arm and a leg to be in on this experiment in providing a distance education product and library resources because I have waited for years for a qualitative, customized doctoral program that can reach me in my rural Oklahoma location, a three hour distance from a desirable university program at that level.

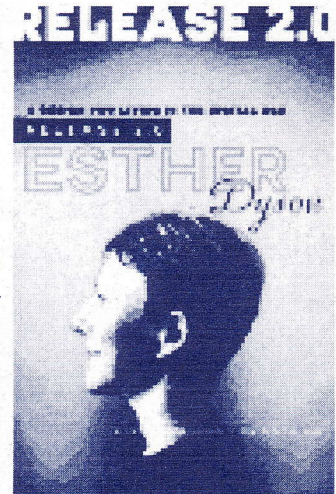
Translate that lack of necessity to appear in person to patrons of public libraries and it tells me that the people on my block who own a home computer with a dictionary on CD do not have a felt need to go to the library. As a result they do not think about the hours the building is open, and by extension, they have no need for the business skills my staff and I possess that deliver the library's product. More than ever libraries have to compete for time, for attention, and for the preferences of the clientele. As the percentage of homes with a computer increases, it will be harder to compete by offering a branch library as the only product outside the central library, and by providing the same service in the traditional way.

CENTERS OF LIBRARY POWER

In the role of societal observer, Dyson describes a power flow away from central authority/monopolies to individuals and groups of individuals. In Dewey's heyday, we gained a pretty solid monopoly on popular, even scholarly access to information. Now, people can easily leapfrog the library's structure. But it's an idea applied not only to libraries. Witness the rise of surgery centers staffed by respected professionals, the doctors and nurses who no longer choose to affiliate with hospitals.

Dyson has on site experience with the transformation of business in Eastern Europe. At PLA she described Russia coming out of the sleep walk of the Stalinized state: centralized, authoritative, and communication controlled. Libraries, schools and university systems that still meet this description exist but they are learning that control at this level is impossible to maintain in a world now imbued with fax and the Internet.

(Continued on page 22)



(Continued from page 4)

that our time had come." Pres. Abrams and the Executive Board prepared six study questions and appointed committees to generate responses to guide discussion. The first asked the fundamental question, "Does the MPLA now consist of state associations and individual librarians whose interests and problems provide a substantial basis for regional association?"

The committee report recognized 1) a sparse and scattered population, 2) great distances between population centers, 3) a relatively low level of support for libraries, and 4) youthful libraries working pretty much on a minimal program as both the common bonds that held the association together and, at the same time, created the difficulties of functioning as a regional organization. They concluded, however, that the distances, low budgets for out-of-state travel, and sometimes poor travel connections, should not prohibit effective meetings and recommended no change in the geographical makeup of MPLA. They also agreed that the interests of state associations and individual librarians provided a justifiable basis for regional association.

Two former presidents, Jerome Cushman (1951-52) and Frank Lundy (1950-51), addressed the validity and direction of MPLA in pro and con articles in the Spring 1960 *Quarterly* as a prelude to the discussions to be held at the conference later in the year.

Cushman recalled that

"MPLA began with high hopes. Its aim at bringing librarians with common problems together though separated by thousands of square miles, was bold and imaginative. Did something go wrong? In the light of our re-examination of the total position of MPLA it might be assumed that a great deal is wrong. In fact some of the thinking propounds the question, why MPLA at all? Talk like 'organization for vacation excuse,' 'programming for the district level,' 'no planning and sense of direction' are

accusations which have been made since the beginning of the Association.

"In criticizing MPLA sometimes one loses sight of the original purpose for its organization. The wide expanse of territory coupled with a sparsely settled population presented library problems which could be served better on a regional basis. That the crossing of state lines has had little or no success does not obviate the fact that a regional pattern of library development, if effected, makes the most sense. . . . While it is true progress has been compromisingly slow it would come to an immediate and final halt were there no organization even thinking about its problems."

Cushman saw programming, research, and legislation as the proper work of MPLA. The programming, however, "must cease to try to please everybody but must aim at a professional and high level of uniqueness." The research should focus scientifically and accurately on regional resources and problems. And legislation should "bring to fruition the idea and practice of truly regional library service."

Lundy, while insisting that he is not "con" MPLA, having been involved from the original conception and organization, he is "con" "MPLA in the form and substance in which I have come to know it during its first full decade." He reminded his readers that in October 1950 he had circulated a mimeographed statement in which he said:

Our state associations here in the Mountain-Plains area are limited in size and scope, . . . [but] they can be immensely helpful at the state, county, and city levels of government in securing favorable library legislation and in aiding local librarians to do a good job. State organizations in our area, however, frequently do not have the money or the manpower to develop the kind of program that would be most helpful

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in raising professional standards and improving local job performance and in promoting library projects that are not quite national in scope, but much broader than state boundaries. The activities of the Denver Bibliographical Center and the program of the Northern Great Plains Library Council are examples of what I mean.

He is convinced that a regional association can offer more worthwhile programming than can the smaller state associations. But it is undesirable for a regional association to duplicate what is already being done commendably on the local and state levels "at an even greater expense of time and effort and money. "It is a little silly to drive a thousand miles to a regional conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming," he said, "only to find a good piece of the program given over to a workshop on book mending. This sort of thing is done better in almost every way at the state and local level." He concludes:

A regional library association, including our own, can survive and do good work if it has regional reasons for being, and pursues its work vigorously within a regional framework. . . . The regional association cannot be just another 'state' association, even though it may hope to be a little bigger and better, but boring its clientele with the same bill of fare. . . . I would also suggest . . . that invitational meetings of officers, committee members, and other professional leaders may be more important to the proper functioning of the regional association than the customary annual camp meetings open to all who can find available transportation. . . . A general conference should grow out of the need by the membership to hear reports and consider recommendations made by the smaller groups assigned to do the spade work. When a full conference develops out of special work done in this manner, it may

then not be inappropriate to attach a general session with an outside speaker, and perhaps even a square dance, barbecue supper, and a ballad singer, all three, to end the event upon a relaxed and happy note! We have tended to go at the business the other way around and have in some measure failed to get down to the serious work which confronts us!

Since the annual meetings were the most visible function of MPLA, their format, purpose, and programming were often the center of the association's search for identity. Originally, the regional conferences were held separately from the state conferences, except for an occasional joint conference with a member state. Between 1961 and 1968, the pattern was changed to biennial meetings, with officers serving two-year terms. In the off year of 1962, the association held a leadership conference at the University of Denver with the program consisting of meetings of the Executive Board, a business meeting, a BCR Trustees meeting, and a couple of program sessions. The rotating annual joint conference with the eleven member states was a later development, although Pres. H. Dean Stallings had suggested this as early as 1953.

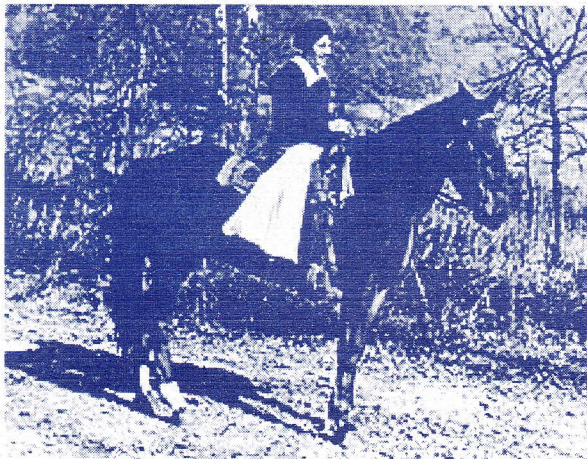
MPLA also held a Leadership Conference on Inter-Library Cooperation for May 23-24, 1973, at the Peaceful Valley Lodge and Guest Ranch in Lyons, Colorado, with 75 librarians and lay people invited. Working papers were commissioned on the topics of "The Cohesive and Divisive Forces in the MPLA Region," Behavioral and Legal Implications for Cooperation," "Networking," "Manpower for Regional Libraries," and "What of the Future?" The authors attended the conference to lead discussion of their topics. The focus of the conference was on library cooperation, but out of it came a call for MPLA to appoint task forces to "continue the study of regional interlibrary needs and the role of MPLA in meeting those needs."

By the MPLA 25th anniversary conference in Cheyenne in November 1974, the task forces had

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collection, made numerous building repairs, and performed dozens of other library tasks. South Dakota public and school libraries cataloged approximately 19,000 books in 1937 with the help of WPA assistance workers. The Wichita (Kansas) City Library secured 44 WPA assistants to rearrange, repair, and file books and other materials. Five of these workers were former library employees laid off as a result of budget cuts during the depression. In Arizona and Colorado, where there were no active state library agencies, WPA regional offices in Phoenix and Denver served as clearing-houses for regional library information. In 1933, the



library budget of the Enid (Oklahoma) Carnegie Public Library was cut 40 percent and the staff reduced 50 percent. Without the assistance of both money and personnel provided by federal work relief programs, it would have been practically impossible for the library either to have carried on or to have served library patrons with any degree of satisfaction. By 1940, the Oklahoma Statewide Library Service and Book Repair Project was operating in 219 local centers with 49 book repair units throughout the state, a reported registration of 65,538 readers, and a total circulation of nearly 700,000 books. At the outset of World War II, librarians in Montana collected books, magazines and scrap papers for paper drives and the WPA-sponsored Victory Book Campaign. The experiences of these libraries were common throughout all of the thousands of libraries benefiting from WPA support.

The WPA's library programs were not without their flaws. Because the programs were primarily designed to relieve unemployment, they often failed to apportion benefits according to the needs of libraries. Considerable criticism was directed at the WPA program for the inadequacy and high turnover of its personnel, and there was resentment by some librarians because of the

influx of unskilled workers into their profession.

Nevertheless, from its establishment in 1935 to its cessation in 1941, the WPA's Library Program spent nearly \$100,000,000 of federal funds on library service projects, or almost double the amount usually spent in support of public libraries throughout the United States each year. In 1938, when the WPA program was at its peak, library projects were providing full-time work for over 38,000 persons, or more than the number normally employed as "librarians or library assistants" (U.S. Census employment category) throughout the entire nation. Over 80 percent of its workers were women. While all of the WPA programs succeeded in providing self-confidence and hope to millions of temporarily unemployed people, the lasting legacy of the WPA Library Program is demonstrated by the continuation of many WPA enterprises through local tax maintenance following the termination of Federal support.

Note: The paper in its entirety examines the successes and failures of the WPA's Library Assistance Program, especially in relation to its impact on the libraries of the MPLA.

Photo: Pack horse librarian, Ohio, WPA, no date.



MPLA

"Making Certain It Goes On"

Montana Library Association
&
Mountain Plains Library Association

1999 Joint Conference

Big Sky Resort
Big Sky, Montana

JUNE 13 - 16, 1999

(Continued from page 18)

These communication tools mean that a carefully structured story dies at the key strokes of Internet users. That's good, because any kind of absolute power *should* be constrained. Declining centralized power in nation states is a mega-example of a trend borne on the wings of new technology. The centralized company is a dying breed. For any group, organization or business, tailoring the truth to be acceptable to an interior audience, hearing only what will validate a current path is to imperil survival. For the organizations of the 21st Century, the definition of too much stability is inertia and death.

Small, personalized businesses are the most vital, most energized segment of contemporary American society. Consider the small, personalized library center as the most exciting place on the planet - no need for a huge administrative function - not even for a monumental downtown HQ. Do you think those of us in the library field's monuments are alone? Dyson tells us that even Microsoft will have to transform. It cannot control both the content and the platform, or it will be just another monopoly on choice and will also falter. Within 20 years, developments will evolve that separate the Microsoft platform from dictating the capability for content.

In Kansas City, Dyson asked the audience of librarians to think of the restaurant business as a quick reality check of market driven (read *choice driven*) behavior. Restaurants specialize in creating a recognizable personality. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the new Holiday Inn Select comes complete with "Sebastian's Library". The restaurant decor is walls lined with bookcases, featuring hot new fiction and popular periodicals customers can read as they eat. Reading selections change regularly. Diners may sit in the fiction or non-fiction sections. Competent wait staff are in place and their performance hinges on successful customer interaction. Here is how food, the content element, is customized at the point of sale. A pasta bar with two kinds of pasta and 16 different toppings is offered at lunch. The restaurant finishes off its persona with a flourish. It plans a seasonal book drive and donates the books to the Adopt-A-School program or to a local library branch, according to owner Robert Found's.³

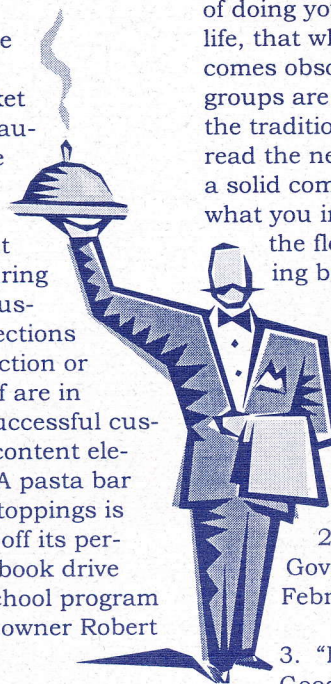
The caution from Dyson is that restaurants like Sebastian's are started because owners like Robert Found's think their interpretation of the basics (their professional truths) will give them an edge. What they ignore, says Dyson, is not only the *capability*, but the *prevalence* of home cooking. Restaurants have a notorious

record of demise. As choices are possible, choices change. This is a future morality play for some library thinking.

Dyson advised her Kansas City audience that libraries have to decide what they want to do, what role they want to play in the invention of the Future. There is opportunity in being an alternative education system. There is a role in offering an alternative to any filtered or institutionalized truth.

In **Release 2.0**, Dyson describes the job of a leader. You display leadership behavior when you absorb the library user's uncertainty and help them frame the question to get access to the truth, then send them on with their journey. People want content knowledge which they can choose to get on their own, but they beg for interactive advisors. *Emotional intelligence* is management skill, judgment, collaborative skills, risk-taking and evenness of temperament. It's a requirement for leadership. Isn't this time of uncertainty an opportunity to demonstrate a library specialty on the information frontier?

Dyson's view of the Internet-enhanced future holds the promise that every person will be enabled to be a grownup, decide when enough is enough and exercise choice. Your fail-safe is to create a fluid enough system of doing your library business, or of making your work life, that when one standard or way of doing things becomes obsolete, it is replaced by another. Cyber groups are now known as "communities." Hold both the traditional and this new definition in mind as you read the next sentence. As change becomes constant, a solid community reputation and a vision of who and what you intend to be for your community enhanced by the flexibility factor will describe the distinguishing behavior of those who choose to thrive.



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Editor's Note: Besides being MPLAs Vice-President/President Elect, Marilyn Hinshaw is Director of the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System, a six county public library district headquartered in Muskogee, OK.

(Continued from page 20)

addressed many of the issues from the Peaceful Valley conference, and presented their findings at the conference. Acting on their recommendation, the Executive Board appointed A Master Plan Committee, which presented their findings to the members at a "sometimes heated" conference at Lake Tahoe.

The plan called for 1) establishing the office of Executive Secretary; 2) changing the fiscal structure, including raising dues, having states collect MPLA dues, asking State Library Agencies and state library associations for financial support, increasing subscriptions to the *MPLA Quarterly*, and exploring various methods of fund raising; 3) establishing relationships with the region and with ALA; 4) providing and coordinating continuing education programs for the members; 5) coordinating resources in the region, such as supporting BCR; 6) and improving communication and publications, primarily through the *MPLA Quarterly*, whose content should be regional in nature. After much discussion and deliberation, the plan was finally approved by a vote of 97 to 19. Don Trottier moved a substitute motion to disband MPLA and to have each of the eight member states appoint one representative to a Mountain Plains Program Committee, which would then appoint a conference manager. Thus MPLA would become only a loosely structured regional conference-sponsoring organization. The motion was defeated.

A member survey in 1975 found that members wanted conference programs to be "practical, substantive and professional with more scope for informal discussion and interaction rather than inner-directedness about MPLA itself." The largest number, 81%, approved the proposal to alternate Denver conventions with joint MPLA/state association meetings elsewhere. Since 1977, MPLA has held joint conferences with its member state associations and discontinued separate annual conferences.

The question of what MPLA is and should be has risen less frequently in recent years. Most members seem comfortable with the joint conferences

with member states, the *Newsletter*, and other membership benefits. And the sections and committees work together in conference program planning with the member state associations and on other issues of a regional nature that may arise from time to time.

But as recently as September 1997, the Board of Directors again raised the issue of what MPLA should be and do in the context of ways to increase membership, itself an issue raised repeatedly over the years. Past President Judy Zelenski stressed that "if you don't hit the needs of the people out there, you can just forget the slickest brochure, the greatest speakers; you can forget the whole thing. It's the incredible workload, the lack of staff, and the lack of time that keeps people away. It's a whole new world. MPLA really needs to look at the new world we're in." She also discouraged a major membership drive "without knowing what we have to offer and knowing that we offer it to people who want it."

Now as MPLA begins its second fifty years on the eve of a new millennium with new technological marvels that promise to make our present technologies seem primitive and antiquated, Pres. Kathlyn Lundgren's 1974 reminder seems even more timely: "MPLA is changing . . . We are not living in the past, but learning from it. . . . When will this process of change be complete? Probably never. MPLA can no more afford to be static than we as individuals can remain the same."

So after fifty years our organizational search for identity continues as it must. Only by meeting the changing needs of its members as they face the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing profession can MPLA continue to serve the librarians and libraries in this vast mid-continental region of mountains and plains stretching from the Missouri to the Sierras and Canada to Mexico. For MPLA's identity exists primarily in the minds and hearts of its members, in the person-to-person associations we have developed, and in our desire to "act collectively," which according to Henry David Thoreau, "is the spirit of our institutions."





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