What's Happening...

The regulations for school library system pilot projects and regional network pilot projects were recommended to the Board of Regents by the Regents Advisory Council after a line-by-line review. Representatives of the New York Library Association served on a special committee reviewing these regulations. These, and proposed regulations for administration of local sponsor incentive aid to libraries, were also approved. Concern has been expressed that school library system development be based upon adequate staffing of school libraries at the building level. The Council recommended that the Education Department monitor maintenance of effort in use of staff time as well as in dollars expended.

The 1978 Legislature provided funds for two regional networks for interlibrary cooperation and for six pilot school library systems. Copies of the Regents’ regulations for implementing these pilots will be broadly disseminated by the SED. Grant applications for the pilot projects will be due March 1.

NYLA Legislative Day in Albany

Hold the Date!
Meet us in the morning in Legislative Office Building (across from Capitol) Watch your mail for details.

Tuesday, March 20

Harold Hacker's Valentine to NYLA

You've come a long way, NYLA!

By Harold S. Hacker
Former Director
Rochester Public Library and the Monroe County Library System

I accepted this invitation to write about my early experiences as an active member of NYLA for two reasons: today’s members may not realize how far NYLA has progressed in the last four decades — “fantastic” is the word; and older members might enjoy some moments of nostalgia.

My contacts with NYLA span over 40 years, 1937-1978. I attended my first NYLA conference in October 1937 in Niagara Falls. I was a student in the University of Buffalo’s Library School then. In 1977 I attended my last conference as a working librarian — again in Niagara Falls. What changes in between!

I will discuss some of the highlights of NYLA from 1937 to 1950, my early NYLA period; how it switched from a passive to an action organization through its early exciting legislative efforts.

The Growth of NYLA

These selected statistics demonstrate graphically how NYLA has grown. I have chosen 1943 and 1976 — a 33-year span — for comparison.

1943 1978 (estimated)
Paid Members 1,523 3,555
Membership Dues $1 $23 (average)
Dues Income $1,523 $82,120
Total Income $1,723* $194,000
* no 1943 conference, no conference income

Other early membership benchmarks were: 1,785 members in 1946 (first post-war year); and 1,570 in 1948 (the first year under graduated dues schedule).

In February, 1947, NYLA Council gathering for increased program activities, proposed a switch from the $1 dues to a graduated dues schedule — from $1 to $10, depending upon salary. Membership approved the change at the 1947 conference.

NYLA acquired its first office early in 1945 when it rented space in the Commerce Building at 74 Chapel Street in Albany. Prior to that time, the NYLA “office” was in the home of the secretary. The forerunner of the NYLA Bulletin in that early period was a brief News Letter, edited by volunteer librarians.

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NYLA Bulletin Board

February
1 RASS Executive Board Meeting; NYLA Hq.
2 NYLA White House Conference Task Force Meeting; N.Y.C.
21 NYLA Conference Planning Committee Meeting; N.Y.C.

March
3 SLMS Executive Board Meeting; N.Y.C.
14 ACSS Committee Meeting; NYLA Hq.
20 NYLA Legislative Day; Albany
29 Patients’ Library Subcommittee Meeting; NYLA Hq.
My First Conference

In October, 1937, conference attendance costs were a fraction of current costs. The 597 attendees at the 1937 conference paid $1 registration (compared to $25 in 1978). The 1937 banquet ticket was $1.50. Niagara Falls hotel costs were $3.50 a day with bath, or $1.50 a day for 4 in a room. Parking was 25¢ a day (I paid $10 a day for parking at New York’s Hilton in 1978). The round trip bus fare from New York City to Niagara Falls was $12 in 1937.

Some of the program topics at the 1937 conference were echoed by today’s concerns. For example: the NYLA Inter-racial Service Committee held meetings on New York State Indian lore and on the importance of library services, especially bookmobiles (he thought that they were on a house-to-house schedule). He revised some of his planned remarks in his conference address.

The big news at that conference was the stormy session on state aid and libraries. The NYLA News Letter had contained ‘home work’ for the delegates—a conference on statewide public library service that disclosed that 13%, 1.7 million New Yorkers, had none. Strong willinsto delegates overcame a reluctant chairman to adopt and send to the membership meeting a resolution requesting that the State Education Department’s Research Division “make a complete study of the present and future status of statewide library service” and that NYLA Council appoint a committee to work with the Research Division throughout the study. The resolution was passed. Commissioner Stoddard later approved the study and thus was launched the first major State Education Department (SED) involvement with public libraries. That study was to dominate NYLA’s concern for the next three years, culminating in the exciting 1947 conference at West Point.

The 1945 conference had to be cancelled because of war-related problems. However, the series of three regional meetings were held in the fall to report on the progress of the SED survey of public libraries. In the spring of 1946, NYLA Council formed a Legislative Committee of nine members, five of whom served as trustees. The 1946 conference was held in September at Saratoga Springs (rates at the Grand Union Hotel were $8-$10 a day for room and meals). The SED survey was the topic of a general session at that conference; the new Legislative Committee held a meeting on a state aid formula for public libraries.

Then things began to pop in every direction! The conference closed without an introduction of the new officers for 1947 because the deadline for voting was two weeks after the conference. Subsequently it was announced that Francis St. John, of the New York Public Library, was elected President. I was elected Vice-President/President-elect. I was then public relations director at the Grovember Library in Buffalo. Neither Francis nor I had any experience on NYLA Council to that date. We decided to work on a 2-year program and met twice in the fall of 1946 for that purpose, prior to the November Council meeting.

When I arrived in Albany for that meeting, I was stunned to learn that Francis St. John had suddenly resigned as President and was moving to Washington; Council immediately designated me as President; no 1947 conference arrangements had been made, not on the location of a site; Council had decided that NYLA should begin immediately to implement a legislative campaign to lay the groundwork for the expected big push in 1948 when the study proposals would be ready; needed a new Vice-President.

That meeting was a whirlwind of activity. I was directed to negotiate with the U.S. Hotel Thayer at West Point for a 1947 conference site...Council approved a legislative program—library Emergency Relief Bill (20% reimbursement for all public libraries) and asked me to get it drafted and introduced...and Anthony Cerrai, a Yonkers trustee, was elected Vice-President-elect.

The 1947 conference at West Point was packed with drama and suspense. During the early part of the conference State Comptroller Frank Moore gave the keynote talk, advocating funding for library systems; membership voted for its first graduated dues scale and for the first minimum salary for professional librarians ($2,700 for those with M.S. degrees), and the study was unveiled and discussed. The SED plan provided for state-operated regional library service centers, at a cost of $7 million annually. The Board of Regents was considering the proposal.

Harold Hacker gives Governor Rockefeller a tour of the Rochester Public Library in 1961.

Tolerance; there were two publicity workshops; the place of the catalog in the library was discussed (sound familiar!); and, shades of AV, there was a lantern slide-illustrated talk on the Rochester Public Library’s new Central Library building. In 1937, NYLA invited the Ontario Library Association’s (OLA) participation in its conference; in 1977, NYLA and OLA had a joint conference.

Highlights of Other Conferences

I missed the conferences from 1937 to 1941; and World War II forced the cancellation of the 1942 and 1943 conferences. The 1944 conference in Rochester was one of the most exciting that I ever attended. It began dramatically when President Helmer Webb (Union College) announced upon arrival that he had to leave immediately for a secret government assignment in England. He left Vice-President L. Marion Mosher in charge of many loose ends for the conference and asked me to handle conference publicity. The scheduled event was a first for NYLA in many years—Commissioner of Education George Stoddard was to address the conferences on the role of the library in educational planning. I arranged for an Associated Press interview with the Commissioner before his talk. During the interview the Commissioner betrayed his lack of clarity about library services, especially bookmobiles (he thought that they were on a house-to-house schedule). He revised some of his planned remarks in his conference address.

Remember 1947 when you got change for a dollar after paying for two ice cream sodas? Harold Hacker relaxes with his colleague handball partner Paul Rooney (now Dir. of Buffalo & Erie County Public Library).

While conference was in session, Commissioner of Education Francis Spaulding drove from Albany to West Point to address Council on a proposed state library. His “scoop” was a bombshell! The SED approved the establishment of only one regional center on a 3-year experimental basis that would amount to only 2% of the total SED proposal cost. NYLA leadership was bitterly disappointed; protested to the Regents and sent a delegation to seek reconsideration. None was forthcoming. NYLA was considering the proposal at the time.
The Legislative Committee is all geared up to continue on the positive momentum of the 1978 legislative victory. At its meeting in Albany, January 24, it continued to develop the 1979 program thrust, and set the following dates for future meetings: February 27, Albany; July 20 (city to be announced); October, at NYLA conference.

Priorities for legislative action will be announced in the March NYLA Bulletin and will be distributed to all participants in NYLA Legislative Day in Albany, Tuesday, March 20. For further Legislative Day information contact: Edward Menegaux, Executive Director South Central Research Library Council DeWitt Building 6A 215 North Cayuga Street Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

You've come a long way, NYLA!

Young Leadership Period

During the critical 1946-48 period when NYLA moved vigorously into the legislative arena, its three top leaders were well under 35 years of age. I was just 30 when I became President in 1946, Anthony Cerrato was 33 when he was elected Vice-President, Raymond Williams, who became President in 1948, was 31. We were the team that met with the Regents in November 1947.

Remembering my low regard for the role of the Junior Members Section at my first NYLA conference, I seized the opportunity a decade later in 1947, when I was President, to invite the section members to join the mainstream of NYLA leadership. They accepted the invitation and voted to abolish their section.

The Trustees

This account would not be complete without paying tribute to the group of library trustees who played active roles during the 1946-50 period. First through their own Trustees Section of NYLA, then as members of NYLA's Legislative Committee, and finally, as leaders of their own organization, they fought for a new vision of improved library service in New York State.

Thank You, NYLA

Yes, NYLA, you've come a long way since 1937...in legislative efforts and results...in gains in membership and programs...and in stature, both in New York State and nationally. I am grateful to NYLA for giving me my chance to learn and grow professionally.

Editor's Note: Other historical perspectives focusing on school library and college and university library issues within the Association are invited.