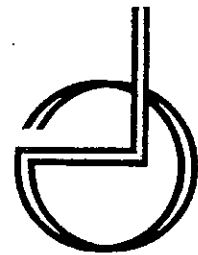


COMMUNICATOR



VOLUME 27, NUMBER 1 - 2

JANUARY - JUNE, 1994

THE LIBRARIANS' GUILD: A HISTORY OF THE FIRST QUARTER- CENTURY

by

Joyce Elliott

Editor's Note:

This special double issue combines Joyce Elliott's present-day perspective on twenty-five years of Librarians' Guild history with reprints of *Communicator* articles selected by Joyce for the insights they provide on the way we were.

I. Background: 1967-1968

1967 and 1968 were years of turmoil and ferment. The U.S. was mired in the Vietnam War with its attendant protests. It was also the time of hippies and the drug culture. The seeds of feminism were being sown.

In Los Angeles, Sam Yorty was mayor and the voters had rejected a library bond issue. The Jacobs Survey of wages and classification showed that librarians were grossly underpaid, but the City did not act on the survey.

It was a time of ferment and change for the Los Angeles Public Library also. The Federal Project at Lincoln Heights and Venice branches and in the Central Region pioneered outreach to the community, and other branches began to adopt the new techniques.



A Progress Report 1967-1977

Nineteen sixty-seven was not a good year for LAPL. A bond issue to finance a new Central Library and many new branches was soundly rejected by the voters. In an effort to find out why the bond issue failed so drastically, Harold Hamill, the City Librarian, proposed meetings in each region and at Central Library to discuss library service. Attendance by the professional staff was voluntary; the discussion, free-wheeling.

I recently came across the minutes of the two sessions held at Palms Rancho branch and was astounded to see how many ideas that were proposed at those meetings have been implemented in the decade since.

(Material in quotation marks is from the original report.)

"It was felt that one of the major causes for the defeat of the bond issue was the attempt to substitute publicity for service. We serve only about ten percent of the city's population and we don't serve them well. We do not reach the poor, the minority groups, or the affluent. Library service today is essentially the same as it was thirty years ago. In a society that is more and more audio-visual oriented and less and less book oriented, we do not begin to meet the needs of our patrons.

The modern library should be a community information center with records, films, tapes, stereo cartridges, video tapes, etc. in every branch as well as books and pamphlets. Technical processes should be automated and modern devices such as the teletype used to improve and speed service. The staff should be community oriented and have the time and opportunity to go out into the community."

In 1967 the Federal Project was in its second year of operation and innovative ideas were spreading through the system. Addie Edwards, the first Community Aide, was beginning her work at Venice branch and Federal Project librarians at Venice, Lincoln Heights and in the Central Region were bringing the library to the community and vice versa.

Library automation was still in the planning stages.

"Each branch library should have a card file of local community services such as where to find voter registrars, health centers, tutors, etc; emergency telephone numbers such as suicide prevention, emergency hospitals, etc., and local organizations, their officers, meeting place and time, etc.

Central Library should have 24-hour information service of this kind and should advertise it and list the number in the front of the telephone directory."

LINK and LINK-West were many years in the future, but we knew we needed them.

"Community volunteers should be used to supplement the branch staff for special programs, etc.

A Friends of the Library group should be organized for each branch and an active and important program should be presented to them for action."

In 1967 we had no volunteers and no Friends. Today, volunteers play an important role in helping us expand and extend library service. More than a third of our branches have Friends groups, including LALA.

"The present public relations staff is Central-oriented. The staff should be expanded so they could work for branches too."

Ten years ago, we had a PR staff of one, plus a display artist who created displays at Central. As Federal Project staff needed flyers, bookmarks, posters, etc., a separate, federally-funded unit was set up to supply these needs. When regular branch staff began programming, they too, needed graphics support and the PR department was gradually expanded.

"We must get best sellers faster."

LAPL was just experimenting in a few branches with the McNaughton service which would later be expanded to nearly every branch.

"Branches should be able to order paperbacks by phone direct from Sunset News or other dealers when there is a sudden great demand for titles."

In 1967 only Federal Project staff could do direct purchasing.

"A hard-bound copy should not be required in a branch before paperbacks can be purchased. Each branch should decide whether they want or need paperbacks. Branches stocking paperbacks should have a drugstore type rack. In some areas branches should sell paperbacks as a public service."

We still don't sell PBs, but they and the racks are an accepted part of every branch collection.

"Interlibrary loan should be faster. There should be teletype connections between branches and their regional branch, and between regional branches and Central."

We haven't done so well on this one. Experiments in some of the regions have speeded up the process a little. Although we do have some teletypes, we cannot use them for ILL.

"The 'red lines' and 'P' on book pockets should be eliminated."

The practice of designating certain books which contained excessive violence, dirty language, or explicit sex has faded long ago. (This made some adult patrons unhappy as they would request "red line" books to read.)

"Part of the group felt the library should buy Nancy Drew, Tarzan and other stories."

We even have comic books today!

"The group would like to see more high interest books with a primary reading level vocabulary for adults in branches which need this material."

The Federal Project staff searched out this material and made us aware of it. Integrating branch book collections made easy reading material available to adults.

"Branches in foreign-speaking areas should have much larger collections of foreign books. Practical foreign books and such things as Bibles, almanacs and atlases should go on branch order sheets for general purchase. The Foreign Department should have more money to buy books and should buy paperbacks in foreign languages. The emphasis should be on popular and practical books for the non-English speaking reader rather than literary books for foreign language students."

In 1967, any foreign books in branches were on loan from the Foreign Dept., except in the Federal Project branches where federal funds were used to begin branch collections.

"Literacy Programs, sponsored by the Board of Education, should be held in branches wherever needed."

A few branches make their facilities available for these classes.

"The present Audio-Visual Department is a disgrace for a city of this size. We must have more records and more films and duplicate copies of films. It should not be necessary to reserve films three and four months in advance of showing or to have two alternate choices and be lucky to get any of them.

Branches must have records, films, language records and other audio-visual materials in their own collections and be able to get others for their patrons quickly. The group recommended that 30 percent of each branch's book budget be spent for AV materials beginning immediately."

The present AV Department has a better collection of recordings and films, but there are still long waits for films. Ten years ago, only Federal Project branches had AV materials and equipment. Today, every branch has them. Spending 30 percent of the budget for AV materials is still a dream.

The most urgent need is for two-way communications. There should be meetings with Administration to discuss problems and not just for Branch and Children's Librarians."

The record here is spotty. We do have Information meetings bi-weekly for Branch Librarians and Department Heads. We used to have Operation LAPL, Dialogues and Union/Management Committees.

"Administration should always reply to memos and suggestions. When branches report community demand, action should be taken."

Still the same old problem.

"Discussion group meetings like this should be held regularly and the personnel involved should be rotated."

The Librarians' Guild was born from these meetings. The Palms Rancho group was so excited by all these new ideas that they began meeting at 7:30 a.m. to continue the discussions over breakfast. A group at Central Library was meeting on their own time also. Eventually, the two groups merged and the Guild was born.

"Branches should have greater autonomy to make small decisions in response to local needs."

This one is hard to assess. In areas like the materials collection there is more freedom, but in other areas we have made no progress.

"The group felt a need for a strong professional staff association which could have a voice in policy making."

We have the Guild, but it is still a struggle to get a voice in policy making.

"The group felt there should be intermediate salary schedules for the following groups: Senior Librarians of Regional Branches; Children's Librarians; and Reference Specialists in the larger branches. It was felt that these people have skills, training and/or responsibilities beyond the average for their groups."

The Senior Librarians in Regional Branches made it. The rest is still being debated.

"Librarians should all have four weeks vacation and a Sabbatical every eight years."

We're still dreaming.

"A classification of Library Clerk and Library Clerk Typist should be developed on a higher salary schedule than the rest of the city offices which do not require evening or Saturday work."

We got the Clerk classification but no extra money.

"The group felt a need for more in-service training on library time and at library expense. Examples given were sensitivity training, training in a foreign language spoken in the branch neighborhood, graphics, audio-visual techniques, and work with groups."

We have had a few workshops, usually put together by a region or for a special group, such as Library Community Representatives, but there has been little or no effort made by Administration at in-service training. We have not even seen the results of a training needs survey that was taken about two years ago.

"There should be more storyhours, including pre-school storyhours. There should be more children's film programs. Tapes, films, records and puppets should be used."

Ten years ago, the only people doing anything other than traditional storytelling to school age children were the Federal Project staff.

Working for a large institution, we sometimes feel we never make any progress, so it is especially heartening to see how far we've come. Congratulations to Administration and all the staff who participated!

Wouldn't it be fun to dream for the next decade?

* * *

COMMUNICATOR Subscription Policy

The COMMUNICATOR is mailed free to: Guild members; the Los Angeles Public Library system; selected government agencies and officials; the media; and, other unions.

The annual subscription rate of ten dollars (\$10.00), which is the cost of publication and mailing, is charged to all subscribers not fitting into any of the above categories.

II. Organization: 1967-1974

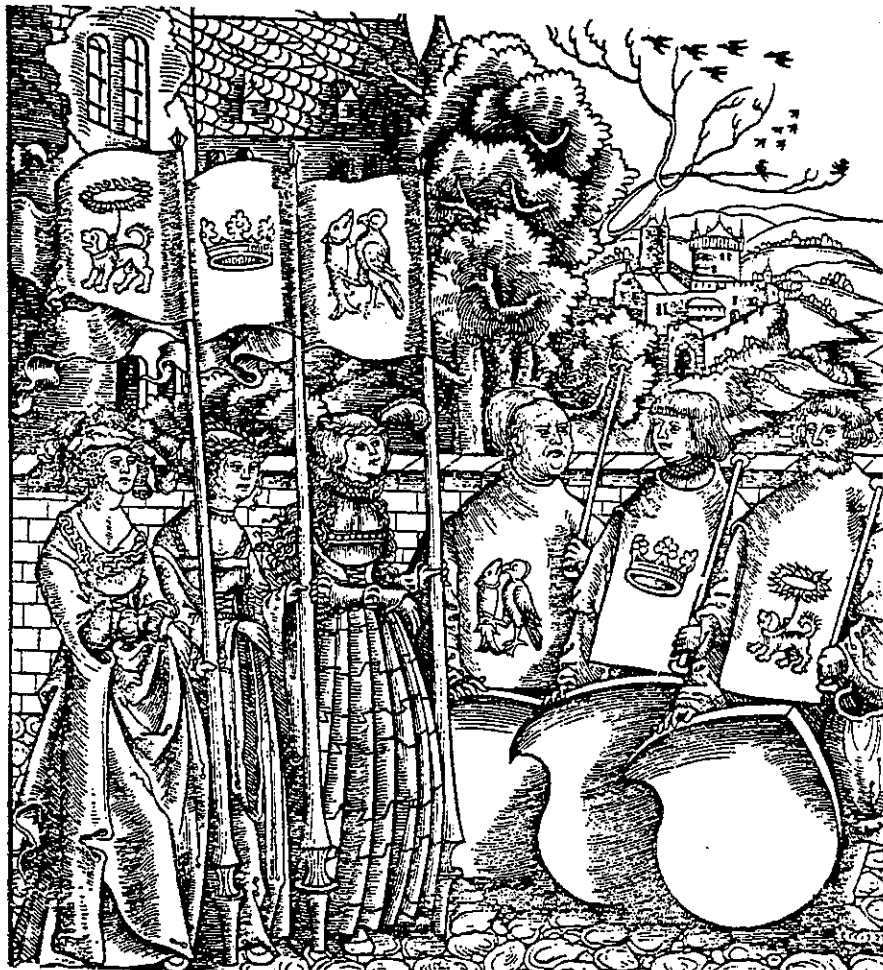
The regional meetings got people talking. A group of librarians at Central Library—primarily in the Social Sciences Department—went further. They began talking union and wrote to the Brooklyn Library Guild for information. This group included Darryl Mleynek, Bob Brown, Mary Fischer (Ghikas), Tom Lippert, and Gordon Brooks.

Early in 1968, Bob Brown, Penny Carr, Hermia Justice, Mary Fischer (Ghikas), Evelyn Greenwald, Jan Johnson (Akin), Darryl Mleynek, Loyce Pleasants, and Marianna Reith met to discuss organization and affiliation with AFSCME.

Union organizer Ron Coleman helped set up a membership drive with a goal of 150, or half the librarians in LAPL. Meetings were held in private homes and in a hospitality suite at the Mayflower Hotel to sign up prospective members. Interestingly enough, union organization had the covert approval and support of City Librarian Harold Hamill.

By June 1968 the goal was reached and a constitution was drawn up by the Organizing Committee. July 21, 1968 was the first membership meeting. The constitution was approved and a Nominating Committee set. Elections were held, and Darryl Mleynek was chosen as the first President. Other board members included Joyce Elliott, Tony Shay, and Penny Carr.

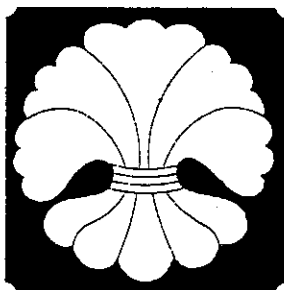
In August 1968 the Guild was officially chartered as Local 1634, AFSCME, AFL-CIO.



LIBRARIANS' GUILD - - YEAR ONE

By Mary Fischer

June 1974



Perhaps the tone of that first year was established by the expressions of satisfaction--and speculation--on the faces of librarians leaving the Board Room after that October 2, 1968, meeting. A federal project librarian had been requested by the Board of Library Commissioners to appear before them to explain a letter he had written to his supervisor. After a hurried executive board meeting, a letter went out to every LAPL librarian stating that this was an issue involving "...the professional responsibility of librarians to the public and the obligation of librarians to express their professional opinion." Librarians were asked to support their colleague by their attendance at the October 2 Board meeting--and they came. On October 2, some 50 LAPL librarians packed the Board. The issue was resolved amicably. It was, for all of us, a useful test of political power.

The new Guild's first membership meeting was held on July 21, 1968, with Darryl Mleynek acting as chairman, and an election was called. When the ballots were all in, the first executive board was convened: Darryl Mleynek, Joyce Elliott, Mary Fischer, Anthony Shay, Muriel D'Amico, Judy (Svec) Donovan, Robert Brown, Loyce Pleasants, Martha Gould, Charlotte Tays, Katharine Carr and Charles Kaufman.

Year one was a year for advertising our successful organizing venture, getting to know the political and organizational realities of unions, feeling out the scope of the tasks ahead, trying our relationship with library management.

August 1968 -- The Librarians' Guild asked for Guild representation, on library time, at all meetings of the Board of Library Commissioners. Request rejected--and then reconsidered, at length.

September 1968 -- President Darryl Mleynek officially requested appointment to an Ad Hoc Employee Representatives Council concerned with a study of city job classifications being made by J.L. Jacobs & Co.

- The flood of letters began. Students asking for information on unions. Other libraries asking how we'd done it--and did we really like it.
- Librarians at Santa Monica Public Library starting to organize a chapter of the Guild.

YEAR ONE ...
(CONT.)

October 1968 -- LAPL's librarians showed up in force to hear a colleague defend himself before the Board of Library Commissioners. It was a day for consciousness-raising!

- The Librarians' Guild went to the CLA Convention (October 22-26 in San Diego) as an exhibitor. AFSCME split the exhibitor's fee with the Guild (\$75 each)--and we spent several days talking unions and activism.
- The Board of Library Commissioners requested a statement of objectives, membership and activities from the Guild.
- Library Administration asked the Guild for suggestions on improving communications. Kathryn Carr, Muriel DAMICO and Martha Gould were appointed to draft a statement.
- The need for more adequate parking facilities at Central Library was referred to the Guild's Grievance Committee, chaired by Tony Shay, with Roger Quimby, Joel Martinez and Rosalind Goddard. It was a busy month!

December 1968 -- The Board of Library Commissioners asked the Guild to comment on existing grievance procedures.

- Joyce Elliott's Salary Committee began firming up the Guild's first salary request.

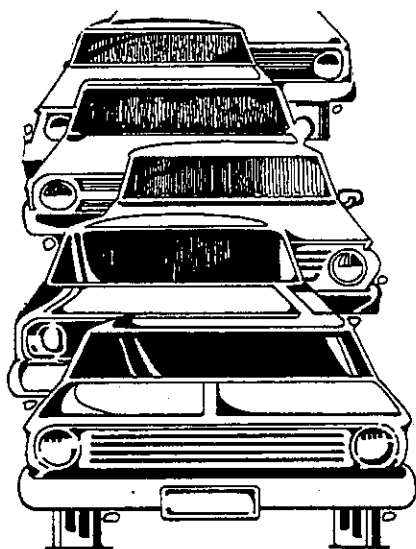
January 1969 -- Wes Doak attended ALA Midwinter for the Guild, meeting with East Coast AFSCME and AFT locals and working at a booth sponsored by AFL-CIO Space (Scientific, Professional, and Cultural Employees).

- Librarians at San Francisco Public Library held their first organizing meeting.
- The Librarians' Guild asked the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor for lobbying assistance in the matter of the needed Central Library parking lot.

February 1969 -- A Guild membership meeting was held, with lawyer Stanley Fleischman speaking on libraries and censorship. Ruth Polsky was commended for setting up the program.

- The Guild went on record in support of the commission form of government for the Library, vs threatened direct Council control.

YEAR ONE ...
(CONT.)



February 23, 1969. 90% of Central Library's 500 employees called in sick "to dramatize" the parking problem. A news release was issued summarizing the situation:

"As far back as December 19, 1968, the City Administrative Officer concluded an in-depth study of the library's parking problem and recommended that the area west of the library be turned into a landscaped parking lot. This report was approved by the mayor on December 23, 1968. On January 9, 1969, the Board of Library Commissioners requested that \$55,000 be transferred from one account to another in order that the project could be immediately begun. The mayor has to date refused to okay that transfer of funds, even though he had previously approved the plan."

- Also in February--AFSCME reexamined its own structure in light of the demand for large scale organizing in California. Council 49, the regional administrative unit of AFSCME, had been badly torn by competitive demands from northern and southern California. After a meeting of AFSCME leaders in San Jose, Council 49 became a legislative agency based in Sacramento. Local-level services and administration were turned over to newly-formed District Councils, (District Council 36 in Los Angeles).
- And finally--February ended with the librarians at Santa Monica Public Library entering into formal negotiations with the City of Santa Monica--the first Guild librarians to be involved in negotiation.

March 1969 -- The Librarians' Guild announced its support for librarians at Richmond Public Library (Contra Costa County) against censorship attempts by the Richmond Public Library Board. A notice mailed out by the Guild requested that librarians not take positions at Richmond as long as the censorship continued.

April 1969 -- Robert Brown headed a Guild committee to lobby for better salaries.

- Sally Dumaux chaired a new membership drive.
- Darryl Mleynek and Wes Doak represented the Guild in the ALA Conference in Atlantic City.

YEAR ONE ...
(CONT.)

-- The not-quite-year old Guild decided to revamp its structure to allow more flexibility and participation. Mary Fischer chaired the committee, working with Sally Dumaux, Jane Goldner, Jan (Johnson) Akin and Wes Doak.

July 1969 -- Mary Fischer and Judy (Svec) Donovan attended the AFSCME area meeting in Los Angeles to share ideas and problems with other representatives.

- The Guild's Executive Board voted to reject any alternative to the proposed (but still delayed) Central Library parking lot. If the parking lot issue was not satisfactorily settled, the Board voted to go to the membership to request a general strike vote. (It did not become necessary).
- Finally, the Guild offered its financial support (\$50) to striking nurses at Cedars of Lebanon. In the future, Guild support would often be solicited--funds, boycott, information--by various unions, and the Guild would similarly look to other groups.

Local 1634 survived its first year, learning something of the political impact of a group of people working together, clarifying some ideas on the use of power--and perceiving more clearly the size of the battle to change attitudes about librarians and libraries!

