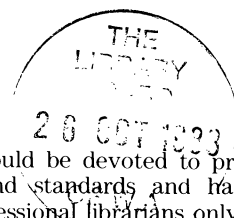


Volume One Cometh



Volume one of the LAA's encyclopaedia, *ALIAS, (Australia's Library, Information, and Archives Services: an encyclopaedia of practice and practitioners)* will be available in December. *ALIAS* Volume one has been sponsored by Kilner's Commercial Carriers. To give you a sneak preview (and to answer the many requests to re-run the 1937 conference photo with a caption) here is Jean Whyte's contribution on the AIL. Volume one (hardcover) costs \$70 for LAA members and \$90 for others (plus \$3 postage/handling).

Australian Institute of Librarians (AIL)

Established in 1937, the AIL was the third attempt at founding a national association in librarianship. Earlier associations were the Library Association of Australasia and the Australian Library Association (ALA). Some states had also formed associations, of which the most successful was the Library Association of Victoria.

The AIL was not a direct but an indirect result of the Munn-Pitt Report, which recom-

mended the formation of a strong national association. However, a comparison between the Munn-Pitt recommendation and AIL reveals significant differences. Munn and Pitt really suggested that the already existing ALA (of which Pitt was the president) be strengthened and made into an effective national association. They saw advantages in an association which included non-librarians and thought that, providing a way of introducing qualifications and certification for librarian members could be found, the ALA could become a strong national association with the support of distinguished and influential laymen, of whom one would be its president.

The three important factors leading to the formation of the AIL were the availability of Carnegie money through the Library Group, the refusal of librarians in New South Wales to join the ALA because they thought it was too much dominated by non-professionals, and the influence of John Metcalfe, who had begun to plan a professional association as early as 1935. Metcalfe's tactics in founding the AIL were masterly. At first he kept his plans secret from the people involved in the ALA and then argued

that an institute would be devoted to professional education and standards and have a membership of professional librarians only and thus would not threaten the more broadly based ALA.

The constitution was drafted by the deputy librarians from the Public Libraries of Sydney (Metcalfe) and Melbourne (A. B. Foxcroft) and the Deputy National Librarian (H. White). The object of the AIL was 'to unite persons engaged in library work, and improve the standards of librarianship and the status of the library profession in Australia'. The AIL was controlled by a federal executive and councillors elected by the state branches. It worked through committees and branches and its presidents spoke for the profession on matters affecting library services and librarians.

The greatest achievement of the AIL was the national system of examining and certifying librarians. This was also the greatest achievement of John Metcalfe, who was convener of the Committee on Library Standards and Training which created the system, and who remained convener of the Board of Examin-

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Cont'd from front page

tion and Certification when it was established in 1941. This system was based on the British model, but the syllabus owed much to American librarianship.

From its beginning the AIL protested against the appointment of non-librarians to professional positions in libraries. It argued the importance of continuing to import books and journals from enemy countries in World War II, and its members spent a lot of time organising the provision of books for the fighting forces. Through its Committee on Classification of Australiana it contributed to the Dewey Decimal Classification.

The presidents of the AIL were: W.H. Ifould (1937-38), E.R. Pitt (1938-39), H.R. Purnell (1939-40), K. Binns (1940-41), H.M. Green (1941-43), Leigh Scott (1943-44), J.D.A. Collier (1944-46), Metcalfe (1947-48), M. Ellinor Archer (1948-49, Metcalfe (Nov. 1949). The fact that these people were all chief librarians in positions of power, accustomed to achieving results, with staff to command and sure of their status among their peers, helped the Institute to gain recognition.

The first of six conferences was held in Sydney in 1938 and the last, again in Sydney, in 1947. The published proceedings of these conferences, together with the records of papers given at branch meetings in the various states, attest the professionalism of Australian librarianship.

In contrast to earlier associations, vigorous and active state branches were characteristic of the AIL. These branches sprang into existence very quickly after the inaugural meeting of the Institute in Canberra in August 1937. Victoria, with its active library association and its *Library Journal*, was the only state with a tradition of meetings, and the Library Association of Victoria welcomed the new Institute. New South Wales as the leader in establishing the Institute, sometimes found the distinction between branch and association hard to maintain. The activity of these large branches was matched by South Australia, which held its first meeting within five weeks of the Canberra meeting. By the first annual meeting, all the states had established branches, held meetings and elected councillors. Two potent forces maintaining activity in the branches were the need to educate junior members of the profession and the push to establish free public libraries with the help of the Free Library Movement in New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.

During the 1940s many Australian librarians visited the UK and the USA as recipients of Carnegie and British Council grants, and these returning travellers contributed to the professional debate in their branches. These branches, which initiated action and were centres of professional fellowship, together with the stimulus of conferences and the existence of an examination system that not only realised the aim of raising the standards of librarianship, but also encouraged a continuing membership in the professional association, were the most important achievements of the AIL.

After the McColvin Report had recommended widening the membership of the AIL, Australian librarians, led by Metcalfe, debated the value of such a change and, in 1949, a new constitution was approved which transformed the AIL into the Library Association of Australia (LAA). The fact that Metcalfe used the same arguments to persuade Australian librarians to accept the change as he had used to persuade them to form the AIL (viz. that the change would advance their professional interest and that their standards would be safeguarded) suggests that he may have planned to widen the ambit of the AIL from the beginning and that the demise of the ALA and the support of an overseas expert provided a chance to carry out that plan.

Jean Whyte