



MALL IN RETROSPECT

by KATHLEEN BEDOR

After attending a recent meeting of the Long Range Planning Committee, I was struck by the new types of problems that have emerged from the growth of MALL over the years --- problems that the organization was not lucky enough to have many years ago.

When I joined MALL 20 years ago the only activity was a social gathering with sherry and cheese appetizers followed by dinner at the University of Minnesota Campus Club. This group was a representation of a dozen or so law librarians mostly from county, state, and law school libraries. There was only one corporate law library represented and rarely a law firm. Hamline University Law School was not yet in existence. MALL had no program, formal meeting, or speakers. It was a chance for law librarians to get together and learn a little about each other's work. But because of the small group and varied institutional needs, regular cooperative efforts and professional development could not be pursued.

Over the next few years the complexion of the organization began to change. More librarians joined the group, and for the first time many of them represented law firms. The traditional social dinners were no longer adequate. The membership expressed interest in speakers, programs and cooperative efforts. And most importantly, these new members were willing to work for these goals.

During my presidency of MALL in 1973-1975, there was a unique opportunity to plant the seeds, that with the right active membership would realize the potential of the organization. Committees were established: Membership, Program, Publicity, Institute, Education and Research. By January 1975 the organization really began to come alive, as summarized in my annual report to the membership:

The year 1974 has been one of reorganization and rapid change for our chapter. State membership has grown from 30 to 52 and has expanded to include 8 new members from Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin and North Dakota. The Bylaws have been amended to add 7 new committees filled by 32 members. This means that over half of our total membership wishes to be at least moderately active in the organization. The year has seen the establishment of a NEWSLETTER, regular program meetings, and the emergence of the "Downtowners".

One of the most important developments for the organization has been the NEWSLETTER. Carol Florin accepted the position as its first editor and pursued the difficult task of establishing its format and procedures, as well as encouraging article contributions. The first issue was September 1974 (two 8.5" x 11" pages) and included organization news (activities, dinner and program announcements), publications, professional reading, and articles of interest --- all contributed by one or two people! By Carol's last issue in October 1977, it had grown to ten pages, with a MALL masthead, and contributions from several sources. The present format was introduced in September 1981. The NEWSLETTER has now evolved into a quality professional publication, with expanded features to meet the growing needs of members --- all made possible by the continuous effort of editors and regular contributors. MALL members can be proud of what has become one of the best AALL chapter newsletters.

Recent years have continued MALL's tremendous growth in professionalism. The directory now lists over 130 members representing all types of law libraries (6 county, 3 state, 5 law school, 6 corporate, and more than 20 law firm). There is a great deal of support and mentorship, both informally and within the structure of such groups as the Downtowners. MALL responds to the needs of its membership in various ways. For example, MALL encourages professional development through continuing education programs, institutes, and educational scholarship funds. MALL also raises awareness by conducting surveys such as those on salary, personal computer applications, microform usage.

MALL is also looking to the future. The Long Range Planning Committee is in the process of producing an operations manual that will resolve many of the problems of committee coordination. The problems that face MALL committees now do not stem from low or inactive membership, but rather from committees that have become so effective in their individual function, they have become mini-MALLs. Committee interrelationships have become complex and need clarification. Members are encouraged to contribute recommendations so that this manual can be an effective planning tool.

It has been a gratifying experience to look back and see MALL realize its potential as a vital, responsive organization through the efforts of its members. MALL is fortunate to be at this point of growth, fortunate to have these organizational problems, and fortunate to have the professionals equipped to solve them.