

SPECIAL LIBRARIES

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The purpose of this book chapter is to trace the development of special libraries in the United States and Canada. A primary central focus is the role, history and mission of the Special Libraries Association during the development of special libraries from the beginning of the association in 1909 to the current practices in North America. What is a special library? How is a special library different from other types of libraries? A traditional definition from the Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition 1989) defines a library as “a place set apart to contain books for reading, study, or reference or a building, room, or set of rooms, containing a collection of books for the use of the public or of some particular portion of it, or of the members of some society or the like; a public institution or establishment, charged with the care of a collection of books, and the duty of rendering the books accessible to those who require to use them.”¹

To contrast the classic definition, author Michael H. Harris defines a “special library” as a unit, which is quite focused in content and has a very specific clientele to serve in terms of information needs. A decided difference between traditional libraries and special libraries is the capability to innovate new technologies and services more readily than standardized libraries. Corporate libraries have a reputation in the United States as being especially nimble and flexible in adopting new information technologies.² Generally, special libraries are either independent or related to general public or university libraries. The other three groups are government, professional and business. Since the founding of the Special Libraries Association in 1909, a number of famous leaders and writers within the special libraries field have authored definitions of special libraries.³ John Cotton Dana who is credited with founding SLA stated:

“These special collections of books, reports and other printed material are so varied in their character and in the use made of them, that no definition will any longer satisfactorily include them all.”⁴

Over time, the definition was expanded to include more factors such as the effectiveness, knowledge and skill of the special librarian. As early as 1923, Rebecca Rankin expressed her thoughts in the following manner, “the essential part of a special library, the part to be emphasized and that which gives it its greatest possibilities, is the personality behind the library, the special librarian.”⁵

¹ Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, 1989.

² Harris, Michael H. “History of Libraries in the Western World,” (Scarecrow Press) 1995, page 275.

³ McKenna, Frank. “Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association,” *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 391.

⁴ Dana, John Cotton. “The President’s Opening Remarks.” *Special Libraries* 1 (1) (1909) page 5.

⁵ Rankin, Rebecca B. “The Public Library and the Special Library,” *Special Libraries* 14 (5) (1923) page 76.

More than twenty-five years later, Herman H. Henkle wrote that efficient service is a key ingredient in the definition of a special library:

“The primary characteristic of special librarianship is not so much the subject content of the collection or the type of organization in which the library is operating, nor the particular personnel it serves, but rather the kind of service it gives.”⁶

In 1952, Rose Vormelker also thought service was a key component with her comments:

The distinguishing characteristic of special librarianship is service. It is service which stops at nothing short of producing on request or without request information which is needed, at the time it is needed and in the form in which it is needed, and in a manner which inspires confidence and respect for the librarian on the part of the user.⁷

In summary a general definition includes: a specialized collection in any format, which is arranged for a specific customer base and special library service which also foresees and provides information to clientele in a rapid and proactive manner. Essentially, the purpose of a special library is to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time. The development of the special librarianship continues to evolve quickly during the 21st century.

In the United States, the forerunners of today’s special libraries began early. As noted author, consultant and Past SLA President (1991-1992), Guy St. Clair states, “a community in the United States was judged as if good place to live if it had a house of worship, a school and a library.”⁸ The reference specifically refers to a public library, which is open to all citizens of the community. The general development of public libraries began in England and America during the nineteenth century and is beyond the scope of this article. The goal of the earliest special libraries is to provide immediate access to “practical and utilitarian information to meet the needs of the library’s users.”⁹

Pennsylvania Hospital Library in Philadelphia began in 1763 and is generally considered to be the first medical library established in the United States.¹⁰ It has been suggested that the United States and Canada were the cradle of civilization for the development of special libraries. Early library developments began well

⁶ Henkle, Herman H. “Education for Special Librarianship,” B.R. Berelson, ed., *Education for Librarianship*, American Library Association, Chicago, 1949, pages 170-182.

⁷ Voemelker, Rose L. “Special Library Potential of the Public Library,” *Library Trends*, 1 (2) (1952) page 200.

⁸ St. Clair, Guy. *SLA at 100: From Putting Knowledge to Work To Building The Knowledge Culture*. (SLA) 2009 (forthcoming).

⁹ St. Clair, Guy. *SLA at 100: From Putting Knowledge to Work To Building The Knowledge Culture*. (SLA) 2009 (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Harris, Michael H. “History of Libraries in the Western World,” (Scarecrow Press) 1995, page 192.

before the American Revolution.¹¹ In Canada for example, in 1725 the first hospital library was founded in Quebec City and a legislative library was founded in 1773 in Prince Edward Island.¹² In 1724, the Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) was created and included a library with books on subjects such as architecture and handbooks of designs by members. The collection began with books printed in England and then with materials published in America.¹³ Today the organization is the oldest trade guild in the United States and there are 3,600 books in the Carpenters' Hall library.

The first law libraries in the United States were founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Boston, Massachusetts respectively. The Law Association Library (Philadelphia) began in 1802 and the Social Law Library (Boston) began in 1804.¹⁴ The National Library of Medicine originated in 1836 and the New York Times Editorial Reference Library was created in 1851.¹⁵

From a historical point of development, Elizabeth Ferguson states "specialized problems in librarianship were recognized almost simultaneously as evidenced by the formation of the National Association of State Libraries in 1889, the Medical Library Association in 1898, the American Association of Law Libraries in 1906. The American Library Association was founded in 1876. It progressed so rapidly that in 1910 the Encyclopedia Britannica called it the largest and most important library association in existence."¹⁶ While all libraries possess a certain degree of specialty, the special library in the United States developed an unparalleled identity in the traditional library landscape at the time. All the necessary elements were in place for significant discussions and the subsequent development of a unique professional association for librarians working in the subject discipline of business occurred rapidly.

The Special Libraries Association was founded in 1909 in the United States by a forward-looking group of specialized business librarians to network and collaborate with their peers.¹⁷ John Cotton Dana was visionary librarian and leader who founded the professional association. His management theory was that librarians should be ready for radical change in the work place and this philosophy has stood

¹¹ McKenna, Frank. "Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 388.

¹² McKenna, Frank. "Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 388.

¹³ McKenna, Frank. "Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 389.

¹⁴ Harris, Michael H. "History of Libraries in the Western World," (Scarecrow Press) 1995, page 193.

¹⁵ Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 8.

¹⁶ Ferguson, Elizabeth. "Association Highlights," *Special Libraries Association-Its First Fifty Years 1909-1959*. (Special Libraries Association) 1959, page 5.

¹⁷ Bender, David. "Special Libraries Association," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 2003, page 2723.

the test of time from the founding of SLA through the first one hundred years of the association and field of special librarianship. During his tenure as Head Librarian at the Newark Public Library in New Jersey (US), John Cotton Dana established a business branch for this public library. He stated the library was for the “men of affairs, a business branch. This was in a rented store close to the business and transportation center of the city. The library’s management believed that men and women who were engaged in manufacturing, commerce, transportation, finance, insurance and allied activities could profitably make greater use than they had heretofore of information to be found in print.”¹⁸ The goal of this specialized arrangement was to promote easy and convenient access to business information.

Sarah B. Ball was the librarian for the business collection at the Newark Public Library. She attended the New Jersey Library Association and Pennsylvania Library Club joint meeting in Atlantic City, which took place in 1909. During the meetings, she met Anna B. Sears from the Merchants’ Association of New York Library. They discussed potential collaboration between their respective organizations and scheduled a planning session to take place in New York. This planning discussion was attended by John Cotton Dana and F.B. Deberard from the Merchants’ Association plus Sarah B. Ball and Anna B. Sears.¹⁹ As a direct result of that energizing conversation in 1909, letters proposing a meeting during the July meeting of ALA were dispatched to forty-five special libraries. The text of the May 20, 1909 letter is as follows:

“To the Librarian:

In a few public libraries a special effort has been made to discuss and meet the needs of businessmen. A few manufacturing, business and engineering firms, and a few civic and commercial bodies have established their own libraries to meet their own needs.

The librarians who are managing these special libraries and special departments could be of much help to one another if they could exchange experiences and talk over methods and results. This letter of inquiry is sent out as the first step toward mutual aid. If you will kindly answer the questions enclosed, make suggestions for further inquiries and add names of other libraries in this field to the brief list, enclosed, to which this first circular is sent, we will report results to you and ask your cooperation in the next step. We especially ask your opinion on the advisability of attempting cooperative work.”²⁰

¹⁸ Dana, John Cotton. “Evolution of the Special Library,” *Special Libraries* 5 (1914) pages 70-76.

¹⁹ Bender, David. “Special Libraries Association,” *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 2003, page 2723.

²⁰ McKenna, Frank. “Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association,” *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 399.

The meeting was held on the veranda of the Mt. Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire and twenty librarians were in attendance to discuss the concept of special librarianship. Elizabeth Ferguson outlined the meeting in the following terms: "The participants in this "Veranda Conference," as it has come to be known decided that the demands of their jobs had actually created a new kind of librarianship – that of library service geared to meet the needs of specialized situations. These librarians were breaking completely new ground."²¹ Lively discussion occurred at the meeting and the vote was taken. The Special Libraries Association was created with the following purpose: "The object of the Association is to promote the interests of the commercial, industrial, technical, civic, municipal and legislative reference libraries, the special departments of the public libraries, universities, welfare associations and business organizations."²²

The charter members of the Special Libraries Association included:²³

Mary Eileen Ahern Editor, Public Libraries	Clement W. Andrews The John Crear Library	Sarah B. Ball Newark Free Public Library
(Mrs.)Helen Page Bates New York School of Philanthropy	Andrew Linn Bostwick Saint Louis Municipal Reference Library	George F. Bowerman Public Library of the District of Columbia
Richard Rogers Bowker Editor, The Library Journal	Beatrice E. Carr Fisk and Robinson School	Clara M. Clark Bible Teachers Training
John Cotton Dana Newark Free Public Library	F. B. DeBerard Merchants' Association of New York	Dr. Horace E. Flack Baltimore Legislative Reference Department
Anna Fossler Columbia University	Marilla W. Freeman Louisville Free Public Library	George S. Godard Connecticut State Library
Mabel R. Haines The Library Journal	Daniel N. Handy The Insurance Library Association of Boston	Dr. Frederic C. Hicks Columbia University

²¹ Ferguson, Elizabeth. "Association Highlights," Special Libraries Association-Its First Fifty Years 1909-1959. (Special Libraries Association) 1959, page 5.

²² Constitution. Special Libraries Association-Its First Fifty Years 1909-1959. (Special Libraries Association) 1959, page 4.

²³ McKenna, Frank. "Special Libraries and the Special Libraries Association," Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science (Marcel Dekker) 1980, volume 28, page 436-437.

Dr. Frank Pierce Hill Brooklyn, N.Y.	Miss L.E. Howard United Engineering Society	Mrs. K. M. Howze Commonwealth Edison Company
Jessie Fremont Hume Queens Borough Public Library	Maude E. Inch Insurance Society of New York	Florence Johnson Boston Town Room Library
Dr. John A. Lapp Indiana State Library	George W. Lee Stone and Webster	Clarence B. Lester New York State Library
Mari Fay Lindholm New York Public Service Commission Library	Dr. Harry Miller Lyndenber New York Public Library	Charles McCarthy Wisconsin Free Library Commission
John J. Macfarlane Philadelphia Commercial Museum	Milo Roy Malbie New York Public Service Commission Library	Guy E. Marion Arthur D. Little Associates
Grace W. Morse Equitable Life Assurance Company	Edith Allen Phelps Oklahoma City Public Library	George E. Plumb Chicago Association of Commerce
Samuel H. Ranck Grand Rapids Public Library	Frances L. (Mrs. Coe) Rathbone East Orange Free Public Library	Mary M. Rosemond Iowa State Library
Anna Sears Merchants' Association of New York	F. O. Stetson Newton, Mass.	Edward F. Stevens Pratt Institute Free Library
William Franklyn Stevens Carnegie Library	Ida M. Thiele Association of Life Insurance Presidents	William Trelease Missouri Botanical Garden
Henry M. Utley Detroit Public Library	Mary S. Wallis (Mrs. Mary W. MacTarnaghan) Baltimore Legislative Reference Bureau	Miss M.F. Warner U.S. Bureau of Plant Industry

Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler	Dr. Robert H. Whitten	T. J. Willis
Public Library of the	New York Public	Milwaukee Municipal
District of Columbia	Service Commission	Reference Library
F. Mabel Winchell	Beatrice Winsor	
Manchester City	Newark Free Public	
Library	Library	

John Cotton Dana was elected as the new president of the fledgling association. The Special Libraries Association had its first annual conference on November 5, 1909 in New York City. The first one hundred years of the organization began in earnest.

In chronological order, the SLA Historical Highlights are as follows:

1909–1920

- 1909 Special Libraries Association (SLA) is officially established
- 1909 Membership count 57
- 1909 Dues \$2 including subscription to *Special Libraries*
- 1910 Affiliation with American Library Association (ALA) begins
- 1910 Special Libraries begins publication. Subscription \$2.
- 1910 Directory of Special Libraries published, listing 100 libraries and 24 fields
- 1914 Membership count 354
- 1915 “Putting Knowledge to Work®” Association slogan coined by John A. Lapp
- 1919 First Conference held completely independent of ALA
- 1919-1920 First Female President elected Maude A. Carabin Mann

1920–1930

- 1923 Five classes of membership were established: Individual, \$3; Institutional, \$5; Associate, \$2; Life, \$100; and Honorary
- 1924 Districts change names to Chapters
- 1927 Association incorporated in Rhode Island
- 1928 Membership count 1,129

1930–1940

- 1930 SLA list of members published
- 1931 SLA moves to Standard Statistics Building in New York City.
- 1931-1932 Special Libraries registered as a trade name with the U.S. Patent Office
- 1931 SLA staff count: Two
- 1932 First recruitment material. Putting Knowledge to Work-Special Librarianship as a Career
- 1939 SLA moves to the Stecher-Hafner Building , 31 East 10th Street New York, NY.

1940–1950

1940 SLA staff count: Three

1941–1942 Dues waived for all members drafted in the military or government service

1942 SLA extends services to all libraries engaged in national defense

1943 SLA opens headquarter library

1944 Membership count 3,491

1944 Dues set for new membership categories: Sustaining, \$25; Student, \$1

1946 SLA becomes a member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

1947 Special Libraries subscription \$7

1947 Salary Survey conducted and published in *Special Libraries*

1949 SLA staff count: Eight; Membership count 5,443; Dues Institutional, \$20; Active, \$7; Associate, \$4

1949 Divisions were formed from groups

1949 SLA disaffiliated from the ALA

1950–1960

1954 Retired membership established, with dues of \$5

1959 *Translations Monthly* publication replaced by *Technical Translations*

1959 First presentation of SLA Hall of Fame

1960–1970

1960 Publications department established

1961–1962 *News and Notes* quarterly publication replaces the *Bulletin*

1963 Subscription to *Special Libraries and Technical Book Review*, \$10 each

1964 Membership count 5,697; Dues Active and Associate, \$20

1967 Conventions renamed conferences to emphasize the professional program content

1967 SLA moves to 235 Park Avenue South, New York, NY

1968 Initiation of a study on mechanized records of membership and subscription

1970–1980

1970 Proceedings initiated to seek Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reclassification of SLA as an Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 501(c)(3) organization

1972 Reclassification as an IRC Section 510 (c)(3) approved by IRS

1973 SLA suspends membership in International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID) until South African National Representative to FID either withdraws or no longer represents a government with a policy of apartheid

1974 *Special Libraries* registered as a trademark

1976 Dues for Members and Associates, \$40; Sustaining Members, \$200

- 1978 Professional development department established
- 1978 Membership approves a resolution not to select conferences and meeting sites in states that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment
- 1979 David Bender is appointed executive director

1980–1990

- 1981 Dues: Member/Associate Member, \$55; Sustaining Member, \$250; Student, \$12
- 1981 Special Libraries changes frequency from monthly to quarterly
- 1981 SpecialList monthly newsletter begins publication.
- 1981 Electronic mail communication between the Board of Directors and Association Staff begin experimental basis
- 1981 First Who's Who in Special Libraries is published
- 1981 Building Fund is established
- 1982 Public Relations program is established
- 1982-1983 Middle Management Institute established
- 1983-1984 Association celebrates its 75th Anniversary
- 1984 Building at 1700 18th Street in Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington DC is purchased as a new home for SLA
- 1984 Dues: Member/Associate Member, \$75; Student Member/Retired Member, \$15; Sustaining Member, \$300
- 1985 SLA Headquarters moves from New York City to Washington, DC
- 1986 Fellows Award is established
- 1986 SLA initiates first annual State of the Art Institute
- 1987 Information Resources Center (IRC) implements online cataloging
- 1988 SLA introduces first computer-assisted study program at 79th annual conference
- 1988 SLA, ALA, District of Columbia Library Association (DCLA), hold Library Legislative Day
- 1989 Staff count: 26
- 1989 First Caucus established: Solo Librarian (which later became Solo Librarian Division)

1990–2000

- 1990 Information Services department established
- 1991 First annual International Special Librarians Day recognized
- 1993 SLA is connected to the Internet@ slal@capcon.net
- 1995 Dues: Members, \$105; Retired/Students, \$25; Sustaining, \$400
- 1995 SLA creates online discussion lists for members
- 1995 SLA launches its first videoconference training session
- 1996 SLA launches its own World Wide Web site (www.sla.org)

- 1996 SLA introduces the Legacy Club
- 1996 SLA publishes Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century
- 1996 SpecialList and Special Libraries are discontinued
- 1997 Information Outlook, the monthly four-color magazine is published
- 1997 New association management system acquired allowing members to update their records via the website
- 1997 SLA's Virtual Bookstore launched
- 1997 CONSULT Online launched on the website
- 1998 Information Outlook available online at www.informationoutlook.com
- 1998 SLA Chat room hosting service created
- 1998 New Vision Statement and Strategic Plan adopted
- 1998 Leadership Development Department created to develop, manage and coordinate the Association's leadership services
- 1999 Professional Development sponsors its first conference in Southern Europe, Management of the Library in the Electronic Era, in Barcelona, Spain
- 1999 SLA's first satellite broadcast videoconference, which included mock licensing activity and discussion groups before and after the broadcast.
- 1999 Asian Chapter formed
- 1999 Introduces online conference planner for Annual Conference in Minneapolis

2000–Present

- Global 2000 conference held in Brighton, England. Members raised in excess of \$80,000 to send 25 librarians from developing countries to the conference.
- 2000 SLA's Career Services Online revised to include online posting of job opportunities, resumes, Virtual Advisers, and greatly improved searching capabilities
- 2000 Launch of the Virtual Exhibit Hall integrated with the online conference planner
- 2000 Major redesign of SLA's website, Virtual SLA
- 2001 SLA Executive Director David R. Bender retires after 22 years of service
- 2001 SLA Board of Directors appoints Roberta I. Shaffer as new executive director
- 2001 Publication of the membership e-newsletter, SLA.COMmunicate
- 2001 Web version of Quicken made available to unit treasurers supporting their need to access their financial records anywhere and at anytime
- 2002 First publication made available electronically in PDF as well as hardback format
- 2002 Electronic newsletter, BOARD.COMmunicate, launched to improve communications between the Association's directors and members
- 2002 Bylaws revisions approved by members
- 2003 Vote on changing name
- 2003 SLA Board of Director appoints Janice R. Lachance as new executive director

2003 SLA members attending the annual business meeting in New York vote to retain Association's name
 2003 SLA adopts new vision, mission, and core values statements
 2003 SLA announces major web site redesign in response to member needs
 2004 SLA accepts multiple currencies
 2004 SLA offers multiple language translations on www.sla.org
 2004 SLA adopts a new naming model and begins to use the acronym SLA publicly
 2004 SLA moves to its new headquarters in historic Alexandria, VA
 2009 SLA celebrates 100th year anniversary as a professional association
 2009 Publication of Guy St. Clair's book, *SLA at 100: From Putting Knowledge to Work to Building The Knowledge Culture. The Centennial History of SLA (Special Libraries Association) 1909–2009.*

As the association grew and changed, the field of special librarianship developed rapidly at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Marian C. Manley (Chair, SLA Committee on Training and Recruiting) the April 1910 issue of *Special Libraries* listed a directory of 108 libraries showing marked development of legislative and municipal reference libraries, scientific and technical collections, some museum developments and a few business libraries.²⁴ As a contrast, the 1935 *Special Libraries Directory* listed 1,475 special libraries. By 1953 the number of special libraries was listed at 2,270.²⁵ The growth from the early days mirrors the value of information in business over the forty-year time span and the increased importance of the information professional in a business environment.

Edythe Moore wrote an article in 1987 which traced the progression of corporate libraries from their beginnings to the late 1980s. She cites three specific factors which influenced the early development of corporate libraries; “the expansion of research and scholarly publishing, the rapid acceleration in the growth of business and industry and the newly emerging library profession.”²⁶ She cited the innovative activity of two noted librarians who were truly ahead of their time in terms of innovations in corporate settings. At the turn of the century (1900s) these librarians were George W. Lee at Stone and Webster and Guy E. Marion at Arthur D. Little Inc. They looked beyond traditional resources collected by libraries at that time to needs of their corporate clientele. In fact, George W. Lee called his special library “a business and information bureau” within the engineering firm in

²⁴ Manley, Marian C. “The Special Library Profession and What It Offers: A General Survey.” *Special Libraries*, vol.29, No. 6, page 182.

²⁵ Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 13.

²⁶ Moore, Edythe. “Corporate science and technology libraries: one hundred years of progress,” *Science & Technology Libraries*, vol.8 (Fall 1987) p. 51.

Boston, Massachusetts (United States) where he was employed.²⁷ Both Lee and Marion were early adaptors and recognized that an effective corporate library enhanced the competitive position of their respective companies. They also transformed their respective corporate libraries from mere professional collections to the “information center.”²⁸ Lee identified the following list of materials as crucial for his special library:

1. Documents, mostly typewritten, the records of the business
2. Books, pamphlets, and periodicals.
3. Maps, atlases, etc.
4. Indexes, catalogs, lists, etc.
5. Other departments
6. Other libraries
7. Business undertakings, institutions and people in general.
8. Miscellany: some unappreciated publications, emergencies and matters of that sort.²⁹

His remarks on the role of the special library or information center ring true in the 21st century. George W. Lee stated “Quick service is indeed called for and rightly expected. We need to realize that not only are we library workers, but that we are office workers, and that the department as a whole is merely incidental to the work of the engineers, financiers and general managers of public utilities.”³⁰

Guy E. Marion worked as the librarian for Arthur D. Little, Inc and that library began in 1886. The early focus of the company was consulting and research in the subject area of chemistry. The collection of the special library was comprised of a plethora of materials including as he stated, “made up of information culled from the laboratory’s daily correspondence, out of the experiences of the various members of the laboratory staff, from experiments carried on in the laboratory, and from various technical reports and investigations made for clients.”³¹ The collection contained 1,000 bound volumes, 900 pamphlets, 20,000 clippings, 10,000 patents, and 800 blueprints indexed with a card catalog of 100,000 cards.³² Marion

²⁷ Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 4.

²⁸ Moore, Edythe. “Corporate science and technology libraries: one hundred years of progress,” *Science & Technology Libraries*, vol.8 (Fall 1987) p. 53-54.

²⁹ Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 56.

³⁰ Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 57.

³¹ Marion, Guy E. “The Library As an Adjunct to Industrial Laboratories,” *Library Journal*, 35 (September 1910, p.401.

³² Kruzas, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 58.

was also an early innovator since his library collection is generally considered to be the first special library in the United States to collect technical reports in a corporate library setting. The CEO of the company by today's standards, Dr. Arthur D. Little stressed the value of special libraries during his inaugural address at the American Chemical Society in 1912 when he stated, "These laboratories should each be developed around a special library."³³

This early adaptation of library management concepts such as the consistent practice of high levels of customer satisfaction, rapid service, deliberate focus on the user, customization and systematic control of nontraditional information provided the very foundation of the librarianship which special librarians particularly in corporate settings put into practice with managing information assets so effectively today.

As commerce and industry grew after World War I, the number of special libraries also increased in number. With the new challenges at hand, librarians turned to each other for advice on building and maintaining their respective collections. As the essay by Edythe Moore outlines, "these librarians, without hesitation, turned to their colleagues who had the same or similar problems; to the Special Libraries Association which had been formed in 1909 and which was beginning to be organized into both geographically designated chapters and subject oriented divisions."³⁴ In other words, the powerful professional network that is cited as the number one benefit among SLA members continued to grow and flourish.

In particular after World War II, the sheer number of special libraries and information centers grew quite rapidly. The libraries in corporations expanded and additionally the special libraries in government, higher education and professional organizations also increased. Anthony Kruzacs conducted a census of special libraries for 1961-62 and identified 8,533 special libraries in the United States.³⁵

With the growth of bibliographic databases in the 1970s, and in particular the formation of OCLC and the creation of their bibliographic utility now known as WorldCat, special librarians were poised strategically on the brink of what would later be called the "Information Age." The computer revolution has revolutionized the profession of special librarianship in ways which are almost beyond human imagination since the founding of SLA in 1909. In the words of futurist, Joseph Becker, "In this new information society, special librarians are destined to play an

³³ Kruzacs, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 59.

³⁴ Moore, Edythe. "Corporate science and technology libraries: one hundred years of progress," *Science & Technology Libraries*, vol.8 (Fall 1987) p.55.

³⁵ Kruzacs, Anthony. *Business and Industrial Libraries in the United States, 1820-1940* (Special Libraries Association) 1965, page 115.

increasingly greater role in shaping and establishing new information connections among libraries, information centers and people.”³⁶

As technology advances, there are many exciting circumstances and shifts ahead for special librarians. One of those shifts took place in the 1990s for SLA and its members with the transition to a virtual association. By using electronic technology, the professional association was afforded an opportunity for special librarians to network and communicate with their peers on global basis. Two of the earliest available resources were the membership database and the online version of *Information Outlook* which is published monthly by SLA.

During the last decade, SLA created two pivotal documents which are particularly relevant to the profession of special librarianship. The first is the vision, mission and core values for the association.

SLA VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUE STATEMENTS

These statements were revised and adopted in October 2003.

Vision: SLA is the global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners.

Mission: SLA promotes and strengthens its members through learning, advocacy and networking initiatives.

The following five core value statements are based on values shared by SLA members:

1. Strengthening our roles as information leaders in our organizations and our communities, including shaping information policy.
2. Responding to our clients needs, adding qualitative and quantitative value to information services and products.
3. Embracing innovative solutions for the enhancement of services and intellectual advancement within the profession.
4. Delivering measurable results in the information economy and our organizations. The Association and its members are expected to operate with the highest level of ethics and honesty.
5. Providing opportunities to meet, communicate, collaborate, and partner with the information industry and the business community.³⁷

The second document is the revised competencies for special librarians and information professionals. Members of SLA explored their interpretation and of the

³⁶ Becker, Joseph. “How to Integrate and Manage New Technology in the Library,” *Special Libraries* vol. 74 (1) (Jan. 1983) pages 1-6.

³⁷ SLA Vision, Mission, and Core Value Statements <http://www.sla.org/content/SLA/AssnProfile/slanplan/index.cfm> (Accessed April 9, 2008)

skills and competencies required in the current environment over several years. The following excerpt from the SLA web site highlights the professional and personal competencies needed by practicing special librarians.³⁸

CORE COMPETENCIES

Information professionals contribute to the knowledge base of the profession by sharing best practices and experiences, and continue to learn about information products, services, and management practices throughout the life of his/her career.

Information professionals commit to professional excellence and ethics, and to the values and principles of the profession.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

A. Managing Information Organizations

Information professionals manage information organizations ranging in size from one employee to several hundred employees. These organizations may be in any environment from corporate, education, public, government, to non-profit. Information professionals excel at managing these organizations whose offerings are intangible, whose markets are constantly changing and in which both high-tech and high-touch are vitally important in achieving organizational success.

A. 1 Aligns the information organization with, and is supportive of, the strategic directions of the parent organization or of key client groups through partnerships with key stakeholders and suppliers.

A.2 Assesses and communicates the value of the information organization, including information services, products and policies to senior management, key stakeholders and client groups.

A.3 Establishes effective management, operational and financial management processes and exercises sound business and financial judgments in making decisions that balance operational and strategic considerations.

A.4 Contributes effectively to senior management strategies and decisions regarding information applications, tools and technologies, and policies for the organization.

A. 5 Builds and leads an effective information services team and champions the professional and personal development of people working within the information organization.

³⁸ SLA Competencies for Information Professionals <http://www.sla.org/content/learn/comp2003/index.cfm> (accessed April 10, 2008)

A.6 Markets information services and products, both formally and informally, through web and physical communication collateral, presentations, publications and conversations.

A.7 Gathers the best available evidence to support decisions about the development of new service and products, the modification of current services or the elimination of services to continually improve the array of information services offered.

A.8 Advises the organization on copyright and intellectual property issues and compliance.

Managing Information Resources

Information professionals have expertise in total management of information resources, including identifying, selecting, evaluating, securing and providing access to pertinent information resources. These resources may be in any media or format. Information professionals recognize the importance of people as a key information resource.

B.1 Manages the full life cycle of information from its creation or acquisition through its destruction. This includes organizing, categorizing, cataloguing, classifying, disseminating; creating and managing taxonomies, intranet and extranet content, thesauri etc.

B.2 Builds a dynamic collection of information resources based on a deep understanding of clients' information needs and their learning, work and/or business processes.

B.3 Demonstrates expert knowledge of the content and format of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate, select and filter them.

B.4 Provides access to the best available externally published and internally created information resources and deploys content throughout the organization using a suite of information access tools.

B.5 Negotiates the purchase and licensing of needed information products and services.

B.6 Develops information policies for the organization regarding externally published and internally created information resources and advises on the implementation of these policies.

C. Managing Information Services

Information professionals manage the entire life cycle of information services, from the concept stage through the design, development, testing, marketing, packaging, delivery and divestment of these offerings. Information professionals may oversee this entire process or may concentrate on specific stages, but their expertise is unquestionable in providing offerings that enable clients to immediately integrate and apply information in their work or learning processes.

C.1 Develops and maintains a portfolio of cost-effective, client-valued information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization and client groups.

C.2 Conducts market research of the information behaviors and problems of current and potential client groups to identify concepts for new or enhanced information solutions for these groups. Transforms these concepts into customized information products and services.

C.3 Researches, analyzes and synthesizes information into accurate answers or actionable information for clients, and ensures that clients have the tools or capabilities to immediately apply these.

C.4 Develops and applies appropriate metrics to continually measure the quality and value of information offerings, and to take appropriate action to ensure each offering's relevancy within the portfolio.

C.5 Employs evidence-based management to demonstrate the value of and continually improve information sources and services.

D. Applying Information Tools & Technologies

Information professionals harness the current and appropriate technology tools to deliver the best services, provide the most relevant and accessible resources, develop and deliver teaching tools to maximize clients' use of information, and capitalize on the library and information environment of the 21st century.

D.1 Assesses, selects and applies current and emerging information tools and creates information access and delivery solutions

D.2 Applies expertise in databases, indexing, metadata, and information analysis and synthesis to improve information retrieval and use in the organization

D.3 Protects the information privacy of clients and maintains awareness of, and responses to, new challenges to privacy

D.4 Maintains current awareness of emerging technologies that may not be currently relevant but may become relevant tools of future information resources, services or applications.

For a listing of the personal competencies and examples of applied scenarios consult the SLA web site: <http://www.sla.org/content/learn/comp2003/index.cfm>

From the beginning of the association in 1909 throughout the 21st century seismic shifts continue to occur in technology, from the invention of the automobile, television, radio to computer technology. Throughout the inventions of the last century, special libraries continue to innovate and embrace change quickly to fit their environments through professional development and competencies for special librarians and information professionals .

As a professional organization, SLA provides unique opportunities for members to actively participate in an association which is an integral part of staying ahead of constant change within the library and information science profession. There

are a myriad of resources and activities which deliver valuable and tangible benefits from networking to continuing education through Click U, and career development. The very essence of daily work is changing with the constant impact of technology like rss feeds, podcasts, blogs and wikis.

Currently, over 11,000 SLA members work in a diverse range of environments such as business, government, law firms, banking industry, non-profit organizations, pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions. There are many additional information settings and learning environments such as news libraries, medical libraries, museum libraries, and engineering firms. The term “special libraries” is often used interchangeably with information centers. Other commonly used names include competitive intelligence units, intranet departments, knowledge resource centers, and content management organizations. In each unique setting librarians or information professionals use information strategically in their jobs to advance the mission of their respective parent organizations. Special librarians collect, analyze, evaluate, package and disseminate information to facilitate accurate decision making in corporate, academic, non-profit and government settings.

The author gratefully acknowledges the excellent support and advice of Guy St. Clair.