

NEW MEXICO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION:
PIONEER YEARS

Prepared by the
Special Committee for the Use of
Vella Galle's Research:

Mary Jo Walker
Laura McGuire

New Mexico Library Association

Portales, 1973

THE NEW MEXICO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION: PIONEER YEARS

Library development has come slowly to New Mexico. Frontier conditions have prevailed until recently and librarians have had to contend with poverty, distance, sparse population, and sometimes indifference. Although these have been difficult obstacles to overcome, New Mexicans may take justified pride in the social progress that has been made. One very important factor in that progress has been the New Mexico Library Association, this year celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. The attempts to organize it and give it status involved several other associations and many highly dedicated people, all genuinely interested in library development in the state.

No one today knows just when the New Mexico Library Association was established, or how long ago attempts to organize it may have begun. In her Development of Library Extension in New Mexico, Mildred Barrett referred to a letter from Julia Brown Asplund, who came to the University of New Mexico in 1903 as the territory's first professionally trained librarian, and who continued to support library development after her retirement through the New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs and later with the State Library Extension Service. Mrs. Asplund stated that several attempts to form a library association were made between 1901 and 1915. No evidence of outright attempts that long ago exists: however, beginning in 1914, groups of librarians and friends of libraries occasionally got together for program meetings during conventions of the New Mexico Education Association. Mrs. Asplund may have been referring to these sessions as she remembered them half a century later. These NMEA-sponsored groups had no continuity from year to year. They elected a chairman and sometimes a secretary, but they kept no records, collected no dues, and apparently had no purpose other than talking over mutual problems. In printed NMEA convention programs they had various designations: some times "Library Section," "Library Round Table," or "School Librarians."

The first documented reference to such a meeting--"A Library Division"--occurred in the program for NMEA's 29th annual conference, held in Albuquerque November 21-25, 1914. Miss Della Sissler, who had succeeded Mrs. Asplund as University librarian, was chairman. Superintendent L.C. Marshfelder of Clovis spoke on "Plans for Establishing Libraries in Public Schools;" Mrs. Asplund, by then an active Santa Fe clubwoman and mother of a young daughter, talked about "Good Books: What and How to Select for Grades One to Eight."

The next year, at the 30th annual NMEA convention, held in Albuquerque on November 22-24, 1915, a "Library Section" was scheduled. Myrtle M. Cole, Raton Public Librarian, was chairman. Mrs. Asplund again spoke: her topic, "The Child and His Book;" Dr. F.H.H. Roberts discussed the "Teacher and the Library." Floy E. French talked about "Library and Teacher as Aids to New Mexico Farmer and Rancher," the first indication of interests wider than school libraries.

No librarians' meeting took place in 1916, but a "Library Section" was scheduled the following year in Santa Fe during the 32nd annual NMEA convention, November 24-28, 1917. The Section met in the Woman's Board of Trade Library, with Miss Moinette Harrison presiding. The program consisted of a round table discussion of the topic: "The Public Library Problem in Our State--Its Possible Solution and the Necessity of Libraries to Our School System."

Many educators and library supporters of this period viewed "traveling" book collections as a solution to the state's dearth of school and public libraries. Between 1912 and 1921, no fewer than five bills to establish and fund traveling libraries were introduced and defeated in the legislature--one reason for their defeat being the legislators' avowed fear that the books would disseminate TB germs all over the state. Despite the legislative defeats, the New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs collected books and boxes in which to mail them. By 1917, with the administrative help of the University of New Mexico, the Federation had assembled four libraries of fifty books each that could be sent out to schools or to local Woman's Club libraries which were "unable to add books regularly."

From 1918 to 1923 librarians scheduled no formal meetings at the NMEA conferences, although in 1920 the convention program called attention to a "Library Exhibit" planned by Mrs. Ella LaBar, a teacher and librarian at

the Albuquerque High School, noting that “The University of New Mexico Library has placed in the high school building an exhibit of books, bibliographies, [and] illustrated material of value and interest to teachers.” During the war years, New Mexico librarians worked together and with other organizations on an American Library Association project. The personal contacts they made were helpful later when they finally formed an organization of their own. At the beginning of World War I, ALA had attempted to supply books wherever U.S. training camps were located, making special efforts in the Southwest where even poor and inadequate libraries were few and far between. Myrtle Cole was first director for the project in New Mexico. When Evelyn Shuler succeeded her as head of the Raton Public Library, she became director for the ALA United War Work Campaign in New Mexico.

Miss Shuler, a dedicated member of the New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs, worked closely with Julia Brown Asplund and soon the ALA campaign had the cooperation of the Federation and the Santa Fe Woman's Board of Trade, founder and sponsor of the Santa Fe Public Library. Miss Shuler's appeal to New Mexicans for books of fiction, travel, popular science, mechanics, and “helps in learning French” resulted in the collection of between six and seven thousand volumes for camp libraries. “I feel that it is a rather good showing when you consider the small number of libraries and our population,” she wrote Mrs. Asplund on May 13, 1918.

After the war, in an effort to turn to civilian use the momentum that had been successfully directed toward supplying servicemen with reading materials, ALA launched its Books for Everybody Campaign, sometimes called the Enlarged Program. Elizabeth Howard West, at that time Texas State Librarian, became coordinator for the Southwest division which included Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico; Miss Shuler continued to direct the work in New Mexico.

Books for Everybody was designed to improve library service on a regional basis. To accomplish this, it supported an idea relatively new for ALA: county library development. Through regional conferences, ALA encouraged workers in the four states of the Southwest division to begin promoting county library systems. New Mexico librarians, however, decided that they would do well to continue to push for “traveling libraries placed in schools or book wagons,” a Federation library objective. As Mrs. N.F. Dixon, Albuquerque Public Librarian, expressed it, “. . . the distances are too great and the libraries too far apart to try the County Library system yet.”

The ALA regional campaigns did not produce immediate and overwhelming results in the Southwest, but they brought library conditions to public attention and thus led indirectly to an event which had eventual significance in New Mexico library history. In Austin, Texas, on the afternoon of October 26, 1922, during the annual conference of the Texas Library Association, the Southwestern Library Association was founded. The idea for the regional association had occurred to several Texas librarians, among them Elizabeth Howard West, who had worked in ALA's regional programs. Miss West and her Texas colleagues urged New Mexicans to participate in forming SWLA and in carrying out its subsequent activities; they therefore quite possibly provided the final incentive for organization of an independent New Mexico Library Association.

At first, support from New Mexico proved difficult to obtain. The Texans had approached librarians in each state bordering Texas, and in Arizona and Mexico, asking that officially appointed representatives be sent to the TLA meeting who could ratify the SWLA constitution and bring their states into membership on an associational basis. In New Mexico, they could discover no state library association and could locate no one in a position to appoint an official delegate. After writing several people, Mrs. Frances Humphreys, TLA Vice-President, got in touch with Mrs. N.F. Dixon who responded with the following information and advice:

. . . I have been trying to find out who is best for you to write to. New Mexico has no State Library Association. So far the library situation in our State is in a deplorable condition but we are hoping to get some library laws passed at the next meeting of the State legislature. In the meantime Miss Evelyn Shuler, Librarian at Raton, N.M. is more familiar with the libraries of this State than any one else.

Before writing Miss Shuler, Mrs. Humphreys addressed a letter to “State Librarian, Santa Fe, New Mexico,” asking if

. . . it will be possible for [you] to come to the meeting of our Association to be held this coming fall

in Austin, or else to have a delegate appointed to come with power to act.

As New Mexico has no state association we are at a loss to know how to proceed as we do not know just whose place it is to appoint the delegate.

My suggestion would be for [you] to come if possible and if you do not find this possible Miss Evlyn Shuler . . . has been suggested as a good person to represent your state.

Mrs. Humphreys received no reply from the "New Mexico State Librarian." After waiting a month, she then wrote Miss Shuler:

As I have had no response from the State Librarian I am at a loss to know just how to proceed . . . If the State Librarian should decide to come as the delegate from New Mexico, we would be very glad to have you come anyway and any other librarians from New Mexico as . . . the more that are present the better, but if you are willing to come as the delegate from your state will you tell me the proper channel to get you appointed . . .

Miss Shuler did not attend the meeting, and organization of SWLA proceeded without full representation. Although no delegates from Arizona, Louisiana, or New Mexico attended the meeting, vice-presidents were nevertheless appointed for each of the six "member" state associations. Sometime during the following winter or spring, Wilma Loy Shelton, Librarian of the University, was named vice-president for New Mexico.

As first president of SWLA, Elizabeth Howard West continued the correspondence with New Mexico librarians, hoping to arouse their interest and support. On January 9, 1923, she sent identical letters to Miss Shuler, to Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, Director of the Museum of New Mexico, and to Wilma Loy Shelton, telling them of SWLA's organization and purposes. "I am sure that you will be interested," she assured all three, "since the Southwestern Association promises to help library conditions materially in our section." What the others replied is not known, but Miss Shelton responded with characteristic enthusiasm: "I do want to join the Southwestern Library Association and to have our library take out an institutional membership." SWLA records, however, do not show that any memberships, either institutional or individual, were taken out that biennium by New Mexicans.

In April 1923, SWLA held a program meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas in conjunction with one of the ALA regional conferences. About fifty attended. Flags of the various "member states" were displayed, and Miss Shelton managed to send a New Mexico flag for Miss West to use at the meeting.

In May, after the Hot Springs meeting, Miss West again wrote Wilma Shelton:

. . . I hope you are going to be able to work up membership for the Southwestern Library Association in New Mexico . . . I think the best way to handle it would be to organize a State Association and come in on the association basis. This in my opinion would be worth while even if only a few librarians could organize. Meetings could be held in connection with the Biennial meetings of the Southwestern Library Association, if annual meetings are found impracticable.

I hope that you will think it through, talk it over with other New Mexico Librarians and let me know what you decide. I would especially suggest your talking it over with Miss Evlyn Shuler of Raton, whom I met . . . three years ago, and who impresses me as being a very forward looking person.

No doubt, Miss Shelton did just that. As librarian of UNM she had lived in Albuquerque since 1920 and was well acquainted with another active figure in the New Mexico library world: Mrs. N.F. Dixon. Both ladies were friends of Edwin Sue Goree, Santa Fe Public Librarian, and all three knew Miss Shuler, who frequently visited her sister in Albuquerque.

In December 1923, a further nudge came from the Texas librarians. During the TLA conference in October of that year, discussion arose regarding the location of the 1924 SWLA biennial meeting. All present agreed that it ought to be in some state other than Texas or Arkansas. New Mexico or Arizona were suggested as possible joint

“hostesses,” if an official invitation could be secured from either or both. Subsequently, Miss West wrote Sue Goree, “informally and personally,” to ask if she could “manage to get us an invitation to meet in Santa Fe . . . “ If she wrote to anyone in Arizona, no correspondence survives.

Miss Goree was cooperative. She contacted the Woman’s Board of Trade and the Chamber of Commerce of Santa Fe, and both groups extended formal invitations to the Southwestern Library Association to hold its first biennial conference in that city. “You will be pleased to know,” Sue Goree remarked with characteristically wry humor, “how delighted people are at the prospect of having a library meeting here. The usual exclamation is ‘Just the class of people we want to bring to Santa Fe.’”

Now the pressure to organize a library association for New Mexico became almost an imperative. Genuinely concerned about improving library service in the Southwest, Miss West was almost as ambitious for SWLA as a parent for a child. She had suggested earlier to Wilma Shelton that a newly organized state association could hold joint meetings with SWLA “if annual meetings are found impracticable.” “I wonder,” she wrote to Miss Goree on January 2, 1924, “if it would not be possible to organize, either before the meeting, or in connection therewith, library associations for Arizona and New Mexico.” According to Wilma Loy Shelton’s “History of the New Mexico Library Association,” which she gave as an address at the 1936 NMLA convention, the New Mexicans already had an association. The people who organized it were the four friends mentioned earlier: Wilma Shelton, Sue Goree, Mrs. N.F. Dixon, and Evelyn Shuler. These women, Miss Shelton said, “met at the home of Mrs. Dixon in December 1923 to talk over library problems. During the course of the afternoon the New Mexico Library Association was organized with Miss Shuler as President, Miss Goree as Secretary, and Mrs. Dixon as Treasurer.”

Many questions may be asked about that meeting: Most of them may never be answered. To begin with, no minutes were kept and time played Miss Shelton’s memory false on one point at least.¹ She, not Miss Goree as she stated in her history thirteen years later, was named secretary. “I would have insisted upon Miss Goree being secretary,” she wrote Miss West on February 15, 1924, “but they persuaded me to do it since Miss Shuler is here in Albuquerque on a six months leave of absence, and we can work together in our drive for membership, etc.”

There are other points that might be raised. No constitution was drawn up or, apparently, planned. In fact, no constitutional committee was appointed until 1926. There was not a shred of publicity, no notice of any kind in any magazine or newspaper. In view of the fact that these librarians placed great emphasis on publicity, lack of it is especially significant. Nowhere, in print or in correspondence, was the exact date of such a momentous occasion officially recorded.

When did the meeting take place? It is necessary to sift and resift available information for clues. In her letter of December 19 to Miss West, Miss Goree said nothing about plans to organize the New Mexico Library Association. Yet Miss Shelton’s history stated that it was formed during December 1923 by the four librarian friends. According to a note in the Raton Range for December 28, 1923, Evelyn Shuler left Raton by train on Wednesday, December 26 to visit her sister in Albuquerque, returning to Raton the following Wednesday morning, January 2nd. There is no evidence that she made the same trip earlier in December; therefore it seems safe to assume that the meeting Miss Shelton referred to took place sometime after December 19, and probably during the week following December 26 when Miss Shuler was in Albuquerque.

Through sheer speculation, the date may be further pinpointed. Miss Shuler arrived in Albuquerque on December 26. After a long trip, she was no doubt tired. She would also, no doubt, have wanted a day or two to devote to her sister, who was not well. Her friends were working librarians, with typical library holiday schedules. They probably worked on December 27 and 28, which fell on a Thursday and Friday. Miss Goree came from Santa Fe. If she worked through December 18, she probably traveled to Albuquerque on Saturday, the 19th. The next day was Sunday, December 20, and the day following was New Year’s Eve, Monday, December 31. Her library would have been closed on that day, as would the others’, but New Year’s Eve is a time for families or for large

¹ Margery Bedinger’s statement (Library Journal, LII [April 1, 1927], 352) that “three librarians met in front of the open fire in the house of one of their number, and proceeded to lay plans” illustrates how easily memories become garbled when passed on orally.

celebrations. The afternoon of December 30, therefore, seems the most likely time that the four friends would have chosen to get together. It was a Sunday, the close of the year, a perfect time for tea and conversation. And as good a day as any to found a library association.

Evidence suggests that, although a meeting of some kind undoubtedly took place in December, none of the four participants at first thought of it as official--and did not do so until thirteen years later when Wilma Shelton wrote her history. Throughout most of 1924 they looked for an auspicious occasion to "organize." On January 23, 1924, Miss Shelton wrote Miss West: "The Business and Professional Women of New Mexico are having a reception and banquet in Albuquerque the second of February, and at that time I hope that we will be able to organize our New Mexico Library Association." On February 15, she informed Miss West: "We have at last a New Mexico Library Association." Examination of B&PW records has turned up no reference to such an event occurring on February 2nd. On March 5, however, Miss West wrote Miss Goree: "Miss Shelton may have told you that I telegraphed on the day that I understood was expected to bring forth this organization. . . ." Miss West did not say which day she meant. Her letter of January 2nd to Sue Goree, suggesting that a New Mexico association might be organized under the wing of SWLA, indicates that she was unaware of and could not have been offering congratulations on the December 1923 meeting. Could she have had reference to the February 2nd meeting of B&PW?

Efforts to find a suitable official date continued. On March 5, Sue Goree wrote a letter which crossed Miss West's in the mail. "We hope," she remarked, "to have a meeting the day before the Conference opens and form a permanent organization. . . ." She meant the forthcoming SWLA conference in Santa Fe; and subsequently that program did set aside time for "organization of the New Mexico Library Association." All of this reinforces the impression that the officers did not regard their association as officially established either in December 1923 or in February 1924. Nevertheless, it is hard to forget Miss Shelton's triumphant "We have at last a New Mexico Library Association," written scarcely two weeks after the B&PW dinner meeting.

Meanwhile, legitimate or not, the infant organization grew with a rapidity that was both astonishing and gratifying. By March, there were thirty members. By May, Miss Goree was able to report: "I spent Saturday and part of Sunday in Albuquerque and Miss Shelton, Mrs. Dixon and I did a little work on our state association. Things seem to be going well and we have seventy-five members."

Who these members were, and whether they paid any dues, Miss Goree did not say. The earliest existing NMLA treasurer's roles are dated 1928, and at that time thirty-seven members were listed as having paid the one-dollar dues. Quite likely, the earlier members were teachers as well as librarians, or perhaps members of the Federation and the Santa Fe Woman's Board of Trade who wanted to help support the August convention.

Everyone was delighted by the birth and rapid growth of the new association. "Speed the good work," Miss West wrote Miss Goree on March 5. "I am sure [this organization] is going to mean a great deal to all of you, and a great deal for library development in New Mexico."

A momentous occasion now loomed ahead. SWLA's first regular biennial conference had been set for August 28-30, 1924 in Santa Fe. New Mexicans planned to organize their state association following a program session on the 30th. Publicity for the conference was intensive. In New Mexico, Miss Goree handled news releases and wrote letters to NMEA officers asking that teachers be encouraged to attend even if they could stay for only one or two sessions.

Back and forth went the letters between Austin and Santa Fe as Miss West and Miss Goree struggled with the seemingly endless frustrations of program planning. Suggested speakers made promises, then withdrew; officers regretted that the distance prevented their attendance. Substitutions were made and new plans formulated again and again. With victory almost in sight, Miss West wrote Miss Goree:

When I get to Santa Fe, I am going to smile my very sweetest smile, be nice and polite to everybody, enjoy everything and make up by general expansiveness of disposition what I lack as a program maker.

She spoke too soon. Less than a week before the conference opened, Miss Goree received a telegram. Miss West

was in the hospital, and her doctors refused to let her make-the long trip.

Wilma Shelton, as vice-president for New Mexico, presided at each general session in Miss West's absence. She and Sue Goree saw to all last minute details and made committee appointments according to instructions from Miss West.

The time between 9:30 and 12:00 on Friday, August 30 was set aside for state meetings. As it turned out, only Texas and New Mexico scheduled programs. The New Mexicans met in the St. Francis auditorium. Miss West had asked Miss Shuler to take responsibility for the program, but Misses Goree and Shelton arranged it. They scheduled a great many items for the slender two-and-a-half hour time slot. Included were greetings from the President, Evlyn Shuler; "The Library's Part in the State Educational Program," by Isabel Eckles, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; "How the Library Can Help in Developing the Industrial Resources of the State," by H.M. Gardner, State Supervisor of Agriculture; and "How to Secure and Organize a School Library," a roundtable discussion led by Superintendent R.T. Hodges of Floyd. A "Business Meeting to Effect Permanent Organization and Elect Officers" concluded the busy session.

Whether the tired conferees actually effected a permanent organization at that time is not known, for again no minutes have survived and what occurred can only be surmised. They elected no new officers, except that Miss Goree was officially named secretary. This action freed Miss Shelton, newly elected President of SWLA, from some of her organizational responsibilities. If the delegates discussed a constitution or appointed a constitutional committee, there is no record.

After their business session and program, the New Mexicans stayed together for a luncheon. A conscientious group, they did not waste time on food alone. President Shuler led a two-part discussion which considered "Plans and Suggestions for Pooling Duplicates for Most Advantageous Distribution," and a "Temporary Plan for Traveling Libraries."

From her hospital bed, Elizabeth West had written Miss Goree: "I am trusting in you southwestern librarians to see to it that this meeting goes through with a bang." Her trust was well-founded, for apparently the conference lived up to everyone's expectations. Its timing, during the week of the Santa Fe fiesta, assured a colorful setting. Its general program, finally consisting almost entirely of local talent, impressed delegates as practical, yet "so full of color and so different from the usual." All in all, it was a good beginning for both associations.

Successful though it may have been, the conference did not end the year for New Mexico librarians. A busy Fall followed, Wilma Shelton took up her duties as president of SWLA and continued to be a pillar of strength in her state association, while Sue Goree became SWLA's vice-president for New Mexico. Less than three months after the Santa Fe meeting, NMLA held its second numbered convention, scheduling a "Library Round Table" at 9:00 a.m. on November 8, 1924 during the 39th meeting of NMEA in Albuquerque. Miss Shelton served as chairman for this meeting, although Miss Shuler continued as president. Miss Goree spoke on "Training High School Students for More Joy Reading and Less Joy Riding," a topic that would not be obsolescent even today. Miss Shelton talked about "The High School Debating League and the Library," explaining how it could be set up in New Mexico and how the library could help. The rest of the year, these two tireless women began working with other library-minded people on a bill which would permit development of county library service, a goal of ALA's Books for Everybody campaign.

The third numbered meeting of NMLA took place on November 7, 1925 in Albuquerque; the NMEA convention program listed a "Library Section" with Miss Goree as chairman and Mrs. Dixon continuing as treasurer. No secretary was mentioned. Mrs. Mary Holt Snobarger, librarian at New Mexico State Teachers' College in Silver City, spoke on "Teaching the Use of Reference Books to Students," and Miss Shelton discussed the "School Libraries Law" which had been passed by the New Mexico legislature in March 1925 after years of cooperative effort. It was the first library law since 1884, and according to SWLA minutes, passage was due largely to the efforts of Wilma Loy Shelton and Edwin Sue Goree. This permissive legislation provided that any county or city board of education could request an additional budget allowance to support county library service "in cooperation with other library agencies." The bill was not what its supporters had hoped to secure, and as a law it proved virtually useless because New Mexico's handful of "library agencies" lacked the strength and the resources which could have enabled them to take the initiative in extending library services to a county-wide area. The measure did, however, represent

NMLA's first success in the legislative arena.

During 1926 and 1927, the New Mexico Library Association continued to grow in every way except in membership. Gradually, it seemed to become more aware of its identity, of its relationship to its constituency and fellow associations, and of its potential powers. Less and less dependent upon SWLA, it put out feelers toward the national ALA, meanwhile continuing its almost symbiotic relationship with NMEA.

Ella LaBar, teacher and librarian at the Albuquerque High School, presided over NMLA's fourth numbered meeting on November 5, 1926 in the Santa Fe Public Library. This, like most earlier sessions, took place during an NMEA conference. The program began with a talk by Wilma Shelton on "Books and Pamphlets Helpful to Librarians" in which she listed such tools as Brown's Mending and Repair of Books and Wilson's Standard Catalog for High School Libraries. Margery Bedinger, librarian at State College, Las Cruces, outlined "Ways a Teacher Can Make Use of the Library." The library is "first, last and always a service department and its head should constantly consult the wishes of the clientele," she advised her audience. Sue Goree spoke on "Illustrated Reprints of Standard Literature for School Libraries," especially recommending Kate Greenaway's Mother Goose and Scribner's series of illustrated classics. Barbara Phillips, English teacher at Albuquerque High School, gave a paper on "The Uses of Modern Literature in the High School," and Mrs. Mary Holt Snobarger led a round table discussion of "Library Problems."

According to Miss Bedinger's report in Library Journal, April 1, 1927, seven members held a business session following, a luncheon in Miss Goree's home. Two years had gone by since the "organizational meeting" with SWLA, yet the members still seemed troubled by the idea that NMLA lacked official status. The delegates agreed on three objectives, the first of which was "to complete our organization" [emphasis supplied]. The other two were: "to increase our membership, and to give library needs and growth a state-wide publicity." Those present recognized the need for a constitution and at last named a constitutional committee with Miss Shelton as chairman, and Mrs. Snobarger, Miss Elizabeth Cooley, and Mrs. Corinne Whitney as members. They considered plans for a survey of library conditions in the state, and the possibility of approaching ALA for help; and they created a "publicity bureau," with Miss Goree as chairman, "to arouse and crystallize interest in and desire for libraries." Miss Bedinger, an enthusiastic newcomer, was elected secretary. Miss Goree continued as president and Mrs. Dixon as perennial treasurer.

The preceding summer, Mrs. Dixon had sent a \$10.00 contribution from NMLA to ALA's 50th Anniversary Fund. "This is the first contribution that we have received from New Mexico," replied Charles Belden for ALA on August 10, 1926. "Do you know of any way," he added, "in which we can interest libraries in New Mexico in our . . . fund?"

New Mexicans, however, had other ideas regarding their relationship with ALA, ideas which did not involve further financial support to the national association at this time. Two days after the November 1926 meeting, Margery Bedinger wrote Carl Milam, ALA Executive Secretary, asking "if there is any possibility of our getting help from the A.L.A. or from the Carnegie Endowment Fund . . . [to make] a survey of library conditions . . ."

Milam regretted that ALA could not directly appropriate funds to make such a survey. He did, however, refer the letter to Julia Wright Merrill, Executive Assistant to the ALA Library Extension Committee, a standing committee appointed in 1925 to help stimulate county library development in predominantly rural states. "Surely you and we together can find some way to assist in New Mexico library development," Milam assured Miss Bedinger in a letter dated November 12, 1926.

Before long, an enthusiastic response came from Julia Merrill. She had just returned from a field trip through several southeastern states where she had succeeded in arousing considerable support for the county library movement among department of education officials, officers of the Federation, the Parent Teacher Association, and other groups. She hoped "very much to travel Southwest" before the end of 1927, and meanwhile offered to supply multiple copies of booklets for preliminary distribution: "Library Extension," "Why We Need a Public Library," and "Rural Library Service."

For nearly two years, now, New Mexico had had a county library law that had proven virtually useless. Many library supporters hoped to secure legislation establishing a centralized state library agency to administer the law and strengthen state-wide library service. For this reason, Miss Bedinger wanted Miss Merrill's visit to coincide

with the 1927 session of the New Mexico legislature. Miss Merrill, however, thought the timing would be poor. "My own feeling," she wrote Miss Bedinger on January 26, 1927, "is that it is necessary to convert the leaders and organizations of the state first, then to have them [emphasis supplied] descend on the legislature instead of going direct to the latter." To Miss Goree she commented:

It was only because Miss Bedinger's plea for a visit before the end of March was so urgent that I was willing to consider a rapid trip and direct work with the legislature. I very much prefer your plan for a smaller beginning and quiet work. [February 5, 1927]

More letters and telegrams followed until Miss Merrill's visit was finally set for April 20-28, a time which coincided with the district meetings of the Federation. She arrived by train in Roswell on April 20, and for the next week crisscrossed the state by rail. She visited Roswell, Gallup, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and State College. She addressed three district meetings of the Federation, spoke to a group of Las Cruces leaders, to students at State College, made talks at several luncheons and dinners across the state, and at the movies in Gallup. In addition, she attended and spoke during a special, called meeting of NMLA in Albuquerque on April 26, 1927.

Everywhere she went, Miss Merrill described the ALA endorsed county library movement as it existed in other states and declared that it was "perfectly feasible for New Mexico to follow their example." Experience elsewhere, she said, had indicated that a system of county libraries, unified under the guidance of a state agency, worked well in rural areas. New Mexico was ready for such a unified program, she told her audiences. It was time for the legislature to create a state supported agency which would give advice and help to existing libraries and seek ways to develop them in rural districts without such service.

Miss Merrill was an enthusiastic, informed speaker, who succeeded in arousing interest and enthusiasm among her audiences. The results were almost tangible and could be seen for many years to come. She herself regarded her New Mexico trip as a success. "My report back to A.L.A. was that the ten days in New Mexico were the most interesting and constructive of my years' field work because the officers of the state association have laid such a solid foundation and made such fine plans for the meeting," she wrote Sue Goree on June 13, 1927. She had a hunch, however, that the New Mexico library movement had become too closely identified with the Federation and ought to take pains to widen its base of support by involving other influential groups. "The Parent Teachers Organization is now . . . as strong as the Federation," she wrote Miss Goree on May 31st. "It may be necessary therefore to make them feel that the state movement represents all organizations."

New Mexico librarians were novices in political manipulation. Miss Merrill gave them pointers which those who would wield influence in legislative halls must understand well. The officers listened and learned, and like converts after a revival went to work with renewed enthusiasm and zeal. As a result, 1927 was a very good year for the association, as Miss Goree's summary at the November 1927 conference indicated. President Goree devoted much time to the NMLA publicity committee. Miss Merrill's visit had renewed interest in New Mexico's library laws; to capitalize on this interest while it lasted, the publicity committee decided to publish the 1925 law. The treasury was much too slim to finance the project, but the Federation came to the rescue, sharing the costs of printing 500 copies and helping distribute the pamphlets across the state. Miss Goree appointed a network of reporters, many from the Federation's local groups, to supply her with news of local libraries which she edited and distributed in a mimeographed monthly bulletin to thirty-three newspapers and to clubs over the state—NMLA's first journal publication. Miss Bedinger shared the publicity work, preparing news-spots and book talks that she broadcast over the State College radio station. She also contributed to the New Mexico School Review, the Stockman-Farmer, the Federation bulletin, and wrote two articles about New Mexico library activities for national magazines. These librarians, incidentally, had very good reasons for their emphasis on publicity. In the New Mexico frontier of the twenties, with necessities sometimes hard to come by, they knew they must publicize their activities in any way possible to stimulate public interest and bring about a more favorable climate for eventual library legislation. Aside from the constitution committee, the publicity bureau was NMLA's first standing committee.

In 1927, the association also attempted and completed a rudimentary survey of library conditions in the state. The results revealed nine public libraries, ten club libraries, eleven school libraries supported by taxation, one

hospital library, and 179,747 volumes. Throughout New Mexico, \$31,418 was spent on books and periodicals in 1926; state support amounted to \$38,961 and private contributions added \$8,801.50.

Not all attempted objectives in 1927 brought immediate results. After hearing Miss Merrill's talk at the special NMLA meeting in April, Wilma Shelton proposed the appointment of a Library Extension Council. She suggested that "the time had come when it was necessary . . . to make specific study of rural library conditions," and asked that the president appoint a committee of non-librarians representing different organizations and occupations. Finding the right people and persuading them to serve fell to Sue Goree, and it proved no easy task. Of the fourteen invitations sent out to become members of the Library Council, seven were answered, three were declined and four accepted, she informed Miss Merrill the following August. The four who accepted² set themselves four ambitious objectives: to make a survey of rural library conditions in the state, to study library systems in other states, to promote library service with "appropriate publicity," and "to further legislative action" when the time seemed right to push for a unified state and county library system.

On November 4th and 5th, 1927, NMLA held its fifth numbered meeting in the Albuquerque Public Library during the 42nd NMEA conference. Although the 1927 membership rolls listed 36 members, it would be thirteen years before NMLA would risk scheduling its conferences apart from NMEA's. As Myrtle Whitehill Carlisle, formerly librarian at New Mexico Western, reminisced, "We met at the same time as the NMEA, as there were so few librarians we felt that we could take advantage of their evening sessions. Many of the librarians were school librarians anyway."

In many ways the 1927 meeting was a fitting culmination for the year. For the first time in NMLA's history the meeting lasted two days. For the first time there were two sections: a Public Library and a School Library Section and both conducted programs. There was also another "first;" the association had a constitution. Miss Shelton and her committee had drafted it in time to be presented during the special April meeting. In November they presented the final, amended draft to the membership and it was formally adopted. The short and simple document provided a bare-bones organizational structure and stated the objective of the association: "to promote the library interests of the state of New Mexico." The 1927 meeting closed with a discussion of objectives for the coming year: more publicity, a model library exhibit to be sent all over the state, and "the completion of the Council looking toward adequate library legislation."

After years of semi-official existence, the New Mexico Library Association was at last "legitimate." It had a duly approved constitution, an active publicity committee and two bona-fide sections. It had cooperated in printing the New Mexico county library law. It had stimulated interest in libraries, with the help of the Federation and Miss Merrill's visit, and it was ready to tackle the legislature regarding the establishment of a centralized state library and extension service. Many strong-minded women had worked tirelessly to make this possible, among them Julia Brown Asplund, Elizabeth Howard West, Mrs. N.F. Dixon, Evelyn Shuler, Julia Wright Merrill, Edwin Sue Goree, Marjorie Bedinger, Mary Holt Snobarger, and Wilma Loy Shelton. These people were not motivated by any thought of personal or professional gain. Their work was their hobby; their goal was the development of library service in New Mexico and the Southwest. Nearly fifty years later, Lucile Merriwether Gray, Mrs. Carlisle's successor at Western, wrote: "Looking backward, don't you think New Mexico was fortunate in its handful of library leaders?"

By 1927, although still too small and poor as a group to strike out quite alone without the support of the Federation and the NMEA, NMLA nevertheless had a new consciousness of identity and purpose. The members were ready to respond to Miss Goree's presidential challenge:

"We have building to do The association must take the leadership in all matters concerning library progress. There is no doubt that we have the opportunity, and--united into a loyal working body--we have the collective skill. If we are not willing to give the time and study necessary

² James Bujac, Carlsbad Lawyer; Mrs. Edna Rousseau, Torrence County Superintendent of Schools; E.A. Paddock, Hagerman Lawyer; Mrs. Tom Charles, Alamogordo clubwoman.

to promote our own profession, then we are not the kind of library workers New Mexico needs at this time, [but] if we can get twenty-five dynamic workers . . . this year, the cumulative effect will be more libraries and better libraries and a keener regard for the contribution of the librarian toward social progress.”

A BRIEF NOTE ON SOURCES

Vella Galle began working on a history of the New Mexico Library Association as a thesis for Arizona State University at Tempe at the suggestion of Miss Dorothy Watkins, New Mexico State Librarian. Before her untimely death in 1969, Mrs. Galle had done a great deal of research and the Committee for the Use of Vella Galle's Research has merely tried to carry on her work.

In addition to materials which Mrs. Galle had assembled, research for this paper has been based on examination of archives of the New Mexico Library Association and New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs in the State Library at Santa Fe; unpublished printed programs of the New Mexico Education Association in the Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico; records of the New Mexico Business and Professional Women in Roswell; early library records of the Albuquerque Public and Zimmerman Library; and archives of the Southwestern Library Association in the Texas State Library at Austin.

The Santa Fe New Mexican, Raton Range, and Albuquerque Journal were searched for the years 1923-1924. Leads were followed in the New Mexico Library Bulletin, New Mexico School Review, ALA Bulletin, Library Journal, and Library Quarterly. Miss Shelton's, "History of the New Mexico Library Association," New Mexico Library Bulletin, VI (April 1937), 3-7, was consulted, as were several unpublished theses of which Mildred A. Barrett's, Development of Library Extension in New Mexico, (Western Reserve University, January 1958) proved most helpful, particularly in passages dealing with legislation during NMLA's early years.

Personal interviews with Mrs. Burton Dwyre, Mrs. Lucile Merriwether Gray, Miss J. Vivian Hedgcock and correspondence with Mrs. Dwyre, Mrs. Gray, Mrs. Myrtle Whitehill Carlisle, and Mrs. Mary Holt Snobarger provided illuminating insights. Special thanks are due Peggy Tozer, Cecil Clotfelter and Forrest Walker who read this paper and offered valuable criticism and suggestions. Cecil Clotfelter, chairman of the Historical Materials Committee, also provided technical help and advice in preparing the manuscript for printing.

Complete detailed documentation will be provided upon request.