

International Dimensions of Library History: Leadership and Scholarship, 1978–1998

Mary Niles Maack

This essay sketches the growth of internationalism in library history since 1978, when the members of the American Library History Round Table (ALHRT) voted to drop the word “American” from its name in acknowledgment of the growing importance of international scholarship in the field. Major conferences and publications on international themes are discussed, as is the role of the LHRT and its members in extending international research on the history of books, reading, and libraries.

The Library History Round Table Emerges from the AHLRT

As I reflected on my own involvement with the Library History Round Table over the past twenty years, one theme that particularly stood out was the LHRT’s commitment to internationalism within the domain of library history. It therefore came as a surprise when I discovered that its original name was the “American Library History Round Table.” Only then did I realize that the main focus of the group during its first three decades had indeed been on the study of American libraries and librarianship. Since the name change seemed to indicate a wider scope of concerns and activities, I became intrigued as to how and when this occurred. Looking back over the ALA yearbooks, I found that in 1978 the broadened interest of the ALHRT was recognized by the removal of “American” from the round table’s mission statement, and a proposal was also introduced to drop “American” from the name. The following year the ALA executive committee authorized a vote of the ALHRT membership to delete “American” from the round table’s name.

Because Donald G. Davis, Jr., was serving as ALHRT’s chair in 1978–79, I naturally assumed that he was instrumental in the name change. When I inquired about this, he replied that his two goals as chair were to organize a program featuring Ian Willison, a distinguished scholar from Britain, and to change the name of the round table to reflect the growing international interests of its members. However, in a more pragmatic vein, he wrote:

As for the name change, I think that many within the RT felt that the former name suggested that the group was concerned only about American library history, rather than being Americans interested in all library history. Some, however, felt that American library history had been so understudied in the past that we should concentrate primarily on that subject. The argument that won was that no other RT had the word “American” in its title and that all RTs were under the aegis of the AMERICAN Library Association. In short, the name change represented reality rather than ideology—though I have some sympathy with those who feel that our own history should have some primacy for our Association connections.¹

While a great deal of Donald Davis’s own work has been on American library history, I also know him to be a committed internationalist who has probably done more than anyone else within LHRT to promote the international exchange of scholarship. Although he himself has traveled, lived, and worked abroad on a number of occasions, his first opportunity to officially represent the Round Table at an international event occurred when he and Bud Gambee (the 1977–78 chair of ALHRT) attended the centenary celebration of the British Library Association in 1977. Their report back to the membership is still a pleasure to read and conveys some of the excitement that surrounded this historic celebration of the one hundredth birthday of our younger sister association. It was also in 1977 that Donald Davis assumed the editorship of the *Journal of Library History*, which moved from Florida to the University of Texas Press. During his tenure as editor of the journal, Davis has consistently enriched our understanding of library history abroad through the publication of work by American and foreign scholars whose interests represent a wildly eclectic range of topics and world areas. Articles over the last twenty years include historical studies on Britain, China, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Senegal, and South Africa. In addition, there have been two single-country special issues of the journal that have been devoted to France and Italy.²

Awards, Programs, and Library History Seminars

Inaugurated at a time when the LHRT was extending its interest to international topics, the Justin Winsor Prize Essay Contest has always been open to library historians who conduct their research abroad. The first Winsor prize for a study done outside the United States was awarded in 1981 to a paper entitled “First Generation of Women Librarians in France” by Mary Niles Maack. The following year the Winsor prize was given to two essays dealing with international library

history or library history abroad; these were "Aryan Librarianship: Academic and Research Libraries under Hitler" by Pamela Spence Richards and "British Propaganda in American Public Libraries, 1914–1917" by Wayne A. Wiegand. More recently, in 1991 Margaret Stieg won the award for a paper entitled "The Postwar Purge of German Public Libraries, Democracy and the American Reaction." Counting the prize given to an international relations historical study by Brother Thomas O'Connor entitled "Library Service to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace and to the Preparatory Inquiry, 1917–1919," a total of five (or one third of all the Justin Winsor essay prizes as of 1998) have gone to scholars working abroad or writing on international topics.

During the past two decades a number of LHRT programs have featured prominent speakers from abroad as well as Canadian and American scholars known for their international research. One particularly memorable talk was presented in 1979 by Ian Willison, then head of the Rare Book Collections at the British Library. Willison's magisterial address on the history of libraries and scholarship was attended by two hundred people at the LHRT annual meeting. Cosponsored by LHRT and the Center for the Book, this lecture was subsequently published as part of the Viewpoint Series.³ Two years later, in 1981, the LHRT sponsored two programs devoted to libraries under Communism. The first session featured a paper entitled "The Historical Development of Soviet Librarianship, 1917–1980" by Boris Raymond of Dalhousie University, who is especially known for his study of Krupskaja. The second session featured a paper entitled "Chinese Libraries and Library Education, 1949–1980: Truth and Myth in the People's Republic of China" by Lee-hsia Ting of Western Illinois University. Adding special excitement to this program was the attendance of a delegation from the People's Republic of China.

Like the ALA conference programming, the ongoing series of Library History Seminars has also demonstrated the international interests of the LHRT members. Held in 1976 in Philadelphia, exactly one hundred years after the founding of ALA, Library History Seminar V featured only papers related to American libraries and librarianship. However, at the Library History Seminar VI, "Libraries and Culture" (which was held in Austin, Texas, in 1980), four of the six sessions were on international topics; these presentations included "Libraries and Antiquity," "Early Modern European Libraries," "Notable Bibliographers," and "French Libraries—France and Its African Colonies." The succeeding Library History Seminars (held in 1985, 1990, and 1995) have all featured numerous panels dealing with libraries in other parts of the world, and typically at least half of the panels have presented research done outside of the United States (see the Chronology). Cosponsored by the LHRT,

the Center for the Book, and various host institutions, these conferences have reflected growing interest in international library history and have attracted scholars from France, China, Finland, Britain, and Canada as well as featuring presentations by a number of American scholars who have done all or part of their research overseas.

International Conferences

In addition to participating in these American-based seminars, LHRT members with international interests have had opportunities to take part in several European conferences focusing on library history. In most cases, these conferences have been cosponsored by institutions in the host country and have benefited from the support of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).⁴ One of the first of the international meetings of library historians held outside of an IFLA congress was a seminar on “Libraries and Cultural Change,” organized by the Library History Group of the Library Association of the United Kingdom. This important seminar featured many papers dealing with librarianship as a profession, including one by Wayne A. Wiegand, who attended the conference as the LHRT chair for 1987–88 and gave a presentation on “The Development of Librarianship in the United States.” The following year, an international symposium was held in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany. These sessions focused on “Library History Research in the International Context.” Organized by the Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Bibliotheksgeschichte, this conference was also attended by Wayne A. Wiegand, who presented a paper entitled “Library History Research in the United States.” Edited by Paul Kaegbein and Paul Sturges, the proceedings provide a fascinating view of the emergence of library history as a discipline in countries as diverse as Britain, Australia, Estonia, Sweden, and Israel.⁵

More recently, two stimulating international library history conferences have been organized thanks to the enthusiasm and the tireless efforts of LHRT member Pamela Spence Richards. The first of these was the 1996 conference in Vologda, Russia, which focused on the “History of Books and Reading in the United States and Russia.”⁶ American participants included Librarian of Congress James H. Billington in addition to several LHRT members. In her introduction to the special issue of *Libraries & Culture* (Winter 1998), Richards notes that this was a meeting of “two divergent traditions of scholarship.” However, she observes that both the American and Russian papers had a number of themes in common, including “the great differences that can exist in times of cultural crisis between the actual (as opposed to the official) function of libraries and texts; the challenge that mass literature can offer to ‘high culture’

or the officially condoned canon; and the complexity of the library's role in a pluralistic, multicultural, multiracial society."⁷

Partly as a result of the interest generated by this conference, Pamela Richards and Martine Poulain (at that time editor of the *Bulletin de Bibliothèques de France*) decided to convene a conference on "Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War." At these meetings, which took place in Paris, France, in June 1998, LHRT was ably represented by our chair, Louise Robbins; other LHRT members also presented papers or chaired sessions, including John Y. Cole, Donald G. Davis, Jr., Christine Jenkins, and Priscilla Yu.⁸ Having had the opportunity to participate in this conference in Paris, I would like to share with you some of the excitement generated by papers given by Russian and Eastern European library historians for whom the Cold War had a profound, visible, and ever-present impact on their professional lives. All aspects of librarianship were affected, and some participants openly expressed their frustration over the previous restrictions on intellectual exchange with foreign researchers and colleagues. Presentations on Russia also dealt with the pervasive role of state censorship, which resulted in the development of "special collections" of works forbidden to most readers. While American speakers at the colloquium eloquently described the ways the ALA and American librarians had struggled to ensure freedom of access to works threatened with censorship during the McCarthy era, their papers shed light on events that were far different from those experienced by our European colleagues, both in Communist bloc countries and in multiparty states such as France where political ideology also took on a significant role in regard to the dissemination of information.

As the conference ended, we all came away with a new and deeper understanding of a difficult era that has so recently ended. Exchanges with colleagues at these very stimulating meetings reaffirmed the importance of cross-cultural comparisons as a means for "shaking hypotheses free from particular sets of cultural entanglements and for catching strategic variables in new ranges."⁹ A greater awareness of the history of library development abroad likewise helps us appreciate the ways our own culture has defined the nature and extent of library service as well as shaping the philosophy and ideology surrounding such practices as classification, open access, and collection development.

During the past decade the growing number of international opportunities for scholarly exchange among library historians in the United States has resulted in two complementary trends. On the one hand, there has been an international expansion of interest in library history; on the other hand, there has been a broadening of focus to include the history of reading, books, and scholarship as well as libraries. Research in all these domains has been greatly enhanced by the creation of the Society

for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP), an international association that was founded in the United States in 1991 “to provide a global network for book historians, who until then had usually worked in isolation.”¹⁰ A number of LHRT members regularly participate in SHARP meetings, and an official liaison from the Round Table is designated. As part of the interdisciplinary book history research presented at SHARP conferences, scholars discuss literacy and readership as well as the social context of publishing and authorship. Such work not only provides an enriched context for our study of libraries, but it also extends our understanding of the complex role libraries have had in the intellectual development of countries with a long tradition of print culture.

Libraries as repositories have of course been greatly affected by changes in the form and format of all kinds of recorded communication. As the new scholarship has influenced our understanding of books and libraries in the United States and abroad, we have also become more aware that change has become a constant in institutions formerly characterized by their stability and their mission to conserve the records of the past. In a stimulating work entitled *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology and the Arts*, Richard A. Lanham notes: “Profound changes in expressive medium always ask a fundamental question: What does this medium do for us? We ask this in a deep way only when the new medium reveals what profound effects the old one has had on us.”¹¹ While Lanham’s questions focus on media rather than institutions, his ideas have significant implications for the library, which, as a social agency, has for almost all its history been associated with a place, a building, and a collection of physical materials. As we enter the twenty-first century, we are already experiencing the issue of dealing with digital records that can be simultaneously accessed from many locations, and we are being forced to ask some deep questions about what libraries have been in the past, what they have done for us, and what profound effects they have had on scholarship and on society.¹² In attempting to understand the past in different cultural and political contexts, we as historians can also contribute to intelligent reflection on the future of reading, books, scholarship, and libraries. As the LHRT begins its second half century on the eve of a new millennium, the challenges and opportunities before us more than ever require that we seek an understanding that goes beyond national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.

Chronology of Events and Publications Relating to the International Dimensions of Library History

1962 The Library History Group (LHG) of the Library Association of the United Kingdom is founded. It is one of the Library

Association's oldest special interest groups and is the only group in the U.K. specifically devoted to the history of libraries and librarianship.

1966 Library historians support the creation of a new scholarly journal with the title *Journal of Library History Philosophy and Comparative Librarianship*. From the beginning the journal has had an international editorial board with representatives from Europe, the Soviet Union, Asia, Africa, and Australia as well as North America.

1975 A round table on the History of the Book is held at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany.

1977 Library Association Centennial is held in London. Donald G. Davis, Jr., and Bud Gambee represent ALHRT; some travel support is provided by the Round Table.

The *Journal of Library History and Comparative Librarianship* moves to the University of Texas Press, where it is edited by Donald G. Davis, Jr.; the journal's international focus is continued and is enhanced by the publication of international symposia as well as special country issues. The Round Table continues to have a liaison to the journal.

The Center for the Book is created within the Library of Congress "to heighten public interest in the role of books and printing in the diffusion of knowledge." Directed by John Y. Cole, the center soon becomes an important source of support for library history conferences, both in the United States and abroad.

1978 At the fiftieth IFLA conference in Brussels the Standing Committee of the Section on Library Theory and Research establishes a working group on library history within the section. The ALHRT program has an international focus with the presentation of a talk by Arthur Young on the "Global Book Crusade: The American Library Association and World War I."

The broadened interest of ALHRT was marked by the removal of "American" from the official scope of the Round Table's missions in its constitution; a proposal was introduced to also drop "American" from the Round Table's name.

The inaugural meeting of the IFLA Working Group on Library History is held at the 1978 IFLA Congress in Strbske Pleso with fifteen representatives.

1979 The ALA Executive Committee authorizes a vote of the membership to delete "American" from the Round Table's name; this action had been a major goal of Donald G. Davis, Jr., who served as Round Table chair in 1978-79.

Ian Willison, head of the Rare Book Collections at the British Library, delivers a major address attended by two hundred people at the LHRT annual meeting; his lecture is cosponsored by the Center for the Book, which subsequently publishes his lecture.

- The Round Table on Library History is established at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany (Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Bibliotheksgeschichte).
- 1980 At the Library History Seminar VI, "Libraries and Culture," which was held in Austin, Texas, in March, four of the six sessions are on international topics; these sessions include "Libraries and Antiquity," "Early Modern European Libraries," "Notable Bibliographers," and "French Libraries—France and Its African Colonies." Papers are published in the *Journal of Library History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1981).
- 1981 The LHRT features two programs devoted to international issues: "The Historical Development of Soviet Librarianship, 1917–1980," delivered by Boris Raymond of Dalhousie University, and "Chinese Libraries and Library Education, 1949–1980: Truth and Myth in the People's Republic of China" by Lee-hsia Ting of Western Illinois University; a delegation from the People's Republic of China attends.
- The Justin Winsor Award is given to Mary Niles Maack for her study entitled "Women Librarians in France: The First Generation," subsequently published in the *Journal of Library History* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 407–49.
- 1982 The Justin Winsor Award is given to two essays dealing with international library history or library history abroad: "Aryan Librarianship: Academic and Research Libraries under Hitler" by Pamela Spence Richards and "British Propaganda in American Public Libraries, 1914–1917" by Wayne A. Wiegand.
- 1983 The LHRT program session at the Los Angeles conference is addressed by Peter Hoare, head librarian at the University of Nottingham and a founding member of the Library History Group of the Library Association. His lecture is entitled "'So Good and Worth a Designe': Archbishop Tennyson's Library and Public Library Provision in England, 1660–1715."
- 1985 The Library History Seminar VII, "Libraries, Books and Culture," which is held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in March, featured John Feather from the University of Loughborough, England, who addresses the first plenary session, speaking on "The Book in History and the History of the Book." In addition, six of the twelve panels are devoted to international topics; these sessions included "The Early Use of Printed Books

in Europe and America” and “Western Influences in the South Asian World of Books” (East Indies and India); “The Role of the Library in Two Cultural Contexts”; “The Influence of Private Libraries”; “Books and Libraries in Twentieth-century France and the Soviet Union”; and “Reports of Current Library Historiography Abroad” (Canada and Germany).

- 1987 International Seminar on “Libraries and Cultural Change” is organized by the Library History Group of the (British) Library Association with support from the IFLA Round Table on Library History; Wayne A. Wiegand presents a paper on “The Development of Librarianship in the United States.” The proceedings, edited by Peter Hoare, are published in *Libraries & Culture* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1989).

The Justin Winsor Award is given to Brother Thomas O’Connor for his essay “Library Service to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace and to the Preparatory Inquiry, 1917–1919.”

- 1988 International symposium held in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, on “Library History Research in the International Context,” organized by the Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Bibliotheksgeschichte with support from the IFLA Round Table on Library History.

- 1989 The Center for the Book at the Library of Congress sponsors a symposium entitled “Publishing and Readership in Revolutionary France”; among the speakers are Henri-Jean Martin from the Ecole des Chartes in Paris, France.

- 1990 The LHRT program features Bernhard Fabian of Münster University, Federal Republic of Germany, who spoke on the “Future of Humanistic Scholarship.”

Library History Seminar VII, “Libraries, Books & Culture,” is held in Bloomington, Indiana; six panels out of twelve are devoted to international topics. These include “In Search of Professional Roots: Two Perspectives” (Europe); “Information Control: Two Perspectives” (Republican Rome and the Soviet Union); “Attitudes toward Literacy: Two Historical Perspectives” (Switzerland and the United States); “To Serve a Purpose: The Establishment of Two European Libraries in the Seventeenth Century”; “Chinese Library History”; and “Libraries and Scholarly Communication under National Socialism.” The proceedings are published in *Libraries & Culture* 26, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter–Spring 1991).

- 1991 The Justin Winsor Award is given to Margaret Stieg for an essay entitled “The Postwar Purge of German Public Libraries, Democracy and the American Reaction.”

- The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP) was created in 1991 “to provide a global network for book historians, who until then had usually worked in isolation.” LHRT members participate in SHARP meetings, and an official representative from the Round Table is later designated.
- 1995 Library History Seminar VII, “Libraries & Philanthropy,” was held in Tuscaloosa at the University of Alabama. Of the twelve sessions, seven dealt with international topics: “Library Philanthropy in India and Ancient Greece”; “Rockefeller Philanthropy: Library Volunteers in Canada”; “Children’s Books and Scholarly Communication in the Cold War”; “Libraries, Beer and Tobacco”; “Carnegie Philanthropy” (Europe and the Commonwealth); “Public Libraries in Finland and Germany”; and “Libraries and Literacy in France and the United States.” The proceedings are published in *Libraries & Culture* 31, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter–Spring 1996).
- 1996 International conference in Vologda, Russia, on the “History of Books and Reading in the United States and Russia,” is organized by the IFLA Round Table on Library History and Research in Reading. American participants included James H. Billington, Mariana Tax Choldin, John Y. Cole, Donald G. Davis, Jr., Mary Niles Maack, Pamela Spence Richards, Jonathan Rose, Larry Sullivan, and Wayne A. Wiegand. The proceedings were edited by Pamela Spence Richards and published in *Libraries & Culture* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1998).
- 1998 International conference is held in Paris on “Libraries, Reading and Publishing in the Cold War,” organized by the IFLA Round Table on Library History and Research in Reading. American participants included John Y. Cole, Donald G. Davis, Jr., Christine Jenkins, Mary Niles Maack, Pamela Spence Richards, Louise Robbins, and Priscilla Yu.

Notes

1. Donald G. Davis, personal email communication, 17 June 1998.
2. William V. Jackson and Benjamin Whitten, eds., “Library and Information Science in France: A 1983 Overview,” *Journal of Library History* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1984); Maria X. Wells and Luigi Crocetti, eds., “Libraries and Librarianship in Italy,” *Libraries & Culture* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1990).
3. Ian R. Willison, *On the History of Libraries and Scholarship. A Paper Presented before the Library History Round Table* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Center for the Book, 1980).
4. The IFLA Round Table on Library History was founded in 1977 at the fiftieth IFLA conference in Brussels when the Standing Committee of the Section on

Library Theory and Research established a working group on library history within the section.

5. For a discussion of the symposium, see the introduction to "Library History Research in the International Context" by Paul Kaegbein and Paul Sturges, *Libraries & Culture* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1990).

6. These papers appeared in *Libraries & Culture* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1998) in a special issue edited by Pamela Spence Richards; in 1996 the proceedings were published in both Russian and English by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

7. Pamela Spence Richards, "Introduction to the Special Issue," *Libraries & Culture* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 1-2.

8. The papers were published in *Livres, éditions, bibliothèques, lectures durant la guerre froide* (Villeurbanne, France: l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et les Bibliothèques, 1998).

9. E. G. Devereux, W. Bronfenbrenner, and G. H. Suci, "Patterns of Parent Behavior in the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany: A Cross-National Comparison," *Social Science Journal* 14 (1962): 48.

10. See the SHARP webpage at <http://www.indiana.edu/~sharp/intro.html> (23 February 1999).

11. Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology and the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xii.

12. According to Robert Darnton, "The New York Public Library dispenses so much information electronically to readers all over the world that it reports ten million hits on its computer system each month as opposed to 50,000 books dispensed in its reading room at 42nd Street." See "The New Age of the Book," *New York Review of Books*, 18 March 1999: 1. Webpage <http://www.nybooks.com/nyreview> (5 April 1999).