

The Library History Round Table's First Twenty-five Years: Reminiscences and Remarks on Recent Research

John David Marshall

This is a personal reminiscence of the first twenty-five years (1947–1972) of the Library History Round Table of the American Library Association. The lives of the two founders of the round table—Louis Shores and Wayne Shirley—are presented and then followed by a historical look at the founding and subsequent years of the organization.

We cannot say “the past is past” without surrendering the future.

Sir Winston Churchill

First of all, let me say that I was not present at the creation of the American Library History Round Table (ALHRT) or at the 1972 meeting when the Wayne Shirley/Louis Shores era came to an end. I attended my first ALHRT meeting in 1956 during the American Library Association's Miami conference, gave a paper at the 1961 meeting in Cleveland during ALA, and served as secretary, with N. Orwin Rush as chairman, from 1969 to 1972.

The Pioneers

For its first twenty-five years (1947–72), the ALHRT *was* Wayne Shirley and Louis Shores. For most of those years Shirley was chairman and Shores was secretary. I knew both Shores and Shirley well, the former for more than a quarter of a century, the latter for almost two decades. These reminiscences are a mix derived from reading and some research as well as recollection, observation, and reflection. Let me begin by discussing the two founders of this round table, and then let me review some of its early history.

Louis Shores

I first knew Louis Shores when I was his student (1950–51) at the Florida State University Library School, of which he was the founding dean. In

time I came to know him as a friend and colleague, fellow writer and editor. I became his bibliographer in 1964 and again in 1979, and I edited the first collection of his shorter writings published by Shoe String Press as *Mark Hopkins' Log and Other Essays by Louis Shores* (1965).

In any list of important librarians of the twentieth century Louis Shores (1904–81) would be in the top ten. For his teaching, his deanships (Peabody College Library School in Nashville, Florida State University Library School in Tallahassee), his Fulbright year (1951–52) in the United Kingdom, his editorship of *Collier's Encyclopedia*, his contributions to library literature, his passion for libraries as central to the educational process, his commitment to books, ideas, and people, librarians and readers, the world of librarianship owes much to Louis Shores. Few other librarians in this century have contributed so much to their profession.

His enthusiasm for library history surfaced early on when he wrote his doctoral dissertation, "The Origins of the American College Library, 1638–1800," at Peabody College. First published in book form in 1934 by George Peabody College for Teachers, this classic study in the history of the American academic library was then published in 1935 by Barnes and Noble. It was reprinted in 1966 by Shoe String Press and in 1972 by Gregg Press. It remains today a landmark in the literature of library history, American or otherwise.

Somewhat small of stature and with snow-white hair when I knew him, Shores spoke softly but had a great stage presence when he lectured. A Yankee by birth, he became the quintessential Southerner, spending the major part of his professional career in Tennessee and Florida. He was a man of great charisma, with wide-ranging and varying interests.

It has been said that to be great in a profession one must first be a great human being. Louis Shores was a great librarian and teacher, a great human being. I cherish his memory, and I am very proud of the fact that he was my teacher and my friend.

Wayne Shirley

I first knew Wayne Shirley when he became one of the two co-editors (Louis Shores was the other) of my first book, titled *Books-Libraries-Librarians*, an anthology of library literature that the Shoe String Press issued in 1955. Shirley (1900–73) was born in Franklin, New Hampshire. His father died when Wayne was six years old. Shortly thereafter, his mother, left with three small children to support, was appointed librarian of the Franklin Public Library. She held this position for thirty-five years. Although he did not receive a degree in library science until age twenty-eight, Wayne liked to recall in later years that he had begun his library career by stamping books at the age of seven in his mother's library.

Wayne attended Phillips Academy, Andover (class of 1918), and received the bachelor of science degree from Dartmouth College in 1922. Following graduation from college, he pursued a career in the business world for some five or six years. In 1928 he received the bachelor of library science degree from Pratt Institute Library School, Brooklyn, where one of his teachers was Josephine Adams Rathbone (ALA president, 1931–32).

After working at the New York Public Library (1928–29, 1932–34), the University of New Hampshire (1929–32), and the Pratt Institute Library (1934–38), Wayne Shirley became dean of the Pratt Institute Library School, a position he held for seventeen years (1938–55). He succeeded Josephine Adams Rathbone, whose life and career he would consider in a paper given before the ALHRT in 1959. From Pratt he went to Finch College in New York City as librarian (1955–62). In 1962 he moved to Durham, New Hampshire, and commuted to Boston, where he was librarian of the Wentworth Institute Library for seven years (1962–69). He retired in 1969 and was elected to the New Hampshire legislature for the 1969–70 term. He died suddenly on 25 December 1973. His ashes were scattered on the New Hampshire land he loved so well.

Wayne was a friendly, sociable individual with a New England accent that was to this native Southerner a delight to hear. He wrote to the library press from time to time. His letters to the editor were thoughtful, often witty, never dull.¹

One of his essays, “An American Librarian’s Heritage,” was written for delivery on 4 May 1953, as a public lecture at Florida State University. It was published first in *Challenges to Librarianship*, edited by Louis Shores (1953), and was reprinted with minor changes in *Books-Libraries-Librarians* (1955). What Wayne Shirley had to say about our professional and American heritage in 1953 is as valid today as it was then. It is a solid contribution to the literature of American library history.

A bookman in the old-fashioned and best sense of that word, Wayne Shirley was a librarian with a keen wit and pawky sense of humor. He is remembered by his fellow librarians, students, and friends as a source of encouragement and sound advice.² Louis Shores wrote of his long-time friend that Shirley would be best remembered for “his courageous commitment to constants in an age of perpetual celebration of change.”³

The Founding

The official program of the 1946 midwinter conference of the ALA lists “a discussion meeting to encourage study of the history of the library movement.” In Shores’s essay “The Library and Society,” he recalls that he and Wayne Shirley “went to Carl Milam some time during the summer

of 1946 to plead for a library history meeting somewhere on the ALA convention program." The ALA executive secretary "not only listened to [us] but provoked us to action."⁴

It was at the sixty-sixth annual ALA conference in San Francisco (29 June to 5 July 1947) that Benjamin E. Powell (Duke University Library) presented to the council a petition with the signatures of fifty ALA members, the number required to organize a round table. Powell moved that the proposal to establish a library history round table be approved.⁵ The motion was passed without debate because, as Wayne Shirley frequently recounted, "it was made at about 6 PM when matters go through quickly."⁶ Thus did the ALHRT become an official unit of the ALA.

The first meeting of the ALHRT was held on 30 June 1947, during that San Francisco conference. Both cofounders presented papers. Shirley spoke on "The Decline and Fall of Adult Education." His paper was later published in the *Library Journal* with the title "What Happened to Our Adult Education Hopes?" Shores spoke on "The Importance of Library History." This landmark essay was published for the first time fourteen years later in my *American Library History Reader*.

At the 1948 ALA midwinter meeting in Chicago, Stanley Pargellis (librarian of the Newberry Library) presented a paper titled "Long Life to the Library History Round Table." This paper was published in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* and was reprinted in *An American Library History Reader*. The Library History Round Table (LHRT)—as it is called today after a name change in 1979—can be very proud of the fact that Shores's and Pargellis's papers, both frequently cited, were given before the ALHRT at its first and second meetings.

As already noted, I attended my first ALHRT meeting in 1956. Three papers were given at this meeting: "Southern University Libraries in the Civil War" by Benjamin E. Powell; "Contributions of Louis Round Wilson to American Librarianship" by Maurice F. Tauber; and "The Carnegie Corporation and the Library Renaissance in the South" by Robert M. Lester.

In 1959 I attended the ALA conference in Washington, D.C., and the ALHRT meeting held during that conference. Shirley presided and Shores served as secretary. Two papers were read at the meeting: "Mr. ALA: Carl Hastings Milam" by Emily Miller Danton and "Josephine Adams Rathbone" by Wayne Shirley. Both papers are reprinted in *An American Library History Reader*. Shores was scheduled to give a paper titled "My Favorite Library School Teachers"; he did not give this paper for some reason, and so far as I know he never gave it at any library conference, ALHRT or otherwise.

My *American Library History Reader*—with a foreword by Wayne Shirley and Louis Shores—was scheduled for fall 1961 publication, and so Wayne

Shirley asked me to give a paper on “Life as a Weekend Anthologist” at the ALHRT meeting in Cleveland on 12 July 1961, when the annual ALA conference would be in progress. I was first on the program and was followed by Gerald D. McDonald (New York Public Library), who first described the Erastus Brooks Library, which had inspired two musical compositions. Following this part of McDonald’s presentation, Ralph Smith (New York Public Library) played the two compositions on the piano, to the delight of the audience. McDonald then proceeded with an account of “The Astor Library Ghost.” Jackson E. Towne (librarian emeritus, Michigan State University at East Lansing) was the third speaker with a paper on the life and career of the well-known book historian, Douglas C. McMurtrie (1888–1944).

Wayne Shirley presided at the meeting. In the absence of secretary Louis Shores, who was spending the summer in England, Shirley drafted me to serve as secretary pro tempore with responsibility for preparing a report of the meeting to be published in the proceedings of the Cleveland conference. This report records that about a hundred individuals attended the meeting; in fact, 102 attended.⁷ I still have the three-page “attendance roll” that attendees signed.

The American Library History Round Table meetings during the Shirley/Shores years were always devoted entirely to a program—no minutes were read, no committee reports were given, no dues were collected. Unusual? Yes, but herein lay for many the appeal of the ALHRT: learn some library history and hear something “of those who were truly great”—or perhaps only near great. Any expenses the Round Table may have had (stamps, stationery, envelopes, telephone calls) were paid for by either Shirley or Shores. Shirley usually presided, opening the meetings with the greeting “Welcome, friends of American Library History.” Shores passed out a sheet or two of paper for those attending the meeting to sign. This document became the ALHRT membership roll. The Shirley/Shores style of conducting Round Table meetings can perhaps best be described as a kind of formal informality.

The Rush/Marshall Years

When Shirley gave up the chairmanship in 1968, N. Orwin Rush (Florida State University) became chairman and continued to conduct meetings much in the Shirley manner. When Shores gave up the office of secretary, he appointed me to be his replacement. I held this office for some four years (1969–72). The Round Table during the Rush/Marshall years differed very little from the Shirley/Shores years. I do not recall whether Rush and I were both ever present at Round Table meetings. When Rush was absent I assumed his responsibilities, and he assumed

mine when I was not present. Two ALHRT meetings from our tenure merit comment here.

In 1970 the ALHRT met during the ALA conference in Detroit from 28 June to 4 July. Two papers on "The American Library in Paris" were given. Foster Mohrhardt (program officer for the Council on Library Resources) dealt with the history of the American Library in Paris from 1960 to 1970. Theodore Waller of the Grolier Educational Corporation spoke on the future of the American library.

Attendance at this meeting was modest, exceedingly modest. No more than ten or twelve ALA folk attended. Among those few were Sir Frank Francis (director emeritus of the British Museum) and Lady Francis. Since N. Orwin Rush did not attend the 1970 meeting, I presided and introduced the speakers. For me the highlight of this meeting was the opportunity I had to meet and talk (however briefly) with Sir Frank and his wife.⁸

In 1972 the ALHRT observed its twenty-fifth anniversary. Louis Shores spoke on "The Library and Society." In this paper he reminisced about the first twenty-five years of ALHRT, and you can read his paper in the July–October 1973 issue of the *Journal of Library History*. I did not attend this meeting, and I doubt that Wayne Shirley attended, since he had been retired by this time for a number of years. He died in December 1973.

Contested Version

Lee Shiflett describes the 1972 meeting in detail in his carefully researched, eminently readable *Louis Shores: Defining Educational Librarianship*. This account appears to have been based in large measure on Shiflett's interview with Michael Harris in Washington, D.C., on 4 January 1989. This account, in my view, cannot be characterized as accurate, in the "extreme acceptance of the word without some risk of terminological inexactitude,"⁹ to use the words spoken by Winston Churchill in an address to the House of Commons on 22 February 1906, to describe a great inaccuracy in a very different context.¹⁰ According to Shiflett's account, I was present at the meeting and was scheduled to nominate N. Orwin Rush to continue as chairman. I was to close the nominations immediately. However, as I have already noted, I was not at this meeting.

The ALA officials had for some years not been too happy with the informal manner in which the ALHRT conducted its affairs. Louis Shores was aware of the ALA's concerns and knew "the round table needed to have an actual election and that Rush and Marshall had no intention of actually holding one." Shores, according to Shiflett, wanted Michael Harris to be the next chairman of the ALHRT and had so indicated to

Harris, but “to be considered meant that he [Harris] had to be nominated in the moment between Marshall’s official request for other names and his closing of the nominations.”

From this account the reader of Shiflett’s *Louis Shores* can—and probably will—infer that Shores was attempting to manipulate the ALHRT election. Louis Shores was not a manipulator. Manipulation was simply not his style and was completely foreign to his manner of getting something accomplished.

Shiflett records that Harris was nominated by Peggy Sullivan, that he was “narrowly elected and Shores, Shirley, Rush, and Marshall retired gracefully from the ALHRT.”¹¹ If by “retiring” from the ALHRT Shiflett means that I would no longer be active in the ALHRT, that is certainly true, for after the 1972 meeting I had no official role in the Round Table. In fact, my “retirement” from the ALHRT really came at the end of the 1970 meeting in Detroit. When, however, I have attended ALA conferences, which has not been often in the years since 1970, I have attended ALHRT meetings, and I well remember the 1976 meeting in Chicago during the observance of the ALA centennial. That the ALHRT meeting was devoted to “Historical Writings: Editorial Problems and Pleasures,” with George S. Bobinski and Howard W. Winger as speakers. Bobinski was serving on the editorial board of the *Dictionary of American Library Biography*, which was published in 1978. Winger was editing the July 1976 library history issue of *Library Trends*. Godfrey Dewey conveyed his best wishes to the ALA centennial conference via a tape-recorded greeting, symbolic of the Melvil Dewey presence at the 1876 Conference of Librarians at which the ALA was founded. The venue chosen by Melvil Dewey’s son for this greeting was, appropriately, the ALHRT meeting.¹²

ALHRT “First Cousins”

As an ALHRT cofounder and longtime officer, Louis Shores could and did involve the Round Table in the cosponsorship of the Library History Seminar. The venue for the first three seminars (1961, 1963, 1968) was the School of Library Science at Florida State University. After the third seminar, various institutions, usually with library schools, have served as host for the seminar.

In 1966 Shores founded the *Journal of Library History* and published it at Florida State University. He served as editor for the first two volumes (1966, 1967) and then became editor emeritus from 1968 to 1976. In 1976 the journal moved to the University of Texas in Austin and in time became *Libraries & Culture: A Journal of Library History*. Shore’s editorial and advisory boards included several librarians who were identified with

the ALHRT. Current members of the LHRT serve on the editorial board of *Libraries & Culture*.

The LHRT at Fifty

The observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the LHRT is indeed a time to celebrate. Both Louis Shores and Wayne Shirley would be pleased that their Round Table has enjoyed a half-century of life. The Round Table through these many years has provided, directly and indirectly, a forum for the presentation and discussion of a variety of topics in the history of libraries and librarianship. Perhaps more importantly, the Round Table has provided library history with a kind of visibility that would not be possible without it.

The past is frequently more interesting than the present or the future. If we claim that "the past is past," we surrender the future. A profession that neglects, forgets, or ignores its past is a profession that has no future. The LHRT is one way of saying that library history is, as we enter a new century and a new millennium, alive and well. The LHRT insures that we do not say, "The past is past."

In 1998 the LHRT began the second half-century of its life. As library history aficionados celebrate the first fifty years, they, and those who come after them, can look forward with great interest to the Round Table's next fifty years and beyond. In these years library history will inevitably change, and the topics to which the Round Table turns its attention will be different in many ways. But the enduring value of recalling our past and remembering those who came before us will never change.

Let there continue to be long life for the LHRT. And may *Libraries & Culture* enjoy a very long life with it. May it never, never, be available only on a CD-ROM or only in an electronic format!

Notes

1. A good example of Shirley's style can be found in his letter to the editor in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* (February 1966) written in response to some less-than-kind comments Jesse Shera had made in his *WLB* column (November 1965) about the ALHRT and the *Journal of Library History*, the first issue of which was published in January 1966.

2. Marshall, "William Wayne Shirley."

3. Shores, "Wayne Shirley: In Memorium," 291.

4. Shores, "The Library and Society," 143.

5. *ALA Bulletin* 41 (15 September 1947): P-18.

6. Marshall, ed., *An American Library History Reader*, xiii.

7. *American Library Association 80th Annual Conference Proceedings*, 107.

8. *MTSU Librarian* 43 (July 1970): 2. The *MTSU Librarian* (July 1967–August 1976) was an in-house newsletter published on a regularly irregular schedule for

the Library Faculty and Staff of Todd Library, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro. It ceased publication with number 118.

9. Churchill, "South Africa (Chinese Labour)," 88.

10. There are some other inexactitudes in the Shiflett biography that were missed when the manuscript was copyedited or proofread: *Resources* and Adult Services Division (p. 272) should be *Reference* and Adult Services Division; *Isadora* Gilbert Mudge (p. 275) should be *Isadore* Gilbert Mudge. The new FSU library school building was dedicated on 21 November 1981; it *was not*, as Shiflett states (p. 273), named for Louis Shores at the dedication. The building was named for him on 15 October 1983. Shiflett states in his biographical sketch of Shores published in the supplement to the *Dictionary of American Library Biography* that the library school building was named for Shores in 1985. As something of a footnote to this note, let me record that Mrs. Shores died on 24 September 1983. She did know that the library school building was to be named for her husband.

11. Shiflett, *Louis Shores*, 261–62.

12. *MTSU Librarian* 117 (July 1976): 2.

References

- American Library Association 80th Annual Conference Proceedings, Cleveland, Ohio, July 9–15, 1961*. Chicago: American Library Association, [1961].
- Churchill, Winston S. "South Africa (Chinese Labour), February, 22, 1906." In Robert Rhodes James, ed., *Churchill Speaks . . . Collected Speeches 1897–1963*. New York: Chelsea House, 1980, 87–91.
- Marshall, John David, ed. *An American Library History Reader*. Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1961.
- . "As I Remember Wayne Shirley." *Journal of Library History* 9 (October 1974): 293.
- . *Louis Shores, Author-Librarian: A Bibliography*. Tallahassee: Gamma Chapter, Beta Phi Mu, Florida State University School of Library Science, 1979.
- . "William Wayne Shirley (1900–1973)." In Bohdan S. Wynar, ed., *Dictionary of American Library Biography*. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1978, 484–85.
- Pargellis, Stanley. "Long Life to the Library History Round Table." In John David Marshall, ed., *An American Library History Reader*. Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1961, 8–14. Also published in *Wilson Library Bulletin* 22 (April 1948): 601–3+.
- Powell, Lawrence Clark. "Of Those Who Were Truly Great." *Library Journal* 87 (October 1962): 3404+.
- Rush, N. Orwin. "Wayne Shirley, 1900–1973: An Appreciation." *Journal of Library History* 9 (October 1974): 294–95.
- Shera, Jesse. "Without Reserve: A Renaissance in Library History?" *Wilson Library Bulletin* 40 (November 1965): 281.
- Shiflett, Lee. *Louis Shores: Defining Educational Librarianship*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1996.
- . "Louis Shores (1904–1981)." In Wayne A. Wiegand, ed., *Supplement to the Dictionary of American Library Biography*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1990, 123–29.
- Shirley, Wayne. "An American Librarian's Heritage." In John David Marshall, Wayne Shirley, and Louis Shores, eds., *Books-Libraries-Librarians*. Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1955, 278–91.

- . “Letters to the Editor.” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 40 (February 1966): 500.
- . “What Happened to Our Adult Education Hopes?” *Library Journal* (November 1947): 1503–7.
- Shores, Louis. “The Importance of Library History.” In John David Marshall, ed., *An American Library History Reader*. Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1961, 3–7. Also published in *Mark Hopkins' Log and Other Essays by Louis Shores*. Selected by John David Marshall. Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1964, 50–55.
- . “The Library and Society.” *Journal of Library History* 8 (July–October 1973): 143–49.
- . *Quiet World . . . The Professional Autobiography of Louis Shores*. Hamden, Conn.: Linet Books/Shoe String Press, 1975.
- . “Wayne Shirley: In Memorium.” *Journal of Library History* 9 (October 1974): 291–92.