

## CSLA GEMS OF THE PAST

The theme of this 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference is “Gems of the Past, Present and Future.” I have been asked to give you some historical gems and I will begin by telling you a little of CSLA’s founding. What I am sharing has been taken from published histories, Dorothy Rodda’s talks and other sources, since I have no firsthand knowledge of these beginnings.

CSLA was started with the vision of one person who felt that educational guidance was needed to support the thousands of church and synagogue libraries that were struggling to serve their local congregations. Near the beginning of the modern church and synagogue library movement in the early 1960’s, Dr. John F. Harvey, Dean of the Graduate School of Library Science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, became aware of the proliferation of church and synagogue libraries. He concluded that there were more religious libraries than all the public, school and academic libraries put together. But neither his library school nor any other that he was aware of was providing training for this huge number of special librarians, most of whom were volunteers and many who were not professional librarians. Visits to a number of these libraries convinced him of the need for education in the field. Congregational library quality varied

greatly—in size, organization and staffing. Some consisted of a shelf of castoff books which circulated rarely. At the same time, he found some well-chosen and well-organized collections supervised by professionals who volunteered their skills to their congregations. And all shades in between seemed to indicate that some organization should be providing service for this group. Furthermore, he felt it was a fruitful field for the interest of book publishers and library suppliers.

John Harvey began by working to organize annual one-day conferences in Philadelphia that consisted of workshops covering the major phases of librarianship for congregational libraries. His search for conference leaders brought to light a number of persons who were vitally interested in this branch of librarianship plus two students who shared his vision. One of these was a synagogue librarian, May Weine, who persuaded him to sponsor a 6-week course in cataloging for synagogue librarians. The other was Joyce White, who was in the process of upgrading her B.S. in Library Science to a master's degree. At this point she was one credit shy of the needed requirements. Learning of her interest in church libraries, Harvey suggested that she could earn the additional credit by directing a one-day workshop for church librarians. The workshop was successful beyond their wildest dreams. Thinking they might attract 50 to 100 people,

they were astonished when registrations poured in from New Jersey and Delaware as well as all over eastern Pennsylvania. Limitations of space and available leaders made it necessary to close registrations at 250.

Convinced that a core of leaders was available to form a nationwide church and synagogue library association, Harvey decided to test his idea. In the summer of 1966, the annual convention of the American Library Association was scheduled for New York City. John Harvey decided to call a meeting at the headquarters hotel, of persons he knew to be interested in church and synagogue libraries. Twenty-seven of the 40 persons to whom he wrote attended the meeting. In this group were persons of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths, representatives of denominational and regional congregational library groups and publishers of religious literature. Among them were librarians, editors, teachers and administrators. Joyce White, Ruth Smith and Dorothy Rodda were three of those attending who were later active over a long period of years in CSLA. All 27 reacted favorably to John Harvey's suggestion of forming a national ecumenical and interfaith association of local church, parish and synagogue librarians. He agreed to write a constitution and bylaws based on the documents of other library associations and to draw up a slate of officers that should include two candidates for each of the four usual offices. In due course, these were sent

to a mailing list garnered from the Drexel workshops. The Constitution was approved and officers were elected. These officers plus 14 appointed chairpersons comprised the first Executive Board.

The first meeting of this group was held on July 11, 1967 in the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia with 12 persons attending. John Harvey opened the meeting with a statement concerning the formation of the Association and his hopes for its future, gave the brand-new gavel to the President, Ruth S. Smith, and announced he would be leaving the country to be a Fullbright professor in Iran. I'm sure you could have heard a pin drop! But what trust he must have had that these new leaders would not only fly but soar! Then he handed Dot Rodda, who was the newly elected treasurer, \$5.00 for his dues. The other 11 present quickly followed suit and the Association now had \$60.00 in its treasury, most of which was used to open a post office box in Bryn Mawr, PA in the name of the Association. And so our fledgling organization began to work without its founding member whose vision had created it.

Dot Rodda's master's thesis at Drexel's Library School had been the compilation of a directory of church and synagogue libraries in the United States. Starting with the 3,100 names in that directory, a mailing was sent out which resulted in 247 members in the first year from 35 states,

Washington, DC and two foreign countries. Since memberships were coming to Dot Rodda as treasurer, she was appointed Executive Secretary at a salary of \$1.00 a year with the result that the national office and all its records were in her home.

The first project undertaken by the original Board was a newsletter. Called the NEWS BULLETIN, it had 2 issues in the spring and fall of 1968 and was sent out to all the new members as their dues came in. In 1969, the publication was renamed CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE LIBRARIES, and became a bi-monthly bulletin of 12 mimeographed pages. In 1970, it became a professionally printed publication and subsequently was expanded to 16 pages and eventually to 24 pages. And then, this year, our bi-monthly was renamed CONGREGATIONAL LIBRARIES TODAY. Incidentally, it was John Harvey who grew tired of saying “church and synagogue” and searched for a word that would cover both. He came up with “congregational” which has obviously stuck. In January 1971, a specific section of the bulletin was set for book reviews and in 1973 a Book Review Editor was appointed. THE HORN BOOK, Inc. was our first institutional member and our first advertiser.

The first year of the Association saw the establishment of the First Annual Conference again held at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in

Philadelphia on May 27-29, 1968. A number of years ago, Joyce White told me that the hotel contract was signed with the Association having \$20.00 in the treasury. Talk about faith!! However, 145 participants representing 14 denominations and faiths, from 15 states, attended this conference. It established the format we use today with a series of workshops or classes interspersed with plenary sessions addressed by speakers on topics of an inspirational and informational nature. Workshop topics covered the basic elements of library practice. A tour of outstanding area congregational libraries was held and 16 exhibits were open to the attendees.

In the next two years, the annual conferences were held in Washington, DC and Pittsburgh and the Philadelphia members missed having their annual spring workshop. So they decided to form CSLA's first chapter to provide for ongoing opportunities for training and mutual help in that region. Since they had interested people from New Jersey and Delaware as well as quite far from Philadelphia, they decided to call it the Delaware Valley Chapter and it was formed in 1970.

The Association's publications program got under way in 1969. The first entitled, A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE LIBRARY RESOURCES, was a 10 page mimeographed booklet. The subsequent bibliographies and how-to guides covered all areas of library

practice and were professionally printed. In 1977, Bill Gentz was named Publications Director and became the Association's second staff member along with Dot Rodda as our Executive Secretary

In 1984, halfway through my year as CSLA President, Dot Rodda and Bill Gentz indicated their plans to retire in June of 1987 and I knew CSLA was at a crossroads. An Ad Hoc Committee on Staff Operations was formed and it soon became evident that simply replacing Dot and Bill was not the answer. CSLA had grown too big and too complex. We could not continue to ask a professional librarian to do mostly clerical work, we could not continue to ask an Executive Secretary to work more than 40 hours a week, and we certainly could not continue to have the CSLA office in someone's back bedroom. These factors plus the wise decision to computerize the office prior to Dot Rodda's retirement (an unparalleled gift Dot gave to us), made us realize that the crossroads we had come to was a major one indeed! But with the help of outstanding leadership in CSLA, we were able to make recommendations for staffing, office changes and structural changes in CSLA's organization, and then appoint a 5 person search committee which needed a year to set up a process, solicit candidates, interview candidates, and bring recommendations back to the Executive Board for their approval. So it was in 1987, at CSLA's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, we introduced

Lorraine L. Burson of Portland ,OR as our new Executive Director, announced that Bill Andrew of Atlanta, GA would be our new Publications Editor, and indicated that the CSLA headquarters would move across the country from Philadelphia to Portland, OR. Then Lorraine spent a week in Philadelphia with Dot getting expert on-the-job training. The move to Portland went well and the office was located in a commercial building. Lorraine hired 2 part-time secretaries, a Publications Secretary and a Membership/Financial Secretary. Then at the end of 1993, when Lorraine retired, a relatively easy transition became possible when one of our part-time secretaries, Judy Janzen, was hired to take Lorraine's place, and subsequently became CSLA's Administrator.

So the vision of John Harvey, combined with the talent and hard work of our original leaders, set a standard for CSLA that enabled the organization to thrive. And throughout our 40-year history, professional and non-professional librarians have worked side by side as equals, with one passionate goal, to increase the effectiveness of local church and synagogue libraries wherever they might be. And in this work, we have been blessed by God. Thanks be to God.

Talk given by: Marilyn Demeter on July 16, 2007  
Church and Synagogue Library Association  
40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference  
The Inn at Valley Forge, King of Prussia, PA



