

Pamela Snelson

# Red Letter Day: May 31, 2015

Celebrating ACRL's 75th anniversary

This month we begin a yearlong celebration of ACRL's 75th anniversary. Following a new constitution that included the creation of self-governing divisions within the association, the ALA Council recognized its first division on May 31, 1940. That inaugural division was ACRL, the Association of College and Reference Libraries.

Yes, you read right—Association of College and Reference Libraries. It was not until 1956 that the word *Research* was substituted for *Reference*—in response to the Reference Libraries Section of ACRL joining a newly formed Library Reference Services Division.

One can reach even further back to 1890 to find historic antecedents for ACRL. In that year, the first meeting of the College Library Section took place at the ALA Annual Conference in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. This would make 2015 the awkward sounding Quasquicentennial (125 years) of this event. The College Library Section morphed into the College and Reference Library Section, the immediate precursor of Association of College and Reference Libraries.

## Why celebrate ACRL

We celebrate this 75th anniversary for three reasons: to commemorate our legacy, to affirm our present, and to inspire our future.

### *Commemorate our legacy*

Every ACRL member considering the association's contributions to librarianship and higher education may come up with a different list.

For me, the ACRL conference, ACRL publications, and the association's advocacy efforts spring to the top. In 1978, ACRL was the first division to hold a conference distinct from ALA. With a barely dry MLS degree, I was among the 2,600

participants at this historic event. And it is with more than a touch of nostalgia that I place the now biennial conference foremost in ACRL's legacy. It is the premier professional development opportunity for academic librarians, having diversified its content over the years in response to members' interests and



Association of College & Research Libraries  
A DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Pamela Snelson is college librarian at Franklin and Marshall College, e-mail: [pamela.snelson@fandm.edu](mailto:pamela.snelson@fandm.edu)

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changes in the profession. Portland will be the site for the ACRL 2015 conference and a nexus for 75th-anniversary celebratory events.

Did you know that one of the first ACRL activities, a year before ALA Council recognition, was to create an official journal, *College & Research Libraries*? Now open access and online only as of 2014, *C&RL* continues its role to offer librarians quality research in the field of academic librarianship. With the addition of a monograph series (1952), *Choice* (1964), *C&RL News* (1967), and *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* (now *RBM*) (1986) and other pertinent publications, ACRL has built a deep knowledge base for the benefit of libraries and librarians.

One of the primary strengths of any association lies in the potential power of a group voice. Initiatives in the areas of scholarly communication, standards and guidelines, information literacy, public policy education, and liaison activities with higher education organizations attest to ACRL's strong legacy in advocacy and its effectiveness as a leader.

### *Affirm our present*

ACRL's Plan for Excellence,<sup>1</sup> adopted by the Board of Directors in 2011, sets out three strategic areas for the next five years: value of academic libraries, student learning, and research and scholarly environment, accompanied by an ambitious set of goals and objectives. Continual revision and renewal will keep the plan relevant and strategic. The recently revised Standards for Libraries in Higher Education<sup>2</sup> provide libraries with a tool to assess today's performance. The more than 300 panels, contributed papers, invited speakers, roundtables, etc. expected at ACRL 2015 attest to a vibrant and stimulating current environment.

### *Inspire our future*

The future of ACRL won't be found in its past. Certainly the past and the present will inform the direction of ACRL in years to come, and the landscape of higher education will affect priorities. But the shape of ACRL's centennial

year will be determined by its current 11,600-plus members. Just as in the past, member leaders and volunteers created and sustained the many programs that count as ACRL's greatest achievements, the future will be shaped by those members who step up and become part of the vibrant ACRL community.

To start a dialogue about new roles for libraries and librarians, the 75th anniversary Task Force commissioned a special report to be authored by notable writers in our field. Steven Bell, Lorcan Dempsey, and Barbara Fister will collaborate on a paper to be released prior to ACRL 2015, and debated and discussed during the conference. It is my hope that the excitement and publicity generated by the 75th Anniversary will inspire ACRL members to realize the vision articulated in the Plan for Excellence: "Academic and research librarians and libraries are essential to a thriving global community of learners and scholars."

### **The celebration**

In spring 2012, the ACRL Board of Directors created a task force to plan celebratory activities related to ACRL's 75th anniversary. It has been my pleasure to lead this creative and talented task force. Members include Nancy Allen, University of Denver; Steven Bell, Temple University; Tyrone Cannon, University of San Francisco; Deb Dancik, Willamette University; Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Illinois Wesleyan University; Frances Maloy, Union College; Bede Mitchell, Georgia Southern University; Mary Jane Petrowski, ACRL; Jill Sodr, Mott Community College; Betsy Wilson, University of Washington; and Greta Wood, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In our column in the June 2014 issue, we'll share more information on how you can participate in the 75th anniversary celebration.

### **Notes**

1. ACRL's Plan for Excellence, [www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/strategicplan](http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/strategicplan).
2. Standards for Libraries in Higher Education, [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standard-libraries](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standard-libraries) ¶¶