

Early History of the Pacific Northwest Regional Group

On October 10, 1953 a meeting of twenty-three medical and allied science librarians held in Seattle, Washington, resulted in the formation of the Pacific Northwest Regional Group. There were twelve participants from the state of Washington, six from the state of Oregon and five from the province of British Columbia. ¹ [see [Appendix 3](#)] Among those active in setting up this professional association were: T. H. Cahalan, Librarian of the University of Oregon Dental School Library; Aeneas P. Collins, Librarian of the National Microbiological Institute, Hamilton, Montana; Alderson Fry, Librarian of the University of Washington Health Sciences Library; Doreen E. Fraser, Librarian of the University of British Columbia Medical School Library; Bertha B. Hallam, Librarian of the University of Oregon Medical School Library; Ruth E. Harlamert, Librarian of the King County Medical Society Library; and Ellen Ludeen, Librarian, U. S. Naval Hospital Medical Library, Bremerton, Washington.

In addition to helping organize the first meeting, Bertha Brandon Hallam was the first chairman of the Pacific Northwest Regional Group. She remains the only Medical Library Association member from the Pacific Northwest to serve as President of the Medical Library Association, which occurred in 1956/57. ^{2,3} [see [Appendix 1](#)]

The Pacific Northwest region was at this time considered to be Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Although distances between population centers were great in this area, the first meeting proved so successful that those attending decided to hold meetings once a year. The next meeting was therefore scheduled for Seattle, the central location, in the fall of 1954 with Alderson Fry as organizer and chairman.

It was not until November 12, 1955, however, that the second meeting of the Pacific Northwest Regional Group occurred. The meeting place was the University of Washington Health Sciences Library, Seattle, and twenty-three librarians were in attendance, representing twelve libraries in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. The program chairman was Bertha Hallam, who was assisted by Jean Ashford of the University of Washington Health Sciences Library and Ruth E. Harlamert of the King County Medical Society. Recruitment of medical librarians was the topic stressed by the Regional Group leaders at the MLA convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1955. ⁴ For further details on the program of the November 1955 meeting, see [Northwest Medicine](#), volume 55, page 115, January 1956. The next Pacific Northwest Regional Group meeting was scheduled for the fall of 1957 in Vancouver, British Columbia with Doreen E. Fraser as chairman.

To understand the reasons for the birth of the PNRG/MLA, one must realize that it occurred ten years after the first regional group had been established and one must recognize the factors, which influenced the development of the eight regional groups already in existence. Insight is provided by a reference to a panel discussion on regional meetings, which took place on June 18, 1953 during the 52nd annual meeting of the MLA. ⁵ The panel moderator stated that the regional groups began in 1943 in Philadelphia during the period when national meetings were abandoned due to World War II. Praise was expressed for the value of regional groups to the MLA as an organization and to librarians as individuals. For the Association the regional groups appeared to provide a mechanism for the strengthening of national projects and activities; for the individual

librarian, regional groups allowed for "closer fellowship for professional and social reasons and participation of junior staff members with subsequent development of their talents." ⁵ Attending this discussion was A. P. Collins from the Rocky Mountain Laboratory, Hamilton, Montana.

Assistance in the understanding of a national program or project is provided by the report of MLA's Committee on Resources, chaired by Alderson Fry and given at the 52nd annual meeting of the MLA. ⁶ It becomes apparent that American librarians were shocked by the destruction of the library resources due to the war in Europe and elsewhere, and had begun to take measures to preserve medical cultural resources in the United States in case of an atomic war. The Committee proposed that the MLA promote the development of a regional medical library in several areas of the United States. If this plan were to be acceptable many details would have to be worked out such as: regional catalogs, pooling of storage areas, the duty of taking assigned material, sources of material (stock duplicates of the few very large libraries, use of the MLA's Exchange), regional want lists. Not only were American librarians trying to protect and strengthen their own resources but, supported by such funding as the Rockefeller Foundation, they were also trying to rebuild the resources of foreign countries. Regional groups, therefore, joined in this national and international project. "It became an Association duty to save duplicates and build libraries; we were always looking for duplicates." ⁷

It is interesting to note that a working relationship existed for a time between the Pacific Northwest Regional Group and the Pacific Northwest Library Association in the early history of the Group. The Regional Group sponsored a health sciences library survey for the PNLA's Library Development Project. The University of Washington Press published the project report in 1961.⁸

Between 1953 and 1971 the Pacific Northwest Regional Group met biennially due to the deterrent of geographic distance among libraries. During this time Alaska had been added as a participating state. From 1971, because of the increasing need to communicate more frequently, a decision was made to meet annually. The twentieth meeting was held in Spokane, Washington on October 1 to 4, 1980 with seventy-four librarians in attendance. By this time the province of Alberta had been added to the Regional Group.

Programs for Regional Group meeting have always been very well developed. In addition to the presentation of library topics, there has been an ongoing practice of including clinical speakers. The first Continuing Education class sponsored by the Regional Group was held in 1975 in connection with the annual meeting in Victoria, B.C. Frances Ishii taught CE22: Planning Hospital Library Facilities to a class of 23 attendees. In recent years MLA continuing education courses have been conducted on the basis of a preliminary survey. [See [Appendix 4](#)]

Between its inception in 1953 and the year 1977 the Pacific Northwest Regional Group met informally and a variety of names was given to Regional Group officers. The local librarian in charge of the program was expected to handle all arrangements; including the conducting of the business meeting and the coordination of business between the MLA and the Regional Group. In 1977 at the business meeting in Tacoma, Washington, Marion von Bruck, chairman of the Regional Group, drew attention to the overload problem and

steps were taken to develop bylaws in accordance with MLA's request. In Vancouver, British Columbia, on October 14, 1978 the Regional Group became formally organized by adopting bylaws, electing officers of a Steering Committee, and incorporating payment of dues into its activities. ⁹

Several committees were established after the formal organization in October 1978. The Bylaws Committee worked on a revision of the Group's bylaws in order to conform to the new MLA group structure. A Regional Legislation Committee was formed to work closely with the MLA's Legislation Committee and increase involvement of members in the political process at both regional and state levels. A PNRG/MLA-RML Liaison Committee was also created and an Archivist appointed in 1980 with responsibility for preserving the Group's records.

In its first twenty-five years, the Pacific Northwest Regional Group demonstrated a strong commitment to the objectives of other regional groups and to the goals of the MLA. With its membership of 135, the Group looked forward to becoming a Chapter of the Medical Library Association under the new group structure.

References

1. Hallam BB. Proceedings, Fifty-third annual meeting, Medical Library Association, Washington, D.C., June 15 - 18, 1954. Pacific Northwest Regional Group. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1955 Jan; 43(1): 105-6.
2. Troxel W. Bertha Brandon Hallam: President, Medical Library Association, 1956-57. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1956 July; 44(3):363-5.
3. Hughes M. Bertha Brandon Hallam (1895-1982). Bull Med Libr Assoc 1983 Apr; 71(2):248-9.
4. Hallam BB. Proceedings, Fifty-fifth annual meeting, Medical Library Association Los Angeles, California, June 19 - 22, 1956. Pacific Northwest Regional Group. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1957 Jan(1); 45: 48.
5. Dumke LB. Proceedings, Fifty-second annual meeting, Medical Library Association, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 16-19, 1953. Regional groups. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1954 Jan; 42(1): 85-86.
6. Fry A. Proceedings, Fifty-second annual meeting, Medical Library Association, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 16 - 19, 1953. Report of the committee on resources. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1954 Jan; 42(1): 105-6.
7. Ashford J. Personal communication. Dec 1980.
8. Dumke LB. Proceedings, Fifty-seventh annual meeting, Medical Library Association, June 2-6, 1958. Report of the Regional Group Liaison Officer. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1958 Oct; 46(4);570.
9. Leith AR. Regional group news; Pacific Northwest Regional Group of MLA. MLA News 1979 Aug; 11 - 12.
10. Keys TE. Past presidents I have known. Bull Med Libr Assoc 1975 Apr; 63(2):216-22.