

BETA PHI MU ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

"FAMOUS LIBRARIANS IN MISSOURI"

INTERVIEW: SUSANNA ALEXANDER

MARCH 11, 1980

INTERVIEWER: MARY KEHR

ORAL HISTORY: PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES

SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATIONAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

AURORA E. DAVIS

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Interviewee: Susanna Alexander  
Date of Interview: March 11, 1980  
Interviewer: Mary Kehr  
Transcriber: Mary Kehr  
Number of Tapes: One

Tape 1, Side 1

INTRODUCTION

Kehr: Susanna Alexander has a distinguished career of service in public and academic libraries in Missouri. She has been with the Missouri State Library since 1965, serving as the Associate State Librarian since 1966.

Because of her familiarity with library development in Missouri, Mrs. Alexander was asked to participate in the Beta Phi Mu Oral History Project "Famous Librarians of Missouri".

The following interview was done March 11, 1980, in her home in Jefferson City with Mary Kehr.

Kehr: Would you like to relate for us some of the activities and goals of the Missouri Library Association from about 1950?

Alexander: When I joined the Missouri Library Association [MLA] in the late 1940s or early 50s [1950s], I at that time was involved in technical services. My first activities with the association were through the Catalogers Round Table, which is part of history now I think. But at that time, we were very anxious that the catalogers in the state have a group so they could talk about the possible problems and the future. I found the MLA an excellent way to become acquainted with librarians throughout the state and in all types of libraries.

I suppose almost since the early 50s [1950s] I have been active in some phase of the association. I have felt that the main goals of the MLA have been to improve library services for the people of Missouri. I think more recently that we've found all associations' memberships to be more concerned, or concerned to a greater degree I might say, in terms of the welfare of individuals in the profession. But I feel still the MLA concentrates to a great extent on improving library services for the people.

Through the years, after I became active in the Public Library Association, I found that there're strong ties there among the public librarians. Incidentally, I think this was along about in 1955 that I became active in the Public Library Association. At

that time there were two groups in the MLA, one was the municipal librarians, and the other county and regional librarians. Just about the time I became active the two groups merged, so I was very happy to be a part of the new Public Library Division of the MLA. And from that day forward I think that that group has worked together to--all libraries that were serving the public as public libraries.

There have been times throughout the history of the Association when there would be concerns that perhaps the MLA was more interested in public libraries, public libraries dominated the Association. I think that the Association has a good history of presidents from the various divisions, probably fewer from the School Library Division than from some of the other divisions, because it's more difficult for school librarians to become active. However, there have been presidents throughout the years from that division too.

Now I think we're seeing a major change in the membership of the Association in its total concern for library service without any distinction of types of libraries. I think with the development of cooperative efforts and networking in the state, what we're now seeing is that libraries who have seen themselves over the years as academic librarians, public librarians, school librarians, and special librarians, now see that there are common problems and common goals. They also understand the problems of each other to a greater extent I would say.

I have been working with the public libraries over the years. I have often said that I feel if nothing else can happen, the school librarians and the public librarians should have coffee together at least once a week in order to recognize that they do both have problems, and that it's very easy to criticize the other until we do know their problems.

I think that the MLA has matured considerably in these twenty (20) some years. For one thing, when I was president of the MLA back in the early 60s [1960s], the officers did a great deal of the technical part of it. This became a heavy drain upon the library and the individual as well. I was delighted to see the Association move into the position where they could hire an executive coordinator, and could have an office, could have an association in their own right, and not depend heavily upon any individual institution. This has certainly been possible. I know that it has been a struggle financially for the Association, but they have, I think--shouldn't say they--I'm still part of the Association--that we have done an excellent piece of work in accomplishing some major growth. I can see the awareness in recent years when now and then I sit in on an executive meeting and I see how much more businesslike things are run, how much more efficient the whole operation is. I think that the executive board and the membership too have much clearer defined goals and,



I think I said earlier, a much more mature attitude at the executive office. Shall we move on to . . .

Kehr: Well, I had read some things about the MLA being involved in first, earlier, before the graduate school [School of Library and Informational Science, University of Missouri-Columbia], a move toward certification . . .

Alexander: For a number of years one of the major legislative programs of the MLA was to attempt to get certification for public librarians. I think that the major concern then was that many of the public libraries were headed by people who did not have a master's degree in library science or did not have library science courses at all. Although many of these people were doing excellent jobs, I think there was a feeling that the Association should attempt to strengthen the quality of the leadership in the libraries. The argument that was frequently used with the General Assembly [state of Missouri] was that these people were handling taxpayers' money, they should be qualified to do this kind of work. Always in every piece of legislation that was introduced there was what was commonly called the "grandfather clause" that would give certification to the people who were in libraries at that time.

One of the things that the Association did to strengthen their hand in this regard was to have a voluntary certification program in the Association. This was possible for anybody working in the library to be certified for various periods of time depending upon their education and their experience. This seemed to be an important aspect until the library school was created and accredited. Since that time I haven't heard anything about certification, and I think that there's every reason to believe that libraries are as well off now without it. One of the arguments against it to the members of the General Assembly was that it was just another licensing group, and that they tried to steer away from this sort of thing.

Many states in the United States do have certification programs for librarians. I think that I hear more now that maybe, perhaps that we should have certification of libraries, that there should be certain legal standards that libraries have to meet, which again is true in some states, but not in Missouri. I suppose that I am a bit doubtful that in my lifetime there will be such a thing, because I think one of the things that I have learned in working with Missouri librarians and with Missouri citizens generally, is that we do like to do things from grassroots, and we like to maintain our own control and our own decision making. I think it's one of the strengths of Missouri libraries. So after all the years of attempting to get a certification program through, it seems to me now that we're just as well off without it.

I do think the MLA had some part in the creation of the library school at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Certainly the

the libraries in the state and the citizens of the state have gained considerably from the addition of that School. Of course, none of us want to take away from the real leadership that Dr. Ralph Parker gave to the creation of that School. Since I worked in Columbia for a good many years, I had many contacts with him and the School from the very beginning when it was first a few courses in the Department of Education. Jim [Frances J.] Flood first came to Columbia to teach these courses and the very beginning of the program. We've watched that grow and grow into the master's degree program and then to full accreditation by the American Library Association. I think that all of us in the library community really felt that this was a red-letter day when that came about.

We have seen real benefits from the School in terms of staff in all kinds of libraries. I suppose the biggest benefit was in the school libraries. Missouri was probably and is probably one of the slowest states in developing elementary and secondary school library programs. I'm sorry to say that it really took the federal government to push the input. But about the same time that there were federal funds to develop school libraries, the library school began to graduate people who were qualified to work in the school libraries. And we have seen a great change in the last fifteen (15) years in terms of superior service in the school library. We still, I think, have a long way to go, but I think the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has worked very hard to continue to increase standards for school libraries. And I think we can give the library school a great deal of credit for helping to staff the school libraries. Certainly we have in the MLA seen a major change in the appearance of the School Library Division. The Missouri Association of School Libraries has become a very important group and a very powerful group, which has developed, again, in about the last fifteen (15) to twenty (20) years.

Kehr: You were in Columbia in 1949 at Stephens College, that's right?

Alexander: Yes. I actually came into the library profession somewhat by accident, because I was widowed during the Second World War, and I was living in a small town which is my home town here in Missouri. I had been working in a bank there, and I had left that job to join my husband for a while. After the end of the war, I wasn't working, and there was an opening in the community library there in St. James, Missouri. I worked there for about four (4) years and really found it very rewarding, but I still had no plans to pursue this as a career until I decided I wanted to live in Columbia. See, I had graduated from Stephens [College, Columbia, Missouri] and went back to Stephens to see if there were any job openings.

Lamar Johnson, who was one of the leaders in the library profession in Missouri and nationally and certainly in the libraries in junior colleges at that time, was the dean of faculty

and the head librarian at Stephens College. Dr. James Wood had determined that the library must be the heart of the campus, and that by making the joint responsibility for faculty and the library was one way to help bring this about.

Lamar Johnson is a very warm, interested person in everybody. As soon as I talked to him, he urged me to consider librarianship as a profession. Of course, in 1948-49 there was a great need for librarians. There were many new library schools opening up in the country. Lamar [Johnson] knew all the deans of all the library schools, and we talked about various and different possibilities. He had an opening on the staff at Stephens in midyear and asked me if I wouldn't like to work that semester just to see how I liked the college work. By the end of the semester he had determined that he could make it possible for me to work during the school year and go to school in the summers.

I'm afraid that I chose Denver [University of Denver] as a graduate school partially because it's a good place to go in the summertime. I did have an excellent experience at Denver. I found that a very good school at the time. I was there shortly after the American Library Association had begun to recognize the master's degree rather than the fifth year bachelor's degree. Denver had just moved into the master's degree as had most of the other graduate library schools in this country. Dr. Donald Strout was the dean there at the time I was there, and Ruth French Strout was teaching cataloging. I probably learned a great deal of my library philosophy from Ruth Strout. She was an excellent teacher and to this day is a very good friend.

So for four (4) years I went out to Denver in the summertime and worked at Stephens. I was in the reference department for some time and then in technical services until I received my degree. At that time the head of technical services left and I became head of technical services at Stephens. Actually I had planned to come back that year and head up the Home and Family Library. Stephens at that time had a number of branch libraries in the program areas and in the department areas. But they needed someone for head of technical services, and I had the experience. I then became well acquainted with many of the college and university librarians in the state and again found them a very fine group of people. I still have many good friends and fond memories of those periods of working with the College and University Library Division of the MLA.

I left Stephens in 1955 to become Librarian at the Columbia Public Library. At that time my colleagues at Stephens could not understand my leaving which was really a very fine situation to take on something that was going to be a real challenge, I guess is the word you'd use today. But I really had thought I would stay at Stephens the rest of my life, because there the library staff was recognized as faculty. We had an opportunity to be involved in the advisory program, became well acquainted with all

the faculty and students. It was a marvelous place for my child to have some fine experiences. I have kept many of those associations at Stephens, and I still am very fond of them. But I have never regretted leaving the college and the academic library field.

I suppose as we move into this we might talk a little bit about the history of the Columbia Public Library. Because when I went to the Columbia Public Library in 1955, I believe it had been established perhaps in the early 20s [1920s], and it had had very few librarians. The librarians who had been there had been there over a long period of time. In most cases they have been extremely dedicated women who have made this their life's work and had done an extremely fine job. The library and the records have been well kept. The collection historically has been a good collection.

However, the people of Columbia really hadn't supported the public library as you would expect them to in a community of that kind. The excuse had always been that the University Library was there, and everybody had access to that. In fact, after the Second World War, Dr. Parker told me that he felt obliged to put in a popular book room, because with so many veterans and their wives returning, he felt that they had to have something at the University Library to meet some of these needs, and the public library was not meeting them.

I suppose Columbia is one of the few communities of that size who didn't have a Carnegie library building. The story is that the reason they didn't is because when Carnegie was handing out money for buildings, the people of Columbia refused to accept the responsibility for levying the tax to support the library program. I think when I went there in 1955, the tax was less than ten cents (10¢) on the \$100 valuation. And as I remember the first budget I worked with in Columbia was an \$18,000 annual budget, which at that time Columbia was probably some 28,000, almost 30,000 people. This is some idea of really the poor support the community had given. Because of this, of course, the collection hadn't been maintained as it might have been, and certainly it wasn't superior.

At the time I was hired, the board had determined that they must improve the library services for the community. As I reflect back on it, I think that I was very innocent to have accepted such a responsibility. But it was a great deal of fun, a great deal of hard work, and the people of the community did respond beautifully. I was there for ten (10) years, and I felt that during those ten (10) years no one could have asked for better support from board, city officials, the citizens of the community. In the community here, they did believe in the library, and all it took was some effort on everybody's part to really develop and really improve public library programs in the community.

At the time during the 50s [1950s], the Missouri State Library was much concerned about developing public library service for the people in the rural areas of Missouri. In 1956 when the Library Services Act was passed, there were funds made available to the states to begin to develop and strengthen service to the rural areas of the country. At that time the Library Services Act spoke only to the rural people, which meant that none of the money could be spent in communities of ten thousand (10,000) or more. This was the figure the Department of Agriculture used to define rural and the more urban areas.

But the way the State Library spent most the money, and there wasn't a great deal, as I remember now, I think it was \$7,500,000 that was distributed throughout the United States. The State Library created demonstration programs for several counties at a time that might form together multicounty units. The State Library was very cautious not to go into an area until there had been a good deal of grassroots support. So in 1957-8 they came into the area surrounding Columbia. The Columbia Public Library worked with them to assist in the demonstration program which was carried out in Boone, Callaway, and Howard County. As I remember now the demonstrations lasted eighteen (18) to twenty-four (24) months.

In the meantime, there were citizens' committees in each county who had continually worked towards a tax vote that would support public library service in the future. When the three (3) counties voted, they all voted at the same time, and they all voted a ten cent (10¢) tax on the \$100 valuation, which at that time seemed to be adequate. But the idea was they hopefully would join together. They were anxious to join with Columbia because Columbia had the facilities and the start of a collection, and the beginning was there. Still, there was a good deal of discussion, a good deal of "Would it really work?" I remember one attorney on the Columbia Public Library Board who was terribly concerned if we joined with Callaway County, and he wanted a book sometime that was over in Callaway County, what would he do? We convinced him he wouldn't be any worse off than if his neighbor next door had the book!  
[Laughter.]

So in 1959 the Daniel Boone Regional Library was formed and has had a very successful history I think during that period. Shortly after the formation of the multicounty unit, the members of Daniel Boone did bookmobile service. Then Fulton joined Columbia so that this gave a substantial outlet in Callaway County. We recognized very soon that we needed a new facility which had been needed for a long time in Columbia. We were operating out of what, at that time, was know as the old Post Office Building. I believe today it is the office of City Water and Light Department. We had remodeled shortly after I went there in 55 [1955] to attempt to make better space, better accessibility. But there were a great many limitations.

Under Missouri law there are several ways that it is possible to raise money for building purposes, but none of them are particularly easy. Since Missouri libraries operate on really a very low rate, twenty-five cents (25¢) today is the maximum, and back in the 50s [1950s] twenty cents (20¢) was the maximum, twenty cents (20¢) on the \$100 valuation. Many libraries at that time were operating on a ten cents (10¢) per \$100 valuation. Of course with that amount of income it's almost impossible to have any excess money available from operations that might go into buildings. Occasionally some library has been able to put a little bit aside, but seldom enough to build a building.

The law provides for the possibility of bond issues, which under Missouri law even today take two-thirds majority, which makes it very difficult. The other way under the law that is a possibility is a voted tax that is designed for building purposes. This takes a simple majority, but it is necessary then to let that tax accumulate until you have sufficient funds to build the building, because Missouri Constitution is very definite in the fact that political subdivisions cannot be into debt other than the bonded indebtedness.

We determined that by far the best way for Columbia to go would be the voted tax, and we estimated that what we needed was approximately a \$1,000,000 (one million dollar) building, and that it would take ten (10) years to acquire money to do that. Some of our very best friends were totally shocked when we said we might spend that much money on a library building in Columbia. It would mean that this was a lot of money, and the bankers screamed. We were successful in the vote--it wasn't a landslide by any means--but we were successful and began to accumulate some funds for a building.

Since that was a long range plan, it gave plenty of time for lots of arguments about where the building might go. There were those who felt that it would be a great boon to downtown Columbia if the building could be in part of downtown Columbia, that of course it would be completely accessible to people who had trouble with transportation. There would be many positive reasons to put it in downtown Columbia. There were others who felt that the property in downtown Columbia was entirely too valuable to be used for library purposes, and that this should be used for commercial purposes. There were others who felt that this was the beginning of some of the federal urban renewal programs, and that this would be an ideal way to use some of the urban renewal property. We had many long sessions about where the library should go.

At that time, the Columbia Public Library Board became divided really upon their feelings about it. It became involved in many other things other than location of the building. The location of the building was the up-front thing. This was during the early 60s [1960s] when there was a great deal of political pressure for

more conservative literature. There were some strong feelings about what libraries should and shouldn't be doing. I think that we found ourselves in more of a controversy than was absolutely necessary.

As I reflect back on it now, I would do many things differently than I did then. I had come to the public library with the idea that libraries had only quote "the best in literature", that we didn't put on the shelves the library books that were poorly written and perhaps not accurate. This was the mistake I think. Today I think that libraries are much more liberal in terms of acquiring materials than may not always seem up to the standards of what we'd call "good literature". And I'm not talking about whether it has sex in it or doesn't have sex in it, but mainly whether it is accurate.

I suppose the book that we really got into trouble with was Phyllis Shaffley's book. The title leaves me right now, but it was an inaccurate book, all reviewers said it was. Yet there was strong effort on the part of some people to put numerous copies in the library. We resisted this, and I think it was a real mistake. I think that we should've gone ahead and accepted all the paperback copies they wanted to give us and let them circulate. Today this is what any library would do I think.

I think that during that period the library profession perhaps leaned too far on the liberal side and did not have in their collection as much conservative literature as they might. I think that librarians, being the kind of people they are before they ever get into the profession, probably are inclined to be more liberal in their thoughts politically. I think that we used the excuse of having only the best literature in the library and we were really censoring when we were fighting censorship at the same time. As a result of these things, I think that the site for the library in Columbia became a bigger issue than it might have otherwise.

It was during this period that I determined that I had probably done all I could do for Columbia. I had run into too many barriers, and so that was when I left the Columbia Public Library and the Daniel Boone Regional Library and came to the State Library. But one of the most rewarding things as far as I'm concerned is to see that library grow. The librarian who followed me is still there. Gene Martin and I have worked together in the MLA for years, and we both see library service in the same way. We both have certain goals and ambitions that we agree upon totally. I was delighted when the board decided to hire him, and when he decided to come to Columbia.

I have watched the library grow, watched the program grow, and also have been extremely pleased with the building, with its location, with the parking. I think that that building is one of the best public library buildings that I know of in terms of

giving people the feeling of excitement, the desire to read and to seek knowledge when you come through the doors. The program that they carry on there I think is exactly what a community like Columbia and the three (3) counties need and deserve. I think the Daniel Boone Regional Library is a good example of what it can mean to the trade center community and to the surrounding areas when they do get together and form a unit like that. Columbia could not have what they have today if it were not for the three (3) county area, and certainly the people out in the rural areas have many opportunities for library service that they could not possibly have if they were in an unserved area.

The regional library movement in Missouri or the multicounty unit really reached its peak along about that period of the late 50 [1950s] or early 60s [1960s]. One of the last regional libraries to be created at this stage was the Thomas Jefferson Regional Library, which is located in Jefferson City. There had for a good many years been a contractual arrangement between Jefferson City and Cole County for library service. But the surrounding counties had no library service. So the demonstration that was carried on in the Jefferson City area was operated in cooperation with the Jefferson City-Cole County Library and served Gasconade, Maries and Miller Counties. All three (3) of those counties voted in the mid 60s [1960s] at twenty cents (20¢) on the \$100 valuation. This is another fine example of a really substantial multicounty unit. Jefferson City along about the same time then voted a tax much in the same way Columbia did, and have built a building since which is also a very fine building.

I used to feel years ago, when I was early in Columbia, that it was extremely important to the library development in Missouri for both Jefferson City and Columbia to have good public library service, because so many people looked to those cities and anticipated that they would have good service. Neither one of them at that time were doing too well so I'm extremely proud now to see those two cities and their surrounding areas with such good library service.

During this period in Missouri sixteen (16) multicounty units were formed. And these have all been successful. There have been maybe two (2) or three (3) cases where counties have pulled themselves out of the multicounty unit, but on the whole, they have stuck together and really created a real service for the whole area.

The library community attempted in the late 60s [1960s] to pass a whole new library law that would make these units more permanent with the idea that they would be consolidated districts. This was not successful in the General Assembly at that time, but since that time there has been consolidation laws passed by the General Assembly. This makes it possible for the multicounty unit to consolidate as one district and this is a permanent consolidation.



There have been three (3) areas where this law has been used to real success: Mid-Continent Library, which operates out of Independence, Missouri, and serves all of Jackson County except the Kansas City, Kansas, and Platte County, and Clay County, now is a consolidated library district. That was the last one. However, the first one was the Rolling Hills Consolidated Library District, which operates out of St. Joseph, and serves everything except the St. Joseph area and includes Buchanan and Andrew Counties. Then down in the southwest part of the state, Barry-Lawrence is consolidated, and this is the two (2) counties of Barry and Lawrence.

And in all three (3) cases this has proved to be extremely successful, because it has meant that it's a much more permanent structure, and makes it possible for long range planning, for single administration with the board a part. . . . The board represents the entire area, but they operate as one board. It seems that it would be to everybody's advantage if more of these multicounty units took this step. However, again, Missourians are slow to give up their autonomy. They've been slow to give up their autonomy with their municipal libraries, and then after that, as much so with the county libraries. In some cases as we move into networking, there's still this concern about local autonomy and who makes the final decision.

Tape 1, Side 2

Alexander: As I've talked on various areas of Missouri library development the State Library naturally has come into the discussion frequently. I think that one of the strengths of Missouri--and I say this with some prejudice since it's evident my whole working experience has been in Missouri, however, I have had a great deal of contact with librarians from other states and other state library agencies, and I have worked a good deal with the library education program throughout the country--I think that one of the strengths of Missouri has been that there has been a very good working relationship between the MLA and the Missouri State Library. This isn't true in every state and there have actually been some studies done that sometimes when one is weak the other becomes strong. I think that we have evidence to indicate this in some states, that where there has not been the leadership from the state library, the association has taken the leadership and vice-versa. I suppose that it appears to me in Missouri that we have had good teamwork. The Missouri State Library has always been anxious to have the Association challenge the State Library when they care to.

I think we might talk just a little bit about the State Library and its structure and organization and how it came into being. Actually I came to the State Library in 1956 and had worked very closely with them, of course, when I was a public librarian. I feel very fortunate to have followed some excellent leadership at

the State Library. Paxton Price had been State Librarian from the mid 50s [1950s] to the mid 60s [1960s] and Eda Bothe had been with the State Library even longer than that. Paxton Price was State Librarian. Edna Bothe's title was Director of Field Services. Many of us give Miss Bothe a great deal of credit for the public library development in Missouri. She worked very hard in developing ways that might help people see what public library services really mean to them and vote to support it. She was the leader in the demonstration program and helped to create the sixteen (16) regional libraries that exist today in Missouri.

The State Library I suppose had its beginnings in the early 1900s. The first records that we have indicate that what was known as the State Library of Missouri is really what is now the Supreme Court Library. Then in the early 1900s it saw movements particularly from the point of women's organizations. And federated women's clubs were very instrumental in encouraging what was known as traveling libraries. That was the goal of I suppose what is now our state library--was a traveling library. Some years ago when we were moving we discovered some of the old wooden boxes that the books used to be packed in and sent out to club women's homes and then they loaned them out to the club women from their homes. Then the Federated Women's Clubs of Missouri I believe purchased the first bookmobile that was used in demonstrations around--over the state.

The State Library itself actually for a number of years had an Advisory Board which was appointed by the Governor, and the Governor hired the State Librarian, as far as we can tell from the records. In 1946 the State Library Commission was created by law. This was a board with the authority to hire a State Librarian and to set policies for the operation of the State Library. The Commission was appointed by the Governor. There were six (6) members on the Commission. Four (4) of them were appointed by the Governor with terms that expired every four (4) years. The two (2) members who were on there because of their positions were the Librarian of the University of Missouri Library and the Commissioner of Education. At that time the--yes, I guess at the time that was true--Dr. Parker was at the University of Missouri then and became a member of the Commission and served on the Commission until he retired from that position. Hubert Wheeler was the Commissioner of Education and served on the Commission until 1974, at the time of the reorganization in fact in Missouri, when the executive branch of state government was completely reorganized.

At that time the State Library became part of the Department of Higher Education. There is a Board appointed by the Governor who then has the authority to hire the State Librarian and set policies for the State Library. This same Board is the one that coordinates higher education in the state and hires the Commissioner of Higher Education. This has been a most satisfactory arrangement from our point of view because it has

made it possible for us to be very close to the academic institutions. We feel as we move into networking--multitype library networking--that our association with the academic world is extremely important.

But in the mid 60s [1960s] when the Library Services Act was expanded to be the Library Services and Construction Act [LSCA], this put a great deal more money and responsibility on the state library agencies to help develop library services not only in the rural areas but throughout the state. Each time the law has been amended there has been a special emphasis on special groups. This now, well I guess from the beginning the LSCA dealt with responsibilities for helping to create library service in institutions supported by the state, like people in correctional institutions and in mental health--this type. There has been much more concern about the people, minority groups, people in disadvantaged areas economically as well as other disadvantages.

The State Library is required by the LSCA law to have an Advisory Committee to work with them in developing plans for the distribution of funds. LSCA is the Library Services and Construction Act. The "construction" came in in 1965 when Congress added this part of the program and funds were made available to the states on a matching basis for the construction of public library buildings. Actually there have been no funds appropriated for this purpose for at least four (4) years now. But at the time that these were made available, it was very difficult in Missouri, and I think in some other states, to find the matching ability.

As I have explained before, building funds are not easy to come by in Missouri. However, there have been a number of buildings where federal funds have been important to them. The University City Library building in University City had federal funds, and several of the branches in St. Louis County, several of the branches in the City of St. Louis, the Plaza Branch in Kansas City, and the Daniel Boone Regional Library, and the Thomas Jefferson Library building. There were funds allotted . . . the last time any construction funds were appropriated, Joplin was ready to move ahead. They ran into many problems but the funds are still there, so they will have some federal funds in the building that they're ready to break ground for right now. Some of these funds have been used for remodeling some public library buildings in the state. So they have been very well used in Missouri and certainly if funds were every appropriated again, I'm sure that there will be some real need for them in Missouri.

One of the things that the librarians are most concerned about now is their lack of accessibility to certain groups of people. I think of the shining examples of a library who is doing something about this is Springfield-Greene County Library, which has on their own with local money put in an elevator, put in a ramp, and

they have totally remodeled the restrooms, making them totally accessible to people in wheelchairs. This has been well received by the community. Everybody is quite pleased about it.

After 1965-66 the Missouri State Library felt that the--at the time I guess it was the State Library Commission--felt that the demonstrations had probably served their purpose in Missouri. Most of the counties had had demonstrations of some kind at one time or another, or they hadn't been interested at all. Of the counties without library service, many of them had attempted a vote which had failed. So it was decided by the Commission that the program should be changed to begin to use more of the federal money to support programs that already existed and help them develop in a more substantial way. This wasn't turning their backs on the unserved areas, but it was recognized that if we were going to leave it to local decision and local control, there was a limit to how much could be done at the state level.

At the present time at least approximately ninety percent (90%) of the people of Missouri have public library service and are paying a local tax for that public library service. The ten percent (10%) who do not have are scattered in a number of counties throughout the state, but they're very sparsely populated areas with the exception of two (2). One of these is Jefferson County, which is a fast-growing county south of St. Louis. They have on at least two occasions attempted to vote a library tax and failed. They're still hopeful that very shortly they will be able to establish county-wide library service there. The other area is Adair County, where Kirksville is located. And I think perhaps there again, part of the reason has been that the people of Kirksville--which is a very rural area and they have tried on several occasions to vote a tax there and it's failed--aside from that the areas are pretty sparsely populated areas where there are no library services.

And every now and then a county does decide that they will vote. One of the counties down in the southwest part of the state which is a large county and a small population, voted a library district last year and a tax to support that library district. So we hope that this will continue until all the people in Missouri can have public library service. There has from time to time been concern in the library community that perhaps they should mandate public library service and require that everybody pay a library tax. This usually doesn't get very far in thinking, because again it is felt that the local decision is extremely important. We have very few endowed libraries in this state and I suppose for a small community one of the best fiscally endowed libraries is in my own home town. They do have very substantial funding support, and they're giving a good library program in a small community. But there are very, very few libraries like this in the state. Most all of them must have the local tax in order to give any kind of substantial service.

When the state constitution was rewritten in the 40s [1940s] there is a very strong statement in the constitution itself that the people of Missouri should have library service and that the state of Missouri should offer support for this. There has been since that time some state aid to public libraries. This has been a very small amount, but there is appropriated each year state aid for public libraries in the General Assembly. This money is distributed on a per capita basis to those libraries who are eligible. Eligibility only requires that a library be established by the vote of the people and have a tax of at least ten cents (10¢) voted by the people. Also in the law was the requirement that after that date no library should be eligible if they served a population of less than five thousand (5,000). Of course, the rationale for that was that a population of less than five thousand (5,000) did not have the tax base to really support a library program.

So in the mid 60s [1960s] the state aid as I remember now was about six cents (6¢) per capita. This year it is thirty-six cents (36¢) per capita, so it has increased considerably, but it started at a very low base. Although Missouri is one of the first states in the nation to have a state aid program for public libraries, by starting at such a low base there are many states now that support at a much more substantial level of funding their public library services. The present state aid is--with this amount--is approximately five percent (5%) of the public library's budget so it's not anything that's going to make or break the public library. However, it is extremely important to the public library. There have been a good many thoughts among the library community as to how this program might be strengthened. There are those today who feel that there should be higher standards to be eligible. There are those who feel that it should be continued in the same way but with a greater amount of money coming from the state.

One of the problems that public libraries are facing in recent years is the loss of certain local taxes: the repeal of personal property tax, and of course they have been threatened this year with the loss of merchants and manufacturers tax. Right now they are getting it, after a very recent Supreme Court [Missouri] decision. But undoubtedly this is going to be challenged in some other ways. There are several bills before the General Assembly right now that may change that tax and the way it is collected.

So all of these things are a real problem for the local libraries when they are supporting themselves at ninety-five percent (95%) from local real estate taxes. Of course, inflation has moved faster than the increased real estate tax to tax the business. And the whole challenge of the real estate tax is a real threat to the public libraries of Missouri. One of the only answers is more support at the state level but, of course, as we see again, much of the library community then feel that it's much better to have their local control than to have too much state money flowing in.

As far as federal money goes, I think that we in Missouri have always seen federal money as seed money to get new programs started. Great effort has been taken not to use that money to start programs that can't be supported through the local and the state level, because we have never seen federal money as that which will continue to flow into the state in this way.

This latest development in library services in Missouri has been the network movement and, of course, this is true in most of the states. This is an effort to attempt to share resources to a much greater degree than they've ever been shared before. And, of course, the new technology makes it much more feasible to be able to do this. The problem with the new technology is that it is terribly expensive and to find ways to get into it is not always easy. But in 1977 the MLA appointed a committee to develop plans for networking, and this plan was adopted by the MLA.

The overall emphasis of the plan is to create seven (7) area networks in Missouri. These are the multitype library networks which have their own governing boards and will develop plans for their area that they feel the best ways to share resources, both material resources as well as personnel. This has been a voluntary movement. To date there are six (6) area networks in operation in Missouri. These so far are supported to a great extent with the LSCA fund. However, in every case there is some local money coming into them. The one area where nothing has been developed to date is the southeast area of the state. This is a large geographical area with again a great deal of sparse population and not the extent of library resources that may be found in other parts of the state.

But there is now an area network development in the Greater Kansas City area and this not only includes the libraries in Missouri, but it extends over to some libraries into Kansas. Then there is a development in northwest Missouri which operates out of the St. Joseph area, and in the northeast part of the state operating out of Springfield-Greene County area. They have, of course, a good many resources down there with a number of academic institutions as well as public and school and two (2) special. And they have made great strides in their development.

The Mid-Missouri group operating out of Columbia includes some of the most substantial library resources in the state of course with the University of Missouri and other academic institutions. Lincoln University is another academic institution in the area, and with three (3) multicounty units included as well as some special libraries and school libraries. Then the St. Louis area, of course, is rich in library resources, and they have developed a network which is making real progress. There they have had a history of cooperation through the Higher Education Coordinating Council of Greater St. Louis. The library element of that group had done a number of cooperative things before the network started. We have found in network development that it takes some

time for the librarians to learn to talk to each other and to learn how to work together. When they've had some experience in the past it has certainly helped them forward.

The library community is supporting a piece of legislation now that is before the current General Assembly which would give legal status to these network areas, and would make it possible for them to propose to the Coordinating Board a budget for the coming year much in the same way the academic institutions present a budget. The Coordinating Board would then recommend to the Governor funds to support these efforts. It would go through the same process that other appropriations go through. This would require that the Coordinating Board develop some rules and regulations for the operation of the networks. This looks like a very promising field and would be one way to get state money into library operations in the state without taking away from the local autonomy and without jeopardizing anything that's going on now. The bill has gone through the House and is now before Senate Committee, so it still has time to get through if it moves through the Senate process with any speed at all. So the library community is very hopeful that this will be a direction for the future.

The network plan that the MLA has offered calls for an overall network board that is representative of the seven (7) regions, which is really an advisory board to the State Library in terms of future developments. Some of the things that they are most concerned with now, of course, is how to get into some of the technology. One of the prime needs it is felt right now would be to begin the creation of some kind of a computerized data base of the holdings--the bibliographic holdings of the libraries in the state. The General Assembly appropriated some money two (2) years ago for a study to investigate how this might best be done. As a result of that, there is a study under way right now to find out what the libraries really want and hopefully we will be in a position that the recommendation in the State Library budget now for some funds that might begin the program.

One of the things, of course, that makes this very feasible today is the opportunity to gain bibliographic information through the Ohio College Library Center, commonly known as OCLC. A number of the libraries in the state are online with OCLC. We at the State Library are acquiring with federal money the machine-readable tapes of the Missouri holdings so that it would be possible to integrate these into the beginning of a bibliographic data base. This, of course, would be only those things that have gone into OCLC, so that unless a library was in the position to do some retrospective input it would only be current acquisitions, but at least it would be a start. This was what the recommendation was--that we take those and get those into the data base. Then from that, of course, we could have computer access from online and through microfiche, microfilm, or even catalogs printed out from them which could be made available to the areas in the state and to even the very smallest library.

Right now there is a interlibrary loan program in the state which has made excellent progress in terms of supplying materials to individuals when they can't get it at their local library. But the real problem with that is that it's a hit-and-miss sort of thing. It's coordinated at the State Library and the collection there fills about forty to fifty percent (40-50%) of the requests, and then they're sent by teletype to other libraries in the state to see if they can be filled. The staff at the State Library has some feeling for what is where but it's still a hit-and-miss thing, where if these were available to us in some readable form it would be more efficient.

So this is one of the things that the library community is hoping for and working toward now. The University of Missouri, of course, is also an important element. They're looking at the Washington Library System right now, which is a computerized program in the state of Washington. We're all very interested in that program with the idea that perhaps Missouri might buy the program and adapt it to their needs and use that program in their own computer.

These are all things that are going on right now and I think that's a bit boring . . . some of this. But as is evident I feel that Missouri librarians are a pretty great bunch of people and work together extremely well, and have made a great deal of accomplishment when they do work together.

I think one of the things that I haven't said about the State Library in terms of changes that have come about is a much greater emphasis at the State Library on services to the government. This is one of the responsibilities that is given to the State Library in the law. Because of lack of funds the Commission over the years had felt that it had been given a lower priority. As state government had become more sophisticated, there've become more staff in the state government, as the people--the elected officials as well as the employed persons in the government--are more aware of research, more aware of information needs, it's become apparent that there is a real need for staff and materials that will support them in their research efforts.

As the result of that the State Library has developed a reference staff that we feel is able then to help them to a great extent. We have expanded considerably our holdings in federal documents and documents of other states. We have access to a number of commercial data bases for information purposes. We attempt to call to the attention of the people in government some of the information that is available--current information that might be important to them. We feel that this is probably one of the important areas that the State Library will continue to develop in, probably with a smaller book collection, but more access to more information that is available throughout the country.



One of the most successful activities of the MLA in current years has been the support of legislation that created the State Documents Depository Center at the State Library. Up until that time for any library to be sure they had state documents and to know what was being published by the state was a difficult thing. The law now requires all the agencies in the state to deposit so many copies of their documents with the State Library. The State Library then is responsible for the creation of depositories throughout the state, both full depositories and partial depositories that are accessible to all the citizens of the state. So that today it's possible for any citizen in Missouri to go into a library within a reasonable distance and have at hand the publications of the state of Missouri. This has been a most successful program, and a not terribly expensive program. It has been well received by the citizens in the state of Missouri, and the state agencies have been real cooperative in the whole program. They, in most cases, have been delighted to feel that they can tell people that their documents are available where they can get to them.

All of these things that we've talked about--the history of library development in Missouri and the State Library and some of these most current programs--were extremely important to the delegates who came to the Governor's Conference on Libraries and Information Services. This was held in November of 78 [1978] and was attended by some four hundred (400) delegates from throughout the state. The program and all the procedures were planned by an advisory committee that represented both citizens and librarians in Missouri. The program was exceedingly well received by the delegates. As a result of that, they passed a number of resolutions which were important at all levels of library service, at the local, state and federal level. They elected delegates to the White House Conference then, which the White House Conference was held in the fall of 79 [1979].

The whole emphasis in both the White House Conference and the Governor's Conference was in terms of a strong representation of library users rather than library people. And the delegates were selected on the basis of two-thirds (2/3) non-library people, and by non-library this excluded not only librarians, but trustees--people who were directly responsible for the operation of libraries. So the library trustees and people in that category were included with librarians in the one-third (1/3) portion of the delegates to both conferences. This seemed like a really excellent way to find out what people really wanted to know and what people want.

We were extremely pleased in Missouri with the delegates that came to the Governor's Conference and their real interest and concern about library services. Although I did not go to the White House Conference, I have every indication that this was true there too, that library users really did have a voice and the resolutions were very much influenced by what they felt and what they wanted.

As a result of the fifty (50) governor's conferences and the White House Conference, certainly libraries have had a great deal of exposure in the last year. According to the Washington office of the American Library Association, this is having an effect on Congress and on the Administration, and hopefully will lead to some future developments perhaps not necessarily direct aid to local libraries, but development of some national programs that to which state organizations or state networks can become associated and we can share resources in a much broader way.

We have talked a little bit about involvement in the American Library Association. I have found the American Library Association an extremely good organization for a profession to work with. For one thing, I think that the American Library Association has maintained its democratic approach. Long ago when I was in library school, one of my instructors would go off to the American Library Association meetings, and come back and tell us, "Class, you have no idea. . . . You get . . . You know everybody in the profession!" And then he'd tell us about knowing the Librarian of Congress and the president of the American Library Association. It was a little unbelievable to the group of students, but this is true in the profession I think. I feel very fortunate to have been able to work with some very fine people over the years who have really done some important things at the national level.

But one of the places I have spent a great deal of my energy in recent years has been with the Committee on Accreditation of the American Library Association. The Committee on Accreditation is the arm of the American Library Association which sets standards and accredits library education programs in the state and in Canada. It is important to them that they have other than educators involved in this, and I have been one of those people who've had the opportunity to be involved with the educators in it. I've learned a great deal from the experience. I don't claim to be an expert on library education, but I have found it very rewarding, and I have found library educators, library schools, to be most interesting.

As a result of that I think, I've been asked then to serve on the Advisory Committee of the School of Library and Information[al] Science at the University of Missouri in Columbia. And I hope that I'm able to offer some assistance to them in terms of the national picture in education. One of the things I suppose that all of us in the library community in Missouri want to be certain is that we've maintained our standards at the School in Columbia, and that we continue to produce librarians and enter people into the profession who have the kind of ability that we have been able to so far, because this is extremely important.

Kehr: Well, to wrap it up, what would you say was personally, for you, your most satisfying accomplishment?

Alexander: Oh, dear, that would be a difficult question to answer. I think that over the years there have been many things. I suppose to see the Daniel Boone Regional Library created and grow has been extremely important to me. To watch library development in Missouri over these years and . . . I find now that particularly with my young colleagues in the profession, they are as impatient today as I was twenty (20) years ago because nothing ever happens. I find myself saying, "But we've come a long way!" and we really have.

I think that right now will probably be one of the most exciting times that we've ever had in the face of the possibilities that are out there. I think there is a danger that some of us may be threatened by the technology.

Children: 1 daughter Mrs. Dave (Betty) Thomas

Other pertinent (professional/nonprofessional, community, or civic) organizations and clubs:

First Methodist Church, Jefferson City  
League of Women Voters  
Stephens College Alumnae Club  
Federation of Women's Clubs;  
American Association of University Women  
Altrusa International

Awards: Alumnae Achievement Award 1959  
from Stephens College, Columbia  
Recognition Missouri Coordinating 1977  
Board for Higher Education  
Beta Phi Mu Award of Merit 1978

Other Affiliations:

American Library Association:

ALA Special Projects Committee  
ALA Adult Services Division  
American Library Trustee Association  
ALA Nominating Committee 1971  
ALA Council 1973-1977  
ALA Committee on Accreditation 1973-1978

Missouri Library Association:

Catalogers' Round Table Chairman 1955  
Legislative Coordinator 1956  
Treasurer 1957-59  
Vice President 1962  
President 1963  
Library Development Committee Chairman 1964  
Archives Committee 1976-78

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USE INFORMATION FORM

Name: *Susanna Alexander*  
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Date(s) Interviewed: *Mar 11, 1980*  
Subject of Interview: *Libship in Mo.*

I would be willing to have my interview published in a book or journal:

Yes

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Signed

*Susanna Alexander*

Interviewer:

*Mary Kehe*