

Irene Graham, September 22, 1994

Oral History Interview, SC/MLA, By Ada Seltzer

Director and Founder of the Rowland Library at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi.

AS: Irene, the first question we would like information about for this project is what can you tell us about the founding of the Southern Chapter?

IG: Well, I remember the early, early days of the Chapter, but I was not one of the initial founders, but I have known all the initial founders because I came to Jackson in 1955, but I had already met most of the members because I was the biol...the Special Library's Association biological science area was a very important part of medical libraries in those days and people who were medical librarians attended those groups and I was right out of graduate school and at the University of Cincinnati as director of the medical library there and the Special Libraries held their meeting there and that was in about 1953 and so I was chairman of the program thing and all the people from the South came and we knew each other and met each other so I do remember those many tales, because it was Mary Louise Marshall and Bill Postell who were the founding people of the association, the group, but it also meant that they had contacted Sarah Brown and Mildred Crow, then, not Mildred Crow Langer, but Mildred Crow, and it really sort of started out I thought that they really wanted to do something that would always have some social event and the kind of thing to get to dinner which we still talk about, having dinner and discussing and talking about things so that's my recollection at the first meeting. The first meeting that I attended was in

1953 in Atlanta and that was Mildred Jordan and the group there. But and from then on I don't think I ever missed a single, solitary meeting.

AS: Wonderful.

IG: And in the entire time of my career in the Medical Library Association I think I only missed three, two or three, one with an acute case of poison ivy. (Laughter) But the remembrance of those people was fascinating because you hardly got in town as somebody new or whatever, that somebody didn't contact you personally and say please come and so that's my recollection of the kinds of people and I always remember Mary Louise Marshall when we would go to different meetings and there were things, she always insisted that you should never room with the same person because she said you expanded your friendships by expanding your association with people that you were with.

AS: True.

IG: Now going back to the nature and kinds of the meetings ...is...you want to

AS: Yes, my next question is what can you tell us about the early meetings, what kinds of programs, what kinds of things made up those early meetings.

IG: Well they were very, they were fascinating programs because they were very, the librarians at the time were very interested in, and they were very knowledgeable librarians and had, they discussed, but they also had an intense interest in the subject matter of what the association was, the Southern Medical Association, and in those days it was primarily, I wouldn't want to say that it was totally made up of academic librarians, because it was, other people came that the hospital but there weren't as

many hospital librarians, and many of the hospital libraries were connected with the larger medical schools, too, so it was heavily geared towards that and there was always which is something that is sort of no longer true, I don't believe, there was always a scientific program, and in those days the medical profession came to the meetings and they were frequently the major speakers and they also attended the social events, and they, and so it was a there was always a scientific program, and then there was always in those days too, there was always a formal banquet, which was a lot of fun, because it was a smaller group and it meant in those days too everybody went to these banquets, because if you didn't, you were out there in Timbuktu all by yourself, because it was such a gregarious group of people that where one went, everybody went and so even if you got ready to go to dinner someplace, why if you were waiting for somebody in the lobby hotel somebody would come along and say, well, where are you going and if they had already made arrangements, everybody'd rearrange and they'd all go together to someplace, so it was a very, very social group of people, very a great deal of just fun, but the programs were quite serious, because they always dealt with something pertinent dealing with the development of the management and organization of libraries. They also dealt with education of newcomers. There was no such thing as newcomers being separated out from those that had been there, in fact is, sort of connected because once you were a southern regional member, it didn't make any difference where you went, you remained a southern regional member, and frequently these people came back to the meetings, so, and I can remember that even my very first southern region, my first

national meeting, that there was people standing there waiting for you, to greet you, such as Gertrude Annan and Mildred, you know, Crow Langer, and, the people that were, it really, these were important kinds of things, but they weren't trivial programs at all, and they were not broken up, of course things are very large today, it was very much a discussion group, a social group, a scientific program.

AS: What was the librarian's role in the scientific program?

IG: Well, frequently sometimes they would present papers, but they were, they dealt, they generally dealt with a pertinent subject, different kinds and a lot of times it would be the most recent research, and then it would tie in with where the library, the librarians, there was a great deal, a close relationship between academic faculties of medical schools and librarians and their meetings. Frequently part of the social life was, would be in part because of some of the physicians and the academic research people whatever that would be at meetings depending on We always went out too. Generally the primary part of the meeting frequently was held at or on the campus of the university rather than in town.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: It was usually in the auditorium. Sometimes it dealt with a tour a lot of times of the library. It also was a question-answer type of thing. So it was both a learning experience and a transfer between different kinds of people that dealt with librarians and who librarians dealt with, plus the camaraderie that went along with close relationships of people. My first meeting, that if I recall correctly was in Atlanta, with Mildred Jordan, who I always refer to as the "Auntie Mame" of the libraries, and she

because she was really a fascinating person and very, very, very interested in young and new people and took, always went out of her way, you never felt isolated no matter where you went when you were either at the southern group or, for that matter, the larger group, the Medical Library Association meeting. I knew some like for instance I first met Miriam Hawking Libby and she was Miriam Hawking and she was very active in special libraries and I met her before she ever came went back came back to Georgia and uh so we were developed friendships at that stage.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: But my first national meeting was in Washington, D.C., at the International Meeting and it was a very fantastic, you know, relationship and it also meant that, it was interesting, this may not be precisely along but I think of this anyway, is when ASIS first came into being,,it was not a librarian's group for the most part. Fact is the first meeting that I, well not the first meeting, but one of the first meetings that I attended in Boston was I think there were only six or eight of us who were librarians present and very politely you got to listen, but you didn't get to participate. (Laughter).

AS: That's right.

IG: It was mainly the technologies and but through this same grouping both to me the interrelationship between the southern group and the national group sort of intertwined all the time because of the nature of the people and the people that I knew beforehand and I remember the early days when Fred Kilgore and, they were would get together and they were discussing what became OCLC at the time it was really the National Library of Medicine grouping in that thing and there would be long this was

another thing, people met after meetings and after the dinners and after anything and everything, they never really wanted to go home, to go back to the hotel and go to bed, there was always these large groups meeting in somebody's room that sometimes I don't think Alderson Fry no matter where he would come south and north and east and west and you know he never went home and so the same would go with all of them, Fred Kilgore and Miriam Libby and oh they would just...it was a conversation in hotel rooms that would go on and on and on and on and on about everything under the sun.

AS: Um-hm. How many people attended these early meetings, about?

IG: That would be difficult really to recall, but I would say

AS: Thirty?

IG: Oh, fifty, because you see you would also have sometimes people that would bring their members some members of their family but also some of the men, people from the medical schools would attend and they were, I would say around fifty, sixty people.

AS: That was a nice number.

IG: I don't think to be honest with you that size, now remember this group never forgot somebody who was ever a member...remember this group also extended, I can remember when there were meetings at seventy-five or a hundred or more, but remember we went all the way west. I think they thought we were going to conquer California. If we could've gotten across the mountains we would have gone.

(Laughter). Because some of the marvelous meetings I can recall was when we went

to Galveston and we, in fact we'd go visit people in their homes. They would always have something that would be, it was indeed a learning experience, but learned through close associations rather than merely just casual ones.

AS: Really close networking.

IG: Yeah, close, close, close, close, and then when they went home they stayed in contact.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: There were just constant conversations and I was not a letter writer, I was a telephoner, and so people would say why no I'll just call everybody so we would call and chit-chat and talk to each other. I guess Miriam Libby and I talked continually and constantly as did Buzz Sawyer and, you know, Mildred Langer and Mildred Langer and I still get keep close touch so does Sarah Brown and I and, so but I guess the really thing I remember is how there the people who had been in the group early on always went out of their way naturally to include and looked for all newcomers, and they were always at the door to greet you. They never let you sit off by yourself. They encouraged you to participate. They also encouraged younger people to the newer, I say younger, the ones who came into the group, were also encouraged and thought of this is something you do within your profession and therefore you were encouraged to participate on committees, to participate in programs, to you were there to use it as an apprenticeship almost to go on to the national Medical Library Association on a national level.

AS: Do you think this had to do with the personalities of the early founders, Postell and

Mary Louise?

IG: Well, I'm not so sure that it that it, they all now, the personalities are all kinds of personalities in any time and age. There, I used to say some that of our characters are gone (laughter) I'm not, don't mean that, but I think that maybe things were a little less complicated in many instances, many people were on pretty much the same economic, social, and whatever because no one in those days, remember now I came into this field immediately right after World War II, which was I was in graduate school after World War II and then came into the medical library profession itself in 1951, I think it was, and that was a time of fantastic expansion of medical libraries.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: So things were growing very, very rapidly. Schools were developing, hospitals were developing, research programs were developing. The National Library was exploding and so a lot of that kind of thing I think that it and possibly maybe I don't this might be a somewhat controversial thing I think even the background of educational background of librarians in those days might, might, I don't know for sure, possibly be a little many came into the field through backgrounds in science.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: May you know the people today would say well let's face it the fact is that I had a advisor in library school who was a Ph.D. chemist as well as a master degree librarian and she was there and she used to say because she intended to teach in an academic institution was told very bluntly she'd never be more than assistant professor (laughter) and so many, many women who had biological science backgrounds or

whose families were physicians or and all well that was the kind then the next I would guess the most important for instance I noticed reading in the recent survey of backgrounds of librarians it seems to today what was it, it was in social sciences and in some was it business and management and these, well they we came in for the most part back then it was usually in the if you were interested in science it was the biological sciences, chemistry, physics, mathematics, history, a great deal of people interested in history

AS: Um-hm.

IG: And so it and also knowledgeable or interested in the literature of the field itself, and remember back in those days you did the searching. It wasn't, you didn't put in a term you never (laughter) I think if somebody said you didn't(unintelligible) after technology came in you didn't know, have to know the meaning of it, if you could spell it, put it into the computer (laughter).

AS: True. Do you remember the first meeting held in Jackson?

IG: Yes.

AS: And what can you tell us about that meeting?

IG: Well,, interesting thing about that we're going back to the spread of the of the grouping. I, Al Brandon was the chairman and at that time you know he was in Lexington.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: University of Kentucky at Lexington and so and it was somewhat the kind of thing, same kind of program that we had generalize and used it had assigned, it had, by the

way in those days the really top people at an academic institution usually came and greeted everybody, so the dean came to greet, as was usual in this grouping and also met people and then it had a we had a program that dealt, I can't recall what the program then was, we came out to the medical, the old medical school before the present library was built, and there was a presentation, a slide presentation on I can't recall what the subject was, and then we had a panel group dealing with education, back then we people were very interested in certification and we reviewed the programs for certification, it was also dealing with new trends in and the possibility of back at one time you know the old Boston medical library classification or the Library of Congress class, well people discussed that this was not adequate and they were looking at some new way that they were going at that particular time, if I recall correctly, the National Library of Medicine classification scheme was really believe it or not, out of print,

AS: Um.

IG: And so people were sometimes sort of inventing and coordinating their own into, as you know when you inherited what we were in the process of upgrading when you came to the Rowland Medical Library, we were still in the process of reclassifying some of those older materials that had been in Graham's expansion of the Boston Medical incorporated into the Library, to the National Library of Medicine, something of this sort, and we I for oh and then we had a bit of a marvelous pre-dinner party on at one of the big hotels downtown and J.A. Majors as usual in those days were the sponsor and it was stupendous. It was everything under the sun. And then the

banquet, it was a sit-down formal dinner party, and the speaker was a physician from Vicksburg who collected southern stories and colloquialisms and you know southerners always tell stories and it was he had just this fact is this was his hobby and he entertained everybody by talking and telling stories about the south and I think if I recall correctly it was called the "The South Ain't South Anymore" or something like that.

AS: Do you remember his name?

IG: (unintelligible) have to recall it, that's terrible

AS: That's okay.

IG: After all, that's a long time ago.

AS: It certainly was.

IG: to do it. Oh, and then we, no that was the second time around, oh no, no, I think we did. I don't I believe that we went to Vicksburg to tour the park.

AS: Very nice.

IG: That was also part of all the other programs. There was always ample opportunity, depending on the kinds of things that you were interested in, there would be something at that time there was one program that held and you ser- and you visited gardens in Jackson and the other (unintelligible) you signed up or you went to Vicksburg for the park.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: And came back.

AS: Um-hm. Very good. Can you share with us your observation about how the

Southern Chapter has evolved over these years?

IG: Well, I think by fact of the rapidly expanding sizes of collections and also for awhile, I think staffs have leveled off, but which they should, I think, because the technology would help do that, but technology and management and, to be honest with you, grant money and more money I think that interest has sort of shifted towards organization and management of information, that was it I think that Scott Adams used to quote T. S. Eliot and said whatever happened to the information in knowledge, or knowledge as it whatever where's the information where's the knowledge in information, that's right and to do, and I think that things became a little bit more hectic, also by fact of the association people we belong to many associations and it was an interlocking group, for instance special libraries association, ASIS, southern regional medical library association, and I'm sure there were others. The historical the medical history society group. By the way librarians in those early days submitted papers which were published in the history and archives of the medical profession itself.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: And if you go back and look at some of these, there are great numbers and fact is that you remember there's still one the awards in the National Library Association and the history whatever, but for many years it was an equal competition, I think eventually, so I think that, that you became so thinly spread that people had to begin to select more particular in associations that they were doing. Then I also think that the southern regional group lost, I'm serious about this and controversy again, lost a little

bit of its spark when the national when MLA insisted that we break that we break up, why I never really well, I think a lot of it had to do with the relationships of the regions to the National Library of Medicine. And it was more or less everybody else should organize along those lines, which I've always that was a sort of a mistake, but and then the this meant that at the first everybody tried to go back and just be members of both groups, but you just can't do it because it requires time, it requires money...

AS: Um-hm.

IG: The other thing I now I've I haven't been attentive to the either association on the national or regional level for the last two or three, couple two years, I've had very difficult illness in my parents who were elderly,, but I for awhile I saw that only apparently only the executive groups of the acad- of the libraries went, the heads of libraries and I think that some people were not encouraged down at the it was no longer an apprenticeship for both participation in the region itself and their moving to the national itself. I guess also and somebody had to stay home, but in the old days nobody stayed home (laughter) but in the old days, too, remember now that the meetings were always held in spring, oh yeah, we didn't move into the fall meetings until the group grew and a number of new people came in and protested the idea or thought that our meeting was too close to national meeting because we usually we also because we liked that fun business of being able to go on parties and to go and see the gardens and see the dogwood in Atlanta and ride the boats in New Orleans and tramp down through the quarter and visit the shore beachshore at Galveston and you know and see the ocean in Miami and this kind of thing, so then they became they

were held in the fall and, and with that there was a train of thought that the reason this became quite important for awhile but I think that but the as I said the change in the meeting, oh the other thing, they were generally held at the time almost at graduation time when we then the national meetings were held then at least later on and people used to protest the idea that as things got bigger and as medical librarians became more integrated into the faculties of the medical schools and were expected to participate in graduation events and whatever, they were, they were rather reluctant, if you want to know the truth, to give up a holiday. They really didn't like being gone on Memorial Day and or and then I also recall one time that I had been absent three graduations in a row and I had a note from the Chancellor who said, Now Irene it was a nice little chatty note and he said we're very proud of the fact that you're attending and participating in your national programs, but we would like sometime this year if you could arrange to be present at graduation. (laughter). I figured that, that was a command performance. But and I know that I talk about national the Medical Library Association, the regional group, but it was so integrated, I mean it was difficult to, the camaraderie between all these groups was so close.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: When you were like people that and when they, they visited back and forth and they knew each other. Say Gertrude Annan wasn't originally in this and oh dear, at California, Louise Darling, you know, Louise Darling was one of the early members of this association of the southern regional

AS: Did not know that.

IG: Yes. Uh-huh. And a number of other people would come and went and come and went and never, never stopped coming

AS: Um-hm.

IG: Until (laughter) until the secession, but anyway, and I think we might also, people might remember that even when they were divided up, we had a peculiarity, Bill Postell Jr. was supposed to be the president of the southern regional group and he was already out of it when he came back to serve as president. (laughter). But going back quickly to the Al Brandon who was the chairman at the time it came to Jackson, it was interesting that, see that time Kentucky was in this group, and, but it was always interesting that for the most part Kentucky divided down the center of Kentucky just about like it did in the 1860's that Lexington and east was pre- was much more involved in the southern area than Louisville and the west which was true in the 1860's. You see Lexington was a stronghold of the confederacy, and which a lot of people (unintelligible), but you know Mary Todd Lincoln's brother was a surgeon in the confederate army.

AS: All right.

IG: But so actually Lexington was more active when they would come in this direction, but then the next thing that we went that another where I was chairman happened to end up in Louisville and I was chairman in the same state that Al had been come from when he came back and that was the year that Mildred Jordan died, it was really was a sad meeting because we were meeting and Mildred Crow Langer had gone through Atlanta, whenever she would go to Atlanta she would always call Mildred at the

hospital and they would always put her through immediately. When she went through Atlanta to go there to Louisville, well they said they (unintelligible) when she thought that something had happened then and came on and so we more or less just waited for this event...

AS: Um-hm.

IG: But this may not be, I cannot help but always go back and talk about people because and funny stories and whatever and talking because we used to say that Miriam Libby never, never went to bed, I'm sure she didn't. (laughter) And I don't think that Buzz Sawyer ever went to bed and I know that Joan Titlianus (sp?) didn't go to bed and I didn't frequently and so there would be a conversation, a round-robin, way into the wee small hours of that and I remember one time that Buzz called me and finally about 1:00 o'clock in the morning I said Buzz, I can't, I've got a meeting tomorrow morning, I have to quit. He said do you think Mildred'll still I mean that Miriam'll still be up? and I said oh sure, Miriam'll be up so the next day I talked to Miriam, I said you'd get a call and she said yes, Buzz called me (laughter). But anyway, I could go round and round on lots and lots of stories about people, but I know you don't have that much time.

AS: But I would like to make a follow-up question here about the split,, we have asked this of other interviewees in this project. Can you tell us what effect you saw, you alluded to the fact that we lost our spark...

IG: Well, I don't know that, I say that lost a spark, I think that there was a reluctance of the group, I know that there was some people which I can look at this too because

when they first had the first developed the regional library I can remember the big situation of people having supposedly to make choices as to which and Mississippi has always been in that in-between state you know, it's difficult, but we generally looked east, but there was a section I guess in Louisiana and I guess the terrain itself separates a little bit, but I think that it was not so much it was something that there was a great reluctance within the membership and it was I felt I think a lot of people felt that had this been something that the reasons for it seemed to be vague for many people. We were too large which we really weren't, because there're not that many libraries in the area, as you well know, right now when you start trying to get people to come into the southern group to make your chapter what it's supposed to be, there aren't as many libraries in certain parts of the south as there are in other parts, so that in itself meant a hard- I think, a hardship to recruit. Now one thing that it did, it probably increased the academic librarians and others to put a little pressure on groups to formulate hospital libraries and to educate and to encourage young people to go into the field of hospital librarianship. In that sense, I guess it was a good thing because in searching for the members they wanted to bring in these people, but the other part of the thing I think it was that, remember this group was actually founded in New Orleans and I don't know of any other group that lost its home (laughter) I mean it wasn't so much I mean here it was it was sort of like you know somebody pitches you out of your home and says well go make your own living (laughter) do it yourself and whatever and I think that New Orleans now I'm sure that different parts of Texas, I mean of Louisiana on that where up in the Shreveport area has a close relationship to

Arkansas and to Texas but I think New Orleans always looked at itself as being coastal, deep South.

AS: Um-hm.

IG: And coming in this direction and everything and it was even the travel, you know for many, many years librarians people who went to library school either went to LSU or to Illinois, it was on the train route (laughter). And you the train went north and south in that direction so you went, so I think it to, maybe we've haggled over it too long, but I think it immediately decreased the size and made it spread out further. We still are pretty, if you were looking at size and number of states included, you have to look at the midwest as a huge, tremendous, and I always thought we had just as much in common with our original founding place as north California and south California. So I guess, this may be just a personal thing, but I think you've found it in most people you've interviewed, maybe it's just our nostalgia (laughter), maybe we're growing I think we, we you know but I always remember the funniness about when we said that here's Bill and we were so proud of the fact that Bill Postell Jr was going to be chairman because in Charleston, South Carolina, where his family was originally from, and his father had been the founder and here Bill served when he joined both sides so he could continue (laughter). All these crazy things anyway. I hope I haven't rattled around too long too far.

AS: Just before we finish up on this particular aspect of the history of the chapter, I hear since I was a newcomer and joined the chapter, that the southern chapter was known for its social aspects. Where did it get that name? How did that come about?

What do you know about other chapters?

IG: Well, now, remember, southerners are social. Furthermore, southerners are story tellers. And as, as Eudora Welty said, somebody said when they interviewed her one time and they were talking about who was it, somebody from up in either the mountain area, whatever, and he said something (unintelligible) southerners have to get you can't tell you need people to listen to. You need people to listen to you and you need to listen and you need to talk when you tell stories. And you can't get two southerners together without them telling stories and they can go on and on and on, as you well know, and that in itself is a social event. Second, they, they tend to know everybody, it's almost like, I don't know it's difficult to know who is related and who is kin, I mean, you know everybody ...I have I have members that I for all my life called aunt somebody and she wasn't any aunt at all, she wasn't even related, my mother's dearest friend was always called Aunt, Aunt Belle, and we were adults before we knew Aunt Belle wasn't even related in any way, shape, or form. But then as Eudora Welty said this man said well do you mean that, that you don't think they'll ever be a good story teller from the mountain area and she said well he would it would only person thing he would hear after he told it was an echo (laughter). So I think that's why and furthermore southerners are people who like to gather together almost their family to eat and eating is a social event. You can't you know no one is for instance in talking about where they met after the meetings, they all gravitated to the to the bar, now everybody didn't drink, but they gravitated to the bar. I have to tell you another wild story about one of the big meetings I do remember though, but anyway, oh and then

from there they would all go to the same place to eat. Then when they got back, they'd all go to somebody's room hotel room to talk and see I, I think it's just by nature...

AS: Okay.

IG: Or as I said if you like to talk and eat, it's no fun unless there's somebody sitting opposite you or with you or listening or interrupting..

AS: Um-hm.

IG: Or trying to top your story. Oh one of the wildest meetings we ever had was the time that a threat it was in oh, I know we'll quit with this because I can't help but to tell remember this when we talking about what they did, was when we went to Gainesville during the bomb..the when Cuban missile crisis and they had to, we were all to be at this big sit-down dinner and one of the Mayo brothers was lecture- was speaker that night and Mildred Jordan sat on one side and Fred Bryant sat on the other, but anyway in the middle of all this they had to disband, all the waiters went off (laughter) to join the Cubans in their fight or something, it was here we suddenly in this big hotel, I don't how many of us there were, a hundred, over a hundred, and the sit-down dinner had to become a buffet and so the cocktail party went on and on (laughter). With that I leave you...a big social event. Everybody went that year because they were afraid that if the war came we wouldn't see each other for a long, long time (laughter).