

Notes from Interview with Ted Srygley
October 17, 1994
by Susan E. Woods

Ted Srygley was Director of the University of Florida Health Science Center Library from 1966 to 1993. He was a very enthusiastic supporter of the Southern Chapter of the Medical Library Association serving as Chair in 1971. He also chaired many committees for the Chapter and served as Southern Chapter's representative to MLA's Chapter Council.

Question: Ted, you were Director of the University of Florida Health Science Center Library from 1966 to 1993. Tell us about your joining the Southern Chapter of the Medical Library Association.

I missed the first wave of librarians in the Southern Chapter, but I remember the Augusta meeting. It was a small meeting with only 30-40 people and was held at the Medical Library in Augusta. There was a bright young man there from Nashville who suggested the meetings be changed to only a half day on Saturdays so everyone could get in a five-day work week. He was soundly booed and I never saw him at any meeting after that. The aim of those meetings was to socialize, get to know people, and not efficiency.

Comment: So you had fun?

It was an excellent meeting. When I was recruited for the Gainesville job, I went to the National Library of Medicine where Marty Cummings was Director. I also met, in addition to Marty, Mildred Langner, who was president of the Medical Library Association. I was flattered and honored to meet them. Mildred asked if I liked to party. She asked if I liked to drink. I answered yes to both questions, and she said "Then you'll like the Medical Library Association!" I decided this was the group for me.

Question: What can you tell us about the split in the organization during the 1970s?

I was relatively new, but had Mayo Drake on our staff at the Health Science Center Library of UF. He was quite prominent and very well liked [in the Chapter.] He gave me a flavor of the Southern group. We went to a meeting in Texas and it was a very large group. There were the states that are currently in the Southern Chapter, plus Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. I remember the business meetings there...there were speeches pro and con the split. People blamed Lee Jones, who was behind the split. Her rationale was that librarians could travel less, and therefore attend more meetings if the group was split. There was a move toward a more regional pattern. The split passed, and [some] people were bitter. They felt that the whole fabric was torn. I personally didn't feel that strongly about it. John Ische, was the Director of the LSU library, continued to come to the meetings of the Southern Chapter. I did lose contact with Leonard Eddy, who was from one of the western states.

Comment: Irene Graham says ours is the only chapter who no longer has its birthplace still in the chapter.

I didn't know Bill Postell, Sr. [from LSU, who was one of the founders]. But the Southern Chapter has always had a strong sense of history [and regret the loss of Louisiana to the South Central Group.]

Question: What role has the Southern Chapter played in your professional development and how have you seen that role evolve in terms of the professional development of its members?

Southern Chapter for me was a way to meet colleagues in the field. The Chapter was friendly and outgoing. I made a tour of the South shortly after I became Director, and met Miriam Libby at Emory, and Eleanor Steinke, Director of the Vanderbilt Library. All these people were people I'd later see at Southern Chapter meetings. We developed cooperative relationships. It helped when the regular program got started, because we were used to cooperating. We developed excellent reciprocal cooperative programs. Over the years, Southern Chapter has gotten much more formal. It used to be informal, and knowledge would be picked up [in casual get-togethers.] Formerly, the host institution planned the program. Things changed about ten years ago. Now there is a program committee with less institutional programming. It used to be that doctors from the host institution would be speakers. But now the chapter is much more involved in the general professional life of medical librarians.

When I was president in the 1970s, the UF HSCL was the host library at one meeting. The highlight was the banquet. Jewel Garvin of our staff had been there since the beginning of our library. She put lots of effort into the menu for the banquet. I remember we met at the Student Union and had a "cracker" menu: fried mullet, cheese grits, swamp cabbage, key lime pie, and iced tea. The entertainment consisted of roving renaissance madrigal lute players which provided a contrast with the country menu. It showed people what north central Florida was about.

Jewel had an ambitious packet with maps and trinkets. This was the meeting where one of our physicians talked about conjuring warts. It was a very interesting meeting and I thoroughly enjoyed it. About 75-100 people attended.

Question: What people contributed to your professional development, especially Southern Chapter people?

They were all Southern Chapter people. Miriam Libbey was one of my idols. She taught a course at Emory on medical librarianship and I was very impressed with that. She was a font of knowledge. Sarah Brown and Mildred Langner were grand ladies who had been presidents of MLA. Buzz Sawyer and Tom Basler taught me how to conduct business in a bar. Mark Hodges was our historian and parliamentarian. He could edit our minutes even if he hadn't been at the meeting. And Tom Lang was another. The males in Southern Chapter didn't

match the females for elegance. They were more "down home."

Question: What was it like being a man in the library world in those days?

I thoroughly enjoyed it. I saw a definite transition. It used to be that I was the only one holding the door and would have to eat lunch last. I paid a lot of bar bills and lunch tabs. The Chapter changed as the women's movement came into being and I went right along with it. I made a lot of women friends I would not have made in a male-dominated profession.

Question: How has the profession changed during your time of involvement?

Technology has had the greatest effect during the years I've been a librarian. I came in at the beginning of technology. I started at Florida Atlantic University [which had nothing but an online catalog.] When I came to UF my reference librarian asked me why she needed a computer; it was faster and easier to look it up herself. Within five years she couldn't do without it. With technology you run the danger of losing the personal interaction with users, but service has increased. The volume of work is greater and information availability has increased. There is an avalanche effect. We are now a more valuable adjunct. The time now is exciting and critical in terms of the role of the library. We've been through such phenomena before. There was an A-V craze in the late 1960's. And times like that when the threat of being swallowed up occurred. Libraries now can stand alone with a clear mission.

Question: Can you tell us something about the early meetings?

This is an apocryphal story, but I'm pretty sure it happened. When Dick Frederickson joined he had a reputation for being a really good guy. The group I was with wanted to introduce him to the Southern Chapter in a friendly way, and give him an idea of what the Chapter was like. So a group of people were on a double bed, lying in a heap under the sheet, with arms and legs sticking out, like an orgy. He was to be brought up and when the door opened, all the people were to jump up and say "Welcome to the Southern Chapter." I don't know if it did or didn't happen but it does give you an idea how friendly we really were.