

***North Carolina Library Association History from the pages of North Carolina Libraries***

# **Resolved: The North Carolina Library Association shall hold an annual conference**

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## **Annual Sessions: Pro & Con - A Foreword**

by Robert H. May, Associate  
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During the 1973 North Carolina Library Association convention, a resolution offered by the Junior Members Round Table was passed by the membership to investigate the possibility of holding the North Carolina Library Association conventions annually rather than biennially. The resolution further specified that a committee be formed to investigate this possibility and all financial factors involved. The committee was charged further with the composition of a proposed constitutional change allowing annual sessions to be voted on at the 1975 convention.

The committee was appointed by Gene Lanier and includes Alieen Aderholdt from Lenoir Rhyne College Library, Sharron Deal from Edgecombe Technical Institute, Ruth Hodge from Havelock Senior High School Library, Nancy Wallace from the State Library, Ariel Stephens from the Charlotte Mecklenburg County Library, and Robert May from the Forsyth County Public Library.

The committee has met three times and decided on a course of action. The committee would: (1) contact leaders of neighboring southeastern state library associations for their

opinions of annual sessions; (2) poll exhibitors on willingness to support the North Carolina Library Association annually; (3) investigate financial ramifications of annual sessions; and (4) invite opinions from the North Carolina Library Association membership.

Letters of inquiry were sent to five state association presidents. Four responded favorably regarding annual sessions. Virginia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida Library Association leaders were for annual sessions, and the Georgia Association president was against annual sessions. The pro and con points in these letters will be described elsewhere in this report.

Exhibitors were polled informally at the 1974 American Library Association Convention in New York City. Approximately 50% of the exhibitors who exhibit normally said they would definitely support the North Carolina Library Association on an annual basis.

Concerning financial factors, it should be observed that rental of exhibit space bears a large part of the burden for supporting the convention. If the number of exhibitors decreased because of annual sessions, it is possible that registration and perhaps membership fees would have to be increased. A fifty percent increase in exhibits might mean as much as a \$3.00 increase in the registration fee, all other factors remaining equal.

More than a dozen North Carolina Library Association members expressed their opinions concerning annual sessions to the members of the Annual Sessions Committee. The following articles embody arguments for and against annual sessions as culled from these opinions.

## **PRO: The Argument for Annual Sessions**

by Robert H. May

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Four out of five state library association leaders from southeastern states listed the following advantages of annual sessions:

(1) It is easier to sustain interest in a professional association when it meets at least annually, since often the momentum gained at convention time wanes as the year gets underway.

(2) An annual convention gives members the opportunity to meet, to keep in touch, and to exchange ideas regarding library programs across the state.

(3) A higher membership level can be obtained when the association meets more frequently than biennially. (Many new librarians in the state who start work between biennial conferences may wait as long as two years before joining the association.)

(4) It is easier to obtain officers, committee chairmen, and others to serve one year rather than two year terms.

(5) An annual convention provides the opportunity to give attention to problems, matters of current interest, and special statewide needs and concerns where there is a sense of urgency.

(6) Annual conventions provide more opportunities to participate in association activities.

(7) There is greater opportunity to see new equipment, books, and supplies.

(8) In South Carolina, where the association went from annual to biennial sessions temporarily, the belief that more people would go to Southeastern Library Association during the off year was discredited. The same number of people went to the Southeastern Library Association Conference when the South Carolina Library Association met biennially as when there were annual sessions.

The list of reasons for annual sessions may be endless, but the issue goes deeper than balancing pros and cons. The more fundamental question is whether North Carolina librarians want a strong, cohesive, vibrant library association with membership from all corners of the profession, or a loose federation of sections going their own way. The latter is what we have now.

The amount of real association business done at conventions for the last three sessions could be typed on two pages. The Executive Board meets more frequently, but spends most of its time appointing committees ad infinitum, listening to reports from these committees, and preparing for the next convention. Most of the North Carolina Library Association committees which are appointed, with the notable exception of the extremely active Intellectual Freedom Committee, make single annual efforts and which

in some instances merely duplicate the work of a section committee.

The sections are active, by comparison. The Public Library Section supports work-shops throughout the state, as does the College and University Section. The North Carolina Association of School Librarians practically stages its own off year convention.

Workshops, however, are far from a replacement for a convention. Attendance is limited, and there are usually no exhibits. Moreover, different types of librarians do not associate with one another to any extent more than once every two years. Because of the resulting loss of interest in one another's problems during the biennium, there is little communication at the convention itself.

Issues like intellectual freedom, networking, union lists, copyright, public and private funding sources for libraries, women's rights, bibliographic control of state publications, and management are good examples. Other state associations have addressed these issues squarely with a continuity and solidarity of purpose brought about by an interested membership meeting annually. The North Carolina Library Association, on the other hand, has hardly scratched the surface of these issues.

Opponents of annual sessions may argue that the financial burden to the association might increase with yearly conventions. It is equally possible that increased interest generated by annual sessions will attract more attendance and more exhibits and that the cost to the association will decrease. In either case, there would be no more than two or three dollars difference to the individual member.

The amount of volunteer time required to put on the convention is another argument. There is no reason, however, why the same persons have to be convention managers, local arrangements chairmen, exhibits chairman, and the like year after year. There is sufficient interest within the association membership to change these appointments each year.

In the final analysis, annual sessions and the proposed constitutional change appearing at the end of this article will not be decided upon by the Executive Board or a few vocal and influential members. It will be the entire membership of North Carolina Library Association who will make the decision and commitment. It will include librarians in the small towns whose budget does not include trips out of state to the Southeastern Library Association Convention, the energetic members who want to discuss current issues annually, and those who want to foster cooperative efforts between libraries in an effort to further goals common to the total library profession.

The chance for change is in the air. It is up to the membership to grasp it.

### **CON: Financial Considerations of Annual NCLA Conferences**

by Ariel Stephens, Director  
Public Library of Charlotte and  
Mecklenburg County

There are several financial aspects to holding annual North Carolina Library Association conferences of which members should be aware. The Treasurer's 1973 Biennial Conference Financial Report is appended for information and study.

If exhibits, as well as meetings, are to be scheduled, space needs for the conference require at least 12,000 square feet for exhibits and an equal amount which can be broken into two large rooms for simultaneous meetings. Hotel and motel accommodations in the state severely limit available locations. When NCLA was smaller, a number of hotels could handle the conference at small cost to the Association and could provide meeting rooms and meal facilities free because we were occupying most of their sleeping rooms. Now, since no single hotel has adequate space, the Association must pay for an exhibit hall, as well as some meeting room space. Hotel ballrooms still come free, but few locations have adequate space for the several large meetings.

Traditionally, revenue from exhibitors' rental payments have exceeded the cost of mounting the exhibits and of space rental and have left a respectable surplus to help the Association operate in the "off-year." Of the recent exhibitors, about one-half of them say they would be

obligated to exhibit regardless of the frequency of the conferences. The other half say they would alternate years, thereby cutting the exhibit revenue. If the exhibit budget broke even with annual conferences, the Association would remain solvent. Should annual exhibit costs exceed revenue, the Association would be in financial difficulty and would be forced to raise membership dues.

Conference registration and ticket sales, which represent approximately 30% of the surplus income, might also be reduced to a deficit figure should there be annual meetings and a possibly consequent smaller attendance.

Another aspect, while not financial, is the amount of volunteer time invested in preparing for the conference. The Treasurer spends much time in mailings, having tickets printed, and pre-registering. The Exhibits Chairman spends about 10 to 20% of his or her time for three to four months prior to conference time with contract forms, mailings, and setting up the exhibit layout.

Local arrangements are a full-time job for several people in the host city in the months before the conference. Furthermore, various Association officers must spend hours of time contacting and confirming speakers and programs. Having been deeply involved in mounting the conference for the last fifteen years, I doubt that I, and many others so involved, could afford the time for an annual conference.

Reports from exhibitors consistently state that North Carolina has the best state conference which they attend. Should we risk one excellent biennial conference for annual conferences which would have fewer exhibitors and fewer librarians attending? Can we financially afford annual conferences? Should off-year conferences without exhibits be held, and would they remain that way? Is ALA's mid-winter conference an indication of what an off-year meeting would become?



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