



MCALLEN PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ADVISORY BOARD AGENDA

Thursday, February 9, 2017, 4:30 pm  
Main Library

- I. Call to Order
- II. Announcements
- III. Minutes
- IV. Public Comments
- V. Bookstore Report
- VI. Librarian's Report
  - Lark Children's Assistant Diana Corona featured in Mayor's State of the City video, "It's Our City"
  - Public Services Report
  - Grants Update
  - Family Place Site Visit & Certification
  - Handout from ALA Midwinter Conference Session on Trustees
- VII. Unfinished Business
  - Orientation Committee – Binder Meeting recap
  - "What Is Our Purpose" Review
- VIII. New Business
- IX. Executive Session

Next Scheduled Meeting – March 9, 2017

## ***Trustees in a Search for Web Order: Phase 2***

Center for the Future of Libraries Symposium, ALA MidWinter, January 2017  
Fred Stielow, Ph.D., M.L.S.

To me, preparations for the future launch with critical evaluations of the past—an approach that looks to surface mistakes, precedents, and crucial continuities. American public libraries, for our example, took shape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—partly to what historian Robert Weibe called *The Search for Order* (1967). Then, the U.S. engaged in a transformative switch from rural and agrarian into modern society. The era was riven by rapid urbanization, massive influx of immigrants, and industrialization. The times also featured a major communications revolution. Innovations in printing and paper making met unprecedented demands from mandatory schooling and a newly literate populace. Enterprising authors and publishers joined to foster the Rise of the Mass Press. Popular reading exploded with a seemingly uncontrollable deluge of new genre—illustrated magazines, penny dreadfuls and dime novels, newspapers with comics. The new media spawned other disturbing outgrowths like modern advertising and propaganda.

While drawing on self-help ideals and the era's educational reforms, public libraries were in fact largely shaped in response to that unstable climate. Internal operations fought to bring order to the media revolution. They would ensure an orderly flow of properly vetted materials. Facilities developed with dedicated reading chambers, but extended as safe civic harbors for women and children. Indeed, these uniquely American creations emerged as requisite symbols for a civilized, progressive community and helped mark the end of the frontier.

Trustees and their community supporters stood largely alone in forming early responses. By the turn of the century matters had changed. State libraries and representatives from the new field of college-educated librarians joined the scene. The private philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie entered to further catalyze a national craze. The institution itself evolved an informal corporate order. Trustee retained oversight, yet trended to the background with fiduciary and policy making functions, as well as crucial liaison activity within their community and to governments. Librarians as part of the nation's new professional classes would direct ground operations. They tied to external developments and emerging scientific techniques from the field, like standardized cataloging along with expanded ILL services and children's programming.

### *Enter the Web*

As evidenced by this panel, the comfortable pattern was destined to encounter another communications upheaval. The World Wide Web forcibly intruded during the mid- to late-1990s. Given a bit of incentive from the Gates Foundation, state libraries, and federal funding—public libraries transformed in remarkably short order at the head of the revolution. ILL streamlined and networking prospects with other libraries expanded. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reference was forced to adapt to the realities of a Google. Core reading and children programming were augmented by information literacy training and expanded public services. Internal layouts altered with the demise of card catalogs and rapid ascent of automated terminals. Dedicated space emerged for public Internet and WiFi stations.

Equally important, institutional walls tumbled. The dominant trope of library as building morphed. New homepages constituted a distinctly different and transformative type of branch facility. The library was longer confined to place or even constrained by local geography. We could now travel around the world with our local library a click away. Instead of limited hours, services were suddenly available 24/7. Electronic collections enjoined with similar impact. The challenges of

binding and housing journals and newspapers could give way to Cloud storage. Materials could be loaned, read, and renewed online. Moreover, virtual holdings altered bedrock ownership principles with licensing and rental agreements.

Today, the inevitability of the Web has been decided. Internal settings have altered. The library website is an expected presence. Despite dire predictions and ongoing cautions, public libraries also continue to survive. Like our 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, they benefited by proactively extending roles as safe havens and revising educational traditions to accommodate a new medium. Although awaiting definitive study, library directors seem to have taken the technical lead in the rush to respond to the new realities. Based on my experiences, boards in general underwent their own significant transformations in coming to grips and pivoting to deal with the onset of the new age. Trustees across the country stepped forward to enable pioneering recognition of Internet services for their communities.

### *Phase 2 Transition*

Fast forward to this panel. The birthing pains are largely over. Change, however, remains endemic. Unpredictable advances dominate the horizon, and the rapid nature of initial responses may call for fine tuning. Hence, where do we go from here—roughly a generation into our second communication revolution? How to best mature and stabilize the roles of public library for the post-modern Web Era?

If the past can be prelude, I suggest that final order waits a bit more time and ultimately insights from an onrushing Born-Web generation. Rather, we've entered a middle or processing phase— one of clean-up, surfacing, and blending. Contemporary trustees engage their directors on a teeter-totter. Our joint goal is balancing the transformational drivers of electronic media on one side with enduring print-era legacies and established traditions on the other.

Rather than final solutions, let us turn the discussions to some of the issues, opportunities, dangers, and questions for possible resolution from both ends of that unfolding dialectic.

- 1. Web/Database Status:** Trustees obviously recognize the impact of the medium per se. That implies consciousness of established Web services along with flexibility for the inevitability and unpredictability of the revolution. To me, it also suggests deferring judgement within the context of a professionalized field. Even the most tech-savvy trustees are advised to rely on their directors and evolving professional approaches generated by the field writ large. Deference, however, does not imply a washing of the hands. Dangers are real. Trustees retain policy responsibilities for balancing the impact of electronic materials and services in redefining their institution for the new era. The inherently disruptive nature of the medium simply demands heightened diligence and added considerations, for instance:
  - *Licensing and Contracts:* Electronic collections and Web services persist in expanding the number of contracts. Although directors remain in the lead, such arrangements include fiduciary and legal obligations that technically fall under the trustees' purview. From my experiences, such documents need to be understood as subject to negotiation, especially on pricing and allied prospects for cooperative purchasing. They are also often in need of clarification on the library's legal position, which extend to a desirable drive to regain ownership rights. Since not every director will be trained or skilled in such matters, individual boards may want to considering if, or how best to assist in the process.
  - *Threat Arenas:* The Web revolution induces other ripple effects, including such heightened dangers as: