

# THE HISTORY, ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE VETERINARY MEDICAL LIBRARIES SECTION/MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper reviews the history and current activities of the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association of the United States. Founded in 1974, the Section has served as an effective forum for veterinary libraries to communicate with each other and to exchange ideas and resources.*

*Despite being one of the smallest sections within the Medical Library Association framework, it has succeeded in being one of the most productive sections. The Section has done much to contribute to veterinary medical librarianship via its many publications as well as its meaningful programs and field trips at the annual meetings.*

*Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Section has occurred within the last five years as it has reached beyond the boundaries of North America to become involved with the international scene. It has encouraged new links of cooperation among animal health information specialists throughout the world on a level never heretofore achieved. The "global village" has truly arrived!*

There are 31 veterinary schools in the United States and Canada. They are quite dispersed. In 1973, they were even more dispersed, as there were only 22 veterinary schools and the networking between the veterinary medical libraries was very minimal. The credit for creating an organization of veterinary medical librarians in the United States must go to Miss Atha Louise Henley. She is the former veterinary librarian at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. Prior to the Medical Library Association meeting of 1973, Miss Henley contacted the veterinary librarians asking if there was an interest in holding a breakfast

meeting to discuss the formation of a veterinary section of the Medical Library Association (MLA). The response was positive enough, that Miss Henley proceeded with the planning and on May 30, 1973 in Kansas City a "breakfast encounter session" was held. There were 12 people in attendance (8 veterinary librarians and four interested parties) at that historic breakfast meeting, including myself and Isabel MacDonald who is present in the audience today. The topic of discussion was veterinary serials, as much an issue then as it is today!

As a result of this breakfast meeting a push was made to gain official recognition of the group within the Medical Library Association. In 1973, the MLA By-Laws required that a petition signed by at least 30 MLA members with a serious interest in the establishment of the group had to be presented to the MLA Board before the matter could be considered. A completed petition (with 68 signatures) was presented to the MLA Board at their Winter meeting, and in December 1973, the Veterinary Medical Library Group (later to be called Veterinary Medical Libraries Section) was granted official status. On June 4, 1974 at the 73rd Annual MLA meeting held in San Antonio the Section held its first business meeting. It is ironic, but exactly 20 years later, in 1994, MLA again chose San Antonio as its meeting site. Five of the founding members are still active within the Section and were present at the 20th anniversary meeting.

I would like to briefly describe to you how the Medical Library Association (MLA) is presently organized. The whole organization is governed by the Board. The Board is

comprised of the President of the Association, the President-Elect, the Immediate Past President and 9 Directors. All of these people are elected by the membership with the exception of the Section Council Liaison and the Chapter Council Liaison. There are two other major governing bodies, both of which report directly to the board. They are the Chapter Council and the Section Council. The Chapter Council is comprised of representatives from fourteen *designated* geographical regions of the United States and Canada. These *regional chapters* hold an annual meeting to interact with the librarians in their region and stay abreast of current medical librarianship practices *via* guest speakers and continuing education courses. The Section Council is comprised of groups based on a special interest. There are currently 23 sections.

Now what is unique about the MLA organization is that each chapter and each section has one vote regardless of how many members it has. Also each section and each chapter can nominate a candidate from its own division to be placed in nomination for the MLA Nominating Committee. Then the members of the Section Council vote upon the names submitted by its members, and the Chapter Council vote upon the names submitted by its members. Hence each council is able to place a representative on the MLA Nominating Committee. The duties of the MLA Nominating Committee are to prepare an annual slate on nominees for President-Elect and for each Director elected by the membership-at-large whose term expires. I perhaps have gone into more depth than I need to here, but I wanted to demonstrate that while the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section, with about 30 active members, is one of the smallest sections, it has as much voice in the total organization as one of the largest sections, i.e., the Hospital Libraries Section with its 1 445 members. The Section is very proud that one of its members, Miss Ann Kerker of Purdue University served as President of MLA in 1976/77.

As I just indicated, the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section (VMLS) is one of the smallest sections in MLA today, and it was the smallest of the 14 recognized sections

within MLA in 1974. I think being small has helped the group. Being such a small group the members can usually be found together, and the first couple of years one would hear comments such as "Oh, there are those veterinary librarians" or "Oh, it's you veterinary librarians, what have you been up to now?" The Section has always made it a point to make a field trip each year. Before the MLA Program rules were changed, the Section sometimes found itself in noncompliance, as special excursions were not to be scheduled during the general business sessions.

So, while the members were sometimes the bad kids on the block, they also gained a reputation of being "doers". Once a section has been approved by the Board it must continue to justify its existence to the Board (actually the Section Council under today's organizational structure). Since the Section was so small it was obvious to all of the members that if it were to survive everyone would need to participate. People who have interacted with the Section immediately comment on the Section's esprit de corps and its tight camaraderie. This cohesiveness, I feel, has been responsible for the Section's many accomplishments - examples are the newsletter - *Highlights & News Notes*, statistical surveys, the *Directory of Veterinary Libraries in the U.S. & Canada*, the *Union List of Serials* and the *Basic List of Veterinary Serials*. In addition the Section exhibits at the annual meetings of the American Veterinary Medical Association to demonstrate how veterinary librarians can provide outreach services to the veterinary practitioner.

The Veterinary Medical Libraries Section is governed by a set of By-laws which is approved by the MLA By-Laws Committee. The statement of purpose is as follows:

"This section stimulates and fosters interest in veterinary medical libraries and librarianship, acquaints persons interested in veterinary medical libraries and librarianship with the association, encourages development of and cooperation among veterinary medical libraries, and fosters a

forum for the exchange of ideas and the discussion of mutual problems and concerns."

The officers include the Chair, the Chair-Elect (also serves as Program Committee Chair), Section Council Representative, Section Council Alternate, Secretary, and Treasurer. In addition, there are two appointed officers - the Archivist and the Newsletter Coeditors. As of this writing there are the following committees: Bylaws Committee, Foreign Language Serials Committee, International Relations Committee, Public Relations Committee, Survey Committee, Union List Committee and the Veterinary Serials Committee. The Section meets during the MLA annual meeting. Traditionally the Section holds a business meeting, a program featuring a guest speaker, a field trip within or near the host city to visit a place of veterinary interest and a banquet. Of course, a few hours of free time are usually found to do a little sight-seeing.

As I indicated earlier, the Section has produced a **Union List of Serials** and a **Basic List of Veterinary Serials**. Both of these publications are now dated and plans are afoot to update the publications. I would like to expand on the **Union List of Serials** and the **Basic List of Serials**. The first **Union List of Serials** was prepared in 1980 and excluded all titles indexed in **Index Medicus**, those appearing in the **Basic List of Veterinary Serials** and those published in the United States. Fourteen libraries participated. The second list was produced in 1988. Word processing had by this time become more commonplace and the coverage was expanded to include all veterinary holdings in the U.S. and Canadian veterinary libraries plus three European veterinary libraries. Two years ago the Committee started converting all of the data into an electronic database which will enable the data to be manipulated in many more ways plus having the capability of providing more information for each entry. For the third edition the Committee wants to include the holdings for as many foreign libraries as possible. Today I issue a special invitation to each of you in attendance to consider adding your libraries' holdings to the Union

List. A paper copy will be produced, but again with continuing advances in technology, the Committee is also looking into the possibility of making the data available online, so that it can continuously be updated. Watch your mailboxes as the Union List of Serials Committee will be contacting you to see if you wish to participate.

Next I would like to talk briefly about the **Basic List of Veterinary Serials**. This list, the 2nd edition revised to 1986, is long overdue to be revised. The creation of the last list involved so much work that I don't think any of the members of the Veterinary Serials Committee were anxious to undertake the task of the revision. However during the last 6 months the Veterinary Serials Committee, of which I am the chair, has been invited by the National Library of Medicine to help them evaluate their coverage of the Veterinary literature by the **MEDLINE/ Index Medicus** database. For some years, veterinary librarians have complained about the coverage, but our pleas always seemed to fall on deaf ears and instead of NLM increasing coverage, it actually decreased. The National Library of Medicine has a policy of periodically doing a full evaluation of each subject area they cover. This fall the subject of veterinary medicine will be coming up for review. The review is lengthy and in-depth, taking about a year to complete. Basically every journal pertaining to veterinary medicine that NLM subscribes to will be evaluated for inclusion in the indexing of the **MEDLINE/Index Medicus** database. I perceive the role of the Veterinary Serials Committee as gathering the raw data for the evaluation committee. This data will come from journal usage studies and surveys taken by veterinary medical librarians as to which journals are most important to their patron. This is a golden opportunity for the veterinary librarians around the world to take a role in deciding future veterinary coverage by the **MEDLINE/Index Medicus** database. Again I encourage you to reply to any surveys sent out by the Veterinary Serials Committee. Once all of the raw data is collected, the Committee feels that it will then have in hand much of the information it needs to compile a revised **Basic List of Veterinary**

**Serials.** So, hopefully within another two years a new basic list will be available.

As already alluded to throughout this conference, the Internet has become a major player in the way we communicate throughout the world. I realize it hasn't come rapidly for some of your libraries here in Africa, but I have faith that it will eventually be available in all of your libraries. In 1990, Victoria Kok, the veterinary medical librarian at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, set up a listserv on the Internet for veterinary medical librarians and other interested parties. There are now 166 users from 23 countries participating. It has become a wonderful resource to ask for help in answering a reference question, to obtain an interlibrary loan in a hurry, to make duplicate material available to other libraries and announce items of general interest. This, along with the World Wide Web, may be the greatest advance we have seen in librarianship since the development of indices to the journal literature. My favorite illustration demonstrating how efficient e-mail is, is the following: One morning I came to work and I had an e-mail message from Celia Reidy, senior library assistant at the Hawkshead Campus of the Royal Veterinary College (London). She needed an article from a particular journal in urgently and asked if I could fax it to her. It so happened that this journal was a South African journal, and it was not widely held in the United States. I immediately forwarded her request to David Swanepoel at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute and he faxed her the article. She had it on her desk when she came to work the next day. Here was a request that went half way around the world twice, yet the article was still delivered within 24 hours. The "Global Village" is truly here!

While the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section has made many contributions to the field of veterinary librarianship during the last 20 years, I feel that the most important thing it has done was to provide the moral and some financial support to Mitzi Williams, Vicki Croft and myself to organize the 1st International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists, which was held in Reading,

England in 1992. In sending out the call for papers for the 1992 conference it became obvious that the United States and Canada were unique in having a veterinary library association. This was not a total surprise because I had learned from the French veterinary librarians, in attendance at the 1981 MLA meeting in Montreal, that they did not have an organization or association with which to affiliate. In fact, they had never met each other until they boarded the plane in Paris for Montreal. A similar situation occurred at the Reading conference when several of the British librarians met each other for the first time. Vicki, Mitzi and I are so proud that through the International Conference we were able to show the world the benefits of having a regional and/or national association.

As a direct result of the conference the British formed the Animal Health Information Specialists - UK Group in March, 1993. In 1994, 30 European Veterinary Librarians, representing 15 countries, held an organizational meeting at the 4th European Conference for Medical and Health Libraries (EAHIL). They voted to petition the board for formal status within EAHIL. Their petition was approved and they will be holding their first formal meeting in Coimbra, Portugal in 1996. The group has also been invited to participate in a special symposium being sponsored by EAHIL in Prague in September 1995.

I do hope that those of you in attendance today will give serious consideration to the idea of forming an animal health information specialists group for Africa. I realize that there are economic and political problems that will have to be overcome, but I think the benefits to be gained in the long run, not just regionally, but also internationally, will overshadow the problems encountered in forming an association. Best of all, though are the endearing friendships that develop from these meetings. Being an optimist, I will be expecting to receive, within the next two years, an announcement for the Second Conference of African Animal Health Information Workers.