

Good evening! I'm delighted to be here on this notable occasion, as we celebrate a most significant milestone in the life of this group. As one of the earliest, formally organized regional medical library groups (until all the others publish their histories we won't know exactly where we fall in the continuum); surely we can use this opportunity to rejoice in our accomplishments as well as our longevity.

Having been part of this organization for more than 30 years (for you statistical buffs, 2/3s of its life), and having watched it grow and change I was pleased (and just a little daunted) to be asked to put together the story of that process. But, rather than reiterate the substance of the history you will soon receive, I would like to share with you some thoughts about the process of "doing" the NCNMLG history.

Initially it was to be a collaboration with Linda Grix, but after some introductory discussions and planning, Linda had to withdraw because her husband suffered a terrible accident while hiking. I noted again recently that according to the Position/Committee Descriptions in the NCNMLG Directory, I was "charged with writing a comprehensive history of NCNMLG that will describe significant events and leaders since the group's inception in 1947." I hope that the finished product does describe significant events, but comprehensive, it is not. Time and financial constraints did not permit as complete and detailed a picture of the group as I would have liked. It might better be called a historical time line, or a growth chart, which highlights NCNMLG's metamorphosis over 5~decades. My husband reminded me of Voltaire's saying, that "History is little else than a picture of human crimes and misfortunes," [L'Ingenou, 1767, chapter 10]. I can assure you that this history has unearthed nothing to support this point of view! However, I offer the following description of the process as a prelude to the distribution of the work itself.

The requirements for compiling an institutional history are pretty basic. In order to determine its origins and life-story, you want the institution's memory in a form which you can look at, read, listen to --internal information from participants, manuscript and/or printed/published materials, issued under the official imprimatur, audio-visual materials, and any associated memorabilia.

Thanks to a concern to save the records expressed early in our institutional life, we have a goodly amount of materials in the NCNMLG Archives. [And I'd like to express here our gratitude to UCSF Archives and Special Collections for accepting the responsibility for housing the collection for the last 10 years or so]. There are nearly five cartons of records, which include some correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports of committees and task forces, and publications -Newsletters and Directories, Union List of Serials, etc. These materials provide the skeleton and substance of the deliberations, activities, the controversies (not many of these!), and the contributions of the members and their elected representatives. Without this information, writing any type of historical account would have been impossible.

That is not to say that gaps don't exist: for example, we lack all the issues of the Newsletter for volume 16 (1994/95), the directories for 1988/89, 1993/94, and 1994/95; we do not have every annual report for every officer and committee, nor the minutes for

all the meetings. (By the way, if anyone out there can supply these missing items, your contributions to the Archives will be gratefully accepted).

Very little correspondence is available, and I'm not sure why. Perhaps the telephone, or today, email is responsible. We may need to enjoin officers and committee chairs from destroying the latter, as the courts have recently done for the White House, i.e., email is as much a part of the institutional record as regular correspondence, and should be reviewed and evaluated as such before destruction.

What is more surprising, we have almost no photographs to record our activities, beyond some from two joint meetings, though I understand a poster with photographs was done on the occasion of the 30th anniversary. In an effort to begin to remedy this, I took a multitude of photographs, I thought, at a recent Transitional meeting, only to find later that there had been no film in the camera...

I say this absence of photographs is surprising, because in many cases, the only surviving records of some institutions (and families, as well), are photographs. Perhaps people relate more readily to the photographic record as being historical, capturing forever one moment in time, which can be revisited. But for some reason, we have never routinely recorded our activities on film. This is a broad hint for the future --perhaps we need to elect or appoint an "official" photographer! Surely there is someone among us whose hobby is photography, and who would be willing to take on the task. I suggest we use the example from the corporate world, and produce an annual "portrait" of all the officers and committee chairs, perhaps at the transitional meeting (with the corollary that those who miss the meeting have lost their chance for posterity!).

One aspect of historical research which is vital to developing as complete an account as possible, is interviews with those who envisioned and implemented policies and activities. The MLA established an Oral History program in the 70s, which began interviewing former officers --primarily previous presidents, and executive secretaries. Having been one of the interviewers, I can testify that given the time and stimulus, such individuals can materially expand our knowledge of events and relationships, and the reasons behind decisions and policies. Although such an undertaking was not possible for this history, I would ask that the Board consider establishing such a program for NCNMLG, sooner rather than later.

This would allow us to capture the memories of some of our oldest former officers, who took major roles in the earlier years of NCNMLG, as well as others who can fill out what's missing from the official minutes. By their nature minutes focus on action, and dialogue and discussion are generally absent. So, by the time a decision is reached, a short or possibly a very long period has elapsed, and reference to the deliberations, to arguments pro & con, is generally omitted.

Well, having gone through every piece of paper in the Archives, I can testify that we have been busy; that our members are talented and generous with their talents and time, and that they are committed to supporting and facilitating the intellectual growth and

development of their colleagues --as well as liking to share a good meal and an amusing program now and then!

Several things occur to me, again having read through the records, which are not new, but newly apparent to me. As many other organizations do, there is a tendency to reinvent, or should I say, re-decide matters addressed years earlier. For example, a decision made one year, which doesn't require a bylaws change, tends to get lost, and after several years, the officers having changed, the institutional memory fades, and the same questions are raised for decision again. Although it frequently happens that someone recalls, vaguely, that the decision was made, there is rarely evidence at hand to examine and resolve the issue. Along the same line, periodically issues get lost between board meetings, or just disappear altogether, and no one follows them until they are resolved satisfactorily. Again, actions take place which are not reported at meetings or in publications, but show up subsequently with little explanation. For example, the first name change, to NCMLG, is not noted in the Board minutes, but appears later in the Newsletter. Presumably the newly constituted Documentation Committee can devise workable solutions for such problems.

One unintended consequence --or perhaps I should say a bonus, really, is that during research for the history I created a rough and ready index of the Board and Business Meeting minutes and the Newsletter, and some committees, in WordPerfect, with the result that I, and my successors, will have ready access to recorded activities when requested. And I hope this will be kept up for future minutes and transactions.

Wanting to add a human dimension to the dry (but vital!) archival information, I contacted all the former presidents for whom I had addresses (by email and snail-mail) and asked them to think about their tenures, and let me have their remembrances of specific goals, activities, events, tribulations and successes.

Of these 34, I had responses from 18, or a few more than half. The earliest president I heard from was Dorothy Dragonette, who is living in Riverside. Dorothy said that she couldn't remember anything specific about her term of office [can anyone guess when she held office? 1963-64]. In fact, most of the respondents said the same --and I must add myself to that group! Because of space limitations (i.e., in an attempt to keep the history to a financially manageable size) I was not able to incorporate their observations, but I'd like to share the gist with you tonight. One thing that many remarked on was the planning for joint meetings. Some felt they had found their metier, that they enjoyed the challenge involved; others noted they enjoyed looking for meeting sites --rather like testing caterers for a wedding, perhaps? [Those of us who were VP in the alternate years missed out on this!] One described the candid response from a hotel, that librarians weren't premier customers --they didn't spend much at the bar! --I'd like to see the data on that! Not every one felt that way; some preferred working behind the scenes to running things. One noted the dramatic shift from a smaller group, with lower dues and programs focused more on medical matters, to the larger group with programs emphasizing library and information technology. They were concerned about the size of the group, and the need to offer more substantial programs and powerful speakers to attract larger numbers

to the meetings. A periodic problem was finding members willing to run for office, particularly for dual slates. Fortunately, we always managed to find sufficient members of good will.

Most commented on the caliber of their colleagues, on their willingness to undertake responsibilities when requested, on their pleasure in working together. Finally, I'd like to quote JoAnn Borkman, who observed, in a vein descriptive of many others, "I can't think of one thing that I, personally, did. One of the strengths of NCNMLG is the commitment of so many members to work together to identify problems, to come up with solutions and then to implement them."

Most of the members have served the Group in one way or another --on committees, task forces, by volunteering or responding positively when asked, regardless of the assignment. The institutions for which the members work also provided support over the years. In addition to providing released time for individual members to carry out projects and attend meetings, these entities have supported mailings, contributed computer time and memory, and space for meetings, and Stanford University's Lane Medical Library, and UCSF deserve special mention. Without this institutional sustenance NCNMLG could not have grown in size, in educational offerings and in access to technology.

The title I've given the history is "Challenge, change and continuity: NCNMLG at 50," perhaps symbolized by the nested "C"S of the new logo. As we look back from the end of the 20th century, challenge and change, low-key and subtle in the early years has come to dominate us all, on the job, as well as in our personal activities. Which of us can look back to the 60s or 70s and say our lives are the same, are not in some cases radically different? Yet, through all the years since 1947 this group of medical librarians has met the challenges of re-inventing our professional selves --embracing the complexity of new technologies, meeting each year's changes, (and this last decade has been one where the impact has been especially great), but continuing to support the principles espoused from the earliest period.

As I say in the conclusion of the history, in five decades the Medical Librarians of the Bay Area had grown from a small, socially-oriented group of librarians concentrated around the San Francisco, Menlo Park, Oakland, Berkeley axis, to the Northern California and Nevada Medical Library Group, geographically encompassing the state from Fresno to Eureka to Reno. The membership grew in numbers, in sophistication, in educational preparation and experience and connectivity. Some issues changed format or direction, but the basic goals -offering educational tools and leadership, avenues for communication, opportunities for personal and professional growth, --were never abandoned.

Now, to illustrate our wide participation in NCNMLG endeavors, I'd like to have you all try an exercise you may have done before. When I name a category that fits you, please stand, and remain standing until I reach the end of my list: anyone who has served an elective office (pres, secty, treas), anyone who has served as elected representative or committee chair; as committee or taskforce member, as behind the scenes worker for

meetings, joint meetings, putting together any of the publications, volunteer as data enterers for ULS, anyone who has attended any of the meetings and profited by them -- let's give ourselves a round of applause!

Before I formally turn this over, I'd like to thank my husband, Bill, for all the myriad ways he has helped me through hours of research and writing -including getting dinner, proofreading, and putting the text into Publisher for the final stage.

And now, Madame President....

Nancy Whitten Zinn  
Archives/Library Consultant  
1410 -21st Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94143-3330  
415\753-8483  
zinn@itsa.ucsf.edu