

# ELA Panelists Discuss Librarianship, 2002

## Theme: Is Librarianship as a Profession Headed for Oblivion?

At ELA's 2002 annual meeting, invited panelists discuss the state of librarianship. Librarianship is undergoing many changes. Some insist for the worst. Following a career as a bookseller to North American research libraries, Nicholas Basbanes turned to writing about bookselling and libraries, and in his book, *Patience & Fortitude*, he describes a nightmare situation in which a major U.S. public library's research collections were decimated according to management fiat, and specialist librarians were turned into generalists.

One of our panelists, Dr. Roma Harris, has written about the deprofessionalization of the reference librarian, the low status of "librarianship" in the public mind, and the gradual abandonment of the "L" word. Those of us who are susceptible to gloomy prognoses may fall into the stereotype of an older generation critical of those who follow them. But it is true that many librarians of all ages are pessimistic about the future. That the problem is greatly exaggerated was argued by Deborah Defoe, a chief librarian and member of our panel, while another has suggested that the profession is simply in need of radical change. Dr. Harris sent out a challenge to all librarians, and perhaps in particular to ELA, which holds a unique position in that it serves individuals rather than libraries. She pointed out that when a provincial government at great expense set up new health information services for the public, it was unaware that librarians in public libraries already provided these services. And yet no library organization protested.

The jury is still out, but our six panelists and members of the audience in the discussion that followed on November 4th, 2002, gave us more than enough to think about.

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## Panelists

**Mary F. Williamson** (moderator)

**Roma Harris** is currently Vice-Provost and Registrar at the University of Western Ontario (UWO). She has taught in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science there since 1982. Among her several advanced degrees she holds a PhD in Psychology from Western. Roma's research addresses aspects of technological change in the information age and gender issues within the professions, in particular the career development of librarians. Her 1992 book: *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman's Profession* has electrified many readers. I ran into it just as I was formulating the topic for this panel discussion, and Roma's thesis seemed to confirm my worst fears. In a recent issue of *Library Trends* Roma has written about the digital reference call-center model. Here she paints a surreal picture of proposed low-cost reference services issuing from third world call centres, a scenario that some library managers apparently find appealing.

**Deborah Defoe** has been Chief Librarian of Kingston Frontenac Public Library since 1999. For almost twenty years she was Manager of Reference and Adult Services at Kingston Public Library, before amalgamation enlarged the area. Deborah is a UWO library science graduate. She whispered to me

that “reference” remains her secret passion!

**Maureen O'Reilly** is Public Service Librarian at Brentwood District Library. She is a Faculty of Information Science (FIS) graduate and began her library career at Mississauga Public Library. She has worked in just about all aspects of public library work: cataloguing, administration, shut-in services to seniors, general reference and children's librarianship. With amalgamation in 1998, Maureen moved from a non-unionized workplace in Etobicoke to the unionized “new” Toronto Public Library. As Recording Secretary of the Toronto Civic Employees Union Local 416 she is a member of its Executive Committee. Her local represents approximately 10,000 municipal workers including library workers and outside workers.

**Elizabeth Driver** comes to us as an enthusiastic user of libraries in both Britain and Canada. Liz lectures on culinary history, and has made numerous appearances on television and radio in connection with a series of cookbook reprints she is editing for Whitecap Books of Vancouver. Liz's background in art history served her well in the editorial responsibilities she undertook for the multi-volume project on artist David Milne. Following the critical success of her 1987 A bibliography of cookery books published in Britain 1875–1914, Liz began work on a bibliography of Canadian cookbooks which will be published by University of Toronto Press as *Culinary landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian Cookbooks from 1825 to 1950*. This work promises to be a model for scholarly bibliography.

**Mary Cavanagh** belongs to a family that is steeped in librarianship. Her mother, her aunt and her sister are all FIS graduates. Mary is a graduate of the library science program at UWO. It is hardly surprising that she feels she has a familial as well as professional stake in the future of librarianship. Mary is currently a second year student in the PhD program at FIS, and continues to hold the position of Manager of Virtual Services at the Ottawa Public library where she has been a librarian since 1998. Earlier she was Community Services Coordinator at Regina Public Library, and during the late 1980s a branch supervisor at the Southeast Regional Library of Saskatchewan.

**Peter Hajnal** retired in 1997 as International Organization and Government Information Specialist in the University of Toronto Library. He has taught as an adjunct Professor at FIS. He is currently Research Associate at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, and Senior Library Consultant to the Southeast European University at Tetovo, Macedonia. Peter is the author of a number of books and looks forward to imminent publication of his *Civil Society in the Information Age*. For Peter, retirement has clearly offered important and satisfying opportunities.

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## Introduction

Mary Williamson

Welcome ELA members, panelists and guests to our discussion “Is the profession of librarianship headed for oblivion?”

Some of you may be wondering whether our topic today represents just another dreary attempt by the old fogies - that's us, the retirees - to glorify the past and make the expected dire predictions about the future. Young fogies always believe that on principle old fogies resist change. But this time some of us are wondering whether there is a will out there to preserve and celebrate a profession that for many centuries has made a particular contribution to society. Are its best characteristics being cast aside as libraries relentlessly embrace the information age? With public agencies always trying to save money, are we feeling the pressure to replace highly trained professional staff with low-wage

workers who can find a quick answer to any question? As moderator today I will leave it to our speakers to address the issues, and anybody in the audience who wishes to add their own questions and comments after the six talks. Consensus is not the point here. If we are to have a truly stimulating morning, and I have no doubt that we shall, it will be because we can be passionate about what we believe and still appreciate thoughtful disagreement and polite confrontation. And we can all lick our wounds over coffee at the break, and lunch at the end of the session.

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## **"Is librarianship as a profession heading for oblivion?" — Roma Harris**

I want to say, in a nutshell, that while the future of librarianship could be, and should be, bright, and not just in the interests of librarians but in the interests of the public, several developments suggest that it may be in jeopardy. Let me start by saying that it is absolutely clear in this day of exploding sources of information, that there is a tremendous social need for people who understand how to organize information, how to create systems for retrieving information that's relevant to people's needs, and for being able to assist people to assess the credibility of the sources of the material that they look at. And there is one profession that prepares people to do this kind of work, and that's librarianship.

For a specific example that illustrates the need for librarians' skills, let's consider briefly the area of consumer health information. In a study that was done in the early 1990s, people were asked how they perceive sources of medical information. The respondents indicated the most important features of the sources from which they seek information, and in order they are: that it is current and up-to-date, that it's accurate, that it's easy to understand, that it's credible, that it is easy to get, that it is exactly what they want, and that it is confidential. And while these same individuals perceive that physicians are the most credible and most accurate sources of medical information, they rank their physicians lowest in the categories of easy to understand and easy to get. However, they rank mass media as highest in terms of ease of access, but lowest in credibility and accuracy. A more recent study by my colleagues at Western reveals that health care consumers consider credibility, and trust in the information source, to be absolutely critical in the provision of preventative health information on the Net. And while consumer advocate groups like the Canadian Cancer Society, or well-known organizations like the Mayo Clinic as well as government, are seen to be credible sources of health information, these same individuals, in response to this type of study, view corporate web sites, especially those of drug companies, not to be credible

The challenge of providing up-to-date, understandable and credible information is one of the things that public libraries are mandated to meet. Librarians have an important role to play in mediating between information seekers and information resources because of their knowledge of source credibility, and their ability to retrieve and deliver appropriate information efficiently. Right at the moment the public has an overwhelming array of resources available to them if they're looking for health information, but often what they find is out of date, it's of questionable authority or quality, and in general they tend to find it confusing. Health care consumers find that they get information that is often conflicting, it's misleading and it's unreadable, and although people say that they can find health related information quite easily on the Net, they often don't know what to make of it, and they don't know how to evaluate it. Regrettably, the understanding on the part of many members of the public, and on the part of policy-makers and managers in both public and private organizations about the potential contributions of librarians in solving these kinds of information-related problems, is poor. And generally, most people have very little understanding of the kind of information skills that

librarians possess. If it's the kind of information handling skills that consumers of health information obviously are looking for, they tend to look for it from people that they think of, loosely, as IT experts, database managers, computer science graduates, or graduates who hold the MBA who describe themselves as information systems or knowledge management experts. However, other than the so-called hard skills of computer science grads in programming, software development, database management and some forms of indexing, in my mind there's little to recommend the skills of these other occupational groups over those of librarians when it comes to drawing together complex sets of information, setting up organizational and retrieval systems, and assisting users to find what they need. So in the face of those demands for those kinds of skills, why am I saying that I think librarianship may be in peril?

Well, there are several reasons. First of all, there is a widespread belief that librarians, as well as libraries, are becoming anachronisms in the information age, and that everything you need to know is on the Net and that whatever is out there requires no organizing and no intermediary to assist people to retrieve it. There is also little credibility attached to the label of librarian. In a study I did two years ago with Margaret Ann Wilkinson, also at Western, we surveyed over 2000 entering first year university students about their understanding of several different occupations, one of which was librarianship. Librarianship was considered to be the occupation lowest in status, lowest in compensation rate and most lacking in opportunities for future career growth relative to occupations like, for example, database manager, medical records technician or the euphemism 'Internet researcher.' But in addition, it was the only occupation in this study that was seen by these students as not requiring a university education. In my book *Librarianship, the erosion of a women's profession*, and in other articles, I talk quite a bit about some of the problems that librarianship faces that are similar to experiences of other female intensive occupations. Those problems revolve around the ability of these fields to attract status and compensation because they are perceived as women's work that anybody could do.

Another problem that contributes to the peril for librarianship, is that the library and information science community, and in particular library and information science education, has been trying to abandon the label librarian with the result that no one thinks librarianship is thriving as a profession. New people don't know about it and hence don't want to enter it. People who are looking for the skills of librarians have no idea what kind of person to seek out, and they certainly don't attach the skills that we think of to the work of librarians. In addition, individual librarians, and in particular those who have assumed some of the most senior roles in the public and the private sector, often describe themselves as something other than librarians, so we're really at a loss for role models. Among these I have in mind a current university president in Canada as well as the former head of a major federal information service, both of whom were trained as librarians but who do not describe themselves that way. And of course the national librarian is rarely a librarian. In Canada we've had one, but there's never been one in the US. In addition the work of librarians is associated with the public sector, and as much as you and I may value what goes on in the public sector it is not as highly regarded today as it once was, particularly by young people who see opportunity, see growth, and see excitement in the private sector, but not in the public sector.

And finally, there is no professional association of librarians that lobbies and advocates for the profession, and raises a stink when the legitimate turf of librarians, and libraries, is colonized by other interests. So in the few minutes left, I want to go briefly into what is happening right now in Canada in the development of community health information systems which are being developed at the federal and the provincial level. As you know, what are perceived to be out of control health costs have many governments looking to promote more judicious and presumably more cost effective use of health care services by consumers. One method that is being introduced across the country is centralized government-run health information services. Unfortunately, these services have evolved with no

awareness, it seems, that there are existing infrastructures - information infrastructures - already in place, the most obvious of which are the public libraries. This lack of awareness and lack of coordination is happening at the policy level where there is a huge amount of faith placed in Internet-based so-called 'solutions.' In many cases they overlook the significant role of intermediaries when looking at people who are trying to seek and use health information. The concept of health reference interviews is basically non-existent. Now there are some good examples in Canada of very interesting projects that have been initiated through libraries, some of which are local; however these examples are not the norm, and right now hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent with little regard for existing public information structures already in place. Right now the federal government has invested \$500 million in what they call 'e-health initiatives.' Right now in the province of Ontario we are spending \$45 million a year on e-health initiatives. In fact, last Tuesday you might have heard the announcement of the new service for citizens of Ontario called healthyontario.com. This allows you to look up on basically a web site, but they are calling it a health portal, with the already existing federal Canada health portal. And the province of Ontario has purchased the information that goes onto healthyontario.com not in coordination with public libraries, but they bought it from a private vendor, an outfit called MediResource. I find it shocking. We need to be thinking about the fact that public moneys, in enormous volume, are being diverted out of the public health and public information infrastructures and into private commercial interests. And there's been absolutely no reaction, that I'm aware of, by librarians or by library associations to these developments. Which brings me to the final point. As you know, information in this economy is a huge commodity. And because of the commercial interests in information, librarians are not on the map. So what am I saying? The skills of librarians are more relevant now than they probably ever have been, but their skills are not understood and they're not recognized. And there is no organized lobby group that has been effective in advocating on behalf of what librarians are. And sadly, we're seeing an erosion of the public sector infrastructure.

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## **"The report of the death of (public) librarianship is greatly exaggerated." — Deborah Dafoe**

In preparing for this morning's session I came to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to separate public librarianship from public libraries because what we are and what we do are so closely intertwined. So to paraphrase Fielding's divine Mr Thwakum, when I mention libraries I mean public libraries; and not only public libraries, but public librarians; and not only public librarians, but public librarianship. As we know, free public libraries emerged in the 1850s based on the radical American concept that in a democracy reading and free access to information is a fundamental right of each individual, unrestricted by local or currently sanctioned social values. And, whether we think about it in those terms or not, everything that we do as public librarians from providing programs that introduce children to books and reading; to developing collection policies that ensure balanced collections that reflect opposing points of view; to staffing reference departments with librarians equipped to provide answers for all of our patrons, all of our endeavours are based upon that democratic ideal of free access to information and ideas.

Over the years this concept of free public library service has become part of the accepted and expected fabric of local government, and along with the librarians who lead and direct them public libraries are recognized as beneficial and indispensable to our communities. As the number of public libraries has grown and expanded over the years, so too have the number of professional librarians employed in public libraries. By the mid 1960s there were over 1,000 public librarians across Canada.

In the 1970s, fueled by the public library building boom, new regional and county systems and emerging technologies, the demand for professional librarians was so great that it necessitated the opening of new library schools, and by the 1980s there were over 2000 librarians employed in public libraries across Canada. And while we may occasionally have felt that our profession was undervalued and misunderstood, we felt largely self-fulfilled and relatively secure in our chosen career.

That sense of security was to be severely tested in the nasty nineties. In Ontario at least, political forces put considerable pressure on many public institutions, including libraries. The Social Contract legislated wage freezes, and this meant that not only were no new positions created but too often professional positions that became open through attrition were filled with less costly non-professional staff. Many of us had barely emerged from that period when we were faced with amalgamations with their focus on the "bottom-line," and again it was the professional ranks that were hardest hit as it was professionals who could afford to take the proffered buy-outs, or who had the education and experience to move into other fields. Municipalities were also feeling the affects of down-loading and dollars were harder to come by, yet at the same time circulation figures were falling, and although circulation figures reflect only a small part of what public libraries do they are the statistics by which our funders and stakeholders often measure our worth. And, darker than all these realities, hanging over all of us like the sword of Damocles was the information highway, the world-wide web, the Internet, by whatever name, the pundits predicted it would be the death knell for public libraries and public librarians.

Well, a funny thing happened on the way to the funeral. And ironically the major resuscitators were the Internet and government. With the advent of the Internet the federal government had the radical idea that it was the democratic right of every citizen to have free and equitable access to information, and so they established the Community Access Program to promote universal access to the Internet and to provide training in structured searching. And to their delight and, in some instances astonishment, they realized that there were already resources in place that were accustomed to offering these very services, and that they were called public libraries. So for a time CAP sites and public libraries were almost synonymous. And with this came the recognition that with the help of professional librarians the public could access reliable resources more easily, quickly and cheaply than would otherwise be possible. Suddenly our professional ability to select, organize, and structure knowledge, and to navigate through seas of information, became a valuable commodity.

Some of you may belong, as I do, to a listserv called A Librarian at Every Table. As public librarians we are being invited to sit at every table, where our professional expertise is sought in regards to broadband connectivity, Smart Communities, Connect Ontario, Early Years Initiatives, Ontario Government Service Centres, digitization projects, community networks, community portals...the list goes on. We are everywhere, and this new respect and stature infuses and energizes all that we do. At Kingston Frontenac Public Library our branches are bustling: our circulation figures are rising once more, our reference queries set new records almost every month, we had over 11,000 children and parents at our summer children's programmes. We are buzzing.

Our professional skills are being recognized and employed as never before. We are still the leaders in defense of intellectual freedom, but now we have moved beyond just local challenges such as Internet filtering to global challenges posed by such things as the US Patriot Act and GAT treaties. We are still the people who introduce your children and grandchildren to the joys of reading, but now we can enhance what we do with electronic reading lists and recommended homework pages on our websites; we are still the professionals who collect materials that reflect our community and its heritage, but now we can digitize it and make it available beyond the library walls; we are still the reference librarians who can answer every thing from in-depth reference questions to settling bar-room bets, but now we can do it virtually, 24/7. We are the human link between our citizens and the knowledge they seek, the ultimate search engine. We are information professionals in an

information age.

Public libraries are cool, public librarians are hot, and we are going to be around for a long, long time.

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## **"Senior qualified applicant - a threat to the profession? A union members perspective." — Maureen O'Reilly**

Usually when I enter a room, that polite hand shield goes up - you know the one - "whisper, whisper" - there's that union person. No doubt she'll say something that will make us all uncomfortable.

promise not to be troublesome. Mary also asked for humour (I don't know if I can guarantee that!) but I do hope that I will be provocative and give all of you something to think about.

My views are my own but culled from my experience as a union activist and as a front-line librarian working in the public library sector.

So let's begin.

Senior qualified applicant - a threat to the profession? I think not.

What is a threat to our profession?

Downsizing that has reduced staffing levels 25% over the last decade.

This is comparable to the former City of Etobicoke and the former City of York closing down their library service entirely. That means nothing past Dufferin.

No wonder you can't find a librarian to help you anymore.

What is a threat to our profession?

Gaping budgets amounting to close to \$1,000,000 per annum.

And that's on top of the downsizing and the other budget cuts that have been foisted upon us by a group of politicians and senior managers who have embraced the cult of "slash and burn" with religious fever.

Its such a simplistic solution to such a complex challenge. Where is our leadership?

What is a threat to our profession?

Book selection that has been contracted out to jobbers.

So much for creating diverse collections that are responsive to our community needs. We just buy books, like widgets, by the pound.

What is a threat to our profession?

Directives that come down that demand we weed by the foot.

And everything is treated the same. Just get rid of the stuff and do it now. And no you can't ask any questions. Like Nike says "Just do it". Now.

(But don't do it where the public can see you because they get upset over that type of thing).

What is a threat to our profession?

Cataloguing standards that have been stripped to their bare minimum.

And you haven't seen anything yet. The entire Bibliographic Services Department sits under threat that it will all be contracted out.

But let's not call it that. The unions get so upset. They are awful touchy you know. Let's call it Alternative Service Delivery or ASD then nobody will know what it is.

All in the name of efficiencies. We will wake up one day scratching our heads and ask: where did everyone go?

What is a threat to our profession?

Low salary levels, poor benefits, the increase of part-time workers.

The McDonaldization of the library world. I don't know how anyone can live in Toronto on a 10 hour a week job. But we have hundreds of library workers today doing just that.

Indeed we were told two years ago in bargaining that Chapters is our greatest competitor. Like leemings, we have rushed to the bottom.

Expect your library staff soon to be wrapping Christmas presents and whipping up Mocha lattes for the holidays all in our efforts to serve you better.

Goodness knows, we wouldn't want to promote the staff as information professionals that have a little more to offer than foamy milk?

What is a threat to our profession?

We are all the same. Cookie cutter cut outs. Everyone should be able to everyone else's job after all.

Our most exalted staff members are our pages. Why those earnest young folks with the apple red cheeks are eager to staff our circulation desks, clear snow in the winter and plant tulips in the summer, and throw in a few answers to reference questions to boot. And they are so nice too. They are willing to do it for minimum wage.

I never joined the library to get rich, but after all these years at working away in the profession, I didn't think I would still have to be so careful with my money.

Don't forget to be part of the latest craze either: "spot the children's librarian at the public library." She is on the endangered species list. She'll join her friend the cataloguer. Soon to be joined by their other friend the reference librarian who now spends all of her time signing up "Bozo the Clown" and a wide assortment of other serious pseudonyms for their 30 minutes on the Internet, that great revered information source that trustees think is the magic genie in the bottle and the answer to their woes.

And please never talk about your additional degrees, specialities or interests that you may bring to your position. It just complicates things. Keep it simple, stupid.

There is no such thing as a specialist anymore. It's so base anyway. Those people always ask for more money.

I'll let all of you in on a secret. General librarians are bored out of their minds.

What is a threat to our profession?

That going on six years after amalgamation, library workers in Toronto are not being paid to do like and similar work.

This is known as wage harmonization. A librarian in one part of this city is paid \$10,000 a year less than another for doing exactly the same work. Workers are demoralized. Six years. We have been at the table full time negotiating this since September 2000. Out there sits another huge amalgamation task, known as redeployment, that will follow. We will be shuffled like cards in a deck. People just want a sense of normalcy to return to their lives.

And, I see in the latest edition of the FIS "Informed" that our own City Librarian has been awarded the Alumni Jubilee Award for her success in merging the seven city boroughs into one of the largest public library systems in North America.

wish they would have told us!

Those 2,500 library workers who have delivered the highest circulation levels for a public library in Canada, and the fourth highest for a library in North America, should get the award for doing that in spite of it all.

What is a threat to our profession?

That the library hires workers into positions who bring with them years of experience and knowledge and a great commitment to the organization by placing them in positions that they are qualified to do with a minimum of bureaucratic fuss, in a minimum of time and at a minimum cost.

That is not a threat. That, is what senior qualified applicant in our promotions process will now get you.

I'll provide you first with some background to the issue on how we got from there to here.

Library workers are part of a large composite union here in Toronto. We are members of the 10,000 strong Toronto Civic Employees Union, Local 416. We are the people who brought you the garbage strike this past summer. (More on that later).

Library workers number about 2,500 members in the local. A method of proportional representation ensures that we have comparable voice on our executive board.

Moreover, library workers form one of the two main divisions in the local: the outside workers and the library workers. Our library division chair, Christina Duckworth-Pilkington who happens to be in the audience today, sits on the Executive Committee of the local.

I myself occupy the position of Recording Secretary and I am elected from the membership as a whole and sit on the Executive Committee as well.

Has the relationship worked well for us? For library workers and for librarians?

Absolutely.

We have two excellent contracts to show for it.

Our first contract dating from amalgamation was signed in March 2000. Our second contract was signed this past summer.

There are two highlights I'd like to speak to.

The first highlight is shift premiums.

To the best to my knowledge, we are the first local of library workers who have shift premiums. We earn extra money in recognition for working evening and Saturday hours.

In large part this achievement was thanks to the efforts of our union president. He refers to himself tongue in cheek as "just an outside worker," but it was he who recognized that there was value in the work that we do and that we should be treated like all the other municipal workers.

That indeed this was a question of discrimination.

Male dominated work places had received shift premiums for years. In fact, Local 1003 maintenance workers, the guys at the former TPL, received shift bonuses. The girls at the library did not.

Management said across the bargaining table that the reason we did not was because it was a tradition not to pay us. A tradition. Imagine.

Fortunately our union president did not have as high a reverence for turkeys, and he thought otherwise. A call to the mayor's office exposing this "tradition" soon remedied the situation.

The second highlight was the securing of the senior qualified applicant language during this last round of negotiations.

This was something all the predecessor library systems had fought long and hard for over the years and had never been able to secure. However, timing was on our side this time. We had closely tied our own bargaining schedule to that of the outside workers. We had in fact a strike deadline about a week after them.

The issue of senior qualified applicant was something most of the predecessor outside workers had in their old collective agreements. However, certain individuals in the new city wanted to introduce a scheme that would allow the "best candidate" to be selected.

Both the library workers and the outside workers proposed language for senior qualified applicants as part of their promotions clause.

(Ironically, the only outside workers who were able to retain their rights under the senior qualified applicant process were the paramedics. A group with the highest level of qualifications who are most often identified with the librarians).

The library workers were successful this time in securing the language although it is modified from our original proposal.

(The Outside workers will know the outcome of their efforts on Tuesday. As you know they were ordered back to work by provincial legislation and an arbitrator was put in place to decide their fates. His report will be released tomorrow).

Here is how the language reads:

Senior qualified:

1. For the following positions (See Appendix A) the applicant with the most bargaining unit wide seniority who possesses the REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS, skill and ability shall be selected for the position.
2. Such qualifications, skill and ability shall be those identified in the job description as necessary to perform the job function.
3. All applicants shall be evaluated against the same set of standards.

To be noted, librarians are not part of this process though the union fought very hard to include them. As a general librarian myself, I am disappointed that we will not be.

The climate which all of this change was introduced to was as follows.

In our first contract, we did accept a promotions clause which all of you are very familiar with. What managers like to refer to as the "best candidate" process.

What did it produce for us over the last few years?

A promotions process that was unconsciously expensive and didn't work. Job opportunities were posted. People applied. Interviews were carried on. And on. And on. It took forever.

In the new TPL, on average over 400 interviews were being conducted a year. The HR department couldn't keep up.

At the same time, the library was facing huge budget pressures from the outside. The library's response was to cut service instead of changing the way that they worked. The Union went to the library board. We conservatively estimated that the library was spending between \$315,000 to over \$1,000,000 a year to move staff around. (We think the figures are much higher). And people were not getting the jobs and the opportunities that they were qualified to do. There was no "best candidate".

What the union got was a avalanche of promotion grievances.

More than half of all grievances filed in the first two years were over Article 16.

It was clear that the system was broken and that it had to be fixed.

More sadly, it produced a system with ethno-cultural biases and one that discriminated against older workers.

In the latter instance, a worker who had over 22 years of experience with the library system applied for a position that he had been performing on a temporary basis for over two and half years. He was not successful in getting the position. Even more shockingly, the documentation showed that even if there had been no other candidates, he was deemed to be incapable of doing the job.

Has the senior qualified applicant produced the results the union was hoping for?

It is too early to tell. The collective agreement was ratified just this past July . We have not had the length of time needed to analyze the process.

Interesting to note, that just about the same time I accepted to be on this panel, I came across this article in the Globe & Mail : "The search for merit is killing Canada's civil service". It discusses many of the same problems that I just spoke to.

As a union official I am proud to say that I am a part of the process in trying to bring about change in our profession. Change that will only strengthen it further. Albeit some days I feel like I am standing with my finger in the dyke.

But we need someone to talk to. We need leadership who will not be afraid to become part of the same discussion. And leadership that can recognize and respect the work that we do.

And we need more people to read Dr. Harris' book and take heed. I guess I've been waiting a long time to get invited to a panel like this one because I must say this is the one and only book I own on our profession.

It certainly speaks to me.

Is librarianship under threat?

Yes, I believe it is.

To preempt a question from the floor, would I recommend the profession to anyone?

I've thought long and hard on this. For the library assistants, for now, there seems to be a future in public library work. But for the librarians, there is not. There are fewer and fewer of us.

I am going to stay. More out of perversity than anything else.

I went to a friend's retirement the other day. She spoke so proudly of the profession and I wondered if I would be able to do the same at my retirement party. But the irony was she was taking early retirement because she did not enjoy the work any more.

One more lost. We are lesser for it.

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## "Where is my expert?" — Elizabeth Driver

Firstly, I would like to thank the Association for inviting me to be on today's panel to offer my point of view as a library user. I will not pretend to be a typical patron (if there is such a thing). Most of my research has been related to compiling bibliographies in a particular subject area and associated enquiries to do with authors' lives or company histories; however, I have had broad experience of Canadian libraries. Over the past decade or so I have visited hundreds of institutions in search of cookbooks ? university and public libraries in every province, plus museums and archives, which, it turns out, are also rich repositories of books. Today's question, 'Is Librarianship as a Profession Headed for Oblivion?' prompted me to reflect on my needs and expectations as a library user and to consider the role of the librarian in making my research forays a success. I have come to the conclusion that it is precisely the skills, knowledge, and judgment of the professional librarian that determine the quality of the library experience. However important new technologies, information retrieval systems, management theories, and funding levels may be, the outcome will be compromised if there are no professional librarians to guide and advise the user, and no professional librarians as active participants in all aspects of policy-making. On the one hand, the onslaught of new technologies and all the attendant change has seemed to push the role of the professional librarian to the margins; on the other, it may be that the professional librarian is more necessary than ever.

When I visit libraries or when I contact libraries from home through my computer or by telephone, I hope to find librarians who have an expertise in a particular field, whether it's rare books, business resources, reference, or even children's literature at the local public library. It's important to me that they know, for example, the history and evolution of the collections for which they have responsibility, the nature of the holdings, what is likely or unlikely to be found there, how it's been catalogued, or possibly not yet catalogued, the strengths and limitations of their software systems, and that they can direct me elsewhere if my question cannot be answered at their institution. I also hope to find librarians who have a sense of ownership of the institution's collections and have been vested with a personal responsibility for them. I want to be reassured that policies concerning, for example, access to collections, acquisitions, or the handling of books have been devised with the full participation of the librarian, and perhaps, most importantly, that the librarian can exercise his or her professional judgment as to how policies or rules will be interpreted in individual cases. The professional librarian is my essential expert and my ally, who helps me find my way through that rich storehouse of information called a library, whether the information is to be found in physical books on site or in electronic form in cyberspace. It may seem paradoxical, but the more experienced I become as a researcher and library user, the more I need and appreciate the services of the professional librarian.

Generally, my experiences have been good as I carried out the research for my cookbook bibliography. My enquiries have usually elicited helpful and thorough responses from each institution, even though, at the beginning, I didn't have the benefit of a profile in Canada since my other work had been done in the UK. At the beginning, I made my enquiries by letter, telephone, or in person, and always received a personal response. It was wonderful to be able to contact the same individuals later, if I needed further help, especially when I knew they were excited by the project and happy about the interest I showed in their collections. Establishing a relationship with the librarian made it easier for me to explain what I needed and made it easier for the librarian to find the answer. Sometimes librarians have contacted me to let me know about new acquisitions, which has been a real boon. Last week, for example, out of the blue came a call from Theresa Regnier at the University of Western Ontario, with news of the rare 1912 London Cook Book. Towards the end of the 1990s it became possible to send reference questions by email to most institutions. This cut telephone bills and sometimes was faster than other methods, but I have noticed a worrying aspect to the advent of email reference. One trend is that, increasingly, the librarians are becoming anonymous so that you don't always know the name of the person who answered your question, and you don't know how to contact them directly again if you need to. When you are not allowed to establish a relationship, it's more difficult to feel reassured that the person at the other end has understood all the dimensions of your question and is willing and able to give it the best possible response; anonymous email reference systems have made me hesitate about bringing forward more complex questions, ones that might require more than a simple response. Just as frustrating when the email service is anonymous is that it's difficult to convey adequately your thanks for the answer. This may seem a trivial aspect, but anonymous email reference services, in my view, reduce the satisfaction in the exchange for both the patron and the librarian.

The other trend is to charge for email reference services, especially at public libraries, and especially for users outside of the municipality. I imagine the measures have been put in place because of the increase in demand created by the service. This is ironic because the introduction of email reference, which was supposed to enhance accessibility, now may actually inhibit serious research or discourage the ordinary user. The most frustrating experience for me was with the Hamilton Public Library. This library has a wonderful local history room, and I drove down from Toronto on several occasions to spend the necessary time there. Subsequently, I called or emailed once or twice to follow up some queries, successfully. Not too long ago, another question arose, a simple one that I knew could be answered quickly by checking the card catalogue directly opposite the librarian's desk, but when I tried to email my question to the local history room, I discovered I would have to commit to paying a

charge before I could send my question: \$10 for the first 15 minutes; \$20 for 30 minutes, etc. If such a system were in place at every library, research which required wide-ranging enquiries would be prohibitively costly. I was perplexed that a library devoted to the history of Hamilton would implement policies that created hurdles for research projects that illuminate aspects of the city's history. I would typify myself as a dogged and persistent researcher who will keep digging till she reaches the bone, but even I am sometimes disheartened when I meet resistance, and I have to admit that I dropped pursuing my question when I learned that the librarian who had helped me in the past had retired (part of the fallout from the city's amalgamation) and when I realized that the \$10 I would have to pay for the answer ought to go to a more crucial issue. Last week, in preparation for this panel discussion, I telephoned the local history room to clarify my understanding of the policy concerning user fees. I spoke with the archivist because the retired librarian had not been replaced and there are no plans to do so. Apparently, the archivist does use her discretion not to charge, for example if she recognizes that a project would have a public benefit, although there is nothing in the official library board policy that explicitly allows her to do so. Of course, she can only exercise this discretion if the needy researcher telephones her instead of emailing, because if you email you must push the "I agree to pay" button. The local history room is the only department that does e-reference, but an "e-reference committee" has been struck to consider extending the service to all departments. Against all reason, the only one who has experience of e-reference in the library, the local history room archivist, is not on the committee! Whether the e-reference service in other departments will be fee-for-service has not yet been determined. I am glad that the occasion of this panel prompted me to call because now I have re-established my relationship with the staff at the local history room. Still, it's troubling that I felt rebuffed by the system in the first place, and, as a user, I wish I didn't have to do so much negotiating to get the help I need.

In the course of my research I have encountered a variety of other problems, such as inaccurate bibliographic records, software limitations, slow delivery times for books, sometimes unreasonable (to my mind) restrictions on photocopying, caches of books that have remained uncatalogued for years, and disputes over control of collections that have prevented access. I don't always know the cause of these problems in particular instances ? is it lack of funding, evolving technologies, bad management, or a combination of different factors? And I can't always be sure to what degree professional librarians were involved or not involved in the decisions that led to the problems. Nevertheless, I know that my best chance of understanding a particular problem and finding a possible solution is to seek out the expertise of the librarian.

As a library user, I have only a vague idea of the debates going on within the profession and, as an outsider, it's difficult for me to assess to what degree the profession might be heading for oblivion. In the presence of this assembled company, I am especially worried about sounding naive. Perhaps I have been sheltered from many changes because my research interests involve, for the most part, special collections. Nevertheless, it's clear to me that over the last decade or two the library landscape has altered. Libraries now look very different inside. At the Toronto Reference Library and at Robarts Library at U of T, the two places where I most frequently work, the arrangement of the physical space seems to change regularly to accommodate the increasing numbers of patrons using the library for free access to the internet and for email. At the main desk on the ground floor of the Toronto Reference Library, I have sometimes, as I waited, counted a ratio of only one patron asking to be directed to a library department to up to five persons asking for an email computer, and there were even more email users during the Pope's visit this summer. It seemed at the time that this great library had been reduced to an internet café. I understand that having accepted the gift of computers from Microsoft, the Toronto Reference Library is obliged to provide the staff services, although it seems an out-of-balance allocation of resources to me. And I have also been told that the staff are concerned about facilitating access to sites that they find offensive. When I visit Main Street Public Library to browse the shelves for a novel, I may be the only person in the fiction room while

queues develop at the banks of computers for internet access. I am not a Luddite when it comes to the new technologies ? as a bibliographer I have benefited greatly from the new ways of communicating and of retrieving information ? but I am sure that these developments are not leading to a perfect world, and that some good things - perhaps the valuable qualities of the professional librarian - may be lost in the process if we are not careful. My concern about the advent of the new technologies is not with the technologies themselves but with the utopian visions that accompany them. A chill ran down my back when I read in the last National Gallery Bulletin\* the words of Louis Forget, the recently retired Director General of Information Technology Services for the National Library and National Archives. He is reported as saying, "the ultimate role of technology in the future is to provide access to knowledge/information just in time to anyone and anywhere." Perhaps I have misunderstood his comment, but the implication seems to be that somehow all knowledge/information, past and present, can be captured in one interconnected system, then, at the touch of a button, the perfect type and amount extracted to match the user's needs, whatever her purpose, her level of education, or her culture, and wherever she lives in the world, then instantly sent to her through cyberspace. I know that I am not 'anyone, anywhere' and that the 'knowledge/information' that I seek may, in some measure, be qualitative, not quantitative. Over the past decade or so, in the course of carrying out the research for my bibliography, I have come to believe that there will never be a system, electronic or otherwise, that is perfect in design and execution and meets every possible need. I imagine that the library user will always come up against difficulties of various kinds and that he or she will need the guidance of a professional librarian, the kind of librarian upon whom I have relied in every step of my personal research journey.

\* Interview with Louis Forget, 'National Gallery Bulletin 34/ 5 (Sept/Oct 2002) 14.

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## **Librarians of the future - following the 'red thread' of the question." — Mary Cavanagh**

The title of this presentation comes from an article by Marcia Bates, from the Dept. of IS, University of California at Los Angeles, entitled, "The Invisible Substrate of Information Science" (JASIS, 50(12), 1999). Last year while I was working on the course work for my doctoral program, I had the equivalent of a reference librarian's Eureka while reading this article. I felt that I was finally reading a beautifully crafted articulation of the essence of my work for the past 15 years. I was reading the words behind my intuitive understanding of what is unique and what is also so difficult to describe about the profession and the practice of librarianship.

Professor Bates describes at a high level, what it is about librarianship / information science that makes it a discipline of its own, with a unique and valuable theoretical framework, within the social sciences. Where other professions value other dimensions of psychology, sociology or the sciences perhaps, library and IS professionals "always follow the information" like Woodward and Bernstein always followed the money. We are on a perpetual quest for "the red thread of information in the social texture of people's lives." (The red thread refers to the red rope sailors on the British seas would use to mark dangers on the seas ? what was as important above the water line was also equally important below the line.)

Bates notes that the theoretical framework of Librarians / IS address 3 big questions: the physical question ? what are the features and laws of recorded information? The social question: "How do people relate to, seek and use information?" And the design question: "How can access to recorded information be made most rapid and effective?"

The job of librarianship then is to reveal answers to these big questions from the view below and above the red thread marking the water line ? to surface what is submerged to create more understanding. In the course of this brief commentary, I would like to table what I think are two critical roles and one core value of librarianship that ? if properly exposed and contextualized ? will ensure our safe passage as a profession into subsequent centuries, and more importantly will also ensure that our work has observable, demonstrated value in our society. And I'd like to conclude with some very practical observations on the career path of [public] librarianship.

Using my career as an example, the roles running through my professional experiences include librarian as trainer / educator, librarian as supervisor / administrator, librarian as information navigator for the every?day information seeker; librarian member on the social services team empowering the less powerful; librarian as content/collection builder; and librarian as virtual information facilitator / collaborator. These roles are likely all familiar to you ? they illustrate how complex and sophisticated in fact, is the profession of librarianship. Did I know I was being trained for all of these roles in library school? As Roma Harris would attest, having had me in her classes, absolutely not! I thought I was destined only for one job, one role, one library, one information desk, in an academic library, no less. Never happened.

The role of librarians in the 21st century requires that we exercise different skills than we used to, and that we demonstrate some of what has historically been our hidden knowledge. We need to tell our story within this technologically sophisticated, social and informational context. There are two professional roles we need to update, reflecting the changing information ecology we and our clients inhabit.

Historically librarians were more often morally, and ethically neutral gatekeepers, historians, record keepers and collection builders. For example as Alfino & Pierce describe in their article on the social nature of information, librarians in the early 20th century adapted their values to address the 'fiction problem.' The 'fiction problem' as it was called, referred to the fact that librarians could no longer substantiate and verify the quality of the information contained in books classified as fiction. And therefore, they adopted a neutral stance towards their collections. Today, I believe librarians defend their neutral stance on the basis of support of intellectual freedom. However, in fact this neutral stance is a way for librarians to continue guarding collections and the community's values by gatekeeping physical or even virtual collections. I suggest that we perpetuate this neutrality ? at our peril.

The rhetoric is out there and Deborah Defoe has already made reference to it ? that public libraries could become irrelevant, or worse, extinct, according to multiple futurologists, in part, because our role in gatekeeping collections has been usurped by the 'techniques' of new information technologies. We need to better acknowledge the changes in what Bates calls the social nature and design questions of information. As professionals, we must become active participants in discussions, we must take positions on content, on collections, on the Internet; we must take risks by speaking out, not by remaining neutral on our commitment to intellectual freedom.

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) campaign waged by librarians and others in the US last year is a large scale demonstration of this new role. Librarians must demonstrate leadership, not by our silence and implied consent, but by our participation in civic, community?based democratic discussions.

The other core role that the profession of librarianship (in particular public librarianship) must raise above the water line's red thread, is encapsulated in our core activity of information access and provision at the reference or information desk in any library or library?like setting. Public librarians serving adults have typically been inclined to disguise their role in client instruction and client

education in contrast to librarians in educational institutions ? universities and colleges - or in contrast to the work of children's librarians. I would argue that as librarians we have a central role in educating our clients, one client at a time, on the patterns, the structures, the way information is represented and how it can be retrieved based on individual, client-based needs. In today's information environment, that teaching almost certainly involves instruction in the virtual domain of the Internet and the world wide web. Many of my colleagues, of the same age and stage, continue to actively and even passively resist this new role definition, in particular in public libraries.

Finally, in addition to the roles of librarian as active participant, and librarian as individual teacher, the information context of the 21st century draws attention to the unique knowledge librarians have that is far too often submerged, and unacknowledged ? our understanding and respect for the information seeking and use process from the client's perspective. We know a simple question is never a simple question; we know that the organizational systems for accessing information can be simple or intricate according to the client's need, skill level and sense of individual control or empowerment. We know how the same person never asks the same question twice, or the same question is never asked in the same context twice. Through our training and experience, we follow the user and the information.

As Roma Harris has described in her work on the erosion of the profession of librarianship, the practice of librarianship is centered on the client or information seeker. Librarians are service oriented helpers, trained to assist library patrons in getting what they want or need at the specific moment from the storehouse of recorded information whether that's a directory on the Internet, or in the National Library collections. In this way, the "democratic professionalism" displayed by many library practitioners should permeate our profession. I think this is a very easy value to lose sight of, especially in the self-serve, enterprise-based model of librarianship promoted during the last decades. I believe that my experience as an information librarian at a busy central library ensures that I remain a librarian first, and an administrator second, no matter what position I may hold.

From a very practical perspective, however,[public] librarianship as a profession may be threatened by our own administrators' approach to providing the skills and competencies required at the front lines. In a recent focus group held at our library in preparation for a new succession and retention program for staff, the middle managers overwhelmingly indicated that they first chose to work in the public library because the work was consistent with their own values related to the provision of service to the community. That is, public librarians often come to the library because they believe they are providing direct service to their community. To take librarians away from this direct service and move them exclusively into supervisory or management positions, as is frequently the solution to budget reductions, in fact strips the institution (and the profession) of its value. From my experience, and certainly reflected in the research literature, the profession of librarianship is grounded in the concept of service, of helping clients achieve their goals. If I can ever get to the stage of doing the research work for my doctoral program, I hope to be able to capture and structurally describe the 'public library value' in terms of social rather than economic capital.

So, is the profession headed for oblivion? Of course not. But our future in the Internet age will depend on our ability to be recognized as full-fledged members of our client community ? whether that's the university campus, the corporate information centre, the medium-sized municipality or the virtual library. We must continually put our values, our skills and knowledge, and our unique understandings out for scrutiny, comment, criticism and support. It's far more than mere imaging and marketing that's required. Our professionalism is based on more than cosmetics and practical shoes. We must shrug off some of the more limited, historically rooted roles and values and define our new place in this brave new information world, one information problem resolved and one empowered client at a time.

## "Librarianship - changed, not doomed." — Peter J. Hajnal

In her invitation to participants in the panel discussion at this year's ELA Annual Get?together, Mary Williamson posed a challenging question: Is librarianship as a profession headed for oblivion? My comments in response to this question are based on personal reflection rather than methodical research; they may be somewhat random but perhaps still relevant.

Librarianship is a very old profession?recall the ancient library of Alexandria or mediaeval monastic libraries such as the one used by Umberto Eco as the setting for *The Name of the Rose*. In the course of its long existence, our profession has undergone many transformations; the change accelerated in recent years due to various factors, the technological revolution being perhaps the most important. But whatever changes librarianship has seen and will see in the future, I believe that it will survive because the need for highly-skilled and capable librarians continues to exist and even increase. In my opinion, therefore, the view that librarianship is headed for oblivion is too pessimistic. That said, let me add that predictions?including this one?are always dangerous; witness the prediction of the inevitability of the 'paperless society', or the notion of the 'end of history', or the idea that the near future of society would be characterized by steadily increasing leisure time and steadily decreasing workload.

I would like to highlight two particular challenges confronting efficient, highly-skilled library services. First, the 'deskilling' of professional librarians by managers in various library settings. I am conscious of the growth of 'the culture of the manager' and I have seen in several institutions a kind of lurching back and forth in response to administrative, budgetary or political pressures, instead of deliberate managerial policy or systematic long?range planning. These swings have forced specialist librarians to become generalists, and have caused appropriate reference service to decline and specialized collections to be scattered in the library's general holdings, thereby making these collections less coherent and much less useful to library patrons. The notes of our ELA programme today mention Nicholas Basbanes's description of a major US public library whose research collections were decimated according to management fiat, and specialist librarians were turned into generalists. And this is far from an isolated incident.

The situation, however, is not hopeless. Professionalism, subject expertise, and user needs can combine to defeat or reverse poor administrative decisions. Sometimes what goes around comes around. But this is not likely to happen without major pressure. Librarians cannot succeed alone; they need allies such as influential faculty in case of university libraries, or elected politicians (MPs, MLAs or city politicians) in case of public libraries whose services or collections are threatened. The library profession must be vigilant, and must not be afraid of advocacy and lobbying to ensure that the users' needs are met. Moreover, specialists and other professional librarians can reassert themselves and rebuild informal functional networks in the face of bad managerial decisions; there are examples of success in this struggle.

Second, as Mary Williamson remarked, there is a tendency in many libraries to devalue academic qualifications and traditional librarian skills in favour of technological and management skills. I would respond that computer literacy and other technological skills have become an indispensable part of our profession, and there is no reason to fear that improving those skills will, in itself, erode professional competence. The strength of the true specialist lies in understanding and working with the whole gamut of resources (traditional and electronic) and their relationships. We must remain concerned about harmful trends affecting our profession, but we cannot and should not fight all

change. Rather, we should harness technology to empower and enhance the library and information profession.

`Library' and `information' take me to my third and final point. It is interesting to consider some coping strategies in the face of change adopted by many institutions in our field. These include name changes for professionals (from librarian to information specialist, and so forth). A number of institutions of librarian education have resorted to name changes, and these changes may have been survival measures. I am sad to recall that my alma mater, Columbia University's School of Library Service, ceased to exist a number of years ago (due to a variety of factors). At the University of Toronto, the Library School was founded in 1928 within the Ontario College of Education; in 1972 it became Faculty of Library Science; in 1982 it was changed to Faculty of Library and Information Science; and in 1994 to Faculty of Information Science reflecting "the growing importance of information management in society" and "the changing role of the profession," according to the latest FIS calendar. There are those of us who regret that the "L" was taken out of librarianship. This is not to say that it was not a good idea (it was) to establish the three academic streams (librarianship, archives, and information studies). We have also seen mergers such as at the University of Western Ontario, where journalism and librarianship were combined in one school, or Dalhousie University, where the schools of business and librarianship were merged. Of course, there were more complex motivating factors behind these developments. In addition to insuring survival of these institutions, name changes and mergers have perhaps served to increase their administrative and financial clout vis à vis the parent university. More important, the changes have resulted from recognition of real changes in the profession, and commonalities with other disciplines. This is not a bad thing.

My conclusion, not particularly a revolutionary one, is that our profession has changed greatly, in many ways for the better and in some ways for the worse. Some change has been good for us; other changes have been shortsighted and must be fought. Future changes are inevitable. Through these changes the profession has shown itself to be flexible and adaptable, even though there have been painful dislocations in the process. I believe strongly that the profession will survive, by whatever name.

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## Discussion

Question:

**Joan Winearls.** Would Roma Harris and Deborah Defoe like to explain their apparently opposing views: the one optimistic, and the other negative?

Answers:

**Roma Harris.** I'm not sure our positions are so different. Public libraries are being put at risk by public resources being diverted away to other interests, and they are unable to deliver levels of service that people expect.

The profession has an identity problem, and it is difficult to attract the people who are needed. At UWO the name change in the library programme was a survival mechanism. No other professional group has decided that when the tough times come, and they should reshape themselves and develop new skills, that it would be better to be called something else.

**Deborah Defoe.** Public libraries need quality people on their boards, and through OLTA trustees are being prepared for advocacy. It is the responsibility of everybody in the room to serve on library

boards and to recommend candidates.

**Mary Cavanagh.** Libraries are not cheerful places at the moment. Politics at all levels are making it essential for librarians as professionals to stake their claim, and not just on a regional basis.

Question:

**Phyllis Platnick.** Roma Harris was critical of library associations. Would she expand on this?

Answer:

**Roma Harris.** Library associations are not recognizing that library turf is being undermined. There is no credible association that represents the profession. We need people who can speak freely, independent of their roles as employees in various organizations. Public librarians, because so many are in management positions, are severely compromised in their ability to speak out. On the other hand retired librarians have the freedom to say whatever they like! The Ex Libris Association is apparently considering opening its membership to non-professionals, but this would take away from the profession having a credible voice. Librarians have no political voice. See The Library Quarterly (Lynn McKechnie and Kirsty Nelson.) The intellectual foundation of what librarians do is unknown to the public. "Rise up Ex Libris and shoot off your mouths!"

Question:

**Paula de Ronde.** What ideas can the panel give us to start the revolution of the librarian as rebel? We're not used to that. When I retired I said "I am leaving the job, but not the profession!"

Answers:

**Mary Cavanagh.** I'd like to join the 'rebel librarians,' but in my library I can't even criticize our funding agencies who support machines.

**Maureen O'Reilly.** The City of Toronto has recently proposed 'alternative service delivery' which is a blueprint to privatize public services. Water is the first to be considered, but libraries tend not to grab the headlines and it is only a matter of time before they will be on the chopping block.

**Peter Hajnal.** We need to enlist allies: in university libraries key faculty, in public libraries their own structures, MPs and MLAs. We can learn from our American colleagues, many of whom are not reluctant to speak out within ALA.

Question:

**Joyce Sowby.** Elizabeth Morton never refused to get into a fray that needed CLA's support. What is CLA doing? We have been infected today by the enthusiasm of our panelists, and we should try to re-create today's panel at the next CLA conference.

Answer:

**Roma Harris.** It is healthy to have a national organization around which we can congregate, but the problem is that the mandate of a library association, whose membership is open, is very different from an association of librarians. There would be a conflict of interest if the library associations took up the cause of one of the member groups which include library employees and trustees. There was an association for librarians - IPLO - which died when it tried to raise membership fees to support its activities. There is no Canadian movement to start a professional group. It's difficult to interest young

people in the profession. The library programmes are still thriving, but there isn't nearly the demand compared with the way they line up to get into other professional schools.

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