LEADER PROFILE

PRESERVING AALL’S HISTORY & LEAVING HIS OWN MARK ON THE PROFESSION

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Frank G. Houdek’s transition from law school to a career in librarianship began with uncertainty about practicing law, which led him to explore alternative career paths. While attending law school at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Houdek discovered his interest in legal research and library work, prompting him to investigate the field further. His budding interest in legal research and library work prompted him to investigate the possibility of law librarianship as a career path by having conversations with the UCLA law library staff and representatives of the UCLA Graduate Library School. He also dipped his toe in the water by working at the downtown Los Angeles Public Library. His interest piqued after graduating law school and passing the California Bar in 1974, so he took the plunge and enrolled at the UCLA library school, a two-year program, and began working toward an MLS in librarianship.

He began his journey in law librarianship by becoming an intern at the Los Angeles County Law Library (now simply known as the LA Law Library) in September 1974, while he was still a library school student. There, he gained valuable experience and was soon offered a job, marking the start of his career. By June 1975, while still pursuing his MLS, he had already assumed the role of a reference librarian at the library.

Houdek joined AALL in January 1975. He started his journey with professional associations at the chapter level by joining the Southern California Association of Law Libraries (SCALL), where he began volunteering. Serving as SCALL president (1981-1982) and participating at the chapter level served as a springboard to significant roles at the national level, such as becoming the organizer and first chair of the Council of Chapter Presidents (1981–1982); serving as editor of Law Library Journal (1994–2007); and eventually, as AALL President (1996–1997).

His many accomplishments have been recognized throughout his career. He received the Frederick Charles Hicks Award for Outstanding Contributions to Academic Law Librarianship in 2001, the Marian Gould Gallagher Distinguished Service Award in 2011 and was inducted into the AALL Hall of Fame that same year, and received the Joseph L. Andrews Legal Literature Award in 2020. He has published several articles and books and is the curator of AALL’s Chronology.

Here, he discusses insights gained from participation in AALL, and offers advice to law librarians looking to transition into leadership roles.

How did you initially become involved with AALL?
I was working in the LA Law Library as a reference librarian, and my first official position happened to coincide with AALL’s Annual Meeting in Los Angeles that year. Despite being the person tasked with holding down the fort
while my colleagues attended the Conference, my curiosity led me to explore AALL and the opportunities it offered. Forrest Drummond and Earl Borgeson, the library’s director and associate director, who were both past AALL presidents, facilitated my early involvement by ensuring my attendance at subsequent Annual Meetings, beginning with the 1976 Conference in Boston. This introduction marked the beginning of my engagement with AALL. I initially started at the chapter level by getting involved with my local chapter, SCALL.

I began gaining visibility within the broader legal information community, eventually leading to interactions with AALL leadership through my work as a coordinator and the first chair of the Council of Chapter Presidents. My participation at the chapter level created a pathway to future engagement within AALL. It started with my taking on newsletter roles, serving on the LLJ and AALL Spectrum Committee (1994–2007), as well as other committees. Eventually, this led to my time on the Executive Board.

My involvement has allowed me to contribute to the development of the Association, support individual law librarians, and make lasting contributions through projects like the AALL Chronology and educational booklets. It is important to stay engaged and proactive in your career; there are always opportunities to get involved and make meaningful contributions, regardless of the size or nature of the task. Furthermore, being involved in committee work often leads to unexpected opportunities and connections, including lifelong friendships with fellow professionals.

My work on committees has been particularly instrumental in the progression of my career and personal growth within the profession. Through my committee work, I have been able to take on significant roles such as editorship of Law Library Journal, which I did for 13 years. These opportunities arose directly from my committee engagements. If you open yourself up to all the volunteer opportunities the Association provides, it can lead to new opportunities.

What inspired you to initiate and maintain AALL’s history, and what has been the most rewarding aspect of curating it over time?

For 40 years, I have meticulously maintained the AALL Chronology, a personal endeavor that keeps me engaged with the Association’s development. This commitment required consistent attention alongside my regular
job responsibilities and provided a unique perspective on AALL’s evolution. By immersing myself in this task, I was able to gain insights into various aspects of the Association’s activities, forcing me to stay informed and engaged with ongoing developments. Despite being retired for almost a decade now, I continue this work because I deeply care about AALL and preserving the many accomplishments of this Association. This ongoing project has allowed me to make lasting contributions, such as the book *The First Century: One Hundred Years of AALL History, 1906–2005*, which provides a comprehensive historical account of the Association’s first century.

**What aspect of your membership has brought you the most fulfillment and satisfaction?**

My tenure as the former president of AALL was marked by significant accomplishments, including the establishment of the very publication you are reading, *AALL Spectrum*, and the expansion of AALLNET. While these initiatives continue to thrive, my presidency was just a single year within my broader career trajectory. Despite its significance, I found deeper satisfaction in my 13-year tenure as the editor of *Law Library Journal*. Working closely with authors, I honed my editorial skills and relished the personal and professional fulfillment that came from helping authors refine their work.

Moreover, my dedication to preserving AALL history has been a constant throughout my career. Collaborating with colleagues like Pat Kehoe and Michelle Wu, we produced 240 oral histories of AALL members, which are available on Hein, providing invaluable insights into the evolution of law librarian-ship over decades. Additionally, I orchestrated engaging AALL Annual Meeting programs, such as “Overheard at the Bar,” which brought together esteemed figures in the field to share anecdotes and wisdom. These endeavors not only enriched our understanding of AALL’s legacy but also revitalized retired members, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie.

**What insights do you have regarding the future of the profession and its potential for building a robust pipeline of talent?**

I believe the most effective way to engage individuals is through personalized, one-on-one conversations that offer genuine insights and experiences. While broader appeals may not always resonate deeply, personal anecdotes highlighting the enriching aspects of involvement can pique interest and encourage further exploration. While mentorship programs are valuable for nurturing commitment, we need to find innovative approaches to both attract and retain professionals within the field.

When I made the decision not to practice law, what I got in return was a profession that felt incredibly comfortable from day one. It offered reasonable hours, a manageable workload, and it gave me opportunities that I never would have had otherwise. In the legal profession, when you practice law, you are one among millions of lawyers, constantly competing and working long hours. This profession, however, allows for more time to volunteer and make a difference in a very feasible way. 

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