

## **History of BSD**

**by Beth Paskoff\***

**When SLA was founded in 1909, there were no subject divisions; it was not until 1923 that "groups" were established. In that year, a Technology Group was organized which represented all aspects of the pure and applied sciences. During the 1934 Annual Conference, 19 medical librarians met to discuss the advisability of requesting that the SLA Executive Board establish a Group "representing their special needs." Their petition, dated June 30, 1934, referred to a Medical Health Section, but the name was changed latter to the Biological Sciences Group. A broad interpretation of biological sciences was used, and the Group included all of the fields that are covered in *Biological Abstracts*. Frank Place, Reference Librarian at the New York Academy of Medicine was selected as the first chair; Josephine Nichols of Cornell University Medical School and Mildred Naylor, Librarian of the Academy of Medicine of Northern New Jersey, were chosen as Vice-Chair and Secretary, respectively.**

**At the 1935 Annual Conference in Boston, Biological Sciences Group meetings were held at the Boston Medical Library, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society Library, and at the Harvard Medical Library. The programs ranged from discussions of book selection and weeding, to those three perennial interests: "How to Sell your Library," "What I Do Different from Standard Practice," and "Economies, Good and Bad." The Group continued to meet at the Annual conferences during the remainder of the 1930's, discussing interlibrary loan of originals v. photostats or microfilm, and offering programs in conjunction with the New York World's Fair.**

**As in any organization, a few rough spots were encountered in the early years. Anna Holt, the 1937-38 Chair, noted that she was appointed to that position "without previous consultation and consent." A nominating committee was appointed the following year. In 1939, Estelle Brodman offered two suggestions to "obviate the**

annual undignified scramble to find individuals capable and willing to take the various offices.” It was agreed that the vice-chair would succeed the chair and that an advisory board would be established to improve the situation.

In 1939, with the Group’s membership at about 200, the first bulletin, *The Grouplighter*, was issued. The Group also published *Special Collections and Services in Biological Sciences Libraries*, with contributions from 163 libraries. The 1943 meeting include a symposium on wartime activities and ideas for post-war streamlining of scientific publications. The war, however, was not the only problem that confronted the Group at this time. A request had been made in 1938 to form a hospital medical library section within the group, and a similar suggestion was made in an early issue of *The Grouplighter*. In 1944, a new Hospital and Nursing Libraries Group was established in spite of objections from the chair of the Biological Sciences Group. At the Annual Conference the troubled history of the Group was discussed, new officers were elected, a general policy for programs was decided upon and, in accordance with SLA’s new policies that year, the name was changed to the Biological Sciences Division (BSD). With this new lease on life the BSD faced its future.

During the 1950’s, BSD emphasized the preparation of a good program for each SLA Annual Conference, and the dissemination of advance information and publicity through the bulletin, which was now called *The Reminder*. Meetings were held in such diverse locations as the Mayo Clinic and Brookhaven National Laboratories. In 1954 a membership directory was published, and a Division Manual of Procedure was prepared. The membership continued to increase, so that by 1958 the BSD was the fourth largest SLA division. The Hospital Division (formerly the Hospital and Nursing School Group) held some joint meetings with the BSD, and in 1960 they merged to recreate a larger and stronger Biological Sciences Division.

In the 1960's, the Division published another book, Information Sources for the Biological Sciences and Allied Fields, and *The Reminder* was so successful that it was one of three SLA publications indexed in Library Literature. The 1970's were a time of stability and maturity for the Division. [In 1973 the Special Libraries Association Biological Sciences Division Newsletter began. It continued under that name for ten years. In 1983\*] the bulletin was renamed, this time as *Biofeedback*, and a student paper competition was introduced which enabled the Division to sponsor a student member at the Annual Conference.

In looking back over these 50 years, it is clear that it has been committed individuals who have made the Division possible: the original petitioners, the people who have served as chairs, vice-chairs, secretaries, treasurers, and committee members. We owe a special debt to the people who kept the Division together when half the members wanted to dissolve it and to those who brought the Nursing Division back to BSD. Some members have gone beyond the Division in their service to SLA: two members have served as SLA President, Irene Strieby Shreve (1947-48) and Winifred Sewell (1960-61). Mrs. Shreve also received the SLA Professional Award in 1956 and was inducted into the SLA Hall of Fame in 1959. Many other members never had their names in the minutes of the meetings, but it was their interest and involvement that brought the Biological Sciences Division through its first 50 years, commitment of this sort will ensure the celebration of the division's centennial in 2034.

\*Paskoff, Beth. (June 1984). History of BSD. Presented in a condensed version at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reception of the SLA, Biological Sciences Division, Hilton Hotel, New York, NY.