



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“The Special Libraries Association is the global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners.”***

-Vision statement, Special Libraries Association (SLA); [sla.org](http://sla.org)

A few weeks ago I attended Gold Nuggets, A Stagecoach and an Anniversary, an event co-sponsored by the San Francisco Bay Region Chapter of SLA and the Wells Fargo History Museum. Anne Hall, the curator of the Wells Fargo History Museum, was a fellow library school student, and so this was my second visit to that fascinating museum.

We started at the offices of *Business Wire*, with refreshments provided by Sandy Malloy, the Senior Information Specialist there, and while we ate, we listened to a talk by Anne. She lightly called her talk a “brief overview,” since she covered 150 years of history and a major earthquake in 15 minutes.

We then proceeded four blocks away to the Museum, located at 420 Montgomery (San Francisco), where we sat in a replica of an old stagecoach, touched a real gold nugget and saw their special exhibit entitled “San Francisco in Ashes:

The Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906,” commemorating the quake’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A particular emphasis of the exhibit was how local businesses responded to the devastation. There were newspapers, huge photographs and lots of other documents and artifacts, which together gave a truly vivid impression of the impact of this major disaster.

This kind of collaboration is an integral part of the SLA. In fact, it is included in their list of Core Value Statements: “Collaboration and Partnering: Providing opportunities to meet, communicate, collaborate, and partner within the information industry and the business community.” I did a little research about them, since all I knew was that every time I heard their acronym, I was briefly reminded of the Symbionese Liberation Army, a group that was constantly in the news in the mid-1970’s.

However, this SLA has been around a lot longer. It was

founded in 1909 and over the almost 100 years since its beginning, it has grown to include 12,000 information professionals in more than 83 countries, with an annual operating budget of \$5.5 million.

What is perhaps most interesting to me is the idea of a special library. Being a public librarian, I understood little about this category of libraries until I went to library school, and even then I wasn't quite clear on what they do. A good place to get an idea is on the SLA website, where the member profile includes a description of the range of libraries that fall into this category: “SLA's members work for corporations, private companies, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, technical and academic institutions, museums, law firms, and medical facilities.” All sorts of companies have special librarians- also called “Information Profes-

sionals or IPs - who do research, organize and document collections, and provide information for people inside or outside of the company. The SLA website also gives a great description of these librarians and their jobs by giving both a short and very long explanation of what an IP does. The short version includes: “An IP strategically uses information is his/her job to advance the mission of the organization. This is done through the development, deployment, and management of information resources and services...”

In addition, on the website is a 1914 piece by John Cotton Dana, whose name is on the annual library marketing awards. This article was printed in one of the earliest editions of SLA's magazine *Special Libraries* and it is called “The Evolution of the Special Library.” This document is fascinating in part because many of the ideas are as relevant today as they were

then. The methods may have changed but these libraries - like public libraries - remain as critical for our society as ever.