

Sarah Cole Brown, AHIP, FMLA, 1911–2015

Ellen Gay Detlefsen, DLS

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3163/1536-5050.104.3.015>



Sarah Cole Brown, AHIP, FMLA, was born in 1911, in Conway, Arkansas, and died on August 8, 2015, in Birmingham, Alabama, at the age of 103 [1]. She earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Hendrix College in Conway in 1933 and then went

on to earn a bachelor's degree in library science from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in 1934. After initial positions as a high school librarian, an academic librarian, and a librarian in the military during World War II, she became the head cataloger at the University of Alabama (UAB) Medical Center Library in Birmingham in 1948. She spent the rest of her professional career at the UAB campus, as she was appointed chief librarian at the medical center in 1955, and in October 1971, she became the first director of the newly opened Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences. In addition to her responsibilities as library director, she also taught courses in dental bibliography, medical terminology, and medical bibliography. She retired in 1977, having served the university's medical community for twenty-nine years. Her staff was said to have admired her "great capacity for hard work and her boundless energy."

Brown was a very active member of the Medical Library Association (MLA), first as a charter member of the Southern Chapter and as chair of the chapter in the 1950s [2]. She served on and chaired the MLA/National Library of Medicine (NLM) Liaison Committee in the late 1960s and was on MLA's Committee on Committees and the MLA Nominating Committee in the 1960s and 1970s. Brown also served two terms on the MLA Board of Directors, from 1967–1970 and again from 1972–1975. She was elected president of the association in 1973/74. During her presidency, the name of the MLA's central office was changed to "headquarters," a new executive director was hired, and the association began the implementation of computerized membership records, the publication of an annual *Membership Directory*, and the

production of a thirteen-minute film on medical librarianship. She also had the distinction of being a Distinguished Member of the Academy of Health Information Professionals. Brown was honored with MLA Fellowship in 1978. The report of the annual meeting in 1978 noted that then-President Gilbert Clausman introduced Lucretia W. McClure, AHIP, FMLA, the chair of the Membership Committee, to present certificates of Fellowship to Scott Adams, Sarah Cole Brown, Louise Darling, and Winifred Sewell, among others—certainly a very talented group of Fellows!

Apparently always a cataloger at heart, she published a thorough analysis of the Cunningham Classification for Medical Literature scheme in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* in 1953—a paper that was also presented at a "Symposium on the Use of Main Classification Schemes" at the MLA annual meeting that same year [3]. In her retirement, Brown continued to work on rare book cataloging for the Reynolds Historical Library at the University of Alabama. The picture accompanying this obituary was taken as she worked with history of medicine materials in the historical library at UAB.

She was also active with other professional organizations, notably the Alabama Library Association, for whom she served as president in 1969/70, the American Association of Dental Schools' Section on Dental Libraries and Information Services, and the American Association for the History of Medicine. She was a member of the community service organization known as the Women's Committee of 100 in Birmingham, and she was recognized by her alma mater, Hendrix College, as a "Distinguished Alumna."

Her friend and colleague Mildred Langner wrote of Brown's love of travel and that she was an "avid and almost perpetual reader," a "brisk and tenacious walker," and an "ardent, even if impatient gardener" [4]. Other colleagues commented on the fact that she was the best-dressed among her peers, always beautifully and perfectly groomed, and known for her practice of wearing long evening gowns to MLA banquets [5]. Her formal portrait, done in oils and

hanging in UAB's Lister Library, shows a grande dame in black ruffles and pearl earrings, with perfectly coiffed white hair, seated beside a stack of old leather-bound books, clearly the image of elegance and bibliophilia [6]!

In retirement, she also renewed a passion for music, begun as a child taking violin lessons with her sisters and continuing with her "fiddle," playing and singing into her last years. At the end of her long life, those who knew her commented on her affection for the violin, and one of her caregivers even remarked that she was "a sweet and classy lady."

Sarah Cole Brown is survived by a son, daughter-in-law, four grandchildren, a great grandson, and her sister. Her memorial service was held August 22, 2015, in Homewood, Alabama. Contributions in her memory may be made to Homewood Church of Christ/Missions at 265 West Oxmoor Road, Birmingham, AL 35209, or to a charity of your choice.

REFERENCES

1. Sarah Cole Brown [obituary]. Birmingham News; 17–19 Aug 2015 [cited 7 Mar 2016]. <<http://obits.al.com/obituaries/birmingham/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=175520454>>.
2. Wender RW, interviewer. Oral history: Brown, Sarah Cole (AHIP, FMLA) [Internet]. Medical Library Association [cited 7 Mar 2016]. <[http://www.mlanet.org/blog/brown,-sarah-cole-\(ahip,-fmla\)?source=1](http://www.mlanet.org/blog/brown,-sarah-cole-(ahip,-fmla)?source=1)>.
3. Brown SC. Cunningham classification. Bull Med Libr Assoc. 1953 Oct;41(4):357–60.
4. Langner MC. Sarah Cole Brown. President, Medical Library Association 1973/74. Bull Med Libr Assoc. 1973 Jul;61(3):352–4.
5. Jones DA. Sarah Cole Brown [in memoriam]. MLA News. 2016 Jan;56(1):17.
6. Carder M, artist. Brown, Sarah Cole, b. 1911 [Internet]. University of Alabama at Birmingham Portrait Collection; 1990 [cited 7 Mar 2016]. <<http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/PORTRAITS/id/3/rec/6>>.

AUTHOR'S AFFILIATION

Ellen Gay Detlefsen, DLS, ellen@sis.pitt.edu, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA