

ChangeMasters All—A Series on Librarians Who Steered a Clear Course toward the Twenty-First Century

An Interview with Betty J. Turock

Marta Mestrovic Deyrup

Betty J. Turock's career as a library professor and Administrator has been one of principled risk taking. What is particularly remarkable is her ability to take on unpopular issues, form a consensus, and then change the culture. She did this in the early 1970s at a recently desegregated public library in Winston, North Carolina; later in the 1970s at the Montclair (New Jersey) Public Library; and more recently as president of ALA, where she was the moving force behind the ALA Spectrum Initiative in the 1990s. In looking back at her career and at the remarkable group of women of her generation who shaped the library profession—among them Elizabeth Martinez, Pat Schuman, Carla Stoffle, Janet Welch, Margaret Myers, Anita Schiller, and Christina Dunn—and at how many of the radical positions she advocated have become the norm, Turock commented with a laugh that the “rabble-rousers have now become the establishment.”

Not only did Turock change the library culture, she helped change the American perception of what women—particularly married women—could and should do. Her dual-career marriage raised enough eyebrows in 1976 for the *New York Times* to run a piece on Turock, called “The Peripatetic Librarian,” which made much of the fact that her husband Frank, a corporate executive, raised their two sons in Phoenix, Arizona, while Turock completed her MLS at Rutgers University. Then she took a job as assistant director of the Montclair Public Library, while the rest of the family remained in North Carolina—a situation that would hardly cause a stir today.

Turock, born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, was raised by an aunt and an uncle—a homemaker and a mining engineer, neither of whom had attended college. Although she came of age in the 1950s and grew up in an industrial city in Pennsylvania's coal belt, “We never talked about what I would do if I didn't go to college. Where I would go and what I would study were the only questions open for discussion.” Looking back, Turock tells a poignant anecdote that illustrates her drive even as a teenager. Determined to be ready for college, she approached an admired woman high school teacher to help “prepare a list of the one hundred books one should read before going to college”—a task Turock completed over the next two years, before enrolling at Syracuse University on a scholarship.

Turock became a top student, eventually graduating magna cum laude with a degree in psychology. At the encouragement of her professors she enrolled in a Ph.D. program on a fellowship to the University of Pennsylvania. She studied there for a year before marrying in 1956. “At that point I gave up the idea of an advanced degree. Syracuse had been very supportive, encouraging me to go on to graduate studies and into private practice as a clinical psychologist. I didn't find the same kind of reception or environment at the University of Pennsylvania. Penn was a man's school. I do not believe that I had one woman professor in my graduate career—short as it was—nor was I encouraged to do much of anything with my life, other than fulfill my duties as a research assistant.”

Turock moved to New Jersey and became a “corporate nomad wife,” a label that was to define her for the next seventeen years. She notes, “Frank was working in New York, and AT&T became a very strong influence in our lives. Every time he was promoted, we were moved, so, before our two children graduated, they had gone to eight different public school systems.”

However, unbeknownst to her, her professional career, which appeared to have ended even before it had begun, was about to change. The coal company at which her father was employed in Scranton went bankrupt, and Turock went to work as a teacher to support her sister, who was attending Syracuse University. She also began to take education courses. One of her instructors, the superintendent of schools in the town of Holmdel, immediately saw her talent. Richard Ford told her about a new position—materials coordinator—that would be opening, which would have library and audiovisual responsibilities.

Turock says, “I told him that I didn't know anything about libraries, and his response was, ‘What's to know?’ Fortunately, I knew enough to go back to the university. I learned that Rutgers had a master's program, and I went there with my transcript in hand to see Ralph Shaw, the dean of the School of Library Service. As I was talking to him, my older son David came running into the office, saying, ‘I have to go to the bathroom.’ Shaw replied, ‘It's right down the hall. Mrs. Turock, you are admitted. Go ahead and take your son to the bathroom.’ Just like that I was accepted on the basis of a fifteen-minute conversation and a transcript from my undergraduate years.

"Almost the same thing happened when I enrolled for my doctorate in 1976. I went to Rutgers in August, hoping to start in September. Ernie DeProspo, who was one of the bright lights there and head of doctoral studies, told me, 'You just can't walk in and say you are going to graduate school.'" After much pleading on her part, Turock was admitted on the condition that she successfully pass the GRE that semester. Turock remarks, "I often think about what it is like now—GRE, recommendations, the number of ways undergraduate and graduate degrees are reviewed—

"The people who taught me . . . were enthusiastic about the career ahead of me. They believed the library occupied an important place in a democratic society, and that it had to respond to the social ills of that society."

and the way that I got in. I've always felt that we've missed some very good people because of the process to which students are now subjected."

Turock juggled working full-time, going to library school, and taking care of two small children—a pattern of intense focus and achievement she was to follow for the rest of her career. She calls this her "period of a super-woman mentality." In the late 1960s, Rutgers, like many other schools, was filled with student unrest. The Vietnam War was approaching its height, and the university was grappling with issues of discrimination in society. Turock notes, "It was a time when the social conscience of Rutgers was one of the highlights of being there. It was an activist campus. Every night there was a rally. My first association with ALA was a conference at Rutgers called Women in a Woman's Profession. Twenty to twenty-five women came together at that time on the Douglass Campus. They've remained among my best friends.

"I found at Rutgers something I could really feel passionate about. The people who taught me, like Ernie DeProspo and Susan Artandi, were enthusiastic about the career ahead of me. They believed the library occupied an important place in a democratic society, and that it had to respond to the social ills of that society. I felt finally as though someone had led me to a career I could dedicate my life to."

Turock tried to model herself professionally on Susan Artandi. She notes, "Artandi was a vivacious, tenacious, enormously attractive, intelligent, charismatic woman who was also a librarian. She had children, a Ph.D., and a husband who had his own professional life. Although she was older than I, she had a similar life."

Turock was only at Rutgers a year, when her husband was transferred to Illinois. She took a job at the Wheaton Public Library as a professional storyteller, while continuing to take library courses. After fourteen months, her husband was again transferred—this time to Phoenix,

Arizona—and she found herself working in the library of a progressive school system. Turock says, "During the three years I was in Phoenix, the Alhambra district won the ALA-Encyclopedia Britannica award for the most outstanding school media services in the United States. My supervisor Nell Manuel, a wonderful role model, who had a master's degree, urged me to finish my own master's. I had long conversations with my husband about what to do. Instead of starting over one more time, it was decided that I would return to the school where I got the best education—

Rutgers—and my husband would stay with our sons in Phoenix, Arizona, while I would finish the degree." Turock completed her master's in 1971 and ten years later, her doctorate.

When asked why she felt the need to get an MLS, Turock replied, "Being at Phoenix, I was

working with the best—it was exhilarating. I had also started to work with public librarians on grant proposals to fund technology and was spending a lot of time at the Phoenix Public Library. It was then that I became trapped forever in the management of the public library, and I realized that I had to finish the degree to get the career opportunities I sought." While she was a student at Rutgers, another of her professors, Henry Voos, who was a member of the board of trustees of the Rockaway Township Public Library in New Jersey, offered her a job as director.

After getting a taste of heading a public library, she never wanted to do anything else. In 1971 her husband was again transferred, this time to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Turock, who by then had finished her degree, followed him. She became head of the Kernersville branch library of the Forsyth County Public Library System, and two years later, the head of the system's East Area. This experience had another strong influence on her perceptions of public libraries and their function in a democratic society.

According to Turock, "The East Winston Library was, until two years before, segregated. I didn't know such things still existed. It was there that I learned the myth of separate and equal is the reality of separate and unequal. All the civic groups of the area, including the Black Panthers, brought children to the library. Kernersville was in a predominantly white community. East Winston served an exclusively African American population. Both libraries needed to do the same thing—become responsive to their communities. East Winston had nothing on the shelves that spoke to the current history of Black Americans, not even the literature of the time by authors like Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, H. Rap Brown, and other new voices that should be heard. As East Area head I had the opportunity to bring courses from the county technical institute into the libraries, to start adult literacy classes, and to take the library's programs and books to child care centers and senior citizens' dwellings. I

think I succeeded in bringing both libraries a lot closer to their communities. It changed me and changed the way I thought about my profession.”

After three years, Turock was again ready for a new professional home. She saw in *Library Journal* an advertisement for the job of assistant director of the Montclair Public Library in New Jersey, which sounded immensely challenging: “I knew the history of Montclair—it was a library with an international reputation for innovation.” With her husband’s support, Turock moved back to New Jersey in 1973 and took up the appointment. She says, “Arthur Curley at that time was the director. He was one of the young turks who were revolutionizing the American Library Association. My experience mixing the library with the people in Winston-Salem was one of the reasons he hired me. Montclair was a community that was predominantly white but with a high percentage of African Americans. He really turned me loose, and supported every creative idea I took to him. Montclair had a staff second to none. There was Ken Yamashita, who has since headed the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, an affiliate of ALA; Caren Brown; Jana Varlejs; and Cheryl McCoy, now the director at Montclair.”

At first as assistant director, and then director, Turock worked hard to make the library an activist community center. To do this took money, and it was at Montclair that she honed her skills as a grant writer. Turock and her colleagues were awarded two small grants by the state to sponsor a women’s information and referral center and a delivery service for the home-bound, then a somewhat larger grant for a local teenage African American dance troupe, which received national recognition and brought publicity to the library. Next they were awarded a more substantial grant by the U.S. Department of Education and created NICHE, a community information and referral service. Using other grant support, Turock invited the recently founded Thomas Edison State College into the library to counsel potential students. She also enrolled in the doctoral program at Rutgers.

By this time, her husband had managed to get transferred to New Jersey. The family was all in one location for a short time before Turock applied for and got the job of assistant director at the Rochester and Monroe Library System in Rochester, New York. She recalls, “Rochester, like Montclair, had a history of innovation and community service. Although I was only there a short time, with my gifted colleagues I wrote a million-dollar grant that would bring under one umbrella the public, academic, and school libraries in the region. It was called R.A.R.E, the Rochester Area Resource Exchange.”

When Turock was eighteen months into the job, a former Montclair colleague, Jana Varlejs, who now headed

Professional Development Studies at Rutgers, called and asked if she wanted to work as an instructor. Although this was a switch for Turock, who had by now become an experienced library director, she accepted and moved back to Montclair. When a full-time position came open at Rutgers, she applied. She remembers, “I started in September. Tom Mott, who was the dean, said that I would have a year to finish my degree. Because I was still involved with the Rochester grant, my colleagues there asked me to complete R.A.R.E.’s evaluation. That work gave me a \$20,000 funded dissertation. It was called “Performance Organization and Attitude: Factors in Multitype Library Networking.”

Turock admits that the transition from administrator to educator was difficult. The skills of a manager, she notes, are antithetical to those needed by an educator. However, she says, “I learned to succeed at the university. First, I had to learn what the job was—that research, service, and teaching all have to be in motion at the same time. Rutgers was not an easy place to get promoted without that ability demonstrated.” Midway through the semester, Turock was informed that the president of Rutgers had changed the requirements for employment; she was told she had to complete her Ph.D. by December. She did it by working sixteen hours a day on her dissertation, while teaching three courses. At one point, after such a marathon session, she tried to stand up. Her legs did not have enough circulation left to support her, and she fell to the floor, spraining both ankles.

In 1989 Turock was made chair of the department of library and information studies. “I returned to the mindset of the manager then,” she says. “You have to make it fun for people to come to work, regardless of what that work is. You want to let everyone know they are valued and worthwhile contributors to the mission of the enterprise, that their shared vision for the future can’t succeed without their best efforts.” When asked what the trick was for building up a good department, she noted, “If you see

“You have to make it fun for people to come to work, regardless of what that work is. You want to let everyone know they are valued and worthwhile contributors to the mission of the enterprise, that their shared vision for the future can’t succeed without their best efforts.”

somebody whom you think will add something that the place needs but doesn’t have, hire them. If you find someone you think is better than you, absolutely, add them. They are the people who are going to move the organization into the future.”

Turock was one of a Rutgers team largely responsible for the successful merger of three Rutgers departments into a new administrative structure, the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies. As chair

of her department, she worked closely with Richard Budd, then dean, in developing several multimillion-dollar grant proposals for new school programs. When asked for the secret of her grant-writing success, Turock remarked, "Find a new direction that is responsive to the unmet needs of the institution and the people the institution serves, then bring a team together that will work well and without interpersonal conflict. Conflict that is creative is empowering, but conflict that involves personality is disabling. Enabling management is fair but firm. There are some things you just don't want to see happen in your organization, so you cut them off at the pass. One of them is conflict among colleagues, which is too frequently typical at a university."

"If I were to say what my strengths were in that situation, it was having the initial idea, putting the vision together, and motivating teams to function in a way that focused their energy on a positive outcome. I am not the person, however, who wants to follow through on the

She traveled 300,000 miles around the nation and throughout the world . . . to promote her message and to focus attention on the library as a fundamental underpinning of a democratic society and on the librarian as playing a crucial role in formulating and advocating policy in the public interest.

implementation of the idea. I didn't do that in the field—I would work with my teams, get a grant, and pass it on—and that was the way I worked at the university." During her time as chair, *U.S. News and World Report* named the SCILS library and information studies program as one of the top ten programs in the United States.

Turock was also becoming increasingly active in ALA. She remarks, "The women whom I had been in the conference with at Rutgers all those years ago—Women in a Woman's Profession—were in a group that was establishing the taskforce on women, now called the Feminist Taskforce. I became part of that group of rabble-rousers and the chief rabble-rouser when I was elected chair." Turock went on to occupy a series of increasingly high-level positions at ALA, among them head of the Statistics Section of LAMA (1982–83), member of Council (1988–92), member of the Executive Board (1992–1997), and 1995–96 ALA President.

Turock campaigned on the platform of Equity on the Information Superhighway, and promoted the library as the point of electronic access for all of the people in the nation. She traveled 300,000 miles around the nation and throughout the world to France, England, Russia, India, China, and Taiwan to promote her message. She focused attention on the library as a fundamental underpinning of a democratic society and on the librarian as playing a crucial role in formulating and advocating policy in the public interest. One of these interests was diversity within the

profession. She says, "I would like to think I had ideas that moved the profession in new directions. I was not afraid to take the risks involved. It doesn't make you popular to have ideas that are shaking the timbers of any organization. It can cause a great deal of hardship."

Turock was president while Elizabeth Martinez was serving as executive director. The two women immediately struck up a bond. Their partnership was an outstanding success. Turock says, "Elizabeth was a woman of enormous vision. She and I worked together as a team, and had a remarkably productive time." In reviewing her accomplishments during her tenure as ALA president, Turock notes, "When I was elected, the Telecommunications Act was being revised for the first time in thirty-three years. I testified before the FCC and the Congress as a spokesperson for the coalition that ultimately helped pass the e-rate for libraries. As a result, libraries were, for the first time in history, designated as universal service providers

and eligible to receive money from the federal government to support telecommunications that made information technology accessible to the public.

"We held a summit, 'A Nation Connected: Defining the Public Interest in the Information Superhighway,' that brought together Nobel and Pulitzer Prize

winners, educators, government officials, and others from the public and private sectors. The summit figured prominently in ALA's Goal 2000, an initiative to position the association as a voice for the public interest in the emerging electronic information infrastructure. Prior to this time the percentage of libraries providing public access was in the teens; now it's in the high nineties.

"Also, during my tenure, the U.S. Department of Education was balking at reauthorizing the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). Jeanne Simon, chair of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), was the wife of Senator Paul Simon, and a powerful leader in her own right. She and I struck up an affinity. We talked about setting up an institute separate from the Department of Education. That was the beginning of the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Jeanne, Carol Henderson, Elizabeth Martinez, Pat Schuman, and I hatched the idea for that piece of legislation in the Senate cafeteria. I agonized over whether it was the right thing to do, because the Department of Education ultimately backed down and offered us more money than ever before. When Bob Martin became director, I knew it was the right decision. Bob had a museum background, taught in the library program at the University of North Texas, and was the state librarian of Texas. His leadership has brought good days for libraries.

"We also forged a new relationship with the Library of Congress. There's always the opportunity for ALA and the

Betty J. Turock

Education

Ph.D., Library and Information Science, Rutgers University, 1981
MLS, Rutgers University, 1970
BA, Syracuse University, 1955

Professional Experience

Library Coordinator of Public Schools, Holmdel, N.J., 1963-65
Storyteller, Wheaton (Ill.) Public Library, 1965-67
Education Media Specialist for Public Schools, Phoenix, Ariz., 1967-70
Head, Kernersville Branch Library, Forsyth County Public Library System, Winston-Salem, N.C., 1970-73
East Area Head, Forsyth County Public Library System, Winston-Salem, N.C., 1972-73
Assistant Director, Montclair (N.J.) Public Library, 1973-75
Director, Montclair (N.J.) Public Library, 1975-77
Assistant Director, Rochester/Monroe County Library System, Rochester, N.Y., 1978-80
Assistant Professor/Associate Professor/Professor, Rutgers University, Department of Library and Information Science, 1980-2003; Department Chair, 1989-95, 2001-2002
Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Library Programs, 1988-89 (on leave from Rutgers)
Associate Dean, School of Communication, Information and Library Studies, Rutgers University, 2002-2003

Selected Publications

Barbara Simpson-Darden and Betty J. Turock, "Career Patterns of African American Women Academic Library Administrators," *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 22 (2005): 321-67.
Betty J. Turock, "Women and Leadership," *Journal of Library Administration* 32, nos. 3 and 4: 111-32.
Betty J. Turock, ed., *Envisioning a Nation Connected* (Chicago: ALA, 1996).
Betty J. Turock and Andrea Pedolshy, *Creating a Financial Plan* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1992).
Betty J. Turock, "Qualitative and Qualitative Evaluation: Eight Models for Assessment," *Evaluating Federally Funded Public Library Programs*, ed. Betty J. Turock (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1990).
Betty J. Turock, *Serving the Older Adult: A Guide to Library Programs and Information Sources* (New York: Bowker, 1982).

Selected Awards and Appointments

ALA Extraordinary Library Advocate of the Twentieth Century, 2000
ALA Equality Award, 1998
Presidential Award for Distinguished Public Service from Rutgers University, 1997
ALA President-Elect, President, Immediate Past President, 1994-1997
New Jersey Library Leadership Award from the State Library Council, 1997
ALA Jesse Shera Award, Library Research Roundtable, for Outstanding Research with Colleagues, 1989

Library of Congress to misunderstand each other. To me, regardless of the administration's persuasion and how it might affect libraries, I believe the Library of Congress and ALA should find common ground to support each other, as firmly and as often as they can. I am pleased to say Jim Billington and I became close colleagues, working together on behalf of the libraries of the nation and the world."

In 1995 Turock set up a diversity council composed of members of the ethnic affiliates of ALA and asked them what they wanted from ALA. The response was increased representation within ALA leadership and increased recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds into the profession. Turock remarks, "What came out of those meetings was the Spectrum Initiative. A basic problem was the lack of scholarships for people of color to attend library school. Elizabeth Martinez and I worked together in very different directions to make the Spectrum Initiative a reality, and let me tell you that wasn't easy. The initial money came

from ALA's endowment—its interest and some of the principal. ALA provided a million dollars for fifty scholarships of \$5,000 each for five years. So far, we've managed to educate 254 librarians from different ethnic groups. Tracie Hall, who is now ALA's diversity officer, was one of first Spectrum scholars.

"It was essential to make our demographics more diverse, like the population; otherwise, we could lose support for libraries. It was more than a moral issue, it was a survival issue, and I believe it still is. After my year as president, I became an advocate in ALA to continue the Spectrum. Every year I went to the president of the association and the executive board to ask for the funding for it. The divisions also contributed money. My husband and sons, David and Drew, started a telecommunications business, sold it, and personally gave a significant donation. Every president of ALA wants to leave a legacy. This is the legacy I share with Elizabeth Martinez."

Today, Turock, who retired sixteen months ago after twenty-three years at Rutgers, serves on the board of the American Library in Paris and is still involved in a number of projects as a member of the Board of Visitors of Johns Hopkins Medicine (Maryland) and the boards of the Trejo-Foster Foundation for Hispanic Library Education (Arizona) and Keystone College (Pennsylvania). She also chairs the advisory council of the Rutgers School from which she retired, where she still heads dissertation committees. In ALA, she is a member of President Carol Brey-Casiano's Advisory Committee and continues as a founding member and past chair of the Spectrum Advisory Committee and the Curley Lecture Committee. When asked whom she sees on the horizon as upcoming women

leaders within the profession, she lists Camila Alire, Leslie Burger, Rhea Lawson, Sally Reed, and Patty Wong.

On a final note, Turock adds, "The demographic bal- lasts of our country are shifting, even as our professional moorings remain static. The need to recruit and retain a diverse workforce continues to be desperate. At the same time the literature repeatedly cites data that show women have made strides in reaching leadership positions in the past two decades. But none of these figures reflect women in leadership ranks in proportion to their numbers in the profession. The conclusion that in the future more women and minorities will enter leadership positions overlooks the necessity to root out the discrimination that is still preva- lent in our profession. That mission is not yet complete."

President's Column *continued from page 114*

If you have any suggestions about ways in which we can partner with other groups, I am eager to hear them. One of the facts that govern our existence these days is that there is far more to do than we can afford to do, so the best way to make progress in some areas will be to work with others.

If we are successful in doing this, our programs will expand and our value to members will increase. I hope you'll be on the lookout for new opportunities that will benefit LAMA!

Index to Advertisers

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