September 1997

Gail A. Schlachter-President and Founder, Reference Service Press

Katina Strauch

Against the Grain

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina (1997) "Gail A. Schlachter-President and Founder, Reference Service Press," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 14.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2216>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

ATG Interview with Gail A. Schlachter

President and Founder, Reference Service Press <findaid@aol.com> <<http://www.findaid.com>>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

Y'all, Gail was a "trip" to interview. We did it over the telephone one Saturday morning and could have stayed on the phone all day! Read this and you will understand why! — KS

ATG: Last year, the *Simba Report on Directory Publishing* labeled your publishing company, *Reference Service Press*, as "a true success in the world of independent directory publishers." I know you started your professional career as a librarian. How did you end up being a publisher?

GS: Let me start by saying that I still consider myself to be a librarian. At this stage of my career, I happen to be a librarian running a publishing company. I think there are two reasons why I gravitated to the publishing side of the information continuum. First as a former library school faculty member, I was very influenced by the "publish or perish" environment. Second, as a librarian, I have always been fascinated by the reference process. It was only a matter of time before these two abiding interests merged.

ATG: Did you always plan on being a librarian?

GS: Originally, I thought I wanted to become a high school history teacher. So, after I graduated from UC Berkeley, I went to the University of Wisconsin and earned a joint master's degree in history and education. However, during my student teaching, I realized that I loved teaching but that the high school level was not for me. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with my life, when I ran into a former classmate of mine who suggested I consider librarianship as a career. She pointed out that, as a librarian, nothing I learned previously would be wasted. Being intellectually frugal, that concept was very appealing to me! But, I knew nothing about the field. So, I went and talked to the then dean of the library school at the University of Wisconsin — Margaret Monroe — and was floored by her intelligence, dynamism, and vision. I "reasoned" that if a woman of that stature was in the field, the field must be great. On that "basis," I made a lifetime career decision! And I've never regretted it. I couldn't have chosen better.

ATG: Did you work as a librarian after you graduated?

GS: After I earned my master's in library science, I applied for two jobs: one as the head of the John R. Commons Industrial Relations Reference Center and as the head of the

Social Sciences [departmental] Library. I know this will be hard to imagine today, but then (1967) there was such a shortage of librarians that rather than leave one library without a librarian, the two separate collections were combined and I was hired to manage both (not at double the salary, I might point out.) It was there that I had my first taste of "publishing." I issued a monthly subject index to the industrial relations articles in the social science journals received by the library.

ATG: Didn't you also work as a library school faculty member?

GS: Beginning in the 1960s, the federal government was pushing to upgrade the training of library school (and other) faculty members, by offering the Higher Education Act Title IIB fellowships. These fellowships were highly prized, because they paid full tuition and a stipend that often met or exceeded what librarians were making at that time. I went to the University of Minnesota's library school under that program and, in 1971, was the first student there to graduate with a Ph.D. specifically in librarianship. By the way, still being intellectually frugal, I used what I learned in my previous job as the basis for my Ph.D. dissertation (which dealt with academic librarians' interest in union and quasi-union representation). After I completed my degree, I moved to Los Angeles and took a faculty position in the library school at the University of Southern California. The first thing I did was to get to work on a publishing project that had been in the back of my mind for a long time.

ATG: And what was that?

GS: As a Ph.D. student in library science, I had lived in fear that the topic of my dissertation had already been researched. I was not alone. At that time, not many library schools contributed to *Dissertation Abstracts*, and it was a recurring doctoral students' nightmare that they would get to their final defense and a professor would produce an earlier dissertation dealing exactly with their topic. To make sure no other doctoral student would have to live in such fear, I went to work on *Library Science Dissertations: An Annotated Bibliography*. *Libraries Unlimited* published the first edition in a blue cover with gold letters and for many years graduate students in librarianship referred to it as "the bible."

ATG: Was that the first book you wrote?

GS: Yes, and in its second edition, it was the book that led me to think about starting my own publishing company.

ATG: How was that?

GS: When I compiled the second edition of *Library Science Dissertations* in 1982, there were considerably more entries than in the first edition, although the first edition had covered nearly 50 years and the second edition covered less than a decade. That's because librarianship, as a research field, was coming into its own, and many more students were graduating with a doctorate in the discipline. This is where I learned that in publishing, big is not necessarily better. Although the first edition of the bibliography had been very well received, the number of copies sold was limited. I guess it's the "shoemaker's children" phenomenon. Librarians seem to pay more attention to the literature of other fields than to their own. It's like we have a lack of expectation and regard for our own literature. From an economic point of view, it would have been too expensive for *Libraries Unlimited* to publish the huge, comprehensive manuscript I delivered for the second edition, when projected sales were so limited. I was asked to "redefine" librarianship, to reduce the size of the book and the corresponding production costs. While I could understand why the economics of publishing require this "redefinition," it still bothered me that the final product did not provide complete bibliographic control. It occurred to me that if I published my own work, I could control whether or not I had to make intellectual compromises. So, I decided that, from that point on, I would publish myself any book I wrote.

ATG: Is that how *Reference Service Press* started?

GS: Exactly. When I was working as the head of the library's social sciences department at California State University at Long Beach, in 1976, I was overwhelmed by the number of reference materials on minorities and women. The information needs in this area were escalating, but there was no bibliographic control over the reference literature. When I taught reference, I had always said that reference librarians were in the best position to identify gaps in the literature and create products that filled them. So, to practice what I preached, I borrowed \$10,000 from my parents, drew on the experience of a number of colleagues (particularly Al Renetsky at Academic Media), started *Reference Service Press*, typed the camera-ready pages (this was way before computers) on the library's IBM Selectric typewriter, and published my first book: *Minorities and Women: A Guide to the Reference Literature in the Social Sciences*. Not exactly a title that rolls off the tongue. My mother agreed to handle the invoicing. Since she did not have a

typewriter, she hand wrote each one. My children "agreed" to do the fulfillment. Once a week, they packed up the books, loaded them into their red wagons, and wheeled them down to the post office. Not your typical corporate culture! But, it is a pattern common to home-based businesses.

ATG: Were you planning to do just one book, or were you planning on continuing to issue books through Reference Service Press?

GS: You know, if *Minorities and Women* had lost money or had broken even, I probably would have just enjoyed the experience and stopped with that one book. And there was a good chance that was the best I could expect. Publishing is a risky business. The majority of your costs are upfront (for composition and printing). As a new publisher, it's hard to sell any copies before the book is out. Getting reviewed as a small publisher is very difficult. Although a publisher might have a great idea for a reference source, the process of getting it produced and reviewed takes so long that the market interest may have shifted, or another publisher may have issued a similar book. But two things happened that insured Reference Service Press's future. First despite the world's most amateurish marketing brochure and the typewritten appearance of the book, the bibliography sold very well and went on to make *Choice's* list of "Outstanding Academic Books" of the year. It was the right book at the right time. I was not only able to pay my parents back, but I had enough capital to finance another project.

ATG: And the second reason?

GS: Tom Drewes (of *Quality Books*) once said that "the worst thing that can happen to a new publisher is to have a phenomenally successful first book. They think they know the secret and that publishing is easy." That's what happened to me! *Minorities and Women* was a success. I was hooked. Besides, I had invoices and shipping labels left over, money to finance the next venture, and a new reference book idea. My mother was still willing to do the invoicing. And, my children were still small enough to be "willing" to do the shipping. So, I was off and running.

ATG: Wasn't it about this time that you began working for ABC-Clio [publishing company in Santa Barbara]?

GS: Actually, that happened a little later. When I began researching Reference Service Press's second title, *Directory of Financial Aids for Women*, I had just left CSU Long Beach to become the assistant library director for public services at UC Davis. After *Minorities and Women* made the *Choice* outstanding book list, I was contacted by Eric Boehm, founder of ABC-Clio who was very interested in my background in both librarianship and publishing. Over the next couple of years, I served periodi-

cally as a consultant for ABC-Clio. Then, in 1981, Eric offered me a job at ABC-Clio, as head of the serials department (responsible for publishing *America: History and Life*; *Historical Abstracts*, and *ABC Pol Sci*). I worked there until the beginning of 1985, first as the head of serials, then as vice president in charge of books and serials, and finally as vice president and general manager.

ATG: What happened to Reference Service Press after you went to ABC-Clio?

GS: A couple of years before I went to ABC-Clio, I had published Reference Service Press's second book, *Directory of Financial Aids for Women*. Interestingly, while the *Directory of Financial Aids for Women* never won an award like *Minorities and Women* did, the directory (which was priced less) generated more than four times the revenue of the bibliographic guide. This clearly illustrates a truism most publishers have experienced: it is easier to sell a library a directory (or other fact book) than it is to sell a bibliography. But, despite my success, I was having "staffing" problems. My mother was getting tired of handwriting all those invoices. And, my children were getting older and not as willing to pack up the books. I was thrilled when Eric Boehm, as part of his employment offer, proposed to copublish the directory with Reference Service Press. We agreed that ABC-Clio would take on the business side of selling the directory and I would continue to compile the listings. While I was at ABC-Clio, we copublished two editions of the *Directory of Financial Aids for Women* and the first edition of a book I had started while I was at U.C. Davis: *Directory of Financial Aids for Minorities*.

ATG: When was it that you began to devote full time to Reference Service Press?

GS: Beginning in 1985, when I left ABC-Clio, I was able to spend full time on developing Reference Service Press. At first, I thought I would emulate the traditional publishing model, with titles in a number of different subject areas. But, then I attended a weekend seminar by Dan Poynter (the author/publisher of the *Self-Publishing Manual*). His publishing philosophy completely changed my approach. Following his

lead, I made two major decisions that characterize Reference Service Press's operations even today: 1) Reference Service Press would operate as a niche publisher (we would produce only financial aid products) and 2) Reference Service Press would minimize its onsite staff and outsource its episodic operations (e.g., cover design, composition, computer programming, graphics). This approach has allowed me to keep my overhead low and to commit a large portion of my revenues to research. By maintaining the financial aid information I collect in a single database, all in the same format, I am able to keep my production costs low as well as produce products on demand. By focusing on one subject, I am able to maximize my promotional costs and to keep in my product line even directories that generate only marginal revenues (something that bigger and more diversified publishers are not always able to do).

ATG: So, who is your market? Libraries? Individuals?

GS: Initially, Reference Service Press's customers were almost exclusively libraries, academic institutions, and other related agencies. There are several reasons why. As a librarian, I felt comfortable with those groups, so they were ones I could approach with some confidence. Furthermore, those markets are relatively easy to identify, are made up of a manageable number of units (thousands rather than millions), are interested in purchasing books,

PROVE YOUR POINT

Invest in your collection with OCLC/AMIGOS Collection Analysis Systems.

Ask for a FREE Collection Analysis CD demo set for results you can see!

- ◆ Compare your collection to more than 2,300 institutions
- ◆ Measure effectiveness of your collection development policy
- ◆ Justify budget requests
- ◆ Evaluate resource sharing opportunities
- ◆ Support accreditation studies

amigos@amigos.org 800/843-8482 972/851-8000

and respond well to direct mail (the only type of advertising I could easily afford). With limited staff, limited resources, and large, complex directories that were priced higher than traditional bookstore offerings, there was no way I could go after individual or trade sales. Recently, however, my market has diversified some. That's because of Reference Service Press's visibility first on **eWorld** and now on **America Online**. With millions of individuals annually visiting our branded area, **RSP Funding Focus**, on America Online, our sales to individuals have increased dramatically—from 10 percent just three years ago to more than 30 percent currently.

ATG: Do you have to pay America Online to be available to their subscribers or do they pay you?

GS: America Online pays Reference Service Press a royalty monthly, based on hours of aggregate usage. Plus, we are permitted to sell our products online. Interestingly, although AOL subscribers can search our financial aid database at no charge (beyond their monthly subscription fee), many of them opt to buy our listings in print. I think that—despite the wonders of Boolean searching—people still like to hold a book, use the book when and where it is convenient, and browse in ways that are awkward to do online.

ATG: This year marks Reference Service Press's 20th anniversary. What's different today than when you started?

GS: I hadn't really thought about it, but you're right, it has been 20 years since I issued the first Reference Service Press title (and 12 years since I made Reference Service Press my full-time job). Obviously, Reference Service Press's title list has grown, from one title to fourteen directories, a dozen special reports, several CD-ROMs, a contract with America Online, and a number of ongoing licensing agreements. Instead of preparing each book's camera-ready copy on a typewriter, we maintain one immense database, add or update entries daily, and use proprietary software to extract and organize the entries needed for each of our products (whether in print, electronic, or other form). Instead of working out of my home (we used to pack books on the vanity in our downstairs bathroom, since that was the longest vertical surface we had in the home), Reference Service Press owns a wonderful facility in the El Dorado Hills Business Park, complete with a conference room, a business office, a specially-designed shipping room, and an onsite warehouse—luxuries I couldn't even imagine when I started in 1977.

Reference Service Press
5000 Windplay Drive, Suite 4,
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
Phone: 916-939-9620
Fax: 916-939-9626
<findaid@aol.com>
<<http://www.rspfunding.com>>

ATG: And what's the same?

GS: It's amazing to me just how much has remained the same. We're still a niche publisher, specializing solely in financial aid products. I'm still outsourcing much of the publishing process (especially composition, art work, and computer programming). I still have the same coauthor, **R. David Weber**, a friend I met when I was working on my history master's at the **University of Wisconsin** in 1964. My children are still helping me in the business, although at a different level. My daughter, **Sandy Hirsh** (a professor at **University of Arizona's** library school) is involved in the research and editing processes. My son, **Eric Schlachter** (an intellectual property lawyer) writes or reviews all my licenses and contracts. My husband, **Stuart Hauser**, still works during the day as a telecommunication strategist and helps to pack up RSP's sales at night. I still haven't made any intellectual compromises because of economic considerations. I still wait, with great anticipation, for the mail delivery. What could be more rewarding, each day, than to open up hundreds of orders from libraries and individuals who want to buy what you have created? And, I still have the same passion for reference.

ATG: If you aren't working in a library now, how do you manage to keep up with new developments in reference?

GS: In addition to all the traditional ways, I have two special responsibilities that ensure I stay on top of reference developments. Each year, I teach up to three reference-related courses at **San Jose State University's** library school. There's nothing that makes you learn a subject better than when you have to teach it. And, this year, I was appointed to do a three-year term as editor of *Reference and User Services Quarterly* (formerly *RQ*). What a privilege. I get to read cutting-edge reports before they ever show up in print.

ATG: I know that your books have won many awards. But, you, personally, were just awarded the **Louis Shores-Oryx Press Award**, which recognizes excellence in the reviewing of books and other materials for libraries. You were the reference book review editor for *RQ* (now *Reference and User Services Quarterly*) for many years. Tell us more about your ideas about improving the reviewing process.

GS: When I was president of Reference and Adult Services Division (now Reference and User Services Association), one of my goals was to come up with ways that would further the professionalism of the reviewing process. In an editorial I wrote for *RQ* during my presidency, "Reviewing the Reviewers," I offered several proposals. Over the years, many of these have been implemented, including im-

proved instructions to reviewers, more emphasis on evaluation and comparison in the reviews, more quantitative analyses of review content, the incorporation of review writing into library school curricula, the presentation of national reviewing workshops, and the establishment of an award to recognize outstanding contributions to the practice, teaching, research, or theory of reviewing. Receiving the reviewing award this year, which is funded by **Oryx Press** and named after **Louis Shores**, gave new meaning, to me, to the expression "what goes around, comes around."

ATG: I hear you've just signed with **SilverPlatter**, to be one of the pilot publishers in their transactional pricing project.

GS: Yes. It's called **Search by Search**. The project should be out of Beta testing by the time this interview is published. Here's the way it will work: users (librarians, library patrons, individuals, etc.) can visit Search by Search at

SilverPlatter's Website. They can search through Reference Service Press's financial aid databases (for under-

graduate students, graduate students, and professionals/postdoctorates), using SilverPlatter's search protocol. When they get hits on their search, they will see displayed without charge each program's title, eligibility requirements, financial data, and deadline dates. For the programs that look useful to them, they can pay a nominal fee (ranging from 20 to 30 cents) to look at and print the full description (which will include sponsoring organization name, address, contact person, telephone number, fax number, email address, and additional program information). We're very excited about this development, which will give our customers greater choice in how they acquire or use RSP products. We will be posting updates on the development of this transactional pricing program on our Website: <www.rspfunding.com>.

ATG: You have another company called **Publishers Support Services, Inc.** What does that company do?

GS: My husband and I run **PSSI**. It's fun to have your partner in life be also your partner in business. We offer fulfillment services for small publishers, including warehousing, computerized inventory control, online order processing, order fulfillment, customer mail list maintenance, and shipping services. A number of library-related publishing companies use our services, including **Library Solutions** (Internet training books) and **Allergy Publications** (allergy and asthma directories).

ATG: For librarians who are interested in becoming publishers, what advice would you give them?

continued on page 42

Profiles Encouraged

Rob Richards

Technical Services Librarian, Univ. of Colorado Law Library
Campus Box 402, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0402
Telephone: (303) 492-7535, Fax: (303) 492-2707
E-mail: richard@stripe.Colorado.EDU
URL: <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~richard>

Geography: Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut. Lived in New Haven for 8 years. Graduated **Yale College** in 1992 with a B.A. in English. Forded the River for Iowa City, where I finished an M.A. in Communications Studies/Film Studies at the **University of Iowa** in 1994. Re-forded the River for Champaign/Urbana, where I finished an M.S. in Library and Information Science at the **University of Illinois** in 1996. Re-reforded the River for Colorado, to work at the Government Publications Library at the **University of Colorado** at Boulder.

First Library Job: Filing catalog cards for the late **Lee Williams** in the Latin American Collection at Sterling Memorial Library.

Current position: Coordinating collection development for the U. of Colorado Law Library. I also work part time in technical services at the Government Publications Library at the University of Colorado, and have been known to write HTML for pay or pure pleasure.

Building blocks: Worked for more than two years in Manuscripts and Archives at the Yale University Library, and then for two years or so in the Yale Library Circulation Department. I've had the benefit of working in several major research libraries, and in some varied settings: the U. of Iowa Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, the Reference Department at the U. of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign, the Newman Foundation Library in Champaign, two branches of the **Denver Public Library**, and now in a major government documents repository and a wonderfully rich legal research collection. **Greg Cotton** at the University of Iowa, **Kathryn Luther Henderson** at the University of Illinois and **Fran Miksa** of the University of Texas made me (and hundreds of others) very excited about technical services. I love acquisitions work in law, because the work involves intensive engagement with all media: print, microforms and digital formats. Some of us love books AND electrons!

Recent professional accomplishments: Helped to develop the 1997 **American Library Association** Reference and User Services Association President's Program, "Towards a New Vision of Reference: Kaleidoscopic Collections and Real Librarians." Developed a bibliography on the topic of "Reference and Collection Development" <<http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~richard/RUSA/bib.html>> which some folks are finding useful for its treatment of electronic formats. Helped to develop "StateList: The Electronic Source for State Publication Lists" <<http://www.law.uiuc.edu/library/check.htm>>, a clearinghouse for state government publications checklists available on Internet — a kind of virtual "Monthly Checklist of State Publications."

Best book read in past year: Peter Gomes, *The Good Book*

Hobbies: Taking long walks by Boulder Creek, bicycling, gazing at the Flatirons, singing, looking at art, listening to any kind of music (but especially Poulenc and Palestrina), reading.

Favorite quotations: "A thought which does not result in action is a dream, and an action that does not proceed from a thought is nothing at all." — Georges Bernanos; "Gratitude is heaven itself." — William Blake

Marketing to Libraries

Publishing for Library Markets

by **Barry Lee** (President, The Reference Society)
<research@juno.com>

Publishing for Library Markets published by Cowles Simba Information (1997, 0-88709-149-7, \$1495) is one of the many special reports Cowles Simba puts out each year.

This report is composed of eight chapters and includes over 50 tables to illustrate its statistics. Key highlights of the report follow:

The libraries questioned spent over \$4.5 billion on information in 1996, up almost 8.5% from the previous year. CD software was the fastest growing media type.

In spite of the rapid increases in electronic media, information is still found predominately in print which makes up 72% of sales to libraries. The most revenue was generated by books, followed by periodicals and journals.

Library budgets have not grown dramatically, although various segments have shown growth. The results show shifts in materials budgets.

Despite an increase in electronic products, publishers reported using traditional methods to reach the library market. The three top methods were direct mail, advertising, and displays at library conferences.

Last year, the revenues from electronic information products accounted for 28% of the entire market.

As of 1996, the United States contained over 138,000 libraries. School libraries accounted for the greatest segment, followed by public, special, and academic libraries.

The academic libraries accounted for approximately half of total print sales to the library market. Their greatest expenditures were for journals. The Special Library segment spent the most for online services.

Libraries accounted for approximately 10% of trade publishers' revenues last year. Many trade publishers created separate marketing divisions to go after the library market. Almost 10% of total book revenues came from the library market. Professional books, university press, and children's books sold well to libraries.

CD software sales are expected to grow at spectacular rates.

Over three quarters of public library funding come from local sources. State funding ran about 12% while federal funds account for about 1%.

Online vendors continue the trend of moving their content and services to the Web.

Large international publishing conglomerates continued to dominate the library market.

Libraries are using consortia and co-ops to negotiate better deals.

CD encyclopedias are stealing market share from traditional print.

The study predicts that the market for online delivery of information will reach \$1 million by the millennia. 🐼

To review a table of contents of **Publishing for Library Markets**, you may search Simba's Web site at <<http://www.simbanet.com>>.

Gail Schlachter Interview from page 40

GS: When asked to list the rules to successful writing, **David Hellyer** responded "1. Have something to say, 2. Know how to say it, and 3. Be able to sell it." A similar list could be offered librarians who are interested in becoming publishers. It would read: identify a need, use your library skills to fill it, and learn how to sell it. Some more advice: Save up a nest egg and be willing to risk it all on your dream. And, make sure you really want to give up your 8-hour plus day working for someone else for the 16 hours a day you may have to spend working for yourself.

There you have it! Lots of new ideas and topics of conversation to pursue when you see Gail in Charleston! — KS