

## LEADER PROFILE

FROM TEACHING LEGAL  
RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA TO  
AIDING PRO SE PATRONS  
IN CALIFORNIA,

# A LAW LIBRARIANSHIP CAREER COMES FULL CIRCLE



## JEAN L. WILLIS

FORMER ASSISTANT  
DIRECTOR FOR  
SUPPORT SERVICES

SACRAMENTO COUNTY  
PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY  
SACRAMENTO, CA

**Jean L. Willis** found her career in librarianship the same way most people in this profession do: purely by accident. During library school at the University of Denver, the director of the law school library at the time, Al Coco, taught a number of classes that piqued her interest. Al was a student of Marian Gould Gallagher and a great advocate for a career as a professional law librarian,

just taking off, and Al encouraged me to pursue this avenue of employment. I can honestly say, I never looked back.

**W**illis received her MLS from the University of Denver and began her career as a law librarian while still attending library school. “I was fortunate enough to participate in an internship at the University of Denver Law School Library under the tutelage of Al Coco and the then-assistant director, Sue Weinstein,” said Willis. “It was an extremely beneficial experience.” Willis learned a lot and both Coco and Weinstein were outspoken about the value of joining the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) and getting involved with local and regional chapters.

Following her graduation from library school, she was hired as one of two law librarians at Holland & Hart in Denver.

Willis was lucky in that Holland & Hart was quite technologically forward thinking. Not only were they in the vanguard with automating document production, but they were a very early adopter of utilizing Lexis.

“It was so long ago that there was not a lot of content in Lexis, but for some reason, they had uploaded not only federal materials but Colorado state materials as well,” recalls Willis. “It was truly Ye Olden Days of acoustic couplers (look it up) and giant machines to access the Lexis database. However, it was truly also a brave new world and quite exciting to be somewhat in on the ground floor.” Willis notes that the experience enhanced her technological expertise, as well as gave her foundational proficiency in using technology in a library setting.

Willis didn’t join AALL right away. Instead, she started with the Southwestern Association of Law Libraries (SWALL), the closest local chapter to her at the time.

“There was a group of us that started what was the precursor to the Colorado Association of Law Libraries,” said Willis. “We started meeting in Denver and Boulder, way back in the ’71 (e)-12mk in tee C(y) in a

librarians from different types of law libraries across the

do not always see the value of in-person meetings and events. While I value online meetings, getting together face to face adds a fuller dimension to all our professional relationships. You will be glad if you do this regularly.

### **What role has AALL played in your career?**

A big one! Al Coco, my earliest law librarianship teacher and mentor, stressed the value and importance of joining professional library associations and chapters. I don't know what I would or could have done without these resources. First and foremost, I immediately had a group of colleagues to whom I could turn