

# ILA OF BOSTON— 125 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE INDUSTRY

*Insurance Library Association of Boston provides a  
wealth of historical and practical resources*

The year 1887, like all years, had its share of significant moments and events, but significance depends on what people find relevant or interesting. If you like military history, the year is notable for the U.S. Senate approval of Pearl Harbor as a naval base. If politics is your thing, you may note that Congress attempted to control voting shenanigans by creating the Electoral Count Act. Do you like sports? Well, 1887 saw the formation of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and, in a memorable baseball game, Mighty Casey struck out. Do you like minor holidays? Then a highlight of the year was the first Groundhog Day celebration in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Are you a fan of the Silver Screen? If so, that year was important because Thomas Edison was awarded a patent for his Kinetoscope and Harvey Wilcox decided to parcel out and sell 120 acres of land for a development that became Hollywood. Finally, for people dedicated to the world of insurance, the end of that year included the founding of the Insurance Library Association of Boston (ILA).

The ILA has been in continuous operation since that founding 125 years ago. As an independently run, insurance-focused library, it is unique in the United States. It provides written materials, information and education to insurance industry workers as well as, without charge, to insurance consumers and students. The association depends upon funds from its subscribing members and from donors in order to continue its valuable operation. It specializes in Insurance Research,

Insurance Archaeology, and Insurance Continuing Education.

The library is a rich resource for information about policy forms and endorsements. It is also a repository of valuable statistics, insurance studies, insurance texts, trade journals, reference materials and records on items such as insurance company histories and company ratings. The latter items are among the most common information requests from insurance consumers. However, the library's full-time staff receives a dizzying variety of inquiries, and requests are pretty constant. The association's Web site ([www.insurancelibrary.org](http://www.insurancelibrary.org)) includes a large section of sample questions. Its staffers have been asked about items such as:

- Information on the first million-dollar jury verdict in the United States
- Paid losses on the sinking of the Titanic
- Details on a specific rating bureau information on loss ratio data, per specific industries (by the way, information provided by *Rough Notes* magazine was suggested as a source)
- Tracing insurance company histories
- Slave insurance policies
- Assistance with securing special event coverage
- Information on malpractice lawsuits



From left: Sarah Hart, Reference Librarian; Meagan Stefanow, Reference Librarian/Education Coordinator; Ellen Barnett, Executive Director.

*“The insurance industry is a graying industry. To respond to the need for new workers, ILA has initiated a program to provide insurance education to prospective employees.”*

*Ellen Barnett  
Education Coordinator  
Executive Director*



The ILA staff—currently composed of Executive Director Ellen Barnett, Reference Librarian/Education Coordinator Meagan Stefanow and Reference Librarian Sarah Hart—also maintain a newsletter as well as a blog titled “Insurance Musings.” They cover various insurance issues, keep readers up to date on ILA events and publicize the availability of new materials. Regarding access to materials, the staff also tackles the ongoing challenge of arranging more access to their materials, electronically. Currently, the most progress has been made with

access to their very large collection of insurance trade journals.

Jean Lucey, former full-time ILA librarian who began her tenure in 1979 (and who now works part-time), articulated the ILA’s role as fourfold.

“The main functions of the Association are, one, to be a traditional library. This involves maintaining and supplementing as complete a collection in the field of insurance as possible. Two, making the collection open to members of the general public as well as members of the insurance community for their on-site use. Three, providing reference and research

services to all who are unable to visit the library. This service includes helping those who can be assisted quickly remotely, and those who are unfamiliar with the use of reference and research tools. The latter group requires the expertise of subject-specialist librarians. Four, to schedule and facilitate insurance-related courses and seminars, including those leading to national designations; seminars on specific insurance subjects; and classes designed to assist people in passing licensing examinations.”

Also, like a traditional library, the ILA is open to the public on weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is a popular spot for insurance colleagues to gather. It is a friendly browsing spot (yes many people enjoy looking through insurance materials) and, as a special benefit for members, the ILA building (located in downtown Boston at 156 State Street) is also available for meetings (on a reservation basis).

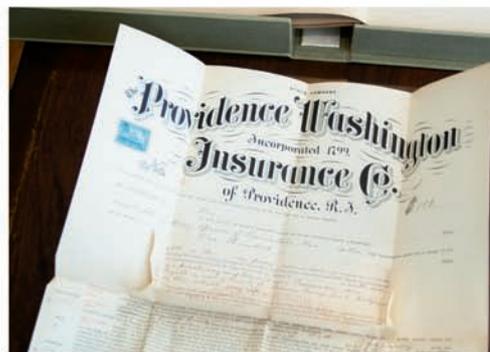
The ILA’s collection of insurance materials is rich and historical, including advertising items, firemarks, and historic insurance policies. Having access to actual policies allows users to trace the development of coverages, such as the Commercial General Liability policy. The core collection is maintained at the Library’s State Street building, but many other items are kept in off-site storage and, as needed, are recalled for display. Often the cost of arranging displays is handled by funding and donations from the ILA’s trustees.

### **Dedicated to education**

Another important part of the ILA is its Saval Insurance Education Center. Within the Center, the ILA continues a nearly unbroken tradition of providing classes for agent licensing and for national designation programs. The Center, named after longtime ILA benefactor (and former trustee) Maurice H. Saval, works particularly closely with Chartered Property & Casualty Underwriter, Associate in Risk Management, Associate in Claims, and Associate in Reinsurance programs. The Center’s courses also include seminars and their offerings provide needed continuing education credits for licensed producers and public adjusters.

The ILA’s executive director, Ellen Barnett CPCU, AIC, notes that their commitment to education is an important part of their mission:

Insurance Library Association of Boston Mission Statement—To be the leading resource for and provider of literature, information services and



quality professional education primarily for the insurance industry and related interests.

True to its educational purpose, the ILA facilitates scores of offerings that serve hundreds of students each year. In its latest year, more than 800 persons participated in seminars as well as courses for CPCU, various other designations from The Institutes and for agency licensing. The seminar topics (40 offered in their latest course fiscal year) were designed by ILA's staff.

Barnett recognizes an important issue that faces the insurance industry:

“As you know, the insurance industry is a graying industry, and there is an urgent need to bring new individuals into the industry.”

In response, the ILA is in the midst of developing a new initiative, which has a working title of the “Bridge Program.” It has been seeded by a \$50,000 grant from Eastern Bank along with a matching gift from Arbella Insurance. The program will act as a bridge that connects those looking for jobs and insurance-related employers. The program’s goal is to provide introductory insurance education to prospective workers who are eagerly

sought after by employers in the insurance industry.

Barnett adds, “We anticipate working with already established nonprofit organizations to identify candidates for scholarships to enter this new program. Our next steps will be to bring together a small working group/ task force to develop the program’s framework. We are extremely excited about this fantastic opportunity to contribute in such a meaningful way to the insurance community and the greater community.”

The ILA has a deep well of experience in working with other groups. Many of its programs are presented in conjunction with a long-standing partnership with the CPCU Society’s Boston Chapter. It also has an outreach to students via The Institutes and Gamma Iota, the insurance-related college organization. The ILA has further broadened its educational impact by creating satellite insurance courses with CPCU Society chapters in Maine, Boston and Central Massachusetts.

### Insurance icon sold on ILA’s value

Insurance industry education icon and *Rough Notes* columnist Don Malecki, isn’t sure when he first heard

about the ILA of Boston. “It was about 15 years ago,” he says. “A number of people had told me that I should look into it because the library conducted research just as I did. While I was in Boston, I visited the ILA and met the librarian, Jean Lucey, CPCU, for the first time. She gave me a tour of the library, which really impressed me because I had never seen such an accumulation of insurance-related material in one place. My only disappointment was that it is too far from where I live to spend my lunch hours there.

“I think that the library would be very helpful to anyone who is interested in current as well as old information,” he says.

Malecki continues, “Apart from the Internet, where the information is sometimes incorrect, where can someone go to find some information or document relating to insurance? The ILA of Boston is the first place that comes to mind. I know the American Institute for CPCU, referred to as the ‘Institutes’ has a large library. I am not sure whether it maintains a full-time librarian like it did at one time. But having visited both, there is no comparison. The ILA of Boston is the largest one I have

ever seen and it has full-time staff ready and willing to assist. The trustees also are very fine people who are professionals of the business.”

Malecki’s dedication to the ILA is noteworthy. His firm, Malecki Deimling Nielander & Associates, LLC, has, for years, donated funds and resources to the organization, including money specifically to help with the cost of restoring some of the library’s older books. Both he and his partner, Greg Deimling, CPCU, participated in a fund-raising presentation at the library.

Malecki characterizes the research fees charged by the library as “dirt cheap” in relation to the services provided.

In addition to encouraging use of the library for research, Malecki says, “It also would help the library if those who are interested in preserving insurance history and obtaining assistance in time of need would become members. There are various ranges (of membership fees) and none is exorbitant.”

Malecki, who has served in the insurance industry for more than a half-century, is a longtime educator, writer and researcher on insurance matters whose appreciation for the ILA continues to grow. He has decided upon a commitment that

should enhance both his and the ILA’s legacies:

“Since I think the ILA of Boston is the largest and most complete insurance library in the USA, I would like to add to it. This is the reason I have decided to leave some of my collection to the library . . . those documents I think need to be preserved for future knowledge. In fact, I am not waiting for my demise to do this. I have been sending various documents to the ILA for a number of years.”

The ILA has an adopt-a-book program as well as an online wish list that may be used by persons who want to preserve as well as contribute to its collection of texts.

### **Maintaining its value, eye on its future**

Insurance professionals who are looking for an inexpensive, valuable source of research should consider becoming a member of the ILA. A membership provides access to more than 350 insurance-related journals (that may be electronically searched); more than 100,000 historic and contemporary books and manuals; more than 220 binders containing manual pages, policy forms, and coverage commentary and more than 70 binders filled with

standard and insurer-specific insurance policies.

The ILA’s staff knows that, in order to thrive in the future, they will have to continue to maintain control over their funding and their relevancy. Each year they host a lecture series in order to broaden their appeal. They are also in the midst of a capital campaign, and this past October their Insurance Professional of the Year Ceremony included a Silent Auction to raise additional funds.

As the library celebrates its landmark 125th anniversary, we should join them in helping to use, preserve and build upon an insurance treasure. ■

### **The author**

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