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Subject: A Brief History of RSA

The following is a quick review of RSA's history, founding principles and guiding philosophy. RSA has always worked with the library systems supporting our member libraries. We will continue doing so in the future as a fully independent organization.

RSA was founded as a Not-for-Profit organization in the early-1980's by a small group of libraries to share data entry and other electronic services. Over time it expanded to encompass libraries belonging to four different regional library systems. In 1990, RSA started providing an integrated library system (ILS) to meet the growing needs of the member libraries. In 1994, Alliance Library System (ALS) formed around the libraries of RSA.

In western and central Illinois, the Corn Belt, Great River, Illinois Valley, and Western Illinois systems were in discussions to form one large library system covering over 13,000 square miles, or 22 percent of the state. Such cooperation among the four systems was nothing new. For over a decade, they had participated in a cooperative computer system known as the Resource Sharing Alliance. That system had served as a model for the rest of the state, and the four systems were lauded for their efforts at cooperation for better patron service. They eventually joined to become the Alliance Library System, established in July 1994.¹

From the start, the driving vision of ALS and RSA was for all ALS member libraries to be members of RSA. At that time, membership was split between automated libraries and Union List libraries who cataloged their collection in the system but did not use the system for other operations. Combining all RSA member library materials into a single database enabled libraries to search and request materials easily. ALS supported RSA's operations and provided grants for all types and sizes of libraries to join RSA. The partnership was so strong that RSA dissolved the Not-for-Profit organization to merge fully into the Alliance Library System in June 1999. This allowed ALS to provide even more support towards the goal of having all ALS libraries participate in RSA.

In 2006, RSA contracted with SirsiDynix to replace their aging automation system. The primary goal of the 6-month contract negotiation was the creation of a first-ever, 'starter' level of automated library inside the new vendor contract. RSA called this the Basic Online

¹ Extracted from the Illinois Secretary of State Website, Heritage Project
https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/heritage_project/home/chapters/a-new-era-for-the-state-library-the-1990s-and-2000s/a-reduction-in-library-systems/

level; a practice that has now spread across the library industry. At the time of the contract, RSA had 75 fully automated members and 98 Union Listing (non-circulating) members. The new contract provided inexpensive licensing terms allowing RSA to begin upgrade Union Listing members to automated status with a limited set of cataloging, circulation, holds and online catalog services. The 2007 price for Basic Online membership was set at \$1,300 with the intent of automating most of the 98 Union Listers.

ALS fully supported the expansion of library services by hiring an additional RSA staff member to help support the increased workload. This increased staffing to 5.5 FTE in early 2007. Additionally, ALS increased support to RSA by expanding the roles of the five ALS Library Consultants. During their site visits, ALS Consultants would talk about RSA's services and goals, provide basic support, and record each library's questions or concerns about RSA's services. After their visits, Consultants would discuss their notes with RSA staff for resolution. RSA rapidly increased the number of libraries automated in RSA's system. When the five Northern Illinois Library Systems merged in 2011, RSA had 75 Full Online members, 51 upgraded Basic Online members and 25 Union Listing members.

The uncertainty surrounding the system merger forced RSA and the other consortia which were tightly integrated with a library system to become independent again to protect their systems and assets. In the months prior to the merger, the Boards of ALS and RSA split out assets and contracts associated with RSA. In April 2011, RSA returned to NFP status and was granted 501c3 status by the IRS. When the merger took place, RSA continued to work with the new RAILS Board and Administration to continue the staffing and other support formerly provided by ALS. In fact, RAILS and RSA negotiated an increase of 2.5 FTE to help RSA continue to run smoothly. Between 2012 and 2019, RSA added 4 FTE positions to RSA's Support Staff. During these years, RSA built a cataloging department to provide in-depth services and original cataloging services for members, most of whom have little in-house cataloging experience. RSA currently has 12 FTE supporting operations. RSA also enhanced our operations side to increase member visits and support services.

RSA currently partners with RAILS for staffing, IT, HR, payroll, office space, and more on a cost recovery basis. On RAILS' request, RSA is in the process of directly providing most of these functions in-house. RAILS will continue to support all 6 consortia in its service area through grant funding. RAILS grants covered the addition of several new RSA member libraries, including Quincy PL and Warren County PL, and helped upgrade over a dozen Union Listing libraries to Basic Online membership. Without RAILS support, it is likely that none of these libraries could have afforded to join RSA or upgrade their membership.

Conclusion: RSA was formed by central and west central Illinois libraries to provide shared access to library automation services. Over time it has partnered with several Library Systems but always retained its goal of automating as many area libraries as possible regardless of type or size. RSA is converting its governance structure and directly employing staff to continue its long tradition of serving libraries and enabling outstanding patron experiences.