History

- At the beginning of the 20th Century, public libraries began to offer special service to businesses and industries.

- In 1909, John Cotton Dana founded the Special Libraries Association, to promote the interests of industrial, technical, civic, municipal, and legislative libraries.
Today

Information agencies (special libraries) identify, collect, organize, and provide access to specific and accurate information, often for a specific clientele.
Definition

- Broadly: Any library that is NOT a school, public or academic library.

- SLA definitions:
  1. A library or information center maintained by an individual corporation, association, government agency, or other group
  2. A specialized or departmental collection within a library for the organization and dissemination of information; primarily offers service to a specialized clientele through a variety of media.
Special libraries

- **Special** 8,906 (e.g. law, music, corporate, museum)
- **Armed Forces Libraries** 289
- **Government Libraries** 1,150

Source: ALA Fact sheet 1: Number of Libraries in the USA
www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/library/libraryfactsheet/alalibraryfactsheet1.cfm
Other Features

- Objectives and collections are narrow in scope; focused on specialized subject areas.
- Emphasize information services; individualized service.
- Quick and efficient; current!
- Support and enhance the objectives of the parent organization.
- Seek out and provide information clients need; do not necessarily acquire and preserve information not directly related to need.
Staff

- Usually have specialized skills.
- May have a second degree or subject specific degree.
- May or may not have the Master of Library Science degree (MLS).
- Usually well informed about corporation/parent organization.
Types of Special Libraries

- Research Libraries
- Federal Libraries
- Corporate Libraries
- Institutional Libraries
Research Libraries

- Usually allied with academic libraries.
- BUT some are independent research libraries; exist for own sake.
  - Funded by benefactors and endowments.
  - Example: Folger Shakespeare Library; Newberry Library (humanities), John Crerar Library (physical and natural sciences), Huntington Library.
Research Libraries, II

- Scientific and Historical Societies: Preserve collections, such as American Philosophical Society Library (Benjamin Franklin papers).
- Use is scholarly; collections do not circulate.
- May provide research funds to scholars.
Federal Libraries

- Under the auspices of federal government.
- Support goals of parent organization.
- Include national health, agriculture, technical and institutional libraries.
- Federal libraries serve the various departments and agencies of the government, (e.g. armed forces)
Corporate Libraries

- Private businesses and industry need information centers to support research needs.
- Examples: banks, insurance companies, advertising agencies, chemical companies, aerospace, law firms.
- Purpose: Profit. Therefore library collects and organizes information for greatest efficiency of parent organization.
  - ‘economic model’ very different from public sector libraries (public, school, public colleges)
Corporate, II

- Dependent upon speed, currency, and accuracy.
- Often subscribe to expensive databases to provide this service.
- Contribution to company’s success determine existence.
- Staffed by information specialists.
- Staff might be involved in research and writing reports.
Institutional Libraries

- May be public or private
- Museum, association, organization libraries.
  - Vary in size, but generally small collections.
- Law Libraries: In almost every county courthouse in the United States
- Hospital and Health libraries:
  1. for patients, providing recreational and leisure materials;
  2. for medical staff, for research needs.
Institutional, II

Prison Libraries

- At first, meant to help reform prisoners by providing moral and religious works.
- More recently: support educational system in prisons.
- Today: Support as above BUT also part of rehabilitation function, offering literacy materials and bibliotherapy (materials to support individual prisoner’s needs).
Summary

- Many different types and functions.
- All support the parent organization.
- Four general categories:
  - Research
  - Federal
  - Corporate
  - Institutional