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Windmills, Flowers, Canals, Art, and Information Specialists: The 64th IFLA Conference

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WINDMILLS, FLOWERS, CANALS, ART, AND INFORMATION SPECIALISTS

THE 64TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE, 1998, AMSTERDAM, (THE NETHERLANDS)

By Wilda B. Newman

This year’s venue was somewhat different than conference sites, such as Beijing, China, (1996) and Istanbul, Turkey, (1995). Cities and countries are always different and always fascinating. But, nothing, nothing, has the charm and ambience of Amsterdam (Picture A). The canals woo you, the flowers entice, and the windmills remind us in a gentle way of other necessities in life. And, if that isn’t art enough, all that is necessary is to take a short walk to the Rijks Museum to see fantastic collections of Dutch artists’ work. George W. Oakes writes in Turn Right at the Fountain, (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971) "...Amsterdam combines business with art - the modern with the old - an active commercial port with the charm of the days of Rembrandt. It’s a colorful city, with flower markets along the quays and music in the streets. It’s a city of some 50 canals. ...most...waterways are lined with cobblestoned streets." Not a bad place to work for a week and that is the point.

Some of us lived at residences on the cobblestone streets overlooking a canal at Hotel Ambassade, a collection of 17th Century row houses (Picture B). Transportation was simple enough; a short walk and you were near a tram stop in the inner city (Picture C) and in minutes (usually) you were at the conference center, the Amsterdam RAI (Pictures D, E, F).

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) General Conference ran from August 16-21, 1998. But, for those people on standing committees and other program responsibilities, then you must be there earlier and leave later than the conference period itself.

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) has several members on different standing committees, as well as special IFLA ad hoc committees. The conference theme for this year was "On Crossroads of Information and Culture" (See Picture F which shows theme banners at the Amsterdam RAI) and was the most active conference yet in terms of interaction and networking. Picture G, shows a view of the conference opening and plenary session, always a highlight of the conference. We were greeted this year by a number of people (young and old, male and female, and a dog) marching through the auditorium in costume to the front of the room and onto the main stage. They assembled into a fantastic rendition of Rembrandts' painting Night Watch (Picture H) and were met with a standing ovation.

By the end of the week everyone has renewed old acquaintances and made new friends; has discussed last year's meeting and attended this year's sessions, and begun plans for next year's conference. In fact, you could say we ended in a yarn of tales and networking (Picture I - SLA President Suzi Hayes, and SLA Board Directors (and Sci-Tech Members) Wilda Newman and Cindy Hill). This ending took everyone by surprise and delight (from most people). It started with hundreds of balls of colorful yarn thrown by a "tall man" on stilts, after several other antics by him. The idea was to have everyone join in and throw the balls of yarn throughout the auditorium. It was fun and exhilarating. You can see some of us got all
caught up in it. At the end, hundreds of strands across the width and length of the auditorium were rolled up from the back of the auditorium to the front into a tapestry of color, representing the broad and diverse group of IFLA members as a whole. My thanks and congratulations to whoever had this wonderful idea. I can hardly wait to see it used again, stateside, maybe at a SLA Annual Business Meeting.

This year's conference had 3,328 visitors, all inclusive of "...participants, accompanying persons, day visitors, exhibitors, exhibition visitors and 75 volunteers..." representing 120 countries. Over 100 companies and organizations were there to display their products and services. Sessions (throughout the week) and workshops (Thursday) were plentiful and informative. The meeting also included open forums, guest lectures and contributed session papers (See Tables 1 and 2) (NOTE: URL: www.ifla.org). There were also 34 Poster Sessions on display in the conference center hallways, with their respective presenters.

An Internet room was available and so was an Internet Café. Workstations were available to conference participants and many of us took advantage of them to contact our offices and families. These services have been available at IFLA the last few years and offer an excellent communications vehicle to people from all over the world at no cost to the user.

Some unusual and special exhibits were available this year: (1) The Wonderful Alphabet; This display was offered in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. The exhibit was from A to Z and included large meandering exhibits dedicated to each letter of the alphabet. It included a small book with descriptions and definitions; and (2) The Silent Library; a project undertaken "...by a group from Belgium and the Netherlands who met on a number of occasions to discuss the essence of the Silent Library." Another book was given to those who were interested in this project. A quote from it follows: "What is a Silent Library? Are or were not all libraries silent? Perhaps a story can help to illustrate what is meant. A Silent Library is a cultural monument; it is also a concept (that)

underlies all library services and therefore requires the attention of all those in libraries. Those who are interested may find inspiration in the description of the concept and the first presentation of the Silent Library project on a special occasion."

(Picture J)

And there was time for colleagues gathering for the SLA members' dinner (Picture K) on a lovely evening in perfect weather. Our Executive Director, David Bender, SLA Past President, Sylvia Piggott, and SLA Headquarters' Senior Director, Fred Casey, were enjoying both the evening and the camaraderie evident throughout the evening (L). On another night some of us gathered for our traditional special dinner where we enjoyed new flavors and delighted in new acquaintances and voices (Picture M - SLA Board Directors, Monica Ertel and Cindy Hill and SLA Division Cabinet Chair, Richard Hulser).

On Saturday one of the excursions was to the Hague and the Peace Palace and its library and the International Court of Justice. I had traveled there in November 1997 but was unable to enter at that time. It was wonderful to go there again and go inside and see the palace, the international court chambers and the library. "The Library of the Peace Palace has the world's most important older collection in international law. This unique organization not only serves the International Court of Justice (founded by Andrew Carnegie), but the national and international law profession as well." In the evening, following this excursion, we had a reception and dinner at the Atrium in the City Hall of The Hague.

There is no way to really convey what happens at these conferences. I can only say if you get the chance to participate then do; no, make sure you get the chance to get involved in these conferences. For more information about IFLA, past and future contact IFLA@IFLA.ORG.

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Table 1
IFLA SESSIONS - AMSTERDAM 1998
Discussion Groups:

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Social Responsibilities
Corporate and for-profit Libraries
Performance Measurements for Academic Libraries
Genealogy and Local History Libraries
Performance Measurements for Public Libraries
Internet
Friends and Advocates of Libraries
Reference Work
Programs:
IFLA Introduction to Newcomers
Report of the Work of the ALP (Advancement of Librarianship Programme)
UNESCO Standing Committee Open Forums
Industry Updates I and II
Management of Change in Modern Library Associations
Building a Digital Library: Methods and Issues
Bridging Cultures
The Librarian's Role in Decreasing Gaps between Those Having Access to Information and Those That Do Not
Technology: Friend or Foe? The Threats and Opportunities of Information Technology for Disadvantaged Persons
Mobile Information Systems and Services on Crossroads in the 21st Century: Global Perspectives and Initiatives
Global Information: The German Digital Libraries Project
Direction at the Crossroads: Integrating Information Skills into a Changing Curriculum
The Right of the Child to Information
Permanent Paper
Libraries in Support of Education
Newspapers in Eastern Europe
Audiovisual and Multimedia Services for the Users
Critical Issues Facing LIS Journals
On Crossroads of Information and Culture: Women's Roles in a Diverse and Dynamic World
Library and Information Science Education and the Electronic Environment
Overcoming the barriers of the Virtual Library:
Linking Communities, People and Service
Intellectual Capital
Library Catalogues: Responding to User Needs
Reading Promotion and Information Technology
Books and Manuscripts in 17th Century
Uppsala, Amsterdam, Rome, Dublin
Government Information and Official Publications as a Resource for Researchers
Statistics for the Modern Age
New Trends of European Library Buildings
Aspects of Library History in the Low Countries and the United States
Privatisation and Government Libraries: An Overview
Recent Developments in Asia-Pacific Libraries and Library Education
Trends in Bibliography
Electronic Publishing and the Transformation of Document Delivery and Interlending

Table 2
IFLA WORKSHOPS - AMSTERDAM 1998
Art Libraries
Document Delivery and Interlending
Education and Training
Government Information and Official Publications joint with Newspapers
Libraries for the Blind joint with Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons
Library History joint with Information Technology co-sponsored by Hebraica Libraries Group
UK/Association of Jewish Librarians (USA)
Reading
Rare Books and Manuscripts
Library Services to Multicultural Populations joint with Library Theory and Research
National Libraries
Management and Marketing
Classification and Indexing co-sponsored by UDC/FID/BSI
University Libraries and Other General Research Libraries
Classification and Indexing co-sponsored by Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Bibliotheque Nationale du Canada, and Bibliotheque Nationale du Quebec Serial Publications joint with Document Delivery and Interlending and the UAP Core Programme, UBCIM Core Programme Permanent, UNIMARC Committee and Division of Bibliographic Control UDT Core Programme Other Workshops: Audiovisual and Multimedia UAP Core Programme Public Libraries Cataloguing Management and Library Associations Library and Research Services for Parliaments Acquisition and Collection Development joint with Serial Publications and Publishers Liaison Committee Management and Marketing

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J.

K.

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