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# Energies for Transition in Baltimore

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*ACRL's Fourth National Conference, April 9-12, 1986,  
provided a glimpse of the future.*

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**B**altimore was the perfect location for underscoring ACRL's Fourth National Conference, "Energies for Transition." The architecture, the activity, and the atmosphere are those of a very modern city, yet one that is firmly rooted in its rich past. The inner harbor area is an appealing mix of old and new, with the venerable "U.S.S. Constellation" vying with the ultramodern National Aquarium for the tourist's attention. Even the April weather—chilly, drizzling, overcast—was a cool reminder of the transition of winter into spring.

The inclement weather did provide unexpected persuasion for the 2,309 librarians, exhibitors, and friends who mostly chose to stay inside and listen to paper presentations and wander through the exhibits rather than wander about the city's streets. Participants came from 48 states and 19 foreign countries (many of the foreign librarians were visiting the U.S. courtesy of the United States Information Agency's month-long international program, "Academic and Research Libraries in the United States"). Nearly 86% attended the full conference, and about 26% were not members of ACRL.

## The sessions

Attendance was high at the six theme sessions, which covered a broad range of trends in society. As Conference Publicity Chair Bill Wilson summarized it: "An underlying message of all the theme speakers was that a major mission for academic librarians will be to create the context in which information can be personalized so as to transform the lives of individuals, or, to turn public knowl-

edge into private knowledge."

Alan C. Kay, a leading scientist for Apple Computers, described some of the research he conducted at the Palo Alto Research Center to design personal computers that even 3-year-old children could learn to use. Current research is tending towards systems that can be used intuitively, Kay said. To illustrate his point he ran a film that showed how a woman who hadn't exercised in 20 years was taught how to play tennis in 30 minutes by sensing intuitively the movements of the sport. As she explained it, "Every time I tried to think, things went wrong."

Other computer trends Kay expects to see perfected over the next ten years are: more portable systems that people can carry everywhere like pencils or wristwatches; computer terminals as common as electrical outlets; and systems that act as agents to weed out irrelevant material and repackage important information in a format convenient to use, somewhat like a personalized newspaper.

Poet and novelist Maya Angelou, the second conference theme speaker, described the transformations in her life that led her to pursue a literary and artistic career. Librarians have at their fingertips all the information gathered under human existence, she said, and consequently they have the power to transform human minds, not merely transact education.

In her presentation, which brought a standing ovation, Angelou reminded librarians that, like writers, they have a serious charge to transform this country into something more than it is today—





*Maya Angelou*



*Alan C. Kay*



*Sallie Kravetz, author of Ethel Ennis: The Reluctant Jazz Star, autographs her book at the ACRL store.*





*David McCullough greets the audience after his theme presentation.*



*Contributed papers given by James F. Comes (left) and B. Anne Commerton (right).*



to serve people, not technology. "The goal," she said, "is to be able in dying to say, 'All my conscious life and energy, all my arts and crafts have been dedicated to the most noble cause in the world: the education and the liberation of the human spirit and mind, beginning with my own.' "

Barbara S. Uehling, chancellor of the University of Missouri-Columbia, spoke about the need for more customized library and information services based upon a better understanding of marketing concepts. She predicted that services in university libraries will be reorganized around the information characteristics of classes of users, particularly researchers, rather than around traditional academic disciplines.

Theme speaker Robert F. Asleson, president of International Thomson Information, Inc., stressed the fact that, although technology has wrought great changes in the publishing industry, the objectives of both publishers and librarians have remained the same: "to maximize the use of materials and services that we provide for the betterment of library users and society as a whole." Asleson predicted an even closer library-publisher relationship for the near future—as users become more aware of the capabilities of online information systems, there will be an increasing demand on libraries to provide those services and the materials that support them.

David McCullough, host of the PBS series "Smithsonian World," compared the "unfinished business" of perfecting American society with the outlook of Thomas Jefferson toward the plans for his home at Monticello. Jefferson never stopped revising and improving Monticello, and at one point he tore down the existing building and built a completely different one.

One critical aspect of American society that requires the most improvement, McCullough said, is television, for which he presented some ominous statistics: every single day 40 million Americans watch (and pay close attention to) "The Wheel of Fortune"; by the time the average American child finishes high school, he has spent much more time in front of television than in the classroom; most children's programming on weekends is designed to sell toys, quite often expensive toys, that poor families can ill afford.

If a child's exposure to history is primarily through television docudramas, which are quite often written by people who care little about the facts, McCullough said, it is no wonder that even college graduates can escape having to learn about the realities of the Civil War, for example. Librarians should bring their influence to bear on young people by putting them in the hands of good writers. "We can go anywhere we want in the past through good books, and sometimes through good film or good television," he said. "A person who doesn't understand history is like someone who spends their whole life eating hamburgers when there is a great buffet to choose from."

One other theme session took the form of a panel discussion in which three novice researchers asked questions of three experienced researchers on the motivations for empirical research in librarianship. Several panelists called for renewed thesis requirements and research methodology courses in library schools to encourage the right thinking required both for conducting research often essential for tenure as well as understanding the research needs of graduate students and faculty.

### Other conference notes

- Most of the 60 contributed papers were well received and stimulated considerable discussion, many times to standing room only audiences. Past ACRL president Sharon Rogers noticed a shift away from the "how we did it good" paper predominant at the first two ACRL conferences toward a more analytical approach and more experimentation within the framework of conceptual humanism. Of the three categories of papers accepted (research reports, position papers, and idea briefs), position papers seemed to generate the most interest and discussion by getting people involved in vital issues.

- The published conference proceedings were distributed to full conference registrants and are still available for sale (ACRL members \$22, non-members \$30) to those who were unable to attend. To place an order, contact ALA Publishing Services, Order Dep't, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Audiocassettes of the paper sessions (none of the theme sessions were recorded) are available for \$8 per tape, plus \$3 handling charge, from Chesapeake Communications, 6330 Howard Lane, Elkridge, MD 21227.

- Three hours of New Product Seminars, at which representatives from 39 firms described their products, were well attended and were useful as an index of exhibits to visit for particular types of equipment needed at the home library.

- Wrap-up sessions at past conferences have centered around a panel that evaluated the contributed paper topics in terms of the conference theme. In Baltimore, the wrap-up took the form of a videotaped retrospective of the major conference events, recorded by a team of video production professionals. Memorable snippets of the tape included Tom Kirk's comment that the Pratt Library reception was "user-friendly," and the two librarians who explained that the initials ACRL stood for Anyone Can Read Literature.

- At the ACRL Placement Center, 66 job seekers examined 113 job vacancy listings (24 in administration, 73 in public services, and 16 in technical services). The commonest job openings were reference positions (29). Of the 113 job listings, 27 called for a second subject master's degree or Ph.D. as a required or desired qualification. Seventeen were entry-level positions without any experience requirements. New York had the most jobs listed





*Jo Harrar, Conference Chair, and Sharon Hogan, ACRL President, cut the ribbon at the Exhibits Reception.*



*Reception for Conference Program participants at the Peabody Library, Johns Hopkins University.*





*National Conference Committee: (l-r) Jo Harrar (chair); Bill Wilson (publicity); Danuta Nitecki (papers); Charmaine Boyd (publicity); and Diana Cunningham (special events).*



*The National Aquarium Reception.*



(35), followed by California (16), Pennsylvania (9), and Virginia (7). One Placement Center applicant suggested that for future conferences there should be a category for jobs in Florida and the Southwest of interest to retired librarians.

• Many conference attendees remarked that their most memorable experiences were the reception at the National Aquarium or Maya Angelou's electrifying presentation. Others listed specific continuing education courses or contributed papers, but everyone seemed to agree that the stimulating environment of the city of Baltimore made it an ideal conference location.

• Jo Harrar, Conference Planning Committee chair, said that the rapidity and smoothness with

which things were accomplished was a tribute to the hard work and efficiency of all the volunteers involved with local arrangements and the ACRL headquarters staff. "ACRL's national conferences," she said, "are valuable as continuing education devices that provide an opportunity for librarians, especially middle managers or people in their first or second jobs, to catch up both formally and informally on the policies and practices of a rapidly-changing profession."

• ACRL's Fifth National Conference will be held in Cincinnati in April 1989. We hope you will join us then when ACRL returns to the Midwest. ■■

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## ACRL's strategic plan

The ACRL Strategic Planning Task Force (SPLAT) met on April 29 to review and revise its plan, incorporating many contributions from ACRL members and officers made over the past two years. They have prepared and will present to the ACRL Board at its meeting in New York a report incorporating their background work: the working principles underlying the plan, the planning model and planning process, and an executive summary of goals, subgoals, and objectives, together with the sources from which they derived.

The plan itself will be included in the report: the revised mission statement, the complete matrix of goals, subgoals, objectives, strategies, responsibilities, resources needed, and timelines, plus a set of strategic management directions and some recommended changes in financial policies. The next steps will be described including the implementation of the plan, its evaluation, the development of an annual operating plan, a process for constant revision and updating on an annual basis, and meth-

ods for dissemination.

Appendix materials include papers resulting from research and discussion growing out of the Task Force's early work: a member needs report; a strategic factors report, which analyzed external factors, market factors, and opportunities and threats facing the Association; a strategic audit report, describing present programs, activities, policies, strategies, and strengths and weaknesses; and a resources report, detailing the Association's financial history, its facilities, information resources, human resources, and analyzing ALA as a resource.

In sum, the Task Force has carried out the process described in "A Proposed Planning Process for the Association of College and Research Libraries," *C&RL News*, September 1984, pp. 396-401, and is now ready to present its work to the ACRL Board for its approval.—*JoAn Segal, ACRL Executive Director.* ■■

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## Tibetan historical works

The ACRL Professional Association Liaison Committee will provide ACRL members with reimbursement funds for registration and travel expenses incurred by presenting a library-related paper at a non-library professional association. The Committee gave me \$100 for my expenses when I presented a paper at the Fourth International Seminar on Tibetan Studies held July 21-27, 1985, at Schloss Hohenkammer near Munich, West Germany. Approximately 100 scholars from 30 different countries attended the seminar; about 85 papers were presented on various aspects of Tibetan studies.

I presented a paper entitled, "A Bibliography of Tibetan Historical Works at the University of

Washington." It described the Tibetan collection of the Special Foreign Currency Program (formerly the PL-480 Program), various catalogs available for accessing the collection, the need for an analytic catalog and an analytic catalog for Tibetan historical works that I compiled, the work done by Western scholars on analyzing Tibetan historical genres, and the usefulness and inherent problems of Tibetan genre labels for classification purposes. Twenty historical genres are easily identifiable, making genres useful for classification purposes, particularly for an online database, should one ever be put together for Tibetan collections.—*Jeffrey D. Schoening, University of Washington.* ■■





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