

The Frankfurt Book Fair

ACRL's fifth year

by Janet Crayne and Marta Deyrup

ACRIL held an exhibit of American libraries at the 2003 Frankfurt Book Fair, October 8–13. The fair, which draws several hundred thousand visitors from Europe, Asia, and the Americas each year, is the largest book trade event of its kind in the world. Although American librarians have other opportunities to meet with small groups of publishers and distributors, this fair provides librarians with the unique opportunity to devote an uninterrupted week to the development of their collections.

During the fair, promoters arrange for celebrities to participate in discussions, performances, and interviews. Outside, in the central plaza that separates the pavilions, vendors sell everything from food to crafts to souvenirs. After the fair closes for the evening, publishers, booksellers, vendors, and librarians take their business into restaurants or cafés, where discussions, conversations, and networking continue.

Despite all of the festivities, the fair is first and foremost a business enterprise, where books, other print materials, and publishing rights are negotiated, bought, sold, and traded as commodities. In this environment libraries and librarians occupy only a small portion of book fair business. While conducting their own business, however, they have the opportunity to witness firsthand how international publishing business is conducted.

The guest of honor

Each year, the fair hosts a special guest of honor, which, at the 2003 show, was Russia. Organizers

from the Russian ministries and publishing houses provided book readings, performances, art exhibits, film showings, receptions, and special displays throughout the six-day event. Two photographic exhibitions, "St. Petersburg–Petrograd–Leningrad–St. Petersburg: XX Century in Photographs" and "Russia–New Pages," highlighted the yearlong celebration of the 200th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg and the changing face of modern Russia.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian publishing industry has grown dramatically, and there are now approximately 6,000 publishing businesses, most of which are located in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Both the Russian publishers' booths and those from Eastern Europe were notable for their sophisticated graphics and use of multimedia displays.

Benefits to U.S. librarians

One of the advantages of attending the fair is that those of us who work with publications from or about other countries or regions can meet their distributors halfway; more of them are able to travel to Frankfurt than to the United States.

Attending the fair is more cost-effective for us, as well. Some of us cover more than 20 countries for our libraries, and it is virtually impossible to travel to each country in order to arrange for the best bibliographic coverage. In Frankfurt we have a distinct advantage. Without travel to publishers and distributors

About the authors

Janet Crayne is head of the Slavic and East European Division at the University of Michigan, e-mail: jcrayne@umich.edu, and Marta Deyrup is West European and Slavic monographs cataloger and subject specialist for Russian and East European studies at Seton Hall University, e-mail: deyrupma@shu.edu

© 2004 Janet Crayne and Marta Deyrup

in Europe, we would lack firsthand information about competitive providers and would be forced to rely on secondary or biased sources of information about the book trade, such as isolated approval plan suppliers. In other words the fair provides us with a wider range of options for collection development.

The fair also provides access to a wide range of publishers and distributors from specific regions. To quote one of the participants: "Where else can you see all the publishers of Quebec, their catalogs arranged alphabetically, the editors from the houses taking their turns in the combined exhibit, there to answer questions like 'How many books of fiction do you issue in a year?' Where else can you see all the books in English currently available from the Philippines?"

Visitors can also learn more about books and journals from other areas of special interest (e.g., African, Russian Orthodox, juvenile), get to know statistical publications and publishers outside the United States, and seek out European resources in the newest electronic format.

ACRL's presence

Since 1999, ACRL has provided a booth and exhibit at the fair to display and distribute section publications, answer questions about the organization, and promote U.S. librarianship to the world. Gordon Anderson, librarian for Scandinavian and Slavic Area Studies and Western European Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota Library, did a splendid job organizing all aspects of ACRL's presence, and he and Beau David Case, field librarian for Classical Studies at the University of Michigan Library, proved wonderful guides for the dozen or so ACRL librarians in attendance. A steady

stream of visitors dropped by the booth, such as a representative from Ethiopia who wanted to know whom to contact for help in establishing a university library system there, and a representative from a major online resource provider, who was interested in scholarship relating to patron searching behaviors.

Some visitors were very interested in studying librarianship in the United States. In this case, being close to the U.S. Embassy's America-House exhibit helped us get the right information to them. In all, representatives from eleven countries—Great Britain, Bosnia, Ethiopia, India, Russia, Latvia, Romania, Germany, Malaysia, Netherlands, and Italy—made introductions and sought information on current issues in libraries and librarianship, document delivery, and Web services.

As in past years, ACRL provided a travel stipend to encourage attendance at the fair. This year, four librarians were grant recipients: Steve Corsin, head of acquisitions at Wayne State University Libraries; Janet Crayne, head of the Slavic and East European Division at the University of Michigan Library; Marta Deyrup, West European and Slavic monographs cataloger and subject specialist for Russian and East European Studies at Seton Hall University; and Graham Walden, librarian for communication, telecommunication, and Germanic languages and literatures at Ohio State University.

Making an impact

The ACRL booth establishes a high profile both for ACRL and ALA among vendors and librarians worldwide. Moreover, it establishes that profile not in the United States or Canada, but in Europe. We serve as an on-site resource for information on professional librarianship in the United States and all it offers.

Samples provide visitors with the opportunity to take home and read some of the best examples of American library scholarship. The broad range of our visitors, including library students, distributors and publishers, librarians, researchers, and members of the general public, indicate that we are many things to many people—all of them positive. The booth also provides us, both as Americans and librarians, with an opportunity to show our best side. We can readily promote our desire to develop highly specialized country-specific collections through area programs, reflecting positively on our libraries, universities, and ultimately on our country. ■

Links of interest

- Western European Studies Section of ACRL Archives of the Frankfurt Book Fair, www.lib.virginia.edu/wess/wessfair.htm
- Frankfurt Book Fair Homepage, www.frankfurt-book-fair.com/en/portal.html
- Russia Guest of Honor Pages at the Book Fair, www.frankfurt-book-fair.com/en/index.php?content=/en/buchmesse_frankfurt/tlp.html
- ACRL's Slavic and East European Section, www.gwu.edu/~sees/