In March of this year, seventeen U.S. librarians, scholars and educators participated in an 11-day educational tour of libraries, archives, universities, and cultural and historical sites in Cuba. Organized by Rhonda Neugebauer, the delegation traveled to five cities and held discussions with Cuban librarians and informational professionals about their work, philosophy, values, their perceptions of their role in society and their obligation to provide access and delivery of information to their patrons. We were impressed by the dedication and plain hard work of our Cuban counterparts, their ability to provide a high level of service with limited resources, and their commitment to the continued development of services and collections throughout the country. This article reports on the highlights of our tour, conveys some of our impressions of this island nation and describes what we learned of Cuban libraries and librarianship.

The Dire Economy and Struggling Libraries
Cuba is a poor country of about 11 million people. It is small, about the size of the state of Pennsylvania. The economy is heavily dependent upon agriculture and tourism for the foreign exchange that is required to purchase commodities from abroad, including such items as food, fuel, clothing and books that are needed to supplement national production. In the early 1990s, the economy was thrown into disarray with the collapse of the socialist bloc and since then, Cuba has had to find new trading partners and financing. This dire economic environment has had a severe impact upon the nation. Consequently, inadequate library budgets inhibit the development of collections, services and preservation programs, severely restricting the purchase of such basics as books and journal subscriptions.

Cuban librarians carry out many of the same activities as their North American counterparts. They strive to build broad and in-depth collections that reflect their cultural and national identity and provide...
Libraries in Cuba:

Continued from page 1

information and reference services to researchers, other professionals and the public. They organize and preserve materials in diverse formats, create tools that aid patrons in the use of their collections and increasingly employ electronic technologies to format, communicate and deliver resources and information. Cuban libraries also face a chronic shortage of resources. The office supplies that we take for granted -- paper, ballpoint pens, paper clips and computers -- are hard to come by. Inadequate telephone system, and domestic and international telecommunications impede library community development. Despite these rather formidable obstacles, Cuban librarians are determined to find solutions to these problems. One innovative program has been the establishment of subscriber groups wherein patrons contribute books or pay a small sum (10 pesos per year) to borrow new books. These groups, called Minerva Clubs, invite patron support for and donations to public library popular fiction collections. The Minerva Clubs, started with donations of materials from Spain, serve large numbers of people and help libraries buy multiple copies of high-demand titles.

The Jose Marti National Library (Biblioteca Nacional “Jose Marti”)
At the Jose Marti National Library, our delegation met with Director Dr. Eliades Acosta Matos and about two dozen staff members who described the library, its collections and services. The National Library, founded in 1901, holds approximately three million items, including books, photographs, rare books, maps, music and materials in Braille. The librarians oversee several active publishing projects, including the Bibliografia Nacional de Cuba and the Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional. In addition to serving as the main repository for Cuban intellectual patrimony, the National Library also provides services to the public including circulation, reference and children’s services and serves as the principal organizer of a network of some 387 public libraries throughout the country. Librarians at the National Library provide training, cataloging and reference tools, program planning support, continuing education programs and technological support to public libraries as well as to about 500 school libraries, 500 health center libraries and 1000 information centers in the Havana area.

Dr. Acosta brought up the issue of censorship and intellectual freedom in Cuban libraries: “The materials we have in our libraries offer a variety of perspectives on the revolution. In our collections, we want diversity. We want to add materials of all types and perspectives. We have books by U.S. authors and books by Cubans that live abroad. We would like more materials that are published abroad, but we just do not have the funds to purchase them. That is why our exchange programs with libraries around the world are so important. Through exchange (canje), we add materials that we could not possibly purchase because of the cost. Many

Young adult reading room at the Ruben Martinez Vellena Public Library in Old Havana, Cuba. (Photo: Rhonda Neugebauer, March 2000)
**Message from the IRRT Chair**  
By Lucinda Covert-Vail, Chair

This issue’s column will be short and sweet for the following reasons:

-- International Leads is filled with interesting articles that should pique your interest.

-- A draft of the ALA International Relations Agenda is available for comment.

-- Annual conference in Chicago is coming soon.

-- International Visitors Reception sponsorship.

Just a few words about the draft agenda and Chicago. The draft of the ALA International Relations Agenda for 2000-2005 is available for your review on the ALA web site. The agenda was developed by a working group that included IRC and IRRT members and was convened by IRC Chair Jordan Scepanski. Comments were invited from the IRRT at midwinter. The agenda lays out the international action areas for the IRRT, IRC and other internationally focused ALA groups for the next five years. Our hope is that it is broad enough to encompass the varied and inspired international activities of all in ALA working in the international arena yet specific enough to give members a more focused idea of the association’s international commitment. Please take the time to review it and we welcome your comments about the draft text. It may be viewed at: [http://www.ala.org/work/international/agenda2000-2005.html](http://www.ala.org/work/international/agenda2000-2005.html)

Finally, the Gale Group is generously sponsoring the International Visitors Reception this year at the Winter Garden of Chicago Public Library’s Harold Washington Library. As you know, this is the culminating international event of the annual conference which all of our international visitors -- and I hope you -- will attend. Gale Group has supported IRRT activities in the past and continues to be a strong supporter of international librarianship and their support of the reception reinforces this commitment.

So that is it, short and sweet as promised. I look forward to seeing you at ALA in Chicago, encourage you to participate in IRRT activities, take the time to attend the international poster sessions and papers presentation and, of course attend the IRRT program on Sister Libraries and the International Visitors Reception.

---

**Sister Libraries: Making the Connections that Build International Communities and Services**

Monday, July 10, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.  
Hyatt-Regency A/B

This year’s IRRT program will discuss the benefits and rewards of becoming a sister library, how to get started, and examples of partnership activities and how to make your partnership successful. If you are interested in creating a sister library partnership at your library, you don’t want to miss this program.

Christine L. McDonald, Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, New York, “The ALA Sister Library Program Initiative”


Carol Sheffer, Queensborough Public Library, Queens, New York and Ivana Soljacic-Richter, Auguste Cesare Library, Zagreb Public Library Network, “From Queens to Croatia: Building Global Bridges”

Donald H. Dyal, Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A&M University, College Station Texas, “The Reciprocal and Transnational Initiatives of Texas A&M University Libraries and Mexico”


Irina L. Klim, Information Resource Center, Consulate General of the United States of America, St. Petersburg, “Bringing Russian and American Libraries and Librarians Together, Experiences from an American Center in Russia”

---

Attention IRRT and IRC members:

IRRT and IRC Programs and Meetings
At 2000 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago (July 6 - 13, 2000)

Programs

Preconference “The State of American Librarianship”
Friday, July 7, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
University of Illinois-Chicago

Orientation for International Visitors
Friday, July 7, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.
McCormick Place Convention Center-S103

“European Initiatives in Library Cooperation and Technology”
Saturday, July 8, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Hyatt-Columbus I/J

International Poster Session
Sunday, July 9, 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
 Exhibit Hall (near the Placement Center)

International Papers: “Libraries Build Community and Building a Worldwide Library Community”
Monday, July 10, 8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon
Hyatt-Columbus C/D

“Going Global: Preparing for an International Job Exchange”
Monday, July 10, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.
Hyatt-Stetson E

“Sister Libraries: Making the Connections that Build International Communities and Services”
Monday, July 10, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Hyatt-Regency A/B

“Reception for International Librarians”
Winter Garden of Harold Washington Library
Monday, July 10, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Meetings

International Relations Committee
Friday, July 7, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Hyatt-Columbus C/D
Tuesday, July 11, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Hyatt-Regency A South

International Relations Committee/International Relations Round Table
All Subcommittee Meeting
Saturday, July 8, 8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.,
Hyatt-Regency C North

International Relations Round Table- Executive Committee Meeting
Sunday, July 9, 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Hyatt-Columbus G

Libraries Build Community and Building A Worldwide Library Community
Monday, July 10, 8:30a.m. - 12:00 noon
Hyatt-Columbus C/D

Elizabeth M. Gericke, University of South Africa, South Africa, “A New Paradigm for Public Library Service in a Multicultural Society”

Fred Guy, National Library of Scotland, United Kingdom “East West Co-operation in Europe: The Role of the National Library of Scotland in Helping to Create a Modern Information System for the Russian State Library, Moscow”

Lorraine Mangonèse and Elisabeth Pierre-Louis, Fondation Connaissance & Liberté (Soros Foundation-Haïti) Haiti “Haïti: Community Libraries and Community Empowerment”

Sarah Ormes, UK Office for Library and Information Networking, United Kingdom, “Stories from the Web: Developing a Global Children’s Library Resource”

Eugene M. Rooney, S.J., Chile, “Thirty Years of Joint Library Ventures in Chile and Uruguay”

Yakov Shrayberg and Victor Zverevich, International Library, Information, and Analytical Center, Russia, “ILIAC as an Example of a New Type of Interlibrary Integration within the Process of Building of a Worldwide Library Community”

Jagtar Singh, Punjabi University, India, “India and the Worldwide Library Community, Problems and Prospects”

* * * * *
From ALA’s International Desk  By Michael Dowling

The International Relations has been busy the last few months handling the registration and hotel arrangements for the over 300 international librarians who will be coming to Chicago for the ALA Annual Conference. I would like to thank Alisha White, IRO Administrative Assistant and Troy Swanson, a recent graduate of Dominican University School of Library and Information Science, for all of their hard work and making it a smooth process.

Please remember to support and assist international colleagues at conference by volunteering for the International Lounge, by being a mentor, and by attending the international papers program, international poster sessions, and the International Librarians Reception.

The draft of new ALA International Relations Agenda for 2000-2005 is up on the IRO website at http://www.ala.org/work/international/agenda2000-2005.html. We would like your input before and at Annual on this since it will guide the direction of ALA international activities during the next five years. The plan is to have it approved in Chicago.

Call for Volunteers --

The Hospitality Committee of the IRRT needs volunteers to staff the International Visitor Lounge at the upcoming Annual ALA Conference in Chicago. Volunteers are needed from noon on Friday, July 7 to 5:00 p.m. on Monday, July 10. Volunteers assist international visitors in answering questions and giving directions at the conference. Typically, a volunteer will staff the Lounge for a two-hour period. This is a wonderful opportunity to greet colleagues from around the globe! If you are interested in volunteering or have questions, please contact the Chair of the Hospitality Committee, Rebecka Lindau, at rebecka.lindau@nyu.edu phone: (212) 998-2515.

The Global Village: Poster Sessions by International and U.S. Presenters

Sunday, July 9, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Exhibit Hall

Louise Rodger (Australia), Gercina Angela Borem Lima (Brazil), Ana Cecilia Torres (Costa Rica), Luis A. Mourellos Rodriguez (Cuba), Phoebe Marshall-Rainbeau (France), Vijaya P. Rajhansa (India), Assuna Arte (Italy), Yuriko Nakamura and Taro Miura (Japan), David Unger (U.S.A.) and Olivia Macias (Mexico), Svetlana Shevkun (Moldova), Lynne Jackett (New Zealand), Vladimir S. Lazarev (Republic of Belarus), Sergey Sereychik (Russia), Danielle Minicoand Daisy McAdam (Switzerland), Sarah Ormes (United Kingdom), Enoch H. Chipunza (Zimbabwe), Lorie Roy, Lisa Mitten, Jeannette Pierce, Anita Breland, Daniel Mattes Durrett, Nadia Lashmanova, Nerea A. Llamas, Susan Schnuer, Barbara von Wahlde, Jerrie C. Merridith, Elizabeth Jackson, Thelma H. Tate, Deborah Harrington, and Charles Gilreath (U.S.A.).

Welcome New IRRT Members!

Amy Abruzzi
Anna Ashikhmina
Mary Treacy Bingham
Nancy S. Boerner
Gayle R. Christian
Margaret R. Coleman
Fadi Harissi Dagher
Andrea J. Erickson
Kathryn C. FitzHugh
Mary Garber
Donna Goda
Maria C. Hernandez
Del R. Hornbuckle
Esther E. Home
Moriba Jackson
Jo Kibbee
Scott A. Gallagher
Marlee Dorn Grantham
Michael Gutierrez

Helen Ladrone de Guevara
Larry Lee
Thea L. Lindquist
Kevin M. Maher
Sherri Clark McConnell
Yuriko Miyaji
Angela Lee Noyes
Moo-Jae Pak
Penelope Papangelis
Sheila M. Plant
Carol L. Sheffer
Elvira Saurina Solanes
Hillary Anne Stevenson
Particia P. Timberlake
Charles T. Townley
Alan Wagner
Hua Yi
Jutta Zaplinski
Libraries and Archives in Kosovo (Continued)

By Andras Riedlmayer

(Continued from page 8, March issues)

Libraries and Archives of Religious Institutions

The oldest libraries and archives in Kosovo are the collections of the Christian and Muslim religious communities. The three most important Serbian Orthodox institutions, the Serbian Patriarchate in Pec and the monasteries at Visoki Decani and Gracanica, have notable collections of manuscripts and documents from the medieval and Ottoman periods. These monasteries and their collections survived the war without damage and are under the protection of KFOR troops; some of the most valuable material had reportedly been moved to Serbia before the outbreak of the war.

The manuscript libraries and historic archives of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (KBI), which held the written record of 600 years of Islamic culture in the region, suffered terrible destruction. The most serious loss of non-governmental archives in Kosovo was the burning of the KBI’s Central Archive in the center of Prishtina, housed in a building adjoining the fifteenth-century Sultan Murad Mosque.

Six of the regional historical archives of the Islamic Community were also attacked and wholly or partially destroyed, including the KBI archives in Pec (Peja), Djakovica (Gjakova), Srbica (Skenderaj), Glogovac (Gilgoc), Suva Reka (Suhareke), and Lipljan (Lipjan).

The Alauddin Medrese in Prishtina, an Islamic secondary school, and its theological library survived unharmed, but other Islamic manuscript collections in Kosovo were singled out for destruction by Serbian forces in March-June 1999. Among the most serious losses:

--- The burning on March 24 of the library of Hadum Suleiman Aga in Djakovica, with holdings of 200 manuscripts and 1,300 rare books in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic and Aljamiado (Albanian in Arabic script), as well as the regional archives of the KBI with records going back to the 17th century.

--- The destruction of the Bektashi tekke (ervish lodge) of Axhize Baba in Djakovica (Gjakova), which had one of the most valuable collections of Islamic manuscripts in the region.

--- The library of the Atik Medrese, an 18th-century theological school in the historic city of Pec (Peja), was also burned to the ground, with only parts of the outer walls still standing and its collection of 2,000 printed books and about 100 manuscript codices a total loss.

Despite what they have gone through and the hardships they still face, our colleagues in Kosovo are looking to the future.

Let us hope that they will find the assistance they need to restore the libraries and library services that can help the people of Kosovo build a better tomorrow.

(Andras J. Riedlmayer is a Bibliographer at Fine Arts Library of Harvard University)
News and Announcements

H. Lea Wells was newly elected Vice-Chair of IRRT. Mary A. Sherman was elected Member-at-Large for a two-year term.

The Shanghai Municipal Library in P. R. China is spearheading an InterCity Digital Library Project to promote the development of digital libraries in the Asia-Pacific region, including the United States. If your library might be interested in this project, please contact Stephen Lesce at Pudong, U.S.A., (212) 432-0002.

The Association for the Support of Individual Charity (ASIC), a non-profit group involved with the support of libraries in Guatemala, is looking for Spanish speaking librarians to help provide training to individuals for a new library in Guatemala. ASIC in conjunction with The Godchild project, a private non-denominational project that provides educational, social, and health services to over 1200 children and their families in Guatemala, have received a Rotary grant of $10,000 to create a library. Since there are no librarians nor people with library experiences in the area, the ASIC is helping with the selection and organization of the books for the new library. One of the biggest problems that is encountered with small library development in Guatemala is the lack of trained professionals. If you are interested in volunteering, or in finding out more information, please contact Denise Westcott of ASIC at denwest@yahoo.com.

Join ALA in Guadalajara! ALA and the Guadalajara International Book Fair are partnering for the fourth year to provide support for American or Canadian librarians to attend the 14th Guadalajara International Book Fair (FIL) from November 25 - December 3, 2000. The ALA-FIL FREE PASS Program will provide 3 days lodging, continental breakfast, and registration at the expense of FIL (six nights if you share a room with a colleague who is also part of the program). ALA will contribute $100 toward the cost of airfare. FREE PASSES will be awarded to up to 200 librarians who are members of ALA who work in the area of Spanish language acquisitions and/or are working to build their Spanish language collection to better serve their community and users. The deadline for application to the ALA-FIL FREE PASS Program is August 31, 2000. For more information or to apply for the FREE PASS Program, contact: David Unger, FIL, New York, Division of Humanities NAC 6293, The City College of New York, New York, NY 10031. Phone: (212) 650-7925, fax: (212) -650-7912, e-mail: FILNY@aol.com

Libraries in Cuba:

Continued from page 2

titles from abroad are in our libraries because of the exchange relations we have had with U.S. and other foreign libraries for decades. In addition to attempting to preserve the national patrimony, our collection development policies reflect the needs and desires of our people to be exposed to all kinds of ideas and perspectives.”

The National Technical Library School (Escuela Nacional de Tecnicos de Bibliotecas)
The National Technical Library School was founded in 1962 in the wake of the Literacy Campaign. The mission of the school is to provide technical and reference training for students who will work in public or regional libraries as “tecnicos medios” (library technicians/paraprofessionals). Students come to attend the school from all regions of the country. They receive free housing, meals and a stipend as well as free tuition. The school currently offers a two and one-half year study program for nearly 300 students who work towards a library technician degree after finishing their high school studies. The school offers a curriculum that includes courses on general library topics (reference, cataloging, collection development, history of the book, the book trade and publishing, bookbinding, etc.), yearly practicums in nearby libraries, visits to all types of libraries, and, during the third year, a semester-long assignment in an institution near the student’s home town. Reports, exams, and a “trabajo de titulación” (a work similar to a thesis) are also required.

On our tour of the school, we saw classrooms, workrooms where the students compile projects and reports (some are similar to poster sessions), the computer room (with four 386 machines, only one of which has a hard drive), the typing room (typing is taught because most of the libraries in which graduates will work do not have computers yet), the school’s archives and the library.

Talks with library school administrators and teachers were an important component of our trip. The enthusiasm of both the teachers and the students was infectious, but the outdated teaching materials alarmed us and spurred several of us to ask what we could do to help find more suitable equipment and add more current library science titles. Several U.S. participants in the program decided, on the spot, to find ways to help the library school by sending library science texts and other professional materials. The school’s head of reference, Catedra Haya, mentioned that the school would

Continued on page 8
Libraries in Cuba:

 Continued from page 7

appreciate receiving any discarded copies of American Libraries, Library Journal, School Library Journal, Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index (they currently work with the 17th edition), encyclopedias, thesauri, or software manuals. Even English language editions of reference works are useful because English is taught at the school.

The Cuban Library Association (Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios, ASCUBI)

Our delegation met with ASCUBI representatives in the National Technical Library School where they had just set up new offices. Marta Terry, President of ASCUBI, and nine members of the national Executive Board welcomed us to Cuba and described the work of the association. ASCUBI has been very active in international organizations including IFLA and it was the lead organizer of the 1994 IFLA conference held in Cuba. The national association has about 1200 members and represents all library workers, including both librarians and library technicians. There are chapters in nine of the 14 provinces. Because of the low membership fees ASCUBI maintains, there is little or no money to send librarians to international conferences. Cuban library workers pay a membership fee of about one peso per month for dues to ASCUBI (about US$.60 a year). ASCUBI representatives expressed considerable interest in U.S. librarianship and ways in which they might participate in ALA initiatives.

American Library Association Sister Libraries Initiative

At most of the libraries, we presented the Spanish language brochure prepared by ALA that details the new Sister Libraries Initiative. The Initiative encourages U.S. and foreign libraries to form relationships that promote the sharing of information and problem-solving techniques while participants learn about other cultures and the global issues facing all libraries.

The host libraries were presented with mementos (bags, pens, pins) from the Libraries Build Communities campaign organized by ALA President Sarah Long. The Cuban librarians were impressed with the program’s goal of matching libraries for mutual support and education. Several of them promised to investigate the possibility of joining the ALA effort. The ALA International Relations Office deserves special recognition for sending the information and gifts to distribute to our Cuban hosts.

To help any of the institutions mentioned above, please contact Rhonda L. Neugebauer, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Box 68, Wichita, KS, 67260, neugebua@twsuvm.uc.twsu.edu

(Rhonda Neugebuer is Reference Librarian at Wichita State University Libraries)