



International Leads

ISSN 0892-4546

A Publication of the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association

Volume 31

June 2017

Number 2

Libraries in Cuba 2017

By Barbara Conaty
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Stained glass ceiling in the atrium of the Jose Marti National Library, Credit: Barbara Conaty

Cuba's oldest public library was the first stop of an ALA-sponsored tour group to Havana, Cuba, February 10-17, 2017. Upon the partial lifting of the embargo enforced by the USA in 2016, past ALA President Sari Feldman led the first group of librarians on a tour of the International Book Fair in Havana. This year's tour included librarians from an array of libraries, three library schools, two professional associations, and a consulting firm. Tour members came from New York, Virginia, Illinois, New Jersey, California, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Texas, New Hampshire, Arizona, and the Virgin Islands. The Cuban Association of Librarians (ASCUBI) and the ALA collaborated on the organization of the tour.

The host library was the Biblioteca Provincial Ruben Martinez Villena in a centrally-located building that housed the U. S. Embassy until 1960. Starting with an aperitif of rum-flavored mojitos, the group met in a small side garden where two young magnolia trees, gifts from past First Lady Michelle Obama, had been planted. Cuba's Ministry of Culture administers the public library system which includes the Jose Marti National Library and about 300 provincial

and municipal public libraries serving a population of 11 million. Another 1300 school libraries are administered by the Ministry of Education.

The budget supporting the public library system is considered adequate to sustain the existing level of services, new materials, and salaries of staff.

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ALA tour group listens intently to Nancy Coradin, a group member in the hat, as she translates the narrative about the National Library. Credit: Barbara Conaty

Message from the Editors

Welcome to the June 2017 issue of International Leads.

This issue is the last issue to be put out by Karen and Gail. It has been our pleasure to serve as co-editors of International Leads for the past two years.

Our new incoming co-editors are Florence Mugambi and Rebecca Miller whose email address appear below in the call for submission. Please welcome them to International Leads for the next issue.

This issue includes articles describing the current state of libraries in Cuba, working as a librarian in Ethiopia, and a congratulations to IRRT's very own Loida Garcia-Febo, who just won the 2018-1019 ALA Presidency!

Also included is the IRRT schedule of events for the ALA Annual 2017 Conference in Chicago.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve as co-editors.

*~Karen Bordonaro and
Gail Sacco, IL co-editors*



Call for Submission

Do you have news about...

International library activities?

People in international librarianship?

Upcoming international conferences?

Why not submit to International Leads? Send your news and stories to the new co-editors: Florence Mugambi, florence.mugambi@northwestern.edu, and Rebecca Miller, rmiller@bibliodiv.com.

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International Leads (ISSN 0892-4546) is published quarterly by the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association in March, June, September, and December. IL is indexed by Library Literature and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA). The IRRT mailing address is: International Relations Office, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Materials for IL should be sent to Co-editor, Karen Bordonaro, James A. Gibson Library, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1

Message from the IRRT Chair



By Elizabeth Cramer

Welcome to the June issue of *International Leads*. Many thanks to the co-editors **Gail Sacco** and **Karen Bordonaro** as they wrap up their two-year appointment. They have done a fabulous job issuing our newsletter in a timely fashion, with excellent content. We have successfully appointed two new co-editors for *International Leads*, **Rebecca Miller** and **Florence Mugambi**. They will assume editorship with the September issue.

This issue highlights international programming for the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, June 23-27, 2017. As always, the **International Visitors' Center** opens Friday morning and the **International Librarians Orientation** takes place that same afternoon. Don't miss the **IRRT Papers** and **Chair's Programs**, both

focusing on the library's role in supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Many more programs and events are listed in this issue, with special mention of the **International Librarians Reception**, taking place Monday evening at the Chicago Public Library, Winter Garden.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge a group of five **ALA Emerging Leaders** that worked with the IRRT Executive Board and the IRRT Sister Libraries Committee to gather and report data that will inform IRRT of key factors that lead to successful Sister Libraries relationships. The Emerging Leaders: Stacy Gilbert, Joy Bridwell, Melissa West, Anna Sandelli, and Lisa Blake, will present a poster session about their project at the International Poster Session, Sunday, June 25, 10:30-noon, McCormick Place West, W181b.

And lastly, I want to thank the IRRT Executive Board members for their service. **John Hickok**

will be finishing his term as Past-Chair, ending years of service on the Board. John is one of the most interesting people I know, his travels and expertise in international librarianship unsurpassed. Also double congratulations to our incoming Chair, **Loida Garcia-Febo**, as she begins her term as IRRT Chair and ALA President-Elect. Strap on tight Loida, it is going to be a crazy year. Thanks to **Christopher Shaffer** and **Angelique Simmons**, as they wrap up their terms with IRRT and to continuing Board members, **Richard Sapon-White** and **Sandy Hirsh**. Congratulations to newly elected Board members, **Muzhgan Nazarova** (Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect), **Julia Gelfand** (Member-at-Large), and **Jeremiah Paschke-Wood** (Secretary/Treasurer) will begin their terms immediately following ALA Annual. And special thanks to **Delin Guerra**, the continuing force behind IRRT, the one who knows the answers and keeps the momentum through the years.

For those traveling to Chicago, travel safe and hope to see you there, Beth



Message from the IRRT Vice Chair/Chair Elect



By Loida Garcia-Febo

During this year my message has been consistent and I would like to continue encouraging each member of the IRRT to continue working together to benefit our profession and the communities we serve! In this IL issue I would like to share some examples of activities related to library advocacy in which I participated in the USA.

Since our last newsletter, I attended the annual conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) where I had the opportunity to participate on ACRL's postcard campaign to Defend Libraries. I spent time at the ACRL booth and saw many colleagues filling out postcards with messages to our USA Legislators. Here I share one of the messages:

I'm proud to stand with the American Library Association today and in the future to fight for fundamental rights like privacy, free speech, and access to the American Dream. Libraries are very important to me and I urge you to work to continue to fund the work of America's 120,000+ libraries. Their work is central to every community and reliable funding ensures they can help even more students, job hunters, veterans, entrepreneurs, businesses, and people from every walk of life to thrive personally, socially, and economically.

This was a very busy time for library advocates. I joined the New York Library Association's Advocacy Day at the New York State Capitol. Together with hundreds of library activists, I met with Senators and Legislators. I was also fortunate to

visit libraries in Massachusetts and Texas to speak to librarians about the importance of library advocacy and upholding our core values.

Besides these library advocacy activities, I had the opportunity to attend IFLA's Global Vision workshop in Athens. This initiative centers around a discussion to bringing together thousands of representatives from the library field worldwide to explore how a connected library field can meet the challenges of the future. I would like to encourage IRRT members to visit the Global Vision website and participate of the discussions.

<https://globalvision.ifla.org/>

It has been an honor to work along with Beth Cramer, IRRT Chair for 2016-2017, and each one of the members of the IRRT Executive Committee: Angelique Denise Simmons (Secretary/Treasurer), John Hickok (Past-Chairperson), Richard E. Sapon-White (Member-at-Large), Dr. Christopher Allen Shaffer (Member-at-Large), and Dr. Sandra Hirsh (Roundtable Councilor). Special thanks to our ALA Staff Liaison, Delin Guerra for keeping us updated, and her tremendous collaboration with our monthly calls and overall round table coordination. I am looking forward to work with all the IRRT members as IRRT Chair 2017-2018.



Libraries in Cuba, continued

(continued from p. 1)



ALA Tour group at provincial library in Old Havana, Feb. 11, 2017. Credit: Miguel Viciado Valdes

Library Director Regla Perea said that the greatest challenge facing the library is to acquire and learn to use appropriate technology while also integrating technology into the communities served by the national library system. Speaking for the tour group in a Q and A session, past ALA President Leslie Burger noted that in libraries in the USA, flat funding is a prevailing issue while service to immigrant communities in the form of ESL classes and foreign language materials has been a major goal. Another tour member, David Seleb, director of the Oak Park (IL) Public Library, noted that the host library and his Oak Park library have just initiated a Sister Library partnership and both libraries are looking forward to a fruitful and beneficial relationship. An unusual feature for these two sister libraries is that one staffer of the Villena library is expected to travel to Oak Brook for a comprehensive cultural exchange.

As the public library serving the capital city's Old Havana district, the

library is well-equipped with a bright and attractive children's room, a well-stocked adult reference room, open stacks of popular and contemporary materials, and several floors of closed-shelf collections. Open every day except Sunday, this library offers public programs of wide interest as well as exhibits such as "The Origami of Love" for Valentine's Day. Ongoing events, such as book award ceremonies, were related to the 26th International Book Fair being held at the La Cabana fortress just a few blocks away.

The group's next library visit was at the Jose Marti National Library, an imposing structure right on the Plaza of the Revolution. Though the national library was established in 1901, this multi-story building dates back to 1958 and was funded by a five-cent tax on all bags of sugar produced by the plantation magnates. With a staff of 320 and 17 floors of space, this library has a collection of 4 million titles. Authors deposit copies of their works while government publishers are obliged to deposit one copy of all publications to the national library. At this location, the library serves students, researchers and professionals. Amongst the array of services, the library has a reading room devoted to services for the visually impaired where library science student assistant Yenisei Fernandez declared "I want to improve my culture" when asked what appealed to her about librarianship. On request from users who on occasion might be from

Spain or from Mexico, the staff is able to scan any print document and convert it to Braille or to audio format.

Due perhaps to Cuba's long reliance on the Soviet Union for economic support, there is a prominent Russian language collection. The sponsor is Fond Russki Mir (Russian World Collection). The collection is used by a school of foreign languages located just down the street. With attractive exhibits and open shelving, this service can be compared to the American Spaces sponsored by U. S. embassies in educational institutions around the world.

Margarita Bellas, on the library staff and also president of ASCUBI, noted that the association has 3400 members and is the largest library association in Latin America. Dues are nominal. ASCUBI was founded in 1986 and has chapters in many areas of the country. The chief goal is the professional development of its members so it schedules its annual meeting to coincide with the International Book Fair in Havana, usually in February. Though relations with the USA are strained, Cuba has many international partners. In 1994, Cuba was the first country in Latin America to host IFLA.

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Hummingbirds form the face of Cuban revolutionary hero Jose Marti at the National Library. Credit: Barbara Conaty

Libraries in Cuba, continued

(continued from p. 5)

The ALA group's third stop was at the municipal library of the small city of Trinidad. This was always an isolated city and did not get a road leading to the capital until 1952. The town center features graceful architectural details, well-preserved structures including a church famous for housing a sculpture of the patron saint of Cuba. The library is housed in an decayed mansion where several rooms are unusable and the children's room has been moved into the main reading room. The collection is not the strong point here, rather it is the library's role as a community center where programs for public health, assistance to tourists, and children's story hours attract users. Though there are 22 trained librarians working here, the resources are far short of the needs. The embargo prohibits delivery of books even from willing donors. Trinidad is the Sister City of Brunswick, Maine so occasional American visitors can deliver materials by hand.

Bilingual editions, in particular, would be greatly valued.

The last stop was Cienfuegos, Cuba's ninth largest city affectionately called The Pearl of the South, and home to French settlers in the 1800's. The provincial library, located in a handsome 1879 building once housing a Lyceum, was established in 1962 and is notable for its strong Local History collection which includes a copy of every book published in or about this province. Director Neify Castellon Vega noted that the bound newspapers are to be digitized to assure their survival for researchers.

As at the National Library, there is a special reading room for visually impaired patrons, a service which the Cienfuegos library was first to initiate in Cuba. Two staff members are themselves blind librarians while the third staffer is sighted. Unlike the special reading rooms which are air-conditioned and protected, the main

reading room with its open-shelf book collection suffers from an infestation of Cuban martins. For environmental reasons, these birds are allowed to nest in this public area with poor results for the books and their readers. Plans are afoot to renovate this open space and remedy the problems.

As Ms. Feldman noted in her article about the first ALA-sponsored trip in 2016. "Our ALA group was initially concerned with the lack of digital access in Cuba. However, we quickly came to recognize that basic access to a wide range of books – so desired in this literate and book-starved country – must be the first step. Books first, then broadband and universal web access." International collaboration between the USA and Cuba is an important goal and small-group travel is one of the most valuable – and enjoyable – ways to achieve it.

Barbara Conaty is a retired librarian with service at the Library of Congress and the U. S. Foreign Service, ALA member since 1969.



Two librarians who staff the reading room for the visually impaired at the provincial library in Cienfuegos who are themselves blind. Credit: Barbara Conaty



Hand-drawn poster promoting children's activities at municipal library in Trinidad, Cuba. Credit: Barbara Conaty

IRRT Meetings and Programs at ALA Annual 2017 in Chicago

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

Supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals with International Open Access Initiatives -- IRRT Preconference

8:00am - 1:00pm

McCormick Place West - W184a

International Relations Committee I (IRC)

2:00pm - 3:30pm

McCormick Place West - W177

International Librarians Orientation

2:30pm - 4:00pm

McCormick Place West - W470

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

IRC*/IRRT+ All Subcommittee Meeting

8:30am - 11:00am

McCormick Place West - W470

+8:30 - 9:00 am IRRT Chairs Meeting

+9:00 - 10:00 am IRRT Subcommittee! Meetings

+10:00 - 10:30 am IRRT Chairs report! back to IRRT Executive Board

IFLA Update

11:00am-12:00pm

McCormick Place West - W470

Libraries Transform: Programs and Services for Sustainable Environments, Social Justice, and Quality Education for All - IRRT International Paper Session & Projects

1:00pm - 2:30pm

McCormick Place West - W181a

Libraries in Germany

3:00pm - 4:00pm

McCormick Place West - W183b

Project Welcome: Libraries Serving Refugees and Asylum Seekers

3:00pm - 4:00pm

McCormick Place West - W181a

Leaning International: Stories from the Field

4:30pm - 5:30pm

McCormick Place West - W184d

SUNDAY, JUNE 25

IRRT Executive Committee Meeting

8:30am - 10:00am

McCormick Place West - W186a

International Poster Session

10:30am - 12:00pm

Exhibit floor

IFLA Global Vision Discussion Group

10:30am - 11:30am

McCormick Place West - W181b

China Libraries Transformed

10:30am - 11:30am

McCormick Place West - W181a

Acting for Humanity: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries - IRRT Chair's Program

1:00pm - 2:30pm

McCormick Place West - W181a

Serving Refugees: Experiences from German Libraries

1:00pm - 2:30pm

McCormick Place West - W181b

International Relations Committee II (IRC)

3:00pm - 4:30pm

McCormick Place West - W194a

Building Global Knowledge through Collaboration the Middle East and South Asia

3:00pm-4:30pm

McCormick Place, W185a

Eurasian and Central Asian Studies in the Heartland and Beyond

4:30pm - 5:30pm

McCormick Place West - W181a

MONDAY, JUNE 26

Libraries for the Global Community: Their Sustainability and Impact - (ISLD program)

8:30am - 10:00am

McCormick Place West - W178b

Cuban Libraries Today

10:30am - 11:30am

McCormick Place West - W176a

German Academic Libraries - New Trends in Management

10:30am - 11:30 am

McCormick Place West - W181a

African Libraries Transforming Their Place in the Community

1:00pm - 2:30pm

McCormick Place West - W178b

Libraries Support Research in Germany

1:00pm - 2:30pm

McCormick Place West - W176a

International Librarians Reception

6:00pm - 8:00pm

Chicago Public Library--Winter Garden
Harold Washington Library Center

Advance registration is required. International librarians registered for the full conference will receive one complimentary ticket. A ticket must be purchased for additional guests. Tickets will be sold in the convention center. (No tickets will be sold at the reception site.) REGISTER today!



An American Librarian in Ethiopia

By Joan Petit
 jpetit@pdx.edu
 Portland State University in Oregon

Over the past year, while on sabbatical from my position at Portland State University Library, I have had the extraordinary privilege of serving as a Fulbright Scholar in Ethiopia. Here I am based in the Department of Information Science at Jimma University in the town of Jimma, a regional capital with a population of about 200,000 and a major center for coffee production. My primary responsibility has been teaching three classes to first-year Information Science graduate students, a group of 18 bright students whose aspirations include earning PhDs, teaching, and working in libraries. As well I have traveled to other campuses to give guest lectures on librarianship, open access, and open educational resources and participated in programs at the Jimma public library.

My family and I arrived last September, just a few weeks before protests throughout the country disrupted daily life and delayed the start of classes. While my family was never in danger, the political and social upheaval created a great deal of tension and uncertainty. As part of a draconian State of Emergency, the government, which runs telecommunications, limited social media access and, for several months, cut off internet access via mobile phone. Bandwidth is quite limited at the best of times in Ethiopia; without mobile data, the only way to access email and the internet was on a

university campus (limited to students, staff, and faculty only) or at a hotel restaurant (prohibitively expensive for most Ethiopians). After a few weeks of delay, in late October I began teaching Advanced Information Science. Higher education in Ethiopia is in English, so we used a British textbook supplemented by articles relevant to Ethiopian library and information science. Over the next several months I also taught Research Methods, using an open textbook from the Open Textbook Network, and Advanced Management, using an American textbook. With the exception of the online textbook, I brought my classroom materials with me from the United States.

This wasn't my first experience as a classroom instructor—in the past I have taught first year writing as well as semester-long information literacy classes—but it was certainly my first time teaching graduate students in library and information science. The department shared syllabi with me and encouraged me to update them and add my insights and experience; I spent hours reading textbooks and articles and preparing lectures and assignments. I learned a great deal about teaching with every class, and, as well, I learned a great deal about librarianship. I received my MSLS in 2006 and have worked in libraries since 2004, but teaching these topics renewed my appreciation for our field and its principles.

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First-year Information Science graduate students at Jimma University in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, continued

(continued from p. 8)

Ethiopia is one of the world's oldest countries, with a manuscript tradition centered on the Ethiopian Orthodox church and dating back centuries. Ethiopia is also one of the world's poorest countries, with a literacy rate of only about 40% and no real culture of reading. But in recent years the economy has been booming, and the government has been making significant investments in higher education. In the late 1990s, Ethiopia had 20,000 students on two campuses; today there are more than 780,000 students on dozens of campuses throughout the country.



Image from CIA World Fact Book 2017

Jimma University, my home base, has 50,000 students and counting. With this growth comes opportunity for young Ethiopians but also significant challenges for universities, especially in regards to staffing classrooms with qualified instructors. Currently there are no PhD programs in information or library science in Ethiopia; BS and MS classes are taught primarily by instructors with master's degrees, supplemented by expat instructors from India, Nigeria, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

The chair of my department, Samuel Sisay, shared with me that, at 30 years of age, he's the oldest Ethiopian in our department.

I first met Samuel via email. Two years ago, recently tenured and anticipating a sabbatical, I contacted a few different Ethiopian universities, hoping to garner an invitation to join their faculty for a year as part of my Fulbright application. Samuel was enthusiastic about welcoming an experienced librarian to teach.

My students come from throughout Ethiopia. Many have worked as teachers and in libraries; about half are working full time at the university while enrolled in grad school.

My professional life in Ethiopia has been quite fulfilling. Daily living, however, can be a challenge, especially given the frequent power and water outages. My family lives in a well-constructed five-bedroom home, newer and nicer than our house in the US and only a ten-minute walk from my office. Yet, we also have two barrels of water outside for the days when the water doesn't run in the tap. As well, because of the protests and safety concerns last fall, we haven't been able to travel as much as we hoped. But still we've seen a lot including the extraordinary rock-hewn churches of Lalibela in the north of the country and the birds and hippos on lovely Lake Hawassa in southern Ethiopia's Rift Valley.

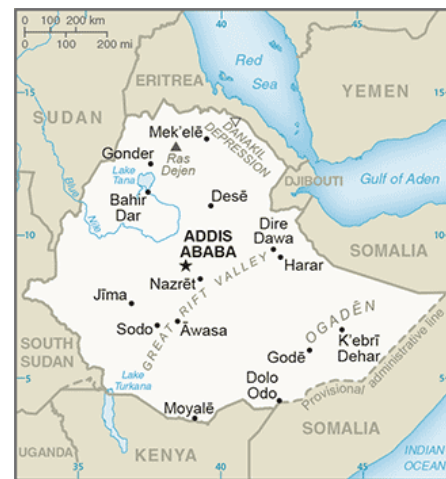


Image from CIA World Fact Book 2017

Most Fulbright Scholars are traditional teaching faculty with PhDs, but I would encourage any American librarian interested in spending time overseas to review the awards catalog and requirements and consider applying. It's been an incredible privilege to live in Ethiopia and teach this country's future library leaders.

Joan Petit is Associate Professor and Communications and Outreach Librarian at Portland State University in Oregon.



Garcia-Febo wins 2018-2019 ALA Presidency

Congratulations to Loida Garcia-Febo, international library consultant and president of Information New Wave in Brooklyn, New York, on her election as president-elect of the American Library Association.

An ALA member for 15 years, Loida has served the library profession both domestically and internationally. Her organization, Information New Wave, is a non-profit organization seeking to bring access to information to underserved populations. She is also very active in IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations) and currently sits on their governing board, and Reforma (The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking).

Garcia-Febo has been an active member of the International Relations Round Table, currently serving as chair-elect. She is the recipient of the 2015 Reforma Elizabeth Martinez Lifetime Achievement Award and was named a Notable Member on ALA's International Relations Round Table. **IRRT is thrilled at her successful bid for the ALA presidency.**

As ALA president, Loida Garcia-Febo will be the chief elected officer for the oldest and largest library association in the world. She will serve as president-elect for one year before stepping into her role as president at the close of the 2018 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans.



Congratulations, Loida!

Ways to Connect with IRRT:

<http://www.ala.org/irrt/>



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