



# From the Great White North to Washington, D.C.

## A Canadian law librarian's experiences at CONELL

By Daniel Perlin

I am not a new law librarian, as I've been a law librarian for the past four years. However, the 2009 AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., marked my first foray into the world of AALL. Since it was my first time going to an AALL Annual Meeting, I decided—and was encouraged by my colleagues here at the Osgoode Hall Law Library in Toronto—to sign up for CONELL, the Conference of Newer Law Librarians.

Admittedly, I was quite nervous, although not about going to the AALL conference per se. After all, I had been to conferences before, such as the Canadian Association of Law Libraries (CALL) conferences. These are much smaller affairs, however; according to the 2009 CALL members report, CALL has around 524 members total (paid and non-paid). Thus, the thought of going to a conference where there would be more than 1,600 librarians was exciting—and a little terrifying.

Luckily, I had nothing to worry about. I met many different people

during CONELL, both during the group sessions and also informally. All of the people I met were friendly and engaging. In fact, some, when they found out that I was from Toronto, complimented me on the fact that I live in a beautiful city and noted that they had always wanted to go to Canada.

restaurant was quite noisy—you had to shout to be heard—but excellent nonetheless. The outing gave all of us a chance to meet informally with an experienced librarian and to discuss some of the ways AALL can help us as well as what we can do for the organization. While we were not

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### Meeting in Small Groups

One of the things that I liked about CONELL right from the start was that participants were able to meet in small groups. The first night, each group met at the registration desk in the convention center, and we all went out separately to individual restaurants for a “dutch treat” dinner with a member of the CONELL committee. My group's

formally paired with a mentor, the informal setting allowed us to bounce questions off the committee member and gave us insight into the workings of AALL. In a sense, she acted like a mentor, albeit to a group of people rather than to a single person.

The informal setting also allowed each of us to talk to one another and comfortable. Many of my new colleagues



were actually quite interested in Canada's health care system, while I was quite curious to hear their takes on George W. Bush and the election of Barack Obama as president.

### More Mentoring

The next morning at CONELL's welcoming breakfast, we heard from AALL President James Duggan. He reminisced on how interesting CONELL was for him when he was a new librarian. Also of note was the very rousing, and at times very humorous, presentation by AALL Executive Board member Cornell Winston who encouraged us to get involved in AALL. One of Winston's first suggestions was to get to know five new people each day. For me, that goal was already well underway as I had met more than five new people the night before and was going to meet more as the day progressed. (One bit of Winston's wisdom that didn't pan out was the possibility that if I played my cards right, I could eat free for the whole conference. Oh well.)

Winston also suggested attending a session outside of one's particular area of expertise. For example, an academic librarian might want to go to a courthouse library session. His reasoning was that you actually learn quite a bit from these unfamiliar sessions because they contain information that you might not normally encounter by limiting yourself to session topics within your usual area of interest.

After the breakfast, we broke into small groups of about five or six to a table. At each table an AALL Executive Board member discussed the opportunities in AALL for leadership and education. The board member at my table asked what each of us would like to get out of being at AALL, and I said that I would like to get more help with U.S. legislation. Seeing the looks of incredulity from some of the people at my table, I then explained that while most of us in Canada do get some U.S. questions, it happens infrequently, because most of the questions we do get deal (obviously) with Canadian law. Also, while I have a law degree, I was

not trained in U.S. law, and therefore find it difficult to navigate certain U.S. sources, such as the U.S. Code. In response, one of the other librarians at my table suggested some helpful sources that I might want to search.

### Interesting Games

One of the more interesting activities we participated in was an event called "Speed Networking." Two rows of chairs were lined up facing each other. Participants had three minutes to talk to the person facing them—not enough time to discover any deep secrets, but a good opportunity to learn some basic information and exchange business cards. After three minutes, everyone in one row moved one seat over.

I was able to meet at least five new people during this event. In fact, speed networking worked so well that a couple of weeks after the meeting, I received an

e-mail from someone with whom I had met during the speed networking session asking for information about a Canadian legal topic. Indeed, the value of the networking was incalculable.

### The Marketplace

The CONELL Marketplace was an interesting experience. Dozens of special interest groups and committees were all available in one room to discuss their own peculiar issues with you. It was a good opportunity to see the various groups that not only make up AALL from a professional point of view, but also groups that represent special interests, i.e., the Native Peoples Law Caucus. It was especially helpful to speak with Mark Estes, editor of *AALL Spectrum*, who took the time to answer my questions about the differences between *Spectrum* and *Law Library Journal*.

### The Bus Tour

After lunch, the CONELL group was treated to a bus tour of Washington, D.C., specifically for the purpose of seeing homes that were owned or inhabited by former presidents. To be honest, after seeing the first five or six homes, I was bored. I didn't really care where Woodrow Wilson spent his last days, although seeing the tavern where John F. Kennedy proposed to Jackie was interesting.

Again, a valuable part of this trip came from the great conversation I was able to have with the person beside me in between listening to our tour guide. We talked about quite a bit, including

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our homes, our work, baseball, and, of course, hockey. (He was from Minnesota.) In fact, we developed quite a camaraderie; we went out for dinner together later in the day, and I have kept in touch with him since the conference.

### CALL (Canadian Association of Law Libraries) and Newer Librarians

I remember my first CALL conference in Ottawa in 2007. At CALL conferences, we do not have something as grand as CONELL for librarians attending their first conference. However, we do have some programs for new librarians. For one thing, new CALL conference attendees receive a big “first timer” ribbon below their conference nametag, so that everyone knows they are attending CALL for the first time. This works quite well in the sense that once people see that you are a first-time delegate, they will rush over to talk to you or at the very least try to include you in the conversation.

At the AALL conference, first timers also receive these ribbons. However, while I am not sure if others at CONELL had this experience, I found that people did not really come up to you if they saw you were a first timer.

This is not to suggest that people at AALL were not friendly—indeed they were. I had conversations with people I sat next to in various sessions, so friendliness was not necessarily the issue.

However, I felt as if I had to initiate the conversation in those situations, which I admit is difficult for me as I am relatively quiet. Perhaps other CONELL participants had a different experience. At CALL, though, I never felt like I had that problem. The people I talked to at AALL were mostly those I met at CONELL before the conference.

At CALL, every first-time delegate is invited to the First Timers Breakfast on the first morning of the conference. Tables are set up in one of the conference rooms, and the first timers sit at a table and engage in casual conversation. The CALL executives, including the president of CALL, go around to each table to say hello. Later on at the breakfast, the president makes a speech exhorting the first timers to get involved in CALL and to join any committee they choose.

For the first time, at the 2009 CALL conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, CALL introduced a mentoring program. (Of course, AALL has had a mentoring program for many years now). In an e-mail to me on November 10, 2009, the chair of the CALL Mentorship Subcommittee noted there were 10 pairs of mentors and mentees at the CALL conference this year. In addition, a reception was given to all the pairs the night before the conference began, which allowed them to formally meet each other and enjoy informal conversation.



While I was not there, I am given to understand that a good time was had by all. In fact, I think I will try to become a mentor for next year's conference.

Like AALL, CALL does provide bus tours of the city and the surrounding area the first day of the conference, but these are not specifically for first-time attendees. In a sense, it is a shame that tours are not provided specifically for first-time attendees at CALL, as it would give them a chance to bond. Then again, I'm not sure it would be practical to have a separate tour, due to the fact that there are usually only about 20-30 new people at the conference every year.

photo credit: Brant Bender



At the 2009 Annual Meeting, CONELL participants take advantage of the opportunity to maximize their contacts in a short amount of time during the CONELL Speed Networking session.

Unlike at the AALL Annual Meetings, CALL does not have a "marketplace" set up at its conference. Instead, special interest groups (SIGs), which represent academic, government, or court or private law firms, meet during the first morning of the conference. Conference attendees are then welcome to attend the group's meeting that corresponds to their area of employment as academic, government, court, or private law librarians. Afterwards, the various committees of

CALL hold meetings representing special interests of various capacities, such as education, cataloging, or research. Again, it is not necessary to sign up—you can just go to the meeting where the organizers will welcome you and record your contact information.

The CONELL Marketplace was a valuable way to give first-time delegates a chance to see the various interest groups that make up the organization. While the CALL president explains at the First Timers Breakfast that you can go to any committee meeting you like, there is really not much of a description of what each group does. A marketplace is something that CALL should look at doing, perhaps even the day before the conference starts.

### Overall

I think the major difference between the AALL and CALL conferences is size. At the CALL conferences, there are usually around 300-350 delegates, whereas at the AALL conference this year, there were more than 1,600 paid attendees. As a result of this additional income, more programming can be made available to CONELL attendees than to those first-time attendees at CALL.

Additionally, each CONELL attendee had to pay \$100 just for CONELL, in addition to the conference fee. At CALL, first-time attendees pay the regular conference fee and that is all. Thus, there is more money set aside specifically for CONELL. I am not suggesting that this detracts from the experience of first-time attendees at CALL—indeed, it is excellent. Yet, by spending money on CONELL by itself instead of using the regular conference fee, CONELL can afford to have more activities for its attendees.

So, what did I think of CONELL overall? I enjoyed it very much. It was a great opportunity to meet new people informally and make new contacts. The mentoring that it offers to new librarians is excellent. I would definitely



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CONELL participants browse the CONELL Marketplace at the 2009 AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The event allows newer law librarians to become familiar with the many committees and special interest sections in AALL.

recommend CONELL to any new librarians who are attending their first AALL Conference. ■

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### Are You a Newer Librarian?

The Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL) is held every year in conjunction with the AALL Annual Meeting. The purpose of CONELL is to welcome the newer members of the profession to the organization, introduce them to the Association and its leaders, and provide a setting or newer members to become acquainted with each other. At this year's Annual Meeting in Denver, CONELL will take place on Saturday, July 10. For more information, visit [www.aallnet.org/events](http://www.aallnet.org/events).

