

A Ful-Phill-ing Experience

by Amy Hale Janeke

I had never been to Philadelphia before, nor had I ever been to an AALL Annual Meeting, so this was a completely new experience. When I arrived in Philly, I felt like I was in a different country, and occasionally a different time. The streets were small and crowded, the houses were packed cheek-by-jowl, and almost every building I saw had a plaque with "Est. 1820" or something similar. This is in sharp contrast to California, where buildings are considered historic if they were built 50 years ago and haven't been torn down to put in a strip mall (yet).

After I got settled in at the hotel, I thought I would walk about a bit and see other parts of this new and exotic land. The first thing I saw as I stepped out of the hotel was the City Hall. It looks like something concocted by a wedding cake decorator on speed. To say it is festooned with arches, curlicues, turrets, and scrolls simply does not do justice to this building. It is an arabesque fantasy in stone. The city hall is an architectural wonder not only for its fanciful decoration, but also because no steel was used in its construction. Since this is a rather tall building, a tour guide informed me the walls had to be 27-feet thick in some places in order to support the weight. So it appears that

government contractors of yesteryear could construct a building for under \$3 billion and make it an eternal inspiration for wedding cakes, unlike most modern government buildings, which have inspired countless shoeboxes.

CONNELL, which is how AALL breaks in new law librarians, was fun. I met other jet-lagged librarians and we got to know each other by playing games. One of them, an informal one-upmanship game called "my patrons are crazier than your patrons," was interesting. However, since I work at a county law library in a downtown urban area, it was really no contest. I won hands down with my story about the patron who insisted that he was from Los Alamos and had traveled to San Diego to tell us that Joseph Stalin was planning on coming through our Internet connection to electrocute all the librarians. I told him we had dealt with deceased dictators' antics in the past and that our computer people were on top of the situation. He left happy. Problem solved.

Another aspect of CONELL that I enjoyed was the historical homes tour. In the afternoon we toured Lemon Hill, where two of Philly's most historic homes are located. These 200-year-old homes were certainly impressive, but the knowledge of the tour guides at the homes was truly awe-inspiring. They pointed out differing types of architecture

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and explained how different implements in the house were used, smiling all the while as we newbie-librarians plagued them with questions: "Are those books in that bookcase real?" "Are they cataloged?" "How are they being preserved?"

The Annual Meeting itself was a blur of meetings, roundtables, receptions, more meetings, and eating. After the first day, I learned why smart librarians don't cruise the Exhibits area with CONELL stickers on their badges. The exhibitors are able to spot the young, vulnerable librarians in the herd, single them out for long, boring talks, and load them up with enough tri-fold brochures to start a bonfire. I learned to remove the CONELL sticker, walk quickly (preferably with a group), and not to smile when entering this dangerous area.

I also learned that the cool shoulder tote bags they hand to you at registration are really saddlebags in disguise. They start out loaded up with this incredibly heavy handout book, in addition to lots of flyers and promotional items. Then, when you get to the programs, you pick up the revised handouts, the revised-revised handouts, and the flurry of business cards that seems to cloud the air like snowflakes. At the end of the day, I was wishing I had remembered to bring a pack animal to haul this stuff around, but the airlines are so strict about transporting llamas these days.

Even though I cleaned it out every night, by the end of the week my tote bag was so heavy I was walking around like Igor the hump-backed lab assistant. It was like the magic cup that could never be emptied. But I did manage to drag it to some great programs.

One of my favorite programs, officially titled "Greeting Our Lay Patrons at the Gateway: Who Are They and How Can We Help Them?" involved reference librarians role-playing how to deal with difficult patrons. This program showcased the "Ready for the Reference Desk Players," who did uncanny impressions of some of the most common types of patrons at a law library. These included "creepy standing-too-close man," "stubborn attorney who won't listen to you," "angry divorced person," and "jailhouse lawyer." These were incredibly true-to-life and provided some insight into how to deal with these types of patrons as well as a few laughs.

After the day's programs, there was usually a banquet or reception to attend. There was no shortage of food, drink, and conversation at these events, and they provided a nice way to end the day. Everywhere I turned, food and drink appeared. I would also chant the familiar phrase, "Oh why did I eat so much?" but it was all so good and free. Although I have been in the professional realm for almost a year now, I was still in my

starving-student mode and one does not ever pass up free food. Next time I will just stuff some of the food into that giant totebag/saddlebag and save it for later. Maybe use it to feed the llama.

At night, I always fell into bed exhausted, slept like the dead, then got up to do it all again the next day. The entire AALL Meeting was a great experience, and I am very grateful to the SWALL Chapter for providing the grant that allowed me to attend.

I have a whole year to prepare for AALL in Minnesota, and I am going to take some necessary equipment this time:

- a back support for hauling around the tote bag full of handouts,
- a life-size cardboard cutout of myself to distract the exhibitors in the exhibit hall while I pillage their candy bowls, and
- an alarm clock that only rings after 8 a.m.

Equipped with these few survival items, I am sure I will look the part of a veteran AALL attendee. Will I have fun when I get there? You betcha!

Amy Hale Janeke (ahale@sdcll.org) is a Reference Librarian for the San Diego County Public Law Library in California. A longer version of this article will appear in a forthcoming issue of the SWALL Bulletin.