



Easing the Path for Newer Colleagues

*Conference for New
Law Librarians Helps
Beginners Learn
AALL's Ropes*

by Joyce Manna Janto

As a member—and later chair—of the Mentoring Committee, I have given a lot of thought to the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL). Last year, an event in my life reminded me of why this conference is so valuable. One of the supposed joys of parenthood is the ability to relive your past through your children. But let's admit it—some of those past experiences, like the dreaded junior high school dance, should be left deeply buried in our psyche. Last year when my daughter's first dance was announced, it was hard to say who panicked more, me or Emily.

I was terrified that no one would dance with Emily, and she would be scarred forever. Then I was terrified that someone would dance with her and that some sweaty little boy would put his hands on my baby! Emily's concerns were different. What if none of her friends came? Who would she talk to? Where should she stand between dances? What should she wear? Even though she had known most of her classmates for nine years, she was worried. Only when a friend suggested that they go together did she decide to attend.

By now you may wonder what the connection is between a junior high dance and AALL's CONELL. Frankly, there isn't one; the connection is to the AALL Annual Meeting.

Who Will I Sit With? What Will I Wear?

The Annual Meeting is very much like the big dance. It is a chance for members, many of whom have known each other for years, to come together to learn, conduct Association business, and socialize. The prospect of attending your first Annual Meeting can be daunting. You may feel comfortable in your position and in your library, but not in AALL. Your newness and unfamiliarity with all things AALL will be exposed to the entire world.

You may have counted on attending programs with a co-worker only to find that the tradition in your library is for librarians to cover as many programs as possible. You may be working in a library where attendance at the meeting is rotated. You may be the only one on the staff attending. Or maybe you're in a library where several librarians are attending the conference.

Those colleagues, however, may be busy with committee meetings, special interest section (SIS) functions, and reunions with old friends, leaving them little time to show a first-timer the ropes.

There are many questions newer law librarians have about the Annual Meeting. First and foremost may be, what is the Annual Meeting? Heck, it might even be what is AALL? Is it worth the time and money to attend? What kinds of programs are offered? Should I only attend programs that correspond to my job title? Do I have to attend a program in every single time slot? Can I plop right down next to someone on the bus ride to the Opening Reception? What do I wear—is this like being on vacation or being at work?

Some newer law librarians are lucky enough to work in a library where they feel free to ask such questions. Others, however, may feel uncomfortable asking questions. During CONELL, attendees have the chance to ask questions like this while surrounded by people who share their concerns.

CONELL Answers Your Questions

The CONELL program is structured to answer these questions and more. It is a brief but intensive introduction to all things AALL. The day begins with remarks from the AALL president, the chair of the Annual Meeting Program Selection Committee, and the editors of *Law Library Journal* and *Spectrum*. Attendees participate in breakout sessions where they spend time with one of the members of the AALL Executive Board. Here participants learn not only about the structure and governance of AALL, but how they can become a part of the organization.

This part of the program has consistently impressed CONELL participants. On evaluations, year after year, attendees express appreciation for the time given to them by the leaders of the Association. "I can't believe how much time they took out of an obviously busy day to make sure that we felt welcomed to the Association," wrote one 2003 CONELL attendee on her evaluation.

Aside from leaders of the Association, attendees will hear from seasoned and not-quite-as-new law librarians. AALL is fond of saying that the Annual Meeting is the premiere educational event for law librarians. At CONELL, we attempt to show attendees how to get the most out of their experience. Experienced conference attendees share their dos and don'ts of conference life. Former CONELL participants give impressions of their first Annual Meeting and what they would have done differently or the same.

Many people have a hazy notion of how to become involved on the national level. A fairly new law librarian will outline the volunteer opportunities available to AALL members. She will tell how committee work has enriched her career. One of the more popular sessions in the CONELL program is "AALL Marketplace." Here CONELL participants meet with members of the various AALL committees, SISs, and chapters to learn about the projects and activities they engage in. CONELL participants will also learn about the history of the Association; three former presidents and a member of the Centennial Committee will reminisce about past Annual Meetings.

Meet People Like You

An important part of CONELL is the mixers, where participants are encouraged to introduce themselves to the other attendees. One of the primary missions of CONELL is to allow newer law librarians to develop a cohort—a group of librarians similar in experience and interests. Many law librarians trace long-standing friendships to their CONELL class.

New this year is the Dutch Treat Dinner program. Since CONELL begins early on Saturday, participants arrive in the conference city on Friday night. Many know no one and have no dinner plans, so the members of the Mentoring Committee will host Dutch Treat Dinners. Participants will meet at the registration area of the conference center and accompany a group of fellow librarians to dinner at one of several nearby restaurants.

"Ask the Experts" is a session that allows participants to interact with each other and with experienced librarians. During this session, CONELL participants will rotate between tables that are devoted to particular libraries or job responsibilities. There may be a table for technical service librarians; computer service librarians; solo librarians; firm librarians; or government, state, court, or county librarians. Each table will have an experienced law librarian to moderate the discussion, which can be quite freewheeling, using the assigned designation as only a starting point.

Borrowing the concept of speed dating, CONELL will also run a session of speed networking. Participants will rotate from table to table every 10 minutes, with the goal of meeting as many people (and collecting as many business cards) as possible.

Time to Play, Too

CONELL is not all work and no play. After a morning of learning, CONELL members

CONELL Schedule at a Glance

Friday, July 9	
Dutch Treat Dinners	7-9 p.m.
Saturday, July 10	
Check-In	7:30-8 a.m.
Welcome	8-9:10 a.m.
From Rookie to Veteran	9:20-10 a.m.
Ask the Experts	10-11:30 a.m.
Marketplace	10-11:30 a.m.
Speed Networking	10-11:30 a.m.
Overheard at the Bar	11:30 a.m.-12 p.m.
Luncheon and Tour	12:30-5:15 p.m.
Sunday, July 11	
Mentor Project Reception	6-7 p.m.
Monday, July 12	
Association Luncheon	12-1:40 p.m.

will be treated to lunch and a tour of Boston. The lunch will take place at the Sheraton, the conference hotel. The bus tour will take in many of the neighborhoods of Boston, including Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and Chinatown. The tour will pass through the Midtown Cultural District and the South End, which boasts the largest Victorian neighborhood in the United States.

A visit to the Waterfront is also planned, and tour members will have a chance to explore the North End, Boston's famous Italian neighborhood. Attendees will visit the Old North Church where the lanterns were hung to signal the beginning of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride. Boston's Freedom Trail continues from here to the USS Constitution, Massachusetts State House, Old South Meeting House, Boston Common, and other sites along the trail.

In an attempt to expand CONELL, the committee has built in activities for most days of the Annual Meeting. Along with Friday's Dutch Treat Dinners and Saturday's formal program, Sunday features a reception for CONELL attendees and those participating in the Mentoring Program. On Monday CONELL will reserve tables at the Association Luncheon, where attendees can touch base with their new colleagues and meet some more experienced law librarians.

And throughout the meeting, CONELL attendees will have the chance to participate in a CONELL/AALL scavenger hunt.

Mentors beyond the Annual Meeting

While meeting people who share your newness in law librarianship is fun and helpful, sometimes a librarian needs an experienced shoulder to lean on. AALL's Mentoring Committee makes every effort to match newer librarians (whether they attended CONELL or not) with a mentor. Mentors are encouraged to introduce their mentee to AALL, attend a program or two together, and share at least one meal. Many of those who have served as mentors at the Annual Meeting report that the experience was one that they found personally rewarding. A significant number of these mentors report keeping in contact with their mentee for at least a year after the Annual Meeting.

Unfortunately, every year we have more mentee applications than mentor applications. If you have ever considered being a mentor, please apply this year. And if you have not thought about being a mentor, consider it. For those people who feel unsure about the process, the Mentoring Committee has developed a hand-out that outlines the typical mentor/mentee relationship and gives suggestions on how to be a successful mentor. The only thing you need to be a great mentor is some time and the ability to listen. Often, what a mentee needs most is a sounding board, someone to listen to him or her and offer advice. While many librarians are fortunate to find this relationship in their workplaces, some are not as fortunate.

If you hesitate to become a mentor because you don't feel you are experienced enough, gray hair is not a qualification to be a mentor. In fact, the January 2004 issue of the *ABA Journal* addressed this very topic. Many law firms now encourage senior associates to mentor newer associates. Senior associates, with their more recent experiences, are better equipped to answer some questions. Senior associates also enjoy the process because they feel it helps them become more connected to the profession.

If you are a librarian with only a few years of experience under your belt, consider mentoring. It may help to make you a better librarian. To help kick off the mentoring relationship, the Mentoring Committee will sponsor a reception for all mentors/mentees prior to the Opening Reception on Sunday.

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With a registration fee of \$505 for the Annual Meeting, it may seem difficult for librarians (especially administrators with that eagle eye on the budget) to justify an additional \$100 charge for the one day-CONNELL program. But CONELL is much more than a one-day event. Ask any member of the Mentoring Committee or a past attendee of CONELL—we will tell you that that \$100 may be the smartest investment to be made in a librarian's career.

And by the way, Emily had a great time at the dance. Having a friend along made it a lot more fun, and it gave her the confidence to say yes when Hunter asked her to dance.

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