

Why Bother to

AALL's 100th birthday a chance to

What's all this brouhaha about AALL's centennial? Early in the planning process for our 100th birthday celebration, some members questioned the wisdom of emphasizing our history. "Younger members care nothing about the past!" they assert.

Having gone to college in Gettysburg and lived in Williamsburg, and because I'm currently working in an historic courthouse in the middle of the New Orleans French Quarter, I have observed young and old tourists flocking to places where they can experience and learn from what remains of our past. As one who continues to spend a great deal of her personal and professional life enjoying things related to history, I have shared my fascination with what happened in the past with people of all ages. Trite as it may sound, history is fun!

Celebrating AALL's centennial affords all of us members an ideal opportunity to enjoy doing something worthwhile together. Although that alone is reason enough for many of us, the benefits are in fact far greater. We would deprive ourselves, our profession, and our Association of one of the best opportunities we've ever had to learn, bond with each other, and show our stuff if we didn't make the most of our centennial.

Remember, Reaffirm, and Renew

Because I never questioned the value of celebrating our centennial, I found myself struggling to express to others the advantages that the occasion presents. When I recently attended bicentennial festivities for an historic church in our city, an English bishop's sermon provided me with ideas.

"Why is it important for us to commemorate the people and events that make up the history of this cathedral?" he asks. "Because we must know where we came from to know where we're going." His admonition was that we should "remember the past, reaffirm the present, and renew ourselves for the future." The bishop's emphasis on words beginning with "re" prompted me to reach for the dictionary to see if there might be other "re" terms for expressing how our centennial can benefit us. There are many.

Everyday in our work, we law librarians *reveal* our intellectual curiosity; our skill at *researching*, writing, and teaching; and our *reverence* for our stated mission to make legal and government information available to as many people as possible. We constantly seek creative ways to communicate the value of our libraries, our profession, and our Association. Our centennial presents us with ideal opportunities to do all of these things.

Researching and *retrieving* the history of AALL and of our libraries enables us to *rediscover* what our founders and all in our profession who came before us accomplished to collect, organize, preserve, and disseminate legal information for law students, the legal community, and the general public in the United States and abroad. The founders, whom we've all seen pictured in their proper black suits and big hats gathered at Naragansett Pier, Rhode Island, at the American Library Association meeting in 1906, are worthy of our respect for the ideals that they set forth for us. President A.J. Small's purpose in calling fellow state law librarians together was "that of making [law] librarianship a profession rather than simply holding a job." He and they were "convinced that an organization was necessary for the advancement of the libraries and cooperative work among the law librarians."

The founders' examples inspired our forebears who followed after to build great libraries, write the literature of our profession, and constantly reinvent improved ways to provide access to legal information for all who needed it. By founding AALL, they became the teachers and mentors who made it possible for all of us to *realize* our professional aspirations. *Reflecting* upon this noble tradition, we *rededicate* ourselves to continue doing important work in our democratic society.

Participate in Centennial Festivities

The year-long centennial observance beginning this month is an ideal time for law librarians to reinforce their skills and talents through individual and cooperative professional development activities. The



Celebrate Our Centennial?

learn, bond, and show our stuff

by Carol Billings

Research Agenda, compiled by Frank Houdek for the centennial Web site, sets out a long list of possible topics relating to AALL history for aspiring authors, speakers, and program planners to explore. Throughout the year *Law Library Journal* and *AALL Spectrum* intend to publish articles reaffirming our past and its meaning for our future. Thus, writers are in demand. The Annual Meeting Program Committee for next year's Conference in St. Louis will likewise expect proposals revealing the progress of our profession and Association. SISs and chapters are encouraged to devise programs about notable people and accomplishments throughout their histories.

Educational program planning for the St. Louis Meeting offers the perfect opportunity to recruit representatives from among our partners in the legal, library, and publishing communities to participate as speakers and panelists. Judges, court administrators, practicing attorneys, law school deans and faculty, government officials, library school faculty, publishers, and others with whom law librarians work and cooperate need to be present to get to know members of our profession and recognize what we do.

President-Elect Claire Germain has resolved that involving as many of our partners as possible will be a priority of her Annual Meeting. The celebration of our 100th birthday should certainly help to attract them to the Meeting. Chapters and SISs can take advantage of the VIP Program whereby AALL provides free registration for special guests from the legal, library, and government sectors to attend the Meeting and mingle with their members. Guests and speakers who have attended past Annual Meetings have given their experiences high ratings, consistently praising the quality of our educational programs and the hospitality extended them by our members. A number of judges have become members of AALL, reconnecting with us regularly at our Annual Meetings, because of the efforts of law librarians like Shirley David and Charles Dyer, who originated the custom of bringing judges to see us in action.

Celebrate on the Local Level

Of course the 2006 Annual Meeting will not be the only venue for the celebration of our 100th birthday. Chapters and individual libraries throughout the country are encouraged to take advantage of the occasion to hold special events calling attention to the value of law libraries and librarians. Inviting our employers and patrons to revel with us at birthday parties in our libraries gives us a way to reintroduce ourselves to them and to publicize our collections and services. Every law library should plan an exhibit about its own history and/or the history of our profession. Chapters with members concentrated in the same locale can plan celebrations on a grand

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scale, perhaps considering a centennial lecture series, a banquet, or, like the clever Law Library Association of Greater New York, a musical show.

Every chapter should look upon the centennial as a superb recruitment opportunity. Those with schools of library and information science within their territories should consider holding a "Law Library Day" at each school or nearby libraries with birthday cake. It should include an entertaining information session

about the history of AALL and the excellent professional development programs that our Association offers. A valuable chapter contribution to our profession would be to sponsor the attendance of students interested in law librarianship at our 2006 Meeting.

Individual members can make important contributions to the centennial effort as well. A number of law school and court librarians, notably those active in the Legal History and Rare Books Special Interest Section, have been actively involved in projects illuminating the history of their own libraries or parent institutions. Their scholarly articles, recorded oral histories, and major exhibits have not only enhanced their own professional reputations, but have also enriched the entire body of knowledge about law libraries and their importance in the wider field of legal history. Articles of a more popular nature should be submitted by AALL member reporters to local and national legal newspapers, bar journals and newsletters, and even general newspapers and radio and television stations. Using the AALL centennial as a jumping off point, they can then elaborate on why law libraries and librarians have mattered in our society and still do today.

Together all of these possibilities represent an unprecedented public relations opportunity for AALL and our profession. Carrying out these projects in cooperation with our colleagues causes us to pool our talents and share our knowledge. *Rekindling* our creative energy will *reinvigorate* us to take our Association, our profession, and our libraries into the future with *renewed* enthusiasm.

So, that's why we're celebrating. The potential *rewards* are tremendous. **Remember**, history *really* is fun! Happy birthday! ■

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