THEY’RE ALL OVER THE MAP:
AALL’S LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEES
American Association of Law Libraries Archives Exhibit, 2010

In the true spirit of thinking globally, but acting locally, Local Arrangements Committees have always played an integral role in AALL – quite literally, annual meetings could not exist without them! (Item 1) As AALL has grown and prospered the attendance at annual meetings has also grown, and in adapting to the changing needs of the organization, local arrangements committees have evolved, transformed, and even gone by different names over time. Several distinct periods of these committees can be identified, in fact, including the ALA era, the Helen Newman era, the post-World War II era, the early AALL Headquarters era, the Roger Parent era, and the current era.

ALA/AALL Meetings

For much of its early history, from 1906 to 1935, AALL did not really have to plan its own annual meeting because it met in conjunction with the American Library Association (ALA) (Items 2 & 3). All that had to be arranged was some special programming of particular interest to law librarians, so early meetings strictly devoted to AALL business were simply worked around the ALA schedule (6 Law Libr. J. 52, 1913) (Item 4). However, the crucial importance of these arrangements was not to be overlooked, and as early as 1908 AALL resolved to “express our appreciation to Mr. John E. King for his kindness in making arrangements and caring for the comforts and welfare of our membership” and “[t]o C. B. Lester, Gilson G. Glasier, Miss Edna D. Bullock, William George Eakins, Herbert O. Brigham, Miss Claribel H. Smith, Miss Hettie Gray Baker, and the various committees [for contributing] to the program in the interests of this Conference” (1 Index to Legal Periodicals and Law Libr. J. 37, 1908). Indeed, the idea of a “local arrangements” committee of some kind specifically within AALL goes back to almost the earliest days of the organization. The first formal reference to such a committee appears to be 6 Law Libr. J. 52, 1913, where “[t]he motion was made, seconded and carried that the president should appoint a Committee on Program and General Arrangements, such committee to secure speakers and to select suitable headquarters for the Association.” Note that at the time, the same committee dealt with both the logistics of the meeting and the conference program.

Not surprisingly, things did not always run smoothly. In 1915, addressing an audience of about 20 AALL members at California-Berkeley’s Boalt Hall, AALL President E. J. Lien noted:

The Committee, having in charge the preparation of a program for this meeting, had an unusual number of adverse circumstances to overcome. It is greatly to their credit that the difficulties were surmounted, and a splendid program prepared. Let us all profit by their suggestion, and join in the discussions with “promptness, snap, and vim,” and thus make the meeting as successful and interesting as it ought to be. (8 Law Libr. J. 13)

The record is silent about what troubles befell them, but cost does not appear to have been a concern. In that era a single guest room at one of the convention hotels could still be had for as little as $2.50 a day (Item 5), which would be just over $50 in 2010 dollars.

As noted above, appreciation was extended to Gilson Glasier for his involvement in planning the 1908 meeting. Glasier, a charter member of AALL and President in 1921-22, was still involved in AALL at the time of the Golden Jubilee in 1956 and had recently written a thorough and quite valuable retrospective covering the earliest years of the organization (Houdek, 98 Law Libr. J. 164, 300, 2006). Referring to the 1907 conference, which was also attended by about 20 members of the infant organization, Glasier said, “. . . those were very busy meetings devoted entirely to the problems confronting the new organization. There were no ‘social activities,’ no sight-seeing trips or fishing expeditions. The matters considered covered a wide range of activities” (43 Law Libr. J. 152, 1950). The first meeting Glasier himself actually attended, however, with 42 of his colleagues, was the one at Lake Minnetonka in 1908 (154).
As it turns out, Helen Newman was the AALL President at the 1950 meeting during which Glasier delivered this paper, and his comments inspired the following playful exchange between them.

PRESIDENT NEWMAN: Gilson Glasier, we are all very grateful to you for this informative and inspiring address on the history of the Association, and particularly its Index to Legal Periodicals. I am just sorry you did not bring those pictures with you. You remember the meeting at Lake Minnetonka in 1908. I have a picture of the group in my office and my visitors invariably say, "Helen, which one is you?" (Laughter)

MR. GLASIER: Helen, I have the picture in my room. I will have it at the next session.

(43 Law Libr. J 158) (Item 6)

Newman, who seems to be the heart of AALL based on the preponderance of her presence in the historical record, did not join the organization until 1931. About 100 AALL members were in attendance at her presidential annual meeting, and while obviously the organization was growing, total membership in the Association still numbered less than 550 at mid-century, which is undoubtedly why annual meetings could still be handled primarily by a committee of volunteers.

“Our Helen”

It was Helen Newman, though, who for many years was instrumental in facilitating location and hotel choices and special transportation fares. While serving as the part-time, paid Executive Secretary of the Association from 1934 to 1945, she frequently corresponded with the volunteers who were handling the local arrangements. Newman and Glasier, of course, had known each other for some time. Their correspondence dates back to 1934 (Item 7), and they were in close contact when Glasier was Chair of the Committee on Arrangements in 1942.

In those days, AALL was “invited” to hold its meeting in various locations (Item 8). The annual meeting was never held in Washington, DC, Newman’s home territory, during her tenure as the AALL staff member, yet Newman surely influenced where, when, and how the annual meetings were held during her era. For example, Old Point Comfort, Virginia, is known to have been one of Newman’s favorite resorts, but it was a restricted setting that did not allow African Americans. Nonetheless, it became the site of the 1941 AALL meeting.

Other controversies have arisen over the years as well. At various times publisher sponsorship has been a hot issue; some AALL members have strongly felt it inappropriate for gatherings to be hosted by law book dealers for fear it might compromise the integrity of their purchasing decisions (71 Law Libr. J. 556-564, 1978). Of course the biggest challenge of all, World War II, halted AALL Annual Meetings altogether for two years. No meetings were held in either 1943 or 1944, though Executive Committee meetings were held during that period. Then, at long last, in June of 1945, after special permission from the Office of Defense Transportation was obtained, AALL held its 38th AALL Annual Meeting – with a total of 44, including guests, attending (38 Law Libr. J. 67, 1945; 98 Law Libr. J. 162, 2006) from a grand total of 503 AALL members (71 Law Libr. J. 547, 1978).

After the War

After World War II meetings were back in full swing, as exemplified by the 1949 annual meeting in Detroit, which had trips to Ann Arbor, Cranbrook, Greenfield Village, and a Ford plant on the meeting schedule (42 Law Libr. J. 35) (Item 9). Clearly, by this time “expeditions,” as Glasier referred to them, had long since become a staple of Local Arrangements Committees (Items 10-12), and other recreational
opportunities were built in as well. There was entertainment for family members **(Item 13)**, and as Marian Gallagher wrote in her *President’s Newsletter* of June 1955,

**The Local Arrangements Committee Told You to Bring a Coat**

to Chicago, but didn't say anything about shoes. We shouldn't either, ordinarily, but we have recently learned that there will be square dancing at the New Members' party, and a word about shoes seems in order. Your president can't square dance in high heels. Come to think of it, your president has never tried it except in ski boots and it may be nearer the truth to say your president can't square dance. But George Johnston will be there and we guess he knows enough about it to steer all of us. *(1954-55.8 AALL Pres. Newsl. 2, 1955)*

In the later post-war era and on into the early 1960s, the succession of Local Arrangements Committees diligently put together AALL Annual Meetings for a growing organization and concomitant group of convention attendees; in 1957 annual meeting attendance finally topped 300 (including about 60 spouses and guests) as the AALL overall membership grew to almost 700. While annual meeting attendance (with company) hovered around 300-350 in the early 1960s, it leaped to over 500 in the late 1960s. More attendees, along with more spouses and children, who were always included, meant more activities were needed to keep them occupied. Eileen Searls, who ultimately served as the co-chair of the Local Arrangements Committee in 1964, was thorough in promoting the community’s attractions in her 1960 letter soliciting an AALL annual meeting in St. Louis *(Item 14)*, and the Local Arrangements Committee for the 1965 meeting in New York included one member whose sole responsibility was “World’s Fair” *(1964-65.1 AALL Pres. Newsl. 5)*.

**The Early Headquarters Years and the Parent Era**

The period from 1964 into the early 1980s brought many changes for the organization, including the establishment of a headquarters office and staff and then the creation of the AALL Archives in 1980-81 and the hiring of an Executive Director in 1981. However, while storage of records became less of an issue and the burden on volunteers in general was lightened, the local arrangements process basically chugged along much as it had in the past. According to AALL historian and 1996-97 AALL President Frank Houdek, “For much of its history, even after HQ was established in the 1960s, the Local Arrangements Committee bore most of the responsibility for . . . planning and putting on the Annual Meeting. . . . This approach changed . . . in the 1990s” *(personal communication, March 12, 2010)*.

Al Coco of the University of Houston, who had been on the local committee (then called the Convention Planning Committee) in 1969, anticipated dramatic changes for AALL in his presidential speech at the annual meeting in Rochester, New York, in 1978. By the time of his tenure, annual meetings were representing a membership of well over 2500, and he noted, “As of this morning we have registered over 1,000 persons and the registration is still open. We are using every available public room facility in Rochester. I am told over 900 rooms have been rented” *(71 Law Libr. J. 547)*. Obviously the demands on the local committees were increasing *(Item 15)*.

However, Local Arrangements Committees have always stepped up to meet the demands. One major responsibility of local committees, for example, is gathering letters of welcome, and the letter from U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1986 was obviously a major coup *(Item 16)*. It was also during the 1980s that the production of annual meeting daily newsletters/newspapers began *(14 AALL Newsl. 198, 1983) *(Item 17)*, and though this effort was originated by the Program Committee, it too ultimately became the responsibility of the Local Arrangements Committee *(Houdek, personal communication, May 4, 2010)*.
Local committees use various means to promote their host city’s annual meeting at the previous annual meeting, and not unlike those who collect Olympics pins, some members collect AALL host city emblems (Item 18). Other specialties of local committees include producing specifically tailored restaurant guides (Item 19), creating a special theme associated with the host city for the closing banquet (Items 20 & 21), and serving as all-around hosts for the many who attend AALL’s annual meetings (Item 22) – and committee members are also tasked with participating in food tastings to choose the menu for the closing banquet, an obligation many surely enjoy. In addition, each year local committee members publish articles in Spectrum showcasing their locations to entice members to attend their annual meeting (Item 23).

While many customs and traditions of Local Arrangements Committees already existed by the 1990s, it was Roger Parent, who became AALL Executive Director in 1993, who brought much innovation and greater professionalization to the organization. During his 1993-2002 tenure, attendance at annual meetings was generally above 2000, and total AALL membership climbed above 5000. Parent, who came from the American Library Association, was familiar with a more modern approach to putting on such a convention; in addition to upgrading the convention subcontractor, he hired Pam Reisinger, who still serves today as Director of Meetings. New strategies since then have included the monthly e-newsletter Annual Meeting Update, which runs from February until the annual meeting, and even the creation of a meeting matrix, which helps avoid schedule conflicts in planning (Reisinger, personal communication, May 11, 2010).

The Way They Are Now

From 1997 to 2008 the committee performing these duties was known as the Local Advisory Committee, but in 2008 this committee was transformed back into the Local Arrangements Committee following the recommendation of the Special Committee on Committee Structure in 2007. Meanwhile, information technology has enhanced not only local committee members’ ability to communicate with each other, but also their ability to communicate with AALL members at large. These committees now promote their annual meeting through Web sites, emails, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and more. Technology even enhances the ability of those who do not actually live in the host location to be engaged – those who live outside the convention city can still volunteer to be a part of the Local Arrangements Committee. An updated handbook for the committee is provided every year, and these committees now run like well-oiled machines.

Indeed, this 2010 AALL Archives Exhibit handout has been put in conference bags through the auspices of this year’s Local Arrangements Committee, and readers finishing this narrative will realize that these committee members are still, at this very moment, working diligently to provide a good conference experience for AALL members. In fact, next year’s Local Arrangements Committee members are already at work on next year’s meeting in Philadelphia – and co-chairs have already been selected for the 2012 AALL Annual Meeting in Boston!