

Notes from Mosier - Report from the Mountain

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The Ninth Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge was held May 16th – 19th. Our keynote speaker this year was Terry Reese, Gray Family Chair for Innovative Library Services at Oregon State University. His address was titled “Open Data: Encouraging Open Source and Integration Between Vendors and the Library Developer Community”.

Given that I’m one of the conference planners, I don’t want to indulge in too much self promotion, and besides, the program will be reviewed and reported on elsewhere. However, in the interest of informing those of our readers who may not know about this little gem of a conference (I didn’t say there wouldn’t be *any* self promotion) I thought a few words about the Institute - and the Lodge - might be in order.

First, the program. In addition to the keynote address, we have nine presentations, running 45 minutes each. A question and answer session follows each presentation. All presentations are made before the group as a whole; we do not have breakout sessions.

Program content is the cornerstone of the conference. In addition to Terry’s keynote, other topics this year included collaborative collection development, streaming video, realigning budgets to support new access models, electronic resources, OCLC Worldcat Local and Acquisitions, gift operations, and coordination of library liaisons in small academic libraries. The complete program for this year’s conference can be viewed at our website, www.acquisitionsinstitute.org

Next, the Lodge. Timberline was built in 1936-37 as a project of the Works Progress Administration. The Lodge sits at 6,000 feet on the south slope of Mount Hood, a little over an hour east of Portland, Oregon. With the major exception of six massive timber columns (whole trees, really) that came from what’s now the Gifford Pinchot National Forest on the Washington side of the Columbia Gorge, most of the building materials were gathered within a mile of the building site.

During the depths of the Great Depression, the WPA sought to give unemployed, desperate people a living wage - and, just as important, a sense

of self-worth and dignity. The results at Timberline are magnificent and enduring. For more information about the Lodge, including photos, visit their website at www.timberlinelodge.com . I'll admit to being somewhat biased, but it's the best venue for a conference on the planet (and yes, the exterior Lodge shots for *The Shining* were filmed here).

Now, about the history of the conference. This all started about twenty years ago, when Richard Brumley (then of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, later Oregon State University) and Tom Leonhardt (then of the University of the Pacific, now director at St. Edwards University in Austin) and I were having a drink in the bar of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco during an ALA. The Charleston Conference had already established a name for itself; we pondered whether there were any issues obtaining to acquisitions, collection development and technical services in the West that were different or unique from Eastern libraries. One thing led to another, as these ALA conversations tend to do, and at the end of the conversation we'd decided to build a meeting around this theme. The University of the Pacific has a conference center/destination resort in the Sierras, and Tom volunteered to look into the details of securing its use for this informal symposium. The facility is called the Feather River Inn, and hence in its first incarnation the conference was known as the Feather River Institute.

By the end of that first meeting we'd concluded that no, in fact, there really wasn't anything all that different about acquisitions in the West, but we had a lot of fun and much stimulating conversation at that first conference, so we decided to make it an annual event.

The Inn was indeed a rustic setting - the main lodge, originally built as a ski lodge in the early part of the twentieth century, had been used as a boarding school for troubled boys in the 1960s, and they'd done a pretty thorough job of trashing the place. The upper floors had been condemned years before we started meeting there, so we just used the cafeteria, bar, and main fireplace room in the lodge, and found accommodation in cabins down the ravine (gully?); some years heat and running water were in short supply. Despite this, the Inn provided a convivial and relaxed atmosphere, and inspired candid and unfettered conversation between librarians, vendors, and publishers.

Tom masterminded the first three meetings, before moving on from the U of P. We continued to meet at Feather River until the late 1990s, when, for a variety of reasons, we decided to relocate.

By that time the planning committee consisted of Brum (by now at Oregon State), Nancy Slight-Gibney (University of Oregon), and me. We decided an Oregon venue made just so much more sense. Although other locations were considered (Skamania Lodge, Edgefield, the Kennedy School), Timberline was our first choice - and the folks there were genuinely interested in us and our meeting. From the beginning they've been a delight to work with.

We meet every May the weekend following Mother's Day. Informal dress is encouraged; be prepared for the possibility of snow (this year we had the most spectacular weather we've ever enjoyed, but some years we haven't been as lucky). We deliberately build free time into the schedule to allow off-line conversations and networking.

The call for papers goes out at the end of August / early September, and we post the preliminary program on our website around ALA Midwinter. Conference registration is limited to 85 people, and we admit on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The Lodge offers several different types of rooms, ranging in price. There are singles, doubles, and rooms that can accommodate larger parties; attendees are encouraged to bring spouses, significant others, and/or their families. (Some mythology has grown up about the rooming at the Institute: (a) no, you don't have to share a room, providing you register early and (b) no, the rooms are not all bunk beds with bathrooms down the hall. There are such rooms, usually utilized by skiers - we've occasionally had people book into them, but we seldom use them. They are cheap, though, and actually, fairly nice.)

The Lodge is fully ADA compliant. Wi-fi is available in selected locations. Rooms are equipped with telephones and television. However, bear in mind this is a 1930s vintage hand built structure, so don't expect luxury - that's not what this is all about.

An optional meal package is included; we strongly encourage attendees to take advantage of this. There are alternatives - the Lodge does have a fine restaurant, the Cascade Dining Room, as well as the Ram's Head Bar, which offers pub food - but part of the networking opportunities and conference experience comes with eating together. Once you're at the Lodge you're pretty much part of a captive audience - it's six twisting miles of alpine road dropping two thousand feet to the village of Government Camp, and the route can get icy at night.

After lunch on Sunday we allow time (weather permitting) for attendees to ride the ski lift on up to the Silcox Hut at 7,000 feet - the view can be absolutely spectacular! This year several folks went snowshoeing with Faye; next year we're going to make that a scheduled Institute event.

The Lodge curator offers a tour (she's great!), and we arrange a wine tasting as well (the Lodge has one of the best cellars in the Northwest). Another tradition handed down from Feather River is "favorite readings" - attendees are asked to bring something to read (prose, poetry, ILS documentation (just kidding!). The readings take place in the Blue Ox Bar, a cozy room in the depths of the Lodge. (The Blue Ox occupies what was originally intended to be a wood storage area. However, near completion of the building the principal interior designer, Marjorie Hoffman Smith, realized there was no bar in the Lodge, and decided that just wouldn't do. Today the Blue Ox is not open to the public, but is available for private functions.)

I would be remiss were I not to mention the generous financial support we receive from the vendor community - we try to keep this conference very affordable; without their help this would be well nigh impossible. There are no exhibits, but book vendors, serials agents, automation vendors and publishers attend and interact as colleagues. This year I must thank Alibris, Ebsco, Gale Cengage, Puvill, Swets, and YBP. We really appreciate it!

A couple of years ago someone referred to us as a "boutique conference", and initially I resented the remark. The more I thought about it, though, I decided it wasn't such a bad reference after all. We work very hard to provide the best possible conference experience, particularly regarding the program content (it's not all skiing and St. Bernard's). So, if you're interested in a meeting somewhat off the beaten path, keep us in mind. Feel free to contact me with any questions. I hope to see you on the Mountain next May!

The Acquisitions Institute Planning Committee:

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The Institute is an Oregon educational non-profit corporation, #361549-95; EIN 71-1001116.