

Polar Libraries Colloquy meets in Edmonton

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In early June, Edmonton hosted a remarkable meeting of polarists. Members of the Polar Libraries Colloquy (PLC), an international organization of librarians and others concerned with the collection, preservation, and dissemination of information dealing with the Arctic and Antarctic regions, gathered for their 22nd meeting. Fifty-six delegates from such exotic places as Svalbard and Tasmania attended scholarly presentations and informal sessions.



The word “colloquy” means “discussion” or “conversation”. The PLC meets every two years, traditionally alternating between Europe and North America, to continue an ongoing conversation about polar information. Sessions at the 22nd Colloquy encompassed several themes including open access polar materials, polar image collections, media treatment of polar subjects and both Arctic and Antarctic information sources.

The 22nd Colloquy was unique in that it was held in conjunction with the annual University of the Arctic Council Meeting. The University of the Arctic (UArctic) is a cooperative network of universities, colleges, and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the North. Several years ago, the PLC became a member of UArctic with the intent of providing a collegial network for librarians working in UArctic institutions and supplying guidance to UArctic on information-related issues. One of the highlights of this joint meeting, was a panel of UArctic instructors, who discussed the information access problems encountered by their students, who are based in a variety of countries, sometimes at small academic institutions.

The Colloquy opened with a keynote by Niobe Thompson, a documentary film maker and a partner in Edmonton-based Clearwater Media. He began his session with a collection of insightful comments on the topic, “Life of an Arctic Filmmaker”. Thompson screened a brilliant film showing the changes in the Arctic lifestyle including issues of autonomy, politics, function and structure, choice, administration and governance, and the relations between local government and the other economic and political levels in which those governments operate.

In the afternoon Thompson changed topics with a film screening and discussion of his documentary “Tar Sands: Canada for Sale”. He used an excellent analytical lens to delve into the highly controversial topic of the Canadian tar sands. Thompson’s film managed to capture the perspectives of the full spectrum of groups, people, corporations, and countries with vested interests in the tar sands and the shifting struggles of the operating of the tar sands. Thompson provided a thought provoking and balanced documentary. Both of his sessions were well received and spoken highly of at the Colloquy.

Later in the day the William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Polar Books was awarded to *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic* edited by Beau Riffenburgh and published by Routledge. An Honourable Mention recognized Ann Fienup-Riordan’s *Yuungnaqpiallerput / The Way We Genuinely Live: Masterworks of Yup’ik Science and Survival*, published University of Washington Press. The Mills Prize is awarded in memory of William Mills who was Librarian and Keeper of the Scott Polar Library at Cambridge University and a long time member of the PLC.

Tuesday morning’s formal opening ceremonies started with Asani performing a unique rendition of the Canadian National Anthem and the song “Me, You, Us, and The World”. Asani which means “rock” in

Cree, is a brilliant Aboriginal trio made up of Debbie Houle, Sarah Pocklington, and Sherryl Sewepagaham. The vocal group was a hit at the Colloquy.

Throughout the Colloquy, Northern Canadian libraries and information were well represented in the presentations. Rae-Lynne Aramburo from Nunavut Arctic College Library described the key book publication efforts in Nunavut. She discussed the characteristics common to the publishers and the importance of their publications, especially to the local library users in the polar region. According to her paper, the Nunavut publishers “provide the much needed Inuktitut resources and present information and stories from Inuit perspectives.”

Peter Geller of the University College of the North spoke about the establishment of a multi-site Regional Library System for Northern Manitoba. Steve Schafer of Athabasca University Library presented with John Gilbert and Edward Atkinson about a project for making the images from the Joint Arctic Weather Stations collection available through a website using ContentDM. Sandy Campbell of the University of Alberta talked about the definition of “The North” in the context of the Canadian Circumpolar Collection. She discussed the evolution of the understanding of the North and what is important to the North, as well as the many other indicators of “northernness” such as language, ethnicity or coldness.

Near the end of the Colloquy, two excellent (and diverse) plenary sessions were presented on Antarctic issues and on the media in relation to polar topics. David Walton, from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), presented his continuing research analyzing 50 years of science publication by the BAS. He demonstrated how publication rates, journal choice, and general science trends can be linked to changing movements in the non-scientific world. This presentation was followed by David John Hyett’s discussion of the British Antarctic Survey’s participation in the NORA project (NERC [Natural Environment Research Council] Open Research Archive).

In the second panel, Lindsay Johnston, from the University of Alberta, presented on her participation in an interdisciplinary research team that examined the English-language media coverage of the U.S. government’s decision to place polar bears on the threatened species list. Johnston discussed her role as a librarian in an interdisciplinary research team and presented the research findings to date.

Mary Katherine Jones, University of Tromsø, followed with her study of the international media coverage of Russia’s recent flag planting on the seabed at the North Pole. She focused on how different media publications from a variety of countries including Canada, Denmark, and Norway, presented the story.

In addition to the formal sessions, PLC and UArctic delegates got to know each other better through informal and social events. The groups enjoyed a visit to Fort Edmonton Park, a country dance at the Oldtimer’s Cabin and a dinner at the Snow Valley Ski Club. An outcry auction raised funds for the Hubert Wenger Fund, which supports librarians to attend PLC. One of the most important outcomes of the Polar Libraries Colloquy meetings is the building of a strong global network of librarians working with polar collections and in polar regions.

The 23rd PLC meeting will be held in 2010 in Bremerhaven Germany, hosted by the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research.

Related Links:

University of the Arctic www.uarctic.org

Polar Libraries Colloquy <http://arcticcentre.ulapland.fi/polarweb/plc/default.asp>