Archiving International School Library History

By Sharon Carlson

In 1971 Dr. Jean E. Lowrie, head of WMU’s School of Librarianship, and several international school library leaders founded the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) at a conference of the World Organization of Councils of the Teaching Professions in Kingston, Jamaica. IASL is a voluntary, professional association, whose mission is the worldwide promotion of school-based libraries. IASL now has 800 members in over 70 countries around the world.

The contributions of IASL are well documented in the dissertation of Dr. Rebecca Knuth, Indiana University, 1995. The International Association has been especially successful in its role as a clearing-house, forum, and disseminator of information. Although its main focus is to provide support and encouragement to librarians in developing countries, IASL has also been a voice of advocacy for broad social movements such as the goal of universal literacy.

Dr. Lowrie retired in 1983 after a distinguished thirty-two year career at Western Michigan University. She served as a faculty member or Director of the School of Librarianship (originally the Department of Librarianship and later the School of Library and Information Science) from 1958 to 1983. Lowrie stayed active professionally in her retirement, and continued to serve as the Executive Secretary of IASL until 1996. The official headquarters for IASL was also located at Western Michigan University until that date. When Lowrie passed the baton to a new Executive Secretary, she deposited all of her records with the University Archives. Among the historical records located in the Archives are papers documenting her founding role in IASL and the official records and publications of the organization.

Gerald R. Brown has now provided additional documentation to the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections. Brown, who earned a Master of Library Science from WMU in 1967, has had his own distinguished career in Canadian school librarianship. He became an active member of IASL including ten year’s of service, 1989-1999, on the IASL Executive Board. Brown, who lives and works as a private educational consultant in Winnipeg, Canada, developed an electronic database index of over 4,000 IASL records, which can be sorted by author, subject, date, recipient, and relationships to IASL. A print index has also been produced and is on deposit at the Western Michigan University Archives.

Brown arrived in Kalamazoo on a warm day last summer to deliver the index and six linear feet of other IASL documents that he accumulated during his service on the Executive Board. Brown had traveled hundreds of miles to insure the safe transport of the records. Jerry Brown was asked why he had not only delivered the materials in person, but provided an extensive index—thus saving the Archives Staff substantial time in processing the records. He replied: “It was obviously a labor of love. When you feel strongly about things like IASL’s work, you are willing to take time to do the job thoroughly.”

The Archives is pleased to add this collection to other organizations that have placed materials on deposit. Papers of the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, the Continued on page 6
print version, but also incorporates the Bridgeman image library and links to Web images. Its best advantage is that this valuable tool links users to sites that are relevant to the subject at hand. In other words, it links to sites that have been evaluated for content so that the user does not have to page through electronic page after electronic page of Web sites yielding only marginal information. Information from Grove is succinct, well documented, and illustrated. Many of these image links take the user directly to Web sites of the institution that owns a pivotal work of art.

The Bridgeman Art Library is a collection of fine art images collected from over 800 collections worldwide available for educational use. The Grove Dictionary of Art Online is working in partnership with the Bridgeman Library to bring high quality images to subscribers. This electronic collection is delivered as a fully searchable database within the Grove Dictionary of Art Online. Essentially, the Grove Dictionary of Art Online is two products delivered in one package.

Both the AMICO Library and Grove Dictionary of Art Online are updated regularly to ensure that patrons receive the most current information on artists, art movements, and works of art. AMICO Library and the Grove Dictionary of Art Online supplement print images such as plates in textbooks, slides from lectures, photographs, and posters.

The Visual Resources Library is providing an unusual set of resources in the online databases just described. Library patrons can try searching for images at any time through the home page of the University Libraries at URL http://www.wmich.edu/library/. At that point, click on ABOUT THE LIBRARIES, and open up the entry Visual Resources Library. Once you have found AMICO, here are some fascinating topics to search and learn how the databases work: carpets, Gobelins, Fauves, and Matisse.

Faculty who would like to request class instruction on these databases can do so by contacting the Visual Resources Library at 387-4111. Patrons can also drop by the Visual Resources Library in Sangren Hall for a demonstration of these new resources.

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Kalamazoo Academy of Medicine, the Ladies’ Library Association, the Kalamazoo Nature Center, and the Kalamazoo Association of Volunteer Administrators are among the organizational records at the Archives. While most of the organizational records at the Archives are regional, the placement of the IASL records at Western Michigan University makes sense given the relationship of the organization to Jean Lowrie, Gerald Brown, and WMU’s former School of Library and Information Science. This international collection will benefit future researchers studying topics such as international librarianship, universal literacy, and voluntary organizations. The records are housed in the Archives at 111 East Hall on the East Campus off of Oakland Drive.

“My library was dukedom large enough.”
—Shakespeare, The Tempest