The eagerly-awaited ASIS 50th Anniversary Conference, the kickoff for the year-long celebration of ASIS' 50 years of service to the information field, succeeded in its goal of providing a sense of the history of the information age, while looking forward to the next pivotal period for all information professionals.

Amid numerous indications that a celebration was, indeed, underway, nearly 2000 people gathered in Boston in October 1987 for "Information: The Transformation of Society." With balloons, anniversary cakes, pens, tote bags and note pads surrounding the festivities, conference-goers spent the better part of a week choosing among superb technical sessions, Exhibit Hall activities, special luncheons and receptions and the diversions offered by the Boston setting. In the end, the attendees proclaimed their pride in ASIS' 50 years and the meeting that symbolized them all.

Conference Chair Toni Carbo Bearman, dean of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh, set the tone for the week's activities, indicating that the conference would "not only celebrate our illustrious past and the role ASIS and its members have played in the growth of the information age," but it would also "set the stage for our next 50 years of commitments and contributions to the still-growing field of information."

Thomas H. Hogan, ASIS president at the time and president of Learned Information, Inc., put the 50 years in perspective when he noted at the conference's first session that, in its relatively short life, ASIS has served the burgeoning information field through World War II and the Korean War; during the turbulent 60s; in the 1970s, which were so full of "promise for information science - the foundations of new technologies"; and now into the 80s when so much change is again before us.

As the program got underway, attendees were quickly aware of the focus of the meeting: the profound ways in which information has transformed society and the changes we can anticipate as the information age moves toward the 21st century. Throughout the technical sessions, as well as in the many special planned events and Exhibit Hall activities, this was the theme of the formal and informal discussions that formed the basis of relationships begun and renewed, among newcomers and oldtimers, scholars and practitioners.

**Plenary Sessions**

In four plenary sessions, designed to assure a wide range of views regarding the transformation of society, the speakers were consistent in urging their audiences to recognize information technology for what it is - a tool that can be employed as a means to solve the world's problems.

*Opening Address.* Robert McCormick Adams, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, im-
explored his audience to "resist the tendency to reify and isolate [the] technological dimensions" of the "ascending curves of information storage, transmission and processing capacity."

"Let us agree that developments in the technology of information are indeed, in most significant ways, context-transforming," Adams said. "What needs to be more widely recognized is that these developments are often context-dependent as well."

known as a moderator of debates on information issues and for his frequent television appearances, lived up to his reputation as he used his keen intellect, incisive judgment and sharp humor to maintain a riveted audience and lively discussion.

Robert Bigelow, Boston attorney specializing in computer and information law, indicated that lawyers have become quite dependent on many of the new technologies and, for the most part, the technologies have

Communications/information specialists, Young said, "are the profession that begins - and, to some extent, controls - the process" of information preparation and distribution and, therefore, must consider "questions of choice and of judgment."

In relating an anecdote in which one of his private communications was unknowingly made available via satellite to an international audience, Miller added that nobody "has really thought through the implications on

In describing plans for the Smithsonian's upcoming permanent exhibition, The Information Revolution, which was previewed in the ASIS Exhibit Hall, Adams noted that the exhibition's curators would be driven not by the technology itself, but rather by the impact that the technology has had from a broad social and cultural perspective.

"[W]e need to think of major technological advances not so much as inevitable consequences of brilliantly creative breakthroughs as of the painstaking linking together of many smaller steps into dense, mutually supportive grids."

Information and the Professions. In a dynamic session moderated by Arthur Miller, professor of law at Harvard University, representatives of four professions - law, education, communication and medicine - described ways in which information and its technologies are changing the practice of each profession. Miller, widely

allowed improvements in the practice of law.

However, in discussing the prevalence of legal databases and the vast amount of information they contain, Bigelow warned that the ease of selection of standard legal documents can lead to lawyers who place "such trust in the system" that the individuality of a particular case is lost in a standard form.

Elizabeth Young, vice president of COMSAT Corporation, focused on issues that communications specialists face in light of the new technologies. Young noted that with the prevalence of such technologies as communications satellites, portable video recording equipment and readily-accessible information databases, "the burden of making selection, of being the gatekeeper - which has always been a traditional role of the information professional - becomes more critical, more profound and infinitely more complex."

the information creator caused by the information projector - the fact that there is nothing that we write today that may not be preserved forever in an information system.

Representing the medical profession, Donald Lindberg, director of the National Library of Medicine, spoke optimistically of the benefits of technology for doctors in medical practice and research. While indicating that doctors must still use their judgment in interpreting information available through the use of technology, Lindberg noted that advanced information technologies will eliminate much of the "guessing" in medical research.

Closing out the panel, Richard Ruopp, president of Bank Street College, repeated a theme heard frequently throughout the week's plenary sessions when he spoke of ways in which information technology can improve education, but only to the extent that technology is
used as a tool to achieve measurable goals.

Describing the college's philosophy, Ruopp defined an educator's role as the process of making children expert filters, focusing their attention on "how to think, being able to filter, knowing what's worthwhile and what's not worthwhile." Because of the massive amounts of information available, making children "expert filters," according to Ruopp, requires "powerful tools in the educational system," managed and coordinated by teachers.

Technology and the Future. Jacques Vallee, computer scientist and general partner of EUROLINK International, began a discussion of social implications of technology with a tongue-in-cheek survey of many recent developments, questioning whether all of the advances have, indeed, been advances. He then described many of the predicted developments that have yet to happen, focusing on the lack of standardization and user-friendliness.

After presenting a laundry list of current technological possibilities that the average citizen cannot understand, Vallee, a venture capitalist, asked for projects that propose to reduce information overload. "This is a world on the verge of understanding the value of information, selection and intelligent sorting, a world that soon may be willing to pay for it. Smart search and retrieval services could be booming," Vallee said.

Anthony Oettinger, director of Harvard's Program on Information Resources and Policy, agreed with Vallee, noting that "what users want is not this or that technology; they want functionality."

Dee Brock, vice president of education at the Public Broadcasting Service, reminded the audience that information technology could make its most significant and profound social impact when applied to the educational process.

Despite the prevalence of available technology, Brock noted that at least one-half of current studies defining processes for reform of our educational system fail to mention technology as a part of the solution and, according to Brock, many of those that do mention technology do so in ways that "you, as well as I, find almost meaningless."

Calling for better use of technologies to improve education and access to information in the nation's schools, Brock said, "Librarians in public schools do not suffer from information overload. They . . . and their students are not hooked into your systems."

Rowland C.W. Brown, president of OCLC, Inc., also acknowledged the importance of information in the educational process, and went on to note that the information age, unlike the industrial revolution, creates the opportunity for "mankind to really look at how we unleash creativity . . . . It's a wholly new concept that we're not unleashing productivity in terms of material things or energy or muscle or physical things, but the creativity of the individual on a global scale."

Ending the discussion of the social implications of technological developments, Richard Rowe, president of the Faxon Company, urged the