

# Preserving and Accessing the History of ASIST and Information Science

**Kathryn La Barre**  
University of Illinois at  
Urbana Champaign  
klabarre@illinois.edu

**Sarah A. Buchanan**  
University of Texas at  
Austin  
sarahab@utexas.edu

**Trudi Bellardo Hahn**  
Drexel University  
tbh29@drexel.edu

**Robert V. Williams**  
University of South  
Carolina  
bobwill@sc.edu

## ABSTRACT

Panel members discuss ongoing efforts to preserve and access four different types of historical resources useful to anyone interested in doing research and publication on the history of ASIST and the field of information science and technology generally. Each presenter will conclude with a discussion of areas of weakness/neglect in these resources, and recommendations for improvement. These resources are: (1) the archives of ASIST; (2) the foundational and developmental histories of ASIST Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and Chapters; (3) the photographic/visual record of ASIST; (4) the oral history record of ASIST and information science leaders. This progression will facilitate the panelists' discussion of opportunities for engaging with ASIST resources at the national, regional, and individual levels. Each panel member has extensive experience in working with the resources discussed and was a member of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force.

## Keywords

ASIST history, ASIST archives, information science history, oral history, preservation, access.

## INTRODUCTION

When the ASIST 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force began its work three years ago one of the most important tasks it set for itself was an assessment of the scope of the existing historical resources needed to do research and writing on the history of ASIST and the field of information science and technology generally (Carbo & Hahn, 2012; Miller, 2013). Early in our work it became apparent that these resources were widely scattered across repositories, poorly organized, needed significant preservation work, and, perhaps most importantly, were difficult to identify and access through standard research and documentation

practices. Involvement of the Society's members in these activities began at the 2011 Annual Meeting through two notable efforts. Here the Task Force convened and developed an action plan for work to occur around the globe and throughout the year with the support of members. Secondly, a moderated panel session, "The Janus Panels," was held which featured two types of presentations (La Barre & Williams, 2011). In the first half, seven members of ASIST each with 25+ years of membership delivered remarks about the past activities of the Society. In the second half, members of ASIST with five years or less of membership spoke about their aspirations for ASIST when it turns 100 in the year 2037. The presentations were filmed and made accessible for later viewing. Both of these activities laid a solid foundation for subsequent work by the Task Force members.

## SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Our initial findings stimulated efforts to ameliorate the issues encountered in locating resources. The Task Force began immediate work on the following areas: a better understanding of the ASIST archives at the University of Michigan Special Collections Library (La Barre, 2012); the history of ASIST chapters and SIGs (Buchanan, 2011); an intensive oral history documentation program (Williams, 2012); a new program to digitize the photographic record held by ASIST headquarters; and a renewed effort to encourage the deposit of personal records/archives of ASIST leaders.

ASIST members also coordinated the digitization of two important historical resources on the Society's behalf. Working with ABC-CLIO and with Access Innovations to convert the text and select optimal software, ASIST made available Irene Farkas-Conn's *From Documentation to Information Science / The Beginnings and Early Development of the American Documentation Institute-American Society for Information Science* online with full text and comment-enabled display. ASIST also prioritized digitization of a special issue of the *ASIST Bulletin* (14.5, June/July 1988) that marked the Society's 50th anniversary in 1988.

Internationally, a Doctoral Forum specializing in quantitative research in information science was held at the University of Wolverhampton on 12-13 April 2012. The

European Chapter held a one-day workshop within the LIDA conference on 22 June 2012 in commemoration of ASIST's 75th anniversary which featured presentations on the history and current states of information science in Europe (Aparac & Saracevic, 2012). Members of the European Chapter, led by founder Michel Menou, continue to participate in the oral history program and facilitate its international scope.

Ongoing are both new additions of archival materials to the ASIST Archives, and compilation of materials available at institutions related to the Society's history, such as at the University of Pittsburgh (Bleier, 2004). All of these continue to be documented on an easily accessible finding aid on the ASIST Web site: <http://asist.org/asist2012/historyofASIST.html>.

Thus far one of the more participatory outcomes of the Task Force's work has been the assemblage and publication of original research by international authors on the history of information science worldwide in the form of the Proceedings of the History Pre-Conference, which occurred during ASIST's 75th anniversary year (Carbo & Hahn, 2012).

#### **KEY CONTRIBUTIONS**

Significantly improving awareness of and ease of access to these materials will greatly enhance the ability of researchers in our field to study the history and development of information science and technology worldwide. Students of the field will find it much easier to explore significant developments in theory and practice.

These historical materials will also be useful for research in related fields, such as the history of science, technology and computing, and the emergent field of information history (Cortada, 2012). The panel presenters will not only detail how this preservation and access work is proceeding but also bring these materials to life by the use of some of the oral history recordings (video and audio), showing examples of the photographs and the significant "founding documents." They will also show where there are considerable gaps in our knowledge of the history of the field and how the audience can help deal with those gaps.

#### **AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT**

As an integral part of the presentations, audience members will take part in a discussion of little known or undeveloped areas that represent gaps in this domain of historical knowledge. The audience will also assist in a needs assessment that will inform the next steps in this ongoing process: how to best make the existing/known materials available for easy access. We anticipate lively discussion and dialogue between audience members and panelists and we will reserve a significant portion of time for this.

#### **EXPERTISE OF PANEL MEMBERS**

Kathryn La Barre has undertaken an intensive study of the ASIST archives at the University of Michigan Library over

the past two years. She is an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and recent past chair of the Special Interest Group for History and Foundations of Information Science. (SIG/HFIS). She conducts research in the area of knowledge organization and access systems (historical and contemporary), and has published on these subjects in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, and in the *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, and the *Journal of Information and Culture*.

Sarah Buchanan has written or compiled a history for each ASIST chapter and SIG. She is a doctoral student in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. Sarah is the current chair of the Special Interest Group for History and Foundations of Information Science (SIG HFIS), as well as a SIG Cabinet Advisor. Additionally she is the immediate past chair of both the Los Angeles Chapter (LACASIST) and SIG Arts & Humanities (SIG AH) of ASIST. Her research interests include archival arrangement and description, historical research, and digital classics, and her articles have appeared in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, and *American Archivist*.

Trudi Bellardo Hahn has authored or edited many books, articles, and encyclopedia entries on historical studies in the areas of online information services, pioneers of the online age, the information industry, relevance research, women pioneers in the information sciences, federal funding for libraries, and the role of the National Science Foundation in establishing ADI/ASIS and the field of information science (Hahn & Barlow, 2012a; 2012b). Over the past two years she has worked to organize, digitize, tag, and make available via the ASIST Web site the thousands of photographs held by ASIST Headquarters.

Bob Williams has conducted more than fifty oral history interviews over the past twenty-five years and is currently directing the ASIST oral history program, which is one of the initiatives created by the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Task Force. Over the past two years, this program has included identifying existing oral histories of ASIST leaders, identifying candidates for new oral history interviews, and has approximately ten interviews in process. He and Kathryn La Barre conducted a well-attended ASIST Webinar on the basics of oral history. He has published extensively on the history of information and technology and is the creator of the Pioneers of Information Science Website, an ASIST funded project.

#### **SPONSORSHIP**

SIG HFIS (History and Foundations of Information Science), SIG AH (Arts & Humanities), 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Toni Carbo, for her leadership of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force and collaborative work with international members and sister societies. A web-based portal for the oral history project is currently under development with funding provided by the ASIST SIG Project Fund.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Kathryn La Barre (corresponding author), Associate Professor. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science. (217) 244-4449

Sarah A. Buchanan, Doctoral Student. University of Texas at Austin, School of Information. Austin, Texas 78701.

Trudi Bellardo Hahn, Teaching Professor and Director of Academic Outreach. Drexel University, College of Information Science. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19104.

Robert V. Williams, Professor, Emeritus. University of South Carolina, School of Library and Information Science. Columbia, South Carolina, 29208.

## REFERENCES

- Aparac, T., & Saracevic, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Libraries In The Digital Age (LIDA) Proceedings*, 12. <http://ozk.unizd.hr/proceedings/index.php/lida2012>
- Carol Bleier Research Files for "Tradition in Transition", 1901-2000, UA.90.29.12. (2004). University Archives, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=ascead&idno=US-PPiU-UA902912>
- Buchanan, S. A. (2011). Regional information science: Education and disciplinary precept in the Los Angeles Chapter of ASIST, 1961–2011. *J. Am. Soc. Inf. Sci.*, 62.11: 2277–2289. doi: 10.1002/asi.21603
- Carbo, T., & Hahn, T. B. (Eds.) (2012). *International Perspectives on the History of Information Science and Technology: Proceedings of the ASIST 2012 Pre-conference on the History of Information Science and Technology*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.
- Cortada, J. W. (2012). Shaping information history as an intellectual discipline. *Information & Culture: A Journal of History*, 47.2: 119-144.
- Hahn, T. B., & Barlow, D. (2012a). "The fortuitous confluence of Helen Brownson, the National Science Foundation, and information science." ASIST History Fund Research Grant.
- Hahn, T. B., & Barlow, D. L. (2012b). The fortuitous confluence of the National Science Foundation, the American Society for Information Science & Technology, and information science. *International Perspectives on the History of Information Science and Technology: Proceedings of the ASIST 2012 Pre-conference on the History of Information Science and Technology* (pp. 5-17). Medford, NJ: Information Today.
- La Barre, K. (2012). Spelunking in the archives: Or how I learned to love the art of the unexpected. *Bul. Am. Soc. Info. Sci. Tech.*, 39.1: 32–34. doi: 10.1002/bult.2012.1720390111
- La Barre, K., & Williams, R. (2011). The Janus panels: Looking back in order to look forward. *Proc. Am. Soc. Info. Sci. Tech.*, 48: 1. doi: 10.1002/meet.2011.14504801106
- Miller, K. (2013). ASIST annual meeting pre-conference activities: The history of ASIST and information science and technology. *Bul. Am. Soc. Info. Sci. Tech.*, 39.3: 33–37. doi: 10.1002/bult.2013.1720390310
- Williams, R. V. (2012). The changed and changing ADI/ASIS/ASIST after 75 years. *Bul. Am. Soc. Info. Sci. Tech.*, 38.5: 32–38. doi: 10.1002/bult.2012.1720380511