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International Dateline — “Librarians of the World Unite We Have Nothing to Lose but Our Card Catalogues.”

by **Frederick C. Lynden** (Brown University) <Frederick_Lynden@brown.edu>

Both my wife, **Irina**, and I decided that going to a library conference in Central Asia would be a fascinating experience, and we discovered that attending a conference in Kyrgyzstan can be educational as well as enlightening. As the *World Factbook* states: “A Central Asian country of incredible natural beauty and proud nomadic traditions, Kyrgyzstan was annexed by Russia in 1864; it achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.” There is still a large amount of good will towards Russia because it was Russia which provided the Kyrgyzstanis with their first written dictionary of their language. Russian is spoken as one of the two languages in the country.

According to locals, the main Kyrgyz export is cotton and the country does have deposits of uranium. However, much of the country is rural where sheep and cattle are raised. Indeed on our return to the capital our van was stopped many times by herds of sheep and I was reminded of traveling in Idaho. Actually Kyrgyzstan reminds me also very much of Arizona with its dry climate and mountains in the North. One can get visas at the principal airport, **Manas Airport**. The political situation is stable now, but one may well remember Kyrgyzstan and Bishkek from CNN since last year there were riots in the streets when the people ousted the ruler at that time, **Askar Akayev** and replaced him with **Kurmanbek Bakiyev**. However, librarians keep doing their business undeterred by politics and our similarities bind us together in one united world

The slogan at the head of this article was not the slogan of the conference but it could well have been the theme of the conference. Librarians there were speaking about consortia and electronic publications. Indeed the conference was impressive. It gathered together librarians from former republics of the Soviet Union, now members of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Altogether 130 librarians attended and the countries present ranged from the United States (me and a librarian from the State Department) to Belorussia, Tajikstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, Lithuania, Turkey, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. The conference was held in Kyrgyzstan at a beautiful resort called **Issyk Kul** next to one of the largest and clearest lakes in the world. The resort was a spa so when one did not attend the three days of meetings one could swim in the lake, or use the facilities including massage, saline baths, pool swimming, etc. There were also apple and pear trees on the premises with a beautiful beach area and dock. There was an opening reception sponsored by **EBSCO** and a closing dinner also sponsored by **EBSCO**. On the second night of the conference, there was ethnic music from

a Kyrgyzstani group, and on the third night a lake cruise.

This conference was similar to the **Charleston** in some respects because this conference has been held for seven years now. It also has the friendly and casual atmosphere of **Charleston** while at the same time, the program has the serious educational aspects of **Charleston**. It is sponsored by a group of librarians from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Each year the conference grows in interest and size. The conference now has so many topics that it may be necessary next year to have breakout groups. One of the major differences was two languages for the Conference: Russian and English being the conference languages.

The overall theme of the conference was “**Libraries and the Democratization of Society**” and ran from October 1-5, 2006. There were welcoming remarks by the Advisor to the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Deputy Minister of Culture (a woman), the Deputy Head of Social and Cultural Development, Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Executive Director of the Soros Foundation of Kyrgyzstan, and the Director of the National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic. Of course, the Conference Leader, **Sania Battalova**, President of the **Library and Information Consortium of the Kyrgyz Republic** who spoke English and Russian perfectly, got things rolling. Incidentally most presentations used Power Point.

The first theme was Interlibrary Cooperation. There was a first rate presentation by **Alexander Plemnek**, the Head, of **ARBIKON**, a consortium in Russia similar to **OCLC**, covering all of Russia and using electronic technology to unite its members. Funded by grants until recently it now is able to fund itself through membership fees and services. His title was: “Interlibrary Cooperation in the Electronic Century: the ARBIKON experience.” **Rebecca McDuff**, from the **Information Resource Office of the Department of State**, gave a presentation on American Libraries: Past, Present, and Future. She found it a daunting task since the presentations were only supposed to be 20 minutes, but she managed to show how local and state governments and private citizens support libraries in the U.S. The national librarian of Belorussia, a young professor, **Roman Stefanovich Motulksky**, next gave a presentation on the new national library of Belorussia. It holds over 8 million volumes which were moved in 50 days to the shelves of the new Library. It is an octagon shaped building which at night looks like a sparkling diamond. It is so impressive that a Presidential office and Parliamentary offices have been located there, and **Roman** believes that it is bringing politicians and government officials

closer to libraries and culture.

Other sessions were held on equally relevant and interesting topics. The second session, on the second day, was on the “Role of Libraries in Development of a Social Partnership between Government and Civil Society.” Incidentally, these sessions were led by **Ms. Jyudyz Bakahsova**, Director of the **National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic**, who is a young, bright, and attractive woman who heads a library with much public relations savvy. She has interested the **First Lady of Kyrgyzstan** in libraries and will be increasing salaries by 100% over the next year. Some of the topics presented included: “Information Services for the Disadvantaged” by **Ms. Musieva Z.**, Director of the **Issyk-Kul Oblast (Regional) Library**; “Role of Libraries in Social Partnership with Civil Society” by **Ms. Dubina A**, President of **Public Foundation for Supporting People with Disabilities**; and Working with Local Government and International Donor Organizations, **Ms. Sagynbaeva M.**, Director of the **Kara-Kulja Regional Library Network**. The next theme was “Library Education” and had presentations on library education by librarians from Tajikistan, Kazakstan, and regional libraries.

The fourth group of meetings was on the topic of Electronic Documents, Resources and Libraries and were headed by **Ms. O. Kovo-chinka**, Executive Director of the **Information Consortium of Kazakh Libraries**. **Ebso** and **Euromonitor** gave presentations on their electronic programs. Then there were a series of presentations on electronic developments in libraries in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz. On Wednesday, the topics for meetings were on the “Library as Center for Dialog in the Multiethnic World” led by the Director of the Youth and Children’s Library of the Kyrgyz Republic, **Ms. R. Sultangazieva**. This theme was followed by “Libraries and Literacy in Sustainable Development”, led by **Ms. R. Turdukeeva**, Director of the **Bishkek Humanities University Library**. Then came the theme “International Experience of Cooperation in the Information and Social Spheres,” led by **Ms. L. Desayatkova**, Director of the **Information Resource Center**, U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyz. Finally, the last theme, before the closing remarks and recap, was “Copyright and Intellectual Property: Problems and Solutions for Libraries” led by **Ms. Baklykov**, Director of the **Kyrgyz State Patent Library**.

All in all the themes and presentations could have been at **Charleston**, but they were in an exotic part of Central Asia where natives in colorful costumes walked in villages, where beautiful mountains surrounded the conference center, and where traditional music and dance was delightful. I heartily recommend **Charleston** goers try this conference next year!!! 🌸

