iassist '84 Conference Report

by Sue Gavrel, President

Over 90 data archivists, librarians, researchers and other users and creators of machine-readable data attended the IASSIST '84 conference in Ottawa, May 15-18. The week began with a day of pre-conference workshops designed to provide practical information and experience on specific aspects of machine-readable data. Workshop topics included: Complex Data Files; Microcomputers; Data Library Management; and Cataloguing Microcomputer Data Files.

The conference opened with an international panel of representatives of statistical agencies from Canada, Sweden, England and the United States. The topic of the panel was "Issues Confronting Statistical Agencies: An International Perspective." Members of the panel included Christopher Denham, Office of Population Census and Surveys; Edmund Rapaport, Statistics Sweden; Lorne Rowebottom, Statistics Canada; and Paul Zeisset, Bureau of the Census. Each representative outlined the activities of his respective agency addressing specific problems which are and will be confronted in the next few years. Similar issues were addressed and the audience was able to see how different countries were confronting similar issues. The session was very informative and stimulated many questions from both the panel and the audience.

The sub-theme of Privacy and Confidentiality began in the afternoon with a plenary session focusing on the researcher's view of these issues. Professor John Bossons of the Institute for Political Analysis, University of Toronto, addressed the problems experienced in obtaining and using microdata. Two discussants, Thomas Brown, Vice-President of the Association of Public Data Users and David Worton of Statistics Canada, responded to the issues raised by Professor Bossons.

The plenary session lead into three consecutive sessions, each dealing with a specific aspect of privacy and confidentiality: anonymization techniques, which addressed techniques used by statistical agencies and private companies in their collection and use of data; legislative aspects associated with machine-readable data in an international perspective; and the implications on archives of privacy and confidentiality issues, in particular the effect on distribution and standardization.

The second sub-theme, the Advance of Technology, addressed the advances in statisical software packages and their adaptation to microcomputers. Nancy Morisson, SPSS, Inc. and Gary Anderson, SIR/DBMS, Inc. were the major speakers and provided insights into the changes being made in these packages. It was suggested that a useful addition to this type of session would be a user of these packages who could discuss problems encountered in using the software.

Three concurrent sessions followed, each one dealing with a specific aspect of the topic. "To Minis and Micros" dealt with the adaptations or approaches required by archivists and researchers in analysing data in hierarchical and relational data bases. The "On-line Bibliographic Systems" session discussed the different approaches that can be taken in developing on-line bibliographic systems.

The third sub-theme, Changing Roles and Responsibilities, began with a session on "The Growth of the Information Elite." Nancy Brodie, National Library of Canada; Joseph Paradi, Dataline Systems Limited; and Erika
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Von Brunken, Karolinska Institute
Library and Information Centre, Sweden,
debated the question of whether a new
elite was being created due to the
cost of equipment and knowledge in the
use of computers. Three concurrent
sessions followed: "Data Archives and
Libraries: New Challenges," which
assessed the impact of government
policies on the establishment and
maintenance of data archives; "Data
Collection and Use: New Directions,"
which addressed new trends in data
processing and their impact on govern-
ments, universities and private com-
panies; and finally, the "Collection
and Use of International Data," which
outlined the problems which the collec-
tion of data from cross-national
sources poses to both archivists and
researchers.

Lunch hour meetings were held for
two groups: Data Link and the IASSIST
Working Group on the Preparation of
an International Standard Bibliographic
Description for MRDF. The latter met
to discuss a draft working paper and
approve recommendations on changes to
specific cataloguing rules. This
report will be submitted to the ISBD
(NBM) Review Group.

Discussions carried over into the
social activities of the conference.
Both Statistics Canada and the Public
Archives sponsored receptions for
participants. A 10th Anniversary
buffet/reception was held on the last
night followed by a digital disco. A
tour of the city in a double decker
bus with a stop at Statistics Canada
to see a CANSIM demonstration was
organized. The week provided an
excellent opportunity for participants
to meet with colleagues from North
America and Europe and discuss issues
and problems which are confronting the
profession.

.The Program and Local Arrangements
Committees would like to thank all the
participants for their enthusiastic

Upcoming Elections

Elections will be held this Fall,
and all paid IASSIST members will
receive information shortly. New
officers will assume their positions
at next year's conference in Amsterdam.
The nominations and elections committee
is composed of three people:

Sue Gavrel
Machine Readable Archives
Public Archives of Canada
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A ON3

Jackie McGee
The Rand Corporation
1700 Main Street
Santa Monica, California
USA   90406

Ekkehard Mochmann
Zentralarchive fur Empirische
 Sozialforschung
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Bachemer Strasse 40
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Please address questions or comments
to this group.

participation in the conference. Next
year's conference will be in Amsterdam,
May 20-24. The theme of the conference
is "Public Access to Public Data."