

ASIS&T SIGHFIS – Notes from Breakfast Planning Meeting

Tuesday, 23 October 2007

Hyatt Hotel, Milwaukee

Present:

- Karen Baker
- Marcia Bates
- Michael Buckland
- Toni Carbo
- Trudi Hahn
- Thomas Haigh
- Cheryl Malone
- Barbara Kwasnik
- Kathryn La Barre
- Mark Lindner
- Shawne Miksa
- Julian Warner
- Howard White

Summary of Discussion:

The meeting was held to provide a venue for informal discussion of the SIG's activities and future. A separate business meeting was held immediately following its conclusion.

Michael Buckland discussed the history of the SIG, and its development during the 1990s from the pre-existing Foundations of Information Science SIG. He observed that experience had shown that organizing historical panels was more difficult and organizing panels on other topics, because the high level of specific research necessary for a good historical paper meant that each presentation must come from the existing knowledge and interests of the presenters. He suggested that inserting historical papers into relevant non-historical panels would be a good way to increase the SIG's visibility. This would require liaison with other SIGS to determine what panels were being planned.

Thomas Haigh suggested that the previous trajectory of work in fields such as the History of Science, History of Technology, and History of Computing suggested that the balance of effort in specialized historical fields tended to shift as they matured. Early work in each field was primarily undertaken by participants eager to preserve the history of their own disciplines and celebrate the contributions of pioneers. As each field developed, generational shifts moved the focus of continued activity toward younger scholars with Ph.D.s in historical disciplines. This accompanied a shift of perspective and historical questions addressed, from "internalist" topics relevant primarily to people within the

discipline concerned to “externalist” topics of interest primarily in placing the particular field within broader historical and social context. Thus, he suggested, ASIS&T should seek closer collaboration and new blood from historical societies such as the Society for the History of Technology (and its Special Interest Group on Computers, Information & Society), the History of Science Society, and the Business History Conference.

The most effective short-term way of doing this would be to encourage the preparation of joint panels split between Ph.D. historians and ASIS&T members. Discussion of the prospects of collaboration revealed some potential disadvantages to SIGHFIS and the ASIS&T meeting as a locus for such collaboration. ASIS&T requires all SIG members to join ASIS&T, which for historians would seem unusually expensive and would provide little of broader interest. The ASIS&T meeting is likewise much more expensive to register for than historical meetings. Also the ASIS&T meeting program process appears to have shifted toward an assumption that panels are primarily for informal discussion or the dissemination of useful material to practitioners, with its “you will learn” bullet points and the elimination of titles from the individual presentations. The more engaged historical work is with the topics and methods of interest to professional historians the harder it is to sell it as directly relevant to the daily needs of practitioners. Because it asks reviewers to assess the “background and credibility” of presenters but does not ask presenters to submit any documentation on this topic, the ASIS&T selection process is structurally biased toward individuals already known to the program committee, and so might not produce good results for panels featuring historians. Participants therefore reluctantly concluded that it would be more effective to bring SIG members to historical conferences than to attempt the reverse.

ASIS&T currently has some interest in oral history interviews. These are conceived as short video clips or recorded lectures rather than research-grade historical interviews.

A half-day workshop on methods and opportunities in oral history was discussed as a possible SIG activity for the 2008 Columbus meeting. Unfortunately ASIS&T has been hiking the fees charged to SIGs for workshops, particularly those held before the main conference. The registration numbers need to be sufficient to return a 10% over cost amount to ASIST. Ideally more than this. This makes the organization of any workshop problematic unless a topic of broad interest can be found. Co-sponsorship of the workshop with another SIG might be a possibility, as would the use of funds from newly available History Fund to underwrite its operation.

A related suggestion was a workshop directed toward people interested in doing Ph.D. research with an historical component. The workshop would focus on research skills, including historiographic material and discussion of how to find primary sources.

The SIG’s website <http://www.asis.org/SIG/SIGHFIS/index.htm> has not been updated for some time. It still features “forthcoming” material from the 2006 annual meeting. Kathryn La Barre explained that this is because the graduate student assigned to update its content was unable to gain access update its content it via the WebDAV interface supported by the ASIS&T server. In addition, an older website, featuring “news” from 2000 and summaries of SIG activities through 2003 remains at

<http://www.personal.kent.edu/~tfroehli/sighfis/hist.html>. Should someone locate this old site via a search engine it gives the unfortunately impression of a truly moribund SIG. Attendees agreed the importance of updating the official website and having the old one taken down after transferring historical information from it onto the new site.

Michael Buckland agreed to seek permission to include in the SIGHFIS website his bibliographic essay with Ziming Liu on the history of information science from the 1998 volume *Historical Studies in Information Science*, possibly in a revised and updated version.

The attendees agreed on the importance of publicizing the SIG's activities to the society's broader membership. One mechanism would be for the SIG secretary to forward items of interest to the list. Unfortunately the newly created position of secretary remains unfilled.

Discussion of ideas for ASIS&T meeting panels was inconclusive. One idea was a panel to address the history of standards, including work on MARC by Shawne Miksa. Thomas Haigh observed that a number of historians of technology and business are undertaking research in this area. Another idea was a panel on cyberinfrastructure.