



The ACH Page

TEI Consortium Members Meet in Chicago

One consequence of being an incorporated legal entity, whether or not for-profit, is that you have to hold annual members' meetings. The TEI Consortium – that august inheritor of the pioneering work in standardizing and expressing a coherent view of what text really is and how it should be managed and represented in digital form carried out over the last decade of the 20th century (partly under the sponsorship of the ACH) – is no exception. Its second annual members' meeting duly took place in the pleasant surroundings of the Newberry Library, Chicago over a sunny weekend this last October.

This year's programme had a strong digital library theme full of controversy and debate, with keynotes from Susan Hockey (an elder statesperson of the TEI, and now a professor of library science at University College London) and from John Price Wilkin (doyen developer of the digital library at the University of Michigan), nicely complemented by thought-provoking contributions from Mark Olsen (University of Chicago), Bill Kretzschmar (University of Georgia) and Wendell Piez (Mulberry Technologies). All the presentations given are available from the TEI Members' website; see <http://www.tei-c.org/Members/2002-Chicago/>.

At the conclusion of its second year of operation as a membership Consortium, the TEI already has something on which to congratulate itself: the complete translation into XML of its Guidelines which was published in June 2002. Perhaps of more long-term significance however is the fact that the technical work needed to bring that standard fully up to date has also begun. New TEI work groups reporting at the Meeting include one focussing on character encoding issues, chaired by Christian Wittern from Kyoto University, and one on stand-off markup techniques, chaired by David Durand of Ingenta PLC. The TEI editors Syd Bauman and Lou Burnard also presented plans for moving the production of the Guidelines into a new XML schema based environment. A newly formed work group on issues relating to SGML to XML migration also met; its recommendations, due early next year, will be of considerable impact.

As a community-driven initiative, the TEI must focus on the interests of its members as well as undertaking the necessary technical work to maintain the standard. One interesting indication of how this community-focus may develop was the notion of forming particular Special Interest Groups which might act as advocacy groups, identifying training and support opportunities within particular

areas, notably perhaps the digital library community. Another major talking point throughout the meeting was the challenge of how to build up membership, at a time when academic budgets are under increasing pressure. Members were realistic, but optimistic: the TEI scheme has become part of the intellectual landscape. No serious alternative has yet emerged as a solution to the problems addressed by the Poughkeepsie Conference of 1987 which set up the TEI, though those same problems are still being re-discovered. A major task for the new TEI is therefore to expand its outreach activities, to ensure that its training and support services are widely available and of a high professional standard.

With that in view, the meeting endorsed proposals to organize a major training event in the summer of 2003, in addition to next year's inevitable annual meeting in November. The investment made in the TEI by hundreds of organizations and individuals world-wide suggests that the momentum which led to the formation of the TEI Consortium will continue to roll it forward as the only way of maintaining the TEI Guidelines. For, as Basil Bunting said of Pound's 'Cantos', "they resemble the Himalayas: you can ignore them if you like – but you will have to go an awfully long way round."

Lou Burnard
European Editor of the TEI Guidelines