

## **Mentoring LISA**

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**Abstract.** LISA meetings began with a core group of librarians who continued to work on planning future conferences. A Preliminary Organizing Committee (POC) was formed by this group after LISA I. Brief biographies of these early POC members, Ellen Bouton, Brenda Corbin, Marlene Cummins, and Sarah Stevens-Rayburn are given. The formation of the fundraising group Friends of LISA (FOL) is also briefly discussed.

LISA (Library and Information Services in Astronomy) meetings owe their beginning — and their continuation over more than 20 years — to a dedicated group of (now retired) librarians who were honored at LISA VI in Pune in February 2010: Brenda Corbin, Ellen Bouton, Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, and Marlene Cummins.

Brenda Corbin's first position in a library was at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC from 1965 through early 1969. She then spent two years (1969–1970) in San Juan, Argentina at the El Leoncito Observatory where her husband, astronomer Tom Corbin, was assigned for an observing project. While there, she volunteered in the library at the observatory, arranging journals in the collection. This was perhaps the beginning of her future life-long work as an astronomy librarian. Beginning in 1971, she worked at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland, and also attended the University of Maryland, earning her Master of Library Science degree in December 1972. In April 1973, Brenda became Librarian at the U. S. Naval Observatory, Washington, DC, and spent the rest of her career there, retiring in October 2005.

Early in her time at USNO, she began corresponding with international colleagues in observatory libraries throughout the world. Correspondence related to finding missing observatory publication issues, asking for assistance with difficult reference questions, and other matters. Although she had not met these astronomy librarians, she quickly came to regard them not only as colleagues, but also as friends.

Brenda has often referred to herself as the “Mother” of LISA due to her work on the first LISA. The planning of the conference took on a life of its own for almost a year. However, when 125 librarians and astronomers came together from all over the globe in the summer of 1988, she felt it was worth every moment. She says: “My association with colleagues at LISA conferences has been one of the great joys of my professional career. I have made so many friends over the years from 1988 forward and it has been a privilege to know these wonderful colleagues.”

Ellen Bouton began her library career in 1962 as librarian in a private boy's school and continued there for three years. In 1974, she went to the University of Virginia Law School Library, where she was hired by Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, and in 1975 she started at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory Library in Charlottesville, Vir-



Figure 1. Brenda Corbin at LISA V

ginia, again hired by Sarah. When Sarah left for the Space Telescope Science Institute in 1983, Ellen became Observatory Librarian at NRAO. Sarah and Ellen began communicating regularly via email, and with the rapid growth of email in the 1980s, Ellen started Astrolib, an email list which became a great way for astronomy librarians all over the globe to communicate. Ellen retired from the NRAO Library in 2003, and from 2003 to present, she has served as the Archivist at NRAO, working part time in this position. Ellen says there have been many exciting, fascinating, and challenging things in her career that have changed the nature of libraries and how we work in them: computers, email, paper to electronic full text, card catalogs to online databases with full-text access, bibliometrics, and more. She concludes: “But there has been one constant: all my wonderful colleagues and friends in astronomy libraries around the world. They have been a joy in my life, and working on LISA meetings, and particularly on FOL, has been one of the most satisfying parts of my career.”

Sarah Stevens-Rayburn held a variety of library jobs early on: between 1970 and 1975, she was employed in a public library, a military library and a law library. In 1975, her association with astronomy began when she became librarian at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory. She explained to the interviewing NRAO Associate Director that she knew virtually nothing about astronomy, to which he responded: “I have a staff of some of the world’s best radio astronomers. What I need is someone who knows something about libraries.” She replied she could probably help him out with that. As Sarah states: “And so began a wonderful career working with not only the world’s best astronomers, but also the world’s best librarians who somehow all ended up in astronomy libraries!”

At NRAO, the library was responsible for tracking all publications by NRAO staff as well as those reporting observations taken with an NRAO telescope. By 1979, there was a huge increase in a new form of publication, something called *preprints*. It was Sarah's idea to distribute a bi-weekly listing of preprints received in the library and to combine that with the efforts to track NRAO publications — and thus RAPsheet was born in July 1979. Sarah and Ellen both say they were in the right place at the right time, at the beginning of what has become the whole field of bibliometrics.

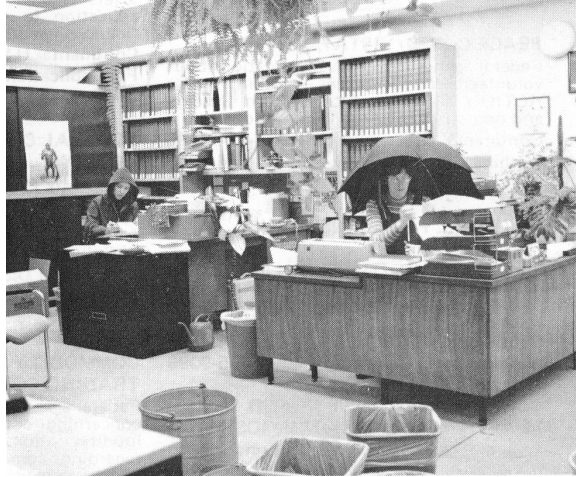


Figure 2. Ellen Bouton and Sarah Stevens-Rayburn in the *wrong* place at the *wrong* time: the NRAO library roof leaked for many years!

Sarah was selected to set up a library for the new Space Telescope Science Institute in 1983 and spent the rest of her library career at STScI, retiring in 2006. As Sarah says, “What may not be quite so obvious is how any success I may have had is almost completely due to the helpfulness of my colleagues. From the beginning I realized that in this profession, it is much less *what you know* than *who you know*. The LISA conferences have enabled us to get to know each other and thus enhance the services we provide to our clientele, even before we had the Internet and all of its blessings and curses.”

Marlene Cummins became the astronomy librarian at the University of Toronto soon after she received her library degree. She spent her whole library career in the Astronomy Department Library, from 1984 until her retirement in 2004. She was active in the Special Libraries Association, especially the Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Division. She participated in several important projects. *The Astronomy Thesaurus* (led by Robyn Shobbrook) embodied an issue dear to her heart (controlled vocabulary) and led to many enlightening conversations with astronomers in her department.

Marlene also served for several years as the library representative to the American Astronomical Society (AAS) Publications Board. She felt the value of her participation there spread beyond the confines of the AAS in other projects she undertook and decisions she made. Two other projects of which she is proud are web-based. *Selected Astronomy Book and Software Reviews* (which was integrated into NASA's ADS) arose

out of a need that was not being filled: librarians needed a way to make discriminating book purchases in an environment of restricted budgets, but *Astronomy and Astrophysics Abstracts* did not include book reviews. *Women in Astronomy*, of particular interest to her, was a rather informal list which she enjoyed compiling.



Figure 3. Marlene Cummins is prepared for sun in Tenerife.

She worked on the Friends of LISA Committee for three LISA conferences, and found that funding librarians from all over the world to attend LISA conferences, thereby ensuring that those LISA conferences were truly international and diverse, was very rewarding. Through the years, she noticed the pattern of teamwork that developed among astronomy librarians. She states: “Over time a core group of us developed wherein we each brought different strengths to the tasks at hand. And we had a lot of fun too!”

The earliest foundations for LISA were laid when Brenda Corbin attended the 1982 IAU General Assembly in Patras, Greece and spoke with Commission 5 about the importance of astronomy librarians meeting together at some point in the future. Commission members agreed, and U.S. Naval Observatory Scientific Director, Dr. Gart Westerhout, continued to discuss such a meeting with Commission 5 at the 1985 General Assembly in New Delhi. Although Brenda did not attend the New Delhi meeting, Robyn Shobbrook, librarian at the Anglo-Australian Observatory, was present and also encouraged such a gathering of astronomy librarians.

Dr. Westerhout, Brenda’s supervisor, returned from India and told her a meeting had been approved as an IAU Colloquium, that the meeting would be held at the U.S. Naval Observatory, and that she would be planning the conference! The usual committees were formed, and Dr. George Wilkins, Royal Greenwich Observatory, Chair of the SOC, was the person who suggested the name of the meeting and the acronym LISA. Support and assistance in planning the meeting came from Dr. Westerhout and U.S. Naval Observatory staff, as well as Sarah Stevens-Rayburn (Space Telescope Science Institute), Ellen Bouton (National Radio Astronomy Observatory), Adelaide del Frate (Coordinator of NASA Libraries, now deceased).

Adelaide Del Frate had become the Head of the Library at the NASA Goddard Spaceflight Center in 1968. Her mission was to automate all of the Goddard Library systems and integrate all of its functions. That was quite a challenge back in the late 1960s but she was certainly up to it. She was later appointed Coordinator of all NASA libraries, a job she conducted from NASA Headquarters. She was an enormously



Figure 4. Gert Westerhout, Scientific Director (1977–1993), U.S. Naval Observatory



Figure 5. Sarah Stevens-Rayburn and George Wilkins, LISA I proceedings editors, confer at the meeting.

accomplished librarian and administrator who volunteered to be part of the LOC for LISA I in 1988. One of her tasks was finding inexpensive lodging in an expensive city for many of our attendees. With her wide-ranging contacts in Washington, she was able to locate dormitory rooms at Catholic University for our use. She also worked on other logistical aspects of the conference. Adelaide passed away in 1991 after suffering from leukemia.

LISA I, held in July 1988 in Washington, DC, in conjunction with the IAU General Assembly in Baltimore, was a huge success, bringing together 125 librarians and astronomers from all over the world, many of whom had communicated for years but

never met in person. The excitement at that first LISA was heady, lasting through both the formal sessions and the informal gatherings of the meeting, and for a long time after.



Figure 6. Attendees, including some mentors honored at LISA VI, enjoy the LISA I opening reception: A. Vagiswari and A. Ratnakar at the rear, Sarah Stevens-Rayburn at center left, and Robyn Shobbrook in the lower right corner.

Although we had not planned that first LISA meeting with any intent of starting an ongoing series of meetings, it generated excitement and enthusiasm that lasted long after the meeting was over. So several years later we began to talk about meeting again to discuss the rapidly changing tasks and tools we as librarians faced. LISA II was held in Garching, Germany, in 1995; LISA III in Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, in 1998; LISA IV in Prague, Czech Republic, in 2002; LISA V in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, in 2006; and, most recently, LISA VI in Pune, India, in 2010. Following in Brenda's footsteps as primary local organizers for subsequent meetings were Uta Grothkopf, Monique Gomez, Marek Wolf, Donna Coletti, and, most recently, a wonderful group of Indian librarians led by Nirupama Bawdekar.

Although Gert Westerhout had decided on the site for the first LISA — and announced to Brenda that she was organizing it — a Preliminary Organizing Committee (POC) evolved for later meetings to guide the choice of location and of dates, and to propose membership on the SOC. For LISAs II–V, POC members were Ellen Bouton, Brenda Corbin, Marlene Cummins, and Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, joined by Uta Grothkopf (European Southern Observatory) beginning with LISA III. The POC for LISA VI was Ellen Bouton, Brenda Corbin, Uta Grothkopf, and Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, with the addition of Jill Lagerstrom (Space Telescope Science Institute). Usually the POC met via email, but we also met in person at the Space Telescope Science Institute Library. We had tea and ginger biscotti and nicknamed ourselves the LISA Divas! As part of one of our meetings in Baltimore, some of us were guest lecturers for a course on conference planning taught by Ellen's sister-in-law at Towson State University; naturally, we talked about the special issues associated with planning international meetings.

The POC was always very aware that the location chosen for the next LISA would be important for its success. The first question, of course, was whether there was a willing librarian or team of librarians at the prospective institution to guide the many aspects of local organizing. But beyond that, we considered other factors crucial for bringing together a large and varied group. Would there be easy and relatively inexpensive access by air? We talked with travel agents (and, for later meetings, checked the Web) to determine average air fares and routes. What possibilities existed for inexpensive lodging within easy commute to the meeting rooms? We found hostels, university dormitories, and shared apartments to greatly reduce costs. What would per diem costs be? Were there a variety of moderately priced restaurants or grocery stores near the meeting location? We knew that only by keeping costs reasonable for attendees would we be able to consistently attract the broad variety of people we wanted at LISA, and that even the best of programs would suffer from reduced attendance if the venue was expensive or travel logistics were difficult.

We also quickly learned how much we did *not* know. At the first LISA meeting we were such novices that we did not realize that we should organize a group photo of attendees (thus, none was taken). And we learned early on that a lot of lead time was needed for registration to allow attendees to navigate through what were sometimes complex and months-long visa processes. So we wrote a manual intended for future organizers, particularly for LOCs, trying to include all the many things we had learned during the planning for each meeting, and encouraging each successive LOC and SOC to add their collective wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

After the first LISA, for which we had IAU funding to use for travel grants, we realized that one of the more valuable aspects of the meetings was the attendance and participation of a broad international representation of librarians, and we knew that in order to continue such representation, we would have to raise funds to bring people to the meeting who would not otherwise be able to come. And thus Friends of LISA (FOL) was born. FOL was repeatedly successful in raising money from publishers and other vendors, societies, professional organizations, institutions, and individuals. We made grants to attendees to support varying combinations of their travel, lodging, and per diem expenses, as well as their registration fees.

An unexpected benefit of the FOL grants to librarians was the prestige it gave them in their own institutions. It was our experience that observatory directors or department chairs sometimes did not think librarians were “important” enough to receive travel funding. But when their librarians received an outside grant to attend an international meeting, particularly one that was part of an ongoing and respected series of meetings, we believe librarians gained recognition in their home institutions. We found that librarians who FOL funded fully for one meeting were often able to get partial funding from their directors to attend subsequent meetings.

For LISA II, FOL was comprised of Ellen Bouton, Brenda Corbin, and Marlene Cummins. Electronic transfer of funds was not an easy option then, and we brought cash with us. Marlene went to a local bank and converted the U.S. and Canadian dollars to Deutsche Marks, then handed out envelopes of cash to FOL grant recipients. After walking around with all that cash (with her teen-aged daughter Holly as guard) Marlene was very glad to have it out of her hands and into the hands of other librarians!

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<sup>1</sup>The manual is available online at <http://www.eso.org/sci/libraries/lisamanual/>



Figure 7. Dinner at LISA II: Uta Grothkopf, Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, Brenda Corbin, Marlene Cummins, Juana Maria Sainz Ballesteros de Lloveras, Ellen Bouton

When Brenda, Marlene, and Ellen reconvened for FOL III, they decided they would raise money and make the grants, but they wanted someone else to handle the bookkeeping and banking. So Ron Enders, Ellen's husband, joined the group as FOL treasurer. He loved the job. He said, "I get to go to interesting places and give away someone else's money to wonderful people!" We had the same team for LISA IV, and by this time we were able to use electronic transfers to disburse some of the funds, particularly travel funds, but there were still complex arrangements needed to transfer and transport money from our U.S. bank to the meeting venue in order to pay lodging bills and hand out cash for per diem.

Marlene had retired when it was time to start working on FOL V, so we added Jessica Moy (NOAO) and Liz Bryson (CFHT) to the committee. And for LISA VI, we passed on FOL to Sally Bosken (USNO) and her husband Jerome Bosken (FOL Treasurer), Jill Lagerstrom (STScI), Jessica Moy, and Lee Robbins (U. Toronto).

When the POC met for preliminary discussions of LISA VI, we were joined by Jill Lagerstrom and Uta Grothkopf, and now that we (Brenda, Ellen, Sarah, and Marlene) have all retired, we hope they will help to mentor LISA forward into the future!

The stunning changes in libraries and data handling over the more than two decades between the first and most recent LISA meetings, and the way in which the six meetings have addressed the evolving role of librarians, make it very clear that LISA has served and will continue to serve an invaluable function in bringing together librarians and astronomers to share ideas, issues, and progress. Working on LISA meetings has been one of the highlights of our careers, and our wonderful colleagues in astronomy libraries around the world have brought us new ideas and, more importantly, lasting friendships. We, the first LISA mentors, are proud to have been part of LISA, and know that the new generation of librarians will continue the tradition with expertise, imagination, and enthusiasm.



Figure 8. FOL IV in Prague: Brenda Corbin, Ellen Bouton, Ron Enders, Marlene Cummins



Figure 9. The POC discusses LISA VI, May 2008: Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, Brenda Corbin, Jill Lagerstrom, Ellen Bouton, Uta Grothkopf