

AEMI CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2008-2009

AEMI CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2008-2009

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In opening this report on the activities of the Association over the last year, may I begin by recalling our Annual Meeting which took place in Genoa, Italy, at the International Centre of Italian Emigration Studies (CISEI), where Fabio Capocaccia and Silvia Martini and their colleagues are embarking on a most ambitious project with wider ramifications in Rome and Naples. As ever, we rely on our Annual Meeting as our main means of renewing old friendships and making new ones, for reviewing progress, and for charting our direction for the coming year. We again thank Fabio and Silvia and their colleagues for welcoming us so warmly to Genoa and making our visit so memorable not least. Those of us who sat in the Palazzo San Giorgio, where the modern system of accounting was developed, will no doubt have recalled it to mind in thinking about what has been happened to the world banking system in the meantime!

This year marks a new departure in that we are joined by Carine Rouah and colleagues from the International Network of Migration Institutions (INMI). Together we thank Simone Eick and her colleagues at the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven and all at the BallinStadt Emigration Museum in Hamburg for their patience, understanding and generosity in acting jointly as our hosts this year.

Apart from meeting in Bremerhaven immediately before the General Meeting, the Board has not met together face to face this year. As usual, however, there has been frequent communication between members of the Board, mainly by email, especially in preparation for the Annual Meeting. In this regard I would like to pay tribute in particular to the prodigious work of Aislinn Merz in Bremerhaven and Maja Berends in Hamburg in co-ordinating all aspects of the very ambitious and exciting programme that we have before us.

The Board that you elected last year in Genoa for the new three-year term has Jens Topholm (Denmark) as Secretary, Eva Meyer (Åland Islands, Finland) as Treasurer, Hans Storhaug (Norway) as Editor of the Association's Journal, Silvia Martini (Italy) as representative of last year's host institution, Aislinn and Maja as representatives of the this year's joint-host institutions, and myself as Chairman (Northern Ireland). I am particularly grateful to Jens and Eva for their work in the posts of secretary and treasurer that were previously combined in the person of Henning Bender from the establishment of the Association in 1989 until his retirement last year. We appreciate the help that Henning has given in ensuring a smooth transition and again wish him well for the future. I am glad that our Editor has been restored to full health and, as you shall be hearing from him, that he now has our Journal back on track.

A continuing issue of concern this year has been future cooperation between AEMI and the International Network of Migration Museums of which Carine Rouah is the volunteer Project Manager. As an initiative of UNESCO, originating in a conference held in Rome in October 2006, the International Network of Migration Museums was established to offer a Web interface to assist the growth of the international network of migration institutions, to support their activities, and to facilitate the interactions among them. In order to signal more clearly that the Network welcomes to membership not only museums but also libraries, archives and research centres, it has been re-named Network of International Migration Institutions. I think it is fair to say that we have a shared understanding that the special nature of migration museums is such that they depend for their success on developing archive and library collections of migration records (especially passenger lists, letters, photographs, oral histories, published autobiographies and biographies) as well as museum collections of migration-related objects, and that the 'migration museum' is a new kind of institution that should embody the idea of partnership between archives, libraries, museums and research or study centres. We hope therefore that 'migration institutions' in both our names will help to promote this inclusive approach and spirit of collaboration.

While Carine Rouah and her colleagues in the Network were holding their own conference in Barcelona last year, we discussed in Genoa various possibilities for growth and collaboration over the next five to ten years and it seemed likely to us that in expanding we would need to develop some kind of regional structure. Institutions in different regions (such as North and South America and Australasia where there are already important groupings) may find it more practical to come together for face-to-face meetings annually - as AEMI does at present in Europe. A meeting of a global network, if we dare to contemplate such, might then be practical only every 3-5 years. We also discussed how we might best avoid the clash in conference dates in future and the happy result this year is that we share a meeting here in Germany, once again thanks to kind co-operation between colleagues in Bremerhaven and Hamburg. An important part of our business will be to chart a way ahead for the coming year, especially in respect

of co-operation.

Your Chairman this year I am afraid to say has been distracted by other business from giving as much time as he would have liked to the affairs of the Association. It was with great regret that I had to decline kind invitations from Erik Gustavson at the Swedish American Center in Karlstad, to attend not one but two splendid events. I am glad nevertheless that the Board was at least represented on the first occasion by our Secretary and Treasurer. I hope that Erik might tell us more about the exciting developments that have been taking place in his institution, which should be a great encouragement to us. I did represent the Association and speak about its work at two conferences in October last year, the first in Berlin on 'Migration in Museums – Narratives of Diversity in Europe' (23-25 Oct) and the second in Bonn where the Metropolis included a section on 'Mobility, Integration and Development in a Globalised World: Migration Museums' (27-31 Oct), to which Carine Rouah also contributed. Also, may I say that I am delighted that the other half of Ireland is once again represented in the Association by Seán Reidy, director of the Dunbrody and Ros Tapestry Projects of the JF Kennedy Trust.

As we enter our twentieth anniversary year, I believe that there is little doubt about the continuing need for an Association such as ours. We still have the potential to grow into a large organization. Our association continues to welcome small, medium and large-sized institutions but the onus in expanding the Association must necessarily fall on the larger institutions, which have the resources better able to support the kind of work involved. As I did last year, I would again urge members to consider that a sign that that our Association will have made the shift from a medium-size organisation to a large one will be when the general expectation is that the Chairman of the Board will not normally serve more than one three-year term. Your present Board has this year and next to run before its three-year term is complete but it is not too soon start considering how best to bring on new talent while maintaining some continuity.

Whatever the future may hold, I would commend to you the work done by of your Board over the last past year, especially with regard to the separation of the posts of Secretary and Treasurer after so many years when the roles were so efficiently combined by one person. Finally, I would like to thank again our colleagues in Genoa for hosting us so well last year and for our colleagues in Bremerhaven and Hamburg in combining to host us this year. May we be ambitious in our deliberations here and may they prove fruitful in the year ahead.

Brian Lambkin
Chairman
AEMI
24/09/09