

The Other Side of PAARL Conferences: A Glimpse of Philippine History

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Librarians' participation in PAARL conferences has a two-fold value. In the first place, it promotes professional development through professional sharing or taking part in fascinating and challenging workshops. Indeed, the seminar on "The Road Map of a New Generation Library Support Staff: Join In or Be Out" was very stimulating and refreshing, and we return back to work ready to try out new methods and ideas. It is more fitting to give due recognition to the support personnel's contribution in the administration, organization and circulation of library materials. They are an indispensable resource and library services are heavily dependent on them.

In the second place, the Association promotes a sense of history through cultural tours. Participation in such activities is one way of rediscovering our past and gaining a deeper understanding of our culture. As we retrace the paths of our ancestors, we are able to navigate to the world of the past and to imagine how they make a living or survive in such a cruel environment and also partake in such struggles of finding our true identity as a Filipino.

We are particularly blessed in this seminar as we were taken on not only a sightseeing tour of the Quezon and Laguna, and the towns surrounding the mystical Mt. Banahaw, we were also fortunate to have a cultural tour. After a sumptuous lunch of sinigang na sugpo, ginataang suso in pako leaves, grilled pla-pla, and other native dishes at Kamayan sa Palaisdaan, Tayabas most prominent restaurant, we boarded our coach for a short drive to **Malagunlong bridge**, built by the Spanish colonizers (this bridge is considered the oldest, but it is not clear whether it was constructed before or after the town church which was built in 1585). Then we visited the library museum housed at the Casa de Comunidad, one of the largest and most beautiful tribunals in the country restored and now a historic landmark. Some in the group took pictures of the church, the **Minor Basilica of St. Michael d'Archangel**, the longest Spanish colonial church in the Philippines. On the way, we passed by another old church, in the town of Luchan, but because the streets were too narrow, the coach could not make a stop over. We were able to stop, however, at Majayjay, after a breathtaking, adventurous ride over too narrow bridges, and hilly climbs, and viewed the interior of the church of St. Gregory, built also in the late 1600s. Then on to Liliw, for a shopping tour of slippers, shoes, handbags, handicrafts, and pasalubongs. Our last cultural stop was at the famous Underground Cemetery in Nagcarlan, built in the 18th century by the Franciscan Missionaries. At the crypt of the cemetery, according to history, is where the local Katipuneros plotted against Spanish rule. It was about 8 p.m. when we finally arrived at our assembly point at the National Library in Luneta.

To me, participation in cultural tours such as the one we just had, provides librarians with a deeper appreciation of a country faced with social, cultural and economic challenges. Librarians are engaged in information-giving activities; but they also play an indispensable role in bridging the past with the present, and has a greater responsibility in the preservation and promotion of our unique culture. Furthermore, it is the role of librarians not only to provide access to the sources of information but to guide people in their journey back to the olden times and letting them take the right

trail through books and other media. Thank you, PAARL, for such a journey into history.