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## The *Centre International de Sylviculture* and its historic book collection

*J. Ball and W. Kollert*

*A collection of rare forestry books amassed in the 1930s and stored in the FAO vaults warrants greater exposure to the world.*

**Jim Ball** is former Coordinator, FAO Forestry Department, now President of the Commonwealth Forestry Association. **Walter Kollert** is Planted Forests Officer, FAO Forestry Department, Rome.

**T**he *Centre International de Sylviculture* (CIS) was an initiative to establish an international forestry organization in the 1930s. Its library collection is now under the custodianship of the David Lubin Memorial Library at FAO in Rome. This article describes the establishment of the CIS, recounts the remarkable story of how the CIS collection ended up at FAO, and gives a glimpse at some of its historic books.

### ESTABLISHING AN INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY CENTRE

The internationalization of modern forestry began in the late nineteenth

century. Twenty-six international forestry congresses were held in Vienna from 1876 to 1914, and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) was founded in 1890. Two international meetings of foresters in France, the first in 1900 in Paris and the second in 1913 in Grenoble, recommended the establishment of a permanent forestry organization (Anon., 1939). The international forest sector was represented at that time only by a section of the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA), which was founded

*FAO librarian Michelle Bergerre inspects a book in the CIS historic book collection*

in Rome in 1905 by the King of Italy with the intention of creating a clearinghouse for the collection of agricultural statistics. In 1930, the IIA published the first world agricultural census.

The First International Forestry Congress, organized by the IIA, was held in Rome in 1926. It set up the International Institute of Forestry, which was affiliated with the IIA, and the IIA Bureau of International Forestry Statistics was established in 1927. However, the success of these institutions was limited due to a lack of funding (Johann, 2007).

The Second International Forestry Congress was hosted by Hungary and held in Budapest in 1936 with the participation of 35 countries. Its first resolution was to consider the establishment of a permanent international forestry organization, the main aim of which would be to organize regular international forestry congresses. The Standing International Forestry Committee was set up, consisting of representatives of all 35 countries, the IIA and the IIA's *Comité International du Bois*, an international clearinghouse for information

on wood technology that published statistical yearbooks on forest products and was based at that time in Vienna.

### **The Centre International de Sylviculture**

The negotiations arising from the resolution of the 1936 Budapest Congress continued under the auspices of the IIA, and in March 1938 the statutes of the *Centre International de Sylviculture* (in German *Internationale Forstzentrale*) were adopted by the IIA Permanent Committee. Article I of these statutes established the CIS within the framework of the IIA and its headquarters in Berlin, Germany. The creation of the CIS benefited from the experience of Baron Giacomo Acerbo of Italy, President of the IIA, Baron Clément Waldbott of Hungary, who had been president of the Second International Forestry Congress in Budapest, and Dr Josef Nikolaus Köstler, Professor of Forest Science at the University of Göttingen. Two other countries, Finland and France, also contributed to the preparatory work for the establishment of the CIS.

The CIS consisted of a permanent secretariat in Berlin and an executive committee made up of delegates from all the CIS member countries. The first session of the executive committee was held in May 1939 in Berlin and dealt with administrative, procedural and financial matters. The CIS office and its staff were granted extraterritorial status by the Government of Germany in 1940, thus placing them above German law. The office was located in a villa in Berlin-Wannsee about 20 km southwest of Berlin.

At its first session, the executive committee elected Baron Clément Waldbott as president, Dr Köstler as director-general and Dr Georges Golay as division chief and head of the secretariat. The CIS had three divisions – on forest resources, forest techniques and forest management – and the staff was from a total of 18 European countries. The library was run by a chief librarian, who was supported by five multilingual librarians and two secretaries (Johann, 2007, 2009).

The CIS did not undertake its own scientific research, but its staff commissioned and published scientific papers of



**The villa in Berlin-Wannsee, formerly the headquarters of the CIS, in January 2011**

J. BAILEY

**The oldest book  
in the CIS historic  
book collection,  
dated 1577**



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international significance. Despite their later importance, the compilation and documentation of international literature on forestry and the establishment of a specialized international library were neither mentioned in the 1938 statutes nor foreseen in the 1939 programme or its budget.

No record has been found in the IIA archives of the invitation sent to countries or institutions to take part in the negotiations in Rome leading up to the establishment of the CIS, or to join it after it had been set up. From the composition of the participants at the first session of the executive committee, the organization appears to have consisted initially of only European countries. Mexico joined the executive committee in 1940, but there is no record of any approach being made to the United States of America, Canada or Spain, and the only record of an approach to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a letter dated April 1940 from the Imperial Forestry Bureau in Oxford, which published *Forestry Abstracts*, evidently in response to a request from the CIS to include notices of

its activities in the *Abstracts*. The Bureau curtly responded that it regretted that it was impossible to comply with the request and, moreover, that “owing to the present international difficulties” (i.e. the Second World War) the Bureau could not enter into an agreement for the exchange of the *Abstracts* for literature from the CIS. “No doubt”, the letter continued, “later on conditions will be more favourable for the arrangement of an exchange agreement”.

From 1939 to 1944, 19 countries were members of the CIS, although membership varied considerably over this period. For example, Latvia and Lithuania, recorded as members in 1939, disappeared from the list in 1940 because both were incorporated into the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics in August 1940 and from 1941 were occupied by Germany. Austria was never a member, having been incorporated into Germany after the 1938 *Anschluss* (annexation).

The working language of the CIS was French, presumably because French was then the international language of diplomacy. The CIS executive committee met yearly, sometimes more frequently, and

reported to the annual meeting of the IIA Permanent Committee. Members of the CIS executive committee represented national governments – as they do today in international governmental forestry meetings such as FAO’s Committee on Forestry and the United Nations Forum on Forests.

#### **The publication programme of the CIS**

Although its programme was reduced during the Second World War, the CIS was able to set up, at its sixth session in 1942, an international clearinghouse for information on wood technology, the *Commission Internationale du Bois* (CIB, not to be confused with the IIA’s *Comité International du Bois*, mentioned earlier), also located in Berlin. The aim of the CIB was to publish the titles and keywords of all forestry publications in three languages yearly and to collect the titles in the documentation centre in Berlin. Despite the challenges of international collaboration and communication during wartime, the CIB produced a large number of publications in several languages between 1941 and 1943, including:

**Schloss Emsburg today. In 1943 it became the headquarters of the CIS**



H. SUTTER

- *Intersylva*, a quarterly review published in French and German between 1941 and 1943 – the objective was to publish articles on forestry issues of international significance and to establish international networks between foresters and researchers;
- monographs published in the series *Silvae Orbis* – by 1945, twelve issues of *Silvae Orbis* had been published, with others in preparation;
- an international forestry bibliography (*Bibliographia Forestalis*), published annually from 1941 to 1943;
- economic forestry bulletins, published monthly in German and English;
- documents published from time to time on legal matters related to forestry.

#### **THE CIS HISTORIC BOOK COLLECTION**

The CIS established an international forestry library which, in 1940, subscribed to 556 technical journals through the purchase, exchange and collection of books and journals on forestry. The entire library of the Forestry Academy at Eisenach, Weimar, Germany, was

purchased. The Eisenach collection consisted of 3 498 books, including 957 rare books. The libraries of the Ducal State Ministry, Gotha (about 950 books), and the Ducal Finance College, Altenburg, were also acquired, and contemporary literature was collected from these and other German institutions. In a joint venture with IUFRO, international collections of current material were formed through exchanges with libraries in, for example, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden. By 1943, the CIS collection is thought to have consisted of 15 277 books and periodicals as well as 348 unpublished papers in 22 languages. It was almost certainly the largest forestry library in the world at that time.

This unique and valuable collection of historical forestry books, mainly from Germany, gives evidence of the origins of the concept of sustainability and is truly a unique treasure. The collection includes at least one hand-written document on forest management from 1577, and the others date mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The books are by the classic scholars of sustainable forest

management, and their texts helped lay the foundation of sustainable forest and natural resource management. The concept of sustainability was first articulated in Germany by Hans Carl von Carlowitz (1645–1714), a mining administrator, who was concerned at the shortage of timber for the mining of silver ore and investigated the principles underlying the provision of regular supplies of timber essential for the industry. The CIS collection is thought to have included a copy of von Carlowitz's famous treatise *Sylvicultura oeconomica, oder haußwirthliche Nachricht und Naturmäßige Anweisung zur Wilden Baum-Zucht* of 1713 (Schmithüsen, 2013). It is feared, however, that this book was lost during the adventurous journey that the library made in the last days of the Second World War (see below).

The CIS collection also includes works of authors such as Sir Dietrich Brandis, considered by some as the father of sustainable tropical forestry, and the Bavarian forester Josef Nikolaus Köstler, the first director of the CIS. Other seminal authors whose works are in the collection are Georg Ludwig Hartig, Wilhelm Leopold Pfeil,

Heinrich Cotta, Henri-Louis du Hamel du Monceau, Johann Christian Hundeshagen, Max Robert Pressler, Johann Heinrich von Thuenen, Adam Schwappach, Friedrich Judeich and Thomas Georg Hartig. The collection also contains copies of Brehm's *Illustriertes Tierleben* (1864–1869, six volumes), essays on the physical description of the earth by Alexander von Humboldt (1847, 1849), von Humboldt's classic *Kosmos*, letters on chemistry by Justus Liebig (1859), classic economic literature by Adam Smith (*Untersuchung über die Natur und die Ursachen des Nationalreichtums*, 1794, originally published in English in 1776 as *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*) and the documentation of climatic variability since 1700 by Albrecht Penck (1890, *Geographische Abhandlungen*).

#### The CIS in Salzburg

In December 1943, Berlin came under intense military attack and the headquarters of the CIS and its library were transferred to Schloss Embsburg in Salzburg, Austria, where it functioned

as usual, although several members of the foreign staff had left. In November 1944, Dr Köstler was conscripted into the army, leaving Dr Golay, his deputy and a citizen of Switzerland, to act for him. Dr von Frauendorfer, who since 1943 had been head of the CIS library, acted as the director of the Salzburg office. In January 1945, the remainder of the archive was evacuated from Berlin to Salzburg. A make-shift convoy of vehicles was assembled for the journey from Berlin to Salzburg, each powered by producer (wood) gas prepared from a charcoal gasifier because of the shortage of petrol and diesel, with members of the staff as drivers. Dr Golay left to return to Switzerland in February 1945, and Dr Géza Luncz and Dr Richard Immel assumed his responsibilities at the CIS.

By April 1945 the theatre of war was nearing Salzburg, and the most important CIS documents were moved to Lower Bavaria in Germany, where they were stored at the Schloss Haidenburg near Aidenbach. Most of the remaining books were moved to Ramsau in Bavaria, while most of the unpublished papers and documents were

stored in a mine shaft at Wolf Dietrich Stollen, Hallein, near Salzburg.

The material held by the CIB was not evacuated from Berlin, and unfortunately most of it was destroyed in the fighting near the end of the war. Only about 600 books survived the bombs; they were removed by the British army and transported to Hamburg in 1946 and subsequently to London. It is possible that they were sent to the then Timber Research and Development Authority at Princes Risborough in England, but that library subsequently closed and the contents were sent to the Building Research Establishment at Watford. That institution, too, closed in about 2005 and at least some of the collection was taken to the Radcliffe Science Library in Oxford in 2010 (R. Mills, personal communication, 2010). It is unclear whether any of the original CIB documents survive today.

#### THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The post-war work of the CIS at Embsburg consisted of maintaining the library and reassembling the collection. Dr von Frauendorfer was responsible for tracking



Books in the CIS historic book collection

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down missing documents in the second half of 1945 and in 1946. He was only partially successful in this because parts of the collection had been lost in the chaotic conditions of its dispersal. He is reported to have recovered 16 boxes of documents.

The integrity of the headquarters of the CIS in Salzburg was fully respected by the American troops, into whose zone it fell after the war, but recognition of its international extraterritorial status was not granted. Nevertheless, the American military government and authorities gave high priority to the maintenance of the CIS and its book collection and agreed to pay the costs of maintaining the offices and the salaries of existing staff and three new staff members from mid-October 1945. The military government also agreed to the eventual incorporation of the CIS into the framework of the newly established United Nations specialized agency, FAO. Based on a resolution of the 16th General Assembly of the IIA, which convened

in Rome on 8–9 July 1946, the CIS was dissolved and its functions and assets integrated into FAO.

As a result of consultations between FAO (then based in Washington, DC) and CIS staff, the book collection was moved from Salzburg to the European office of FAO in Geneva, where a note in the CIS archives states that it was located in 1948. From there it was moved to the IIA in Rome and then to FAO when its headquarters were transferred to Rome in 1951.

FAO's David Lubin Memorial Library remains the home of the approximately 11 000 forestry-related books and journals in 21 languages salvaged from the CIS's original library. To a large extent, the value of this historic collection has been overlooked, perhaps because it is uncatalogued and therefore not easily accessible. In recent years, only Rubner (1997), Steinsiek (2008) and Johann (2009) have mentioned its existence in published papers. In 2007, Dr Elisabeth Johann

carried out an assessment, evaluation and partial cataloguing of the collection of old forestry books in German, which was followed by an exhibition of rare books at the 18th session of the Committee on Forestry held at FAO headquarters in Rome in 2007.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE OF THE COLLECTION

The CIS is important as the world's first international forestry organization (as opposed to a forest research organization such as IUFRO). It collected and disseminated publications in several languages and anticipated the role of FAO in forestry data collection and analysis by a decade. The history of the CIS, outlined here, shows that international cooperation within the scientific and forestry community began in the 1930s and continued even during the Second World War. Due to the war,

*The CIS historic book collection is housed securely in a controlled and fire-protected environment at FAO*



however, the CIS could not meet the high expectations of its founding members, in particular in the organization of international congresses and the development of international conventions related to forestry.

The legacy of the CIS is its surviving library collection, which contains materials published by the CIS and acquired by it. A considerable number of the books in the collection are valuable because of their age and rarity. Many are by famous authors and stem from the dawn of forestry as a science; arguably, some form the origin of the concept of sustainability. Others have continuing scientific value, and yet others are valuable for their artwork, containing beautiful illustrations and copperplate prints of plants and animals. Some are first editions and possibly the only remaining copies of ground-breaking documents (Johann, 2007, 2009). The books bear witness to an era in which traditional forest-related knowledge gained from field experience was replaced or complemented by the results and findings of scientific observations, and they also reflect the social and cultural values of earlier centuries. In short, the collection documents the world's first science-based attempts to sustainably manage renewable resources. It is an invaluable resource, not only for forest historians but also for those researching the development of the concept of sustainability and the origins of sustainable forest management.

Considering the extraordinary history of the books, the collection is in very good condition. It is housed securely in a controlled and fire-protected environment at FAO. Visiting researchers can gain access to it on request to the FAO David Lubin Memorial Library, Rome.

Making this important collection of books accessible to a wider audience in digital form would accord with FAO's mandate to disseminate information and knowledge. The cataloguing of the collection, which Dr Johann began in 2007, must be completed to comprehend its scope and content, after which indexing

and digitization of some of the more important volumes would allow universal online access and ensure that the collection has an enduring benefit for the global forestry community, well beyond the monetary value of the collection.

*An online exhibition of some items in the CIS collection can be accessed at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/73428043@N00/sets/72157603275242277/>.*

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The idea to explore the CIS collection first came from Dr Wulf Killmann, then Director of the Forest Products Division of the FAO Forestry Department, who, in 2007, engaged Dr Elisabeth Johann, Forest Historian at the Universität für Bodenkultur, Vienna, Austria, to make an assessment of the books stored in FAO. We borrowed heavily from her report in preparing this article and gratefully acknowledge both her work and Dr Killmann's initiative. We also thank Peter Csoka, Patricia Merrikin, Rachele Oriente and Harald Sutter for their valuable contributions. ♦



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