

First Timer's Guide to the ALHFAM Annual Meeting

Updated by Tom Kelleher, July 2010

Welcome to your first ALHFAM annual meeting! Usually about 1/3 of attendees are first timers like yourself; 1/3 more have been to a conference or two before; and the rest are seasoned veterans who attend most years. Many people cite networking as one of the best parts of the meeting. We hope that you find the people friendly and the program worthwhile. Like any event, it is what you make of it.

This is an overview of what to expect, where to go, and what to wear. More information is in the conference registration booklet, and on the ALHFAM website, www.alhfam.org. The conference organizers usually have contact information in the conference booklet if you have any additional questions. Don't be shy; if you have a question, ask it so that you can relax and better enjoy the conference!

Packing for the ALHFAM conference

Check the local weather forecast for the conference before you leave. Attire is less dressy than at most other professional conferences and typically ranges from t-shirts and jeans or shorts to business casual, depending on one's personality and profession. Bring a light jacket, comfortable walking shoes, rain gear, and a sun hat if you like. Also, please bring something to donate to the annual auction and for the "Salted, Smoked and Pickled" reception (see more below). Some also like to bring brochures from their site or business; there is usually a table for this literature.

Lodging

In an effort to make the conference affordable, sometimes dormitory lodging is offered, depending on what is available at or near the host site. Typically sheets, towel and washcloth are provided with dorm rooms, but check the registration booklet to be sure. Many dorm veterans bring their own fan, iron, alarm clock, clothes hangers, an extra pillow, soap, and shampoo. If you want/need fresh linens daily, toiletries, multiple towels, a television, private bath, better bed, or other such amenities, you might consider staying in a nearby hotel instead. The conference organizers can advise you as to local options. Only hotel lodging is available some years. Again, check the registration booklet for details and consider your own needs and budget.

Meals

Most meals during the conference are provided as part of your conference registration, ranging from simple but satisfying (e.g. most breakfasts) to fancy (e.g. the presidential banquet). Check the registration booklet for details.

Check-in

The registration table should be your first stop upon arrival. Conference staff will give you your name badge (please wear it!), final conference schedule, a list of participants, and other information. Depending on local arrangements, they might also check you into your lodging, or direct you where to do that. They can also answer routine questions such as where to find an ATM, convenience store, etc. Drop off your donation for the auction. If you brought brochures to make available to others, they can tell you where the literature table is located. After checking in, many like to settle into their room and review the schedule and other registration materials.

Workshops

Many people register for one or more professional development workshops before the official start of the conference, which may include focused trips or hands-on instruction. Pay attention to times and any recommendations in the workshop description. Dress comfortably for the weather and activity, and realize that you may get dirty if it is a hands-on workshop.

First-timers' reception

Please come to this official kick-off of the conference! This is an informal opportunity to meet your hosts for the conference, including the President of ALHFAM and the board of directors. Refreshments are provided. As with nearly all events at ALHFAM, wear whatever you like. This tends to be a very informal conference! This event segues right into . . .

“Salted, smoked and pickled” (the general opening reception)

If possible, bring your own or your region's food or beverage specialty to share. Old friends meet and greet, new friends are introduced, and everyone enjoys casual conversation and music over regional and local food and beverage specialties.

Hospitality suite

Usually there is a designated room for after-hours gathering, talking, music-playing, singing, and casual socializing. Sometimes other ad hoc gatherings also develop. Everyone is always welcome. Don't worry if you don't know anyone; just come in and introduce yourself! Some of the best friendships and contacts are formed after hours.

Keynote and sessions: The first full day

The conference proper typically begins with a greeting from the conference organizer at a plenary session, followed by important announcements about last minute changes and sundry reminders. A keynote address immediately follows. After that there is often a coffee break before a series of concurrent sessions held throughout the day. Read the schedule and session descriptions carefully to decide which are of the most interest to you. Some fill up fast so arrive early for a good seat. Presenters sometimes dress in business casual attire but others and most non-presenters dress comfortably for the climate.

The second day of sessions is similar to the first, with the annual business taking the place of the keynote address.

Meetings of the local regions and professional interest groups are also scheduled on these busy days.

Regional meetings

ALHFAM members are also automatically members of a geographical ALHFAM region. You should attend your regional meeting to learn what is going on in your area and help to plan its future meetings and activities.

Professional interest groups (PIGs)

Please attend and participate in the meeting of whichever group best matches your own personal or professional interests; there is no extra fee and everyone is welcome! You may notice that most “PIGs” have creatively themed acronyms. See www.alhfam.org or the back cover of the *Bulletin* for more information.

Vendors’ Room

Often a room is set aside for those who provide products and services of interest to ALHFAM members. Many enjoy perusing the offerings during breaks between sessions.

Auction

This ALHFAM fund-raiser is a great time with some terrific buys, and always entertaining! There are both live and silent auctions with something for everyone. Please bring a donation from your site to be auctioned off (e.g. a t-shirt, book, craft item, or gift basket). There are sundry traditions that long-timers will share with you if you ask, but the auctioneer usually explains the more cherished ones as they come up. Get your bidding number for \$1 at the door and prepare to stay for a while. Relax and enjoy! Beverages are available for purchase, sometimes with the first one or two complimentary. Proceeds support fellowships to future conferences.

Annual business meeting

ALHFAM is its members. The business meeting is the real reason for the conference, as a yearly meeting of the membership is required in the Bylaws. You should definitely attend and participate. It is an opportunity to get to know the leaders of the organization and the issues we face.

Presidential banquet

Many attendees choose to wear period clothing to this event. Modern attire is just fine as well, although nicer clothing (“business casual”) is recommended. Usually an address by the most recent Past President or the conferring of awards provides the after-dinner entertainment.

Tours and site visits

Usually the conference includes two days of sessions and one or two days of site visits and/or local tours. Be sure to check the schedule carefully. Wear comfortable shoes and clothes for site visits. Be sure to bring along everything you might need for the entire day, including rain gear and a camera. Some years a pick-up game of early baseball called Town Ball is organized on the visit to the host site, although sometime folks are too hot or tired to play. If there is a game, anyone is welcome to participate... or watch.

Plowing match

The plowing match, which occurs more or less annually, keeps the ALHFAMily close to its agricultural roots, and typically takes place during the visit to the host site. All are welcome to join in. Instructors are ready and willing to help anyone try their hand. There are categories and prizes for every skill level.

Closing banquet

The conference typically concludes with a dinner and dancing at the end of the visit to the host site. Most attendees then return to the conference headquarters and depart for home after breakfast the next morning.