Building a Library Collections in the 21st Century -
- If I Were Reborn as a Librarian Today

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Building Library Collections in the 21st Century — If I Were Reborn as a Librarian Today

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Those of us who are acquisitions and collection development librarians of a certain age have had to learn many new things in our professional careers. To begin with, everything that we now know about computers, most of it at least, was learned after and outside of library school. Some began, as I did, in nearly total precomputer librarianship. I actually learned elementary computer programming at Indiana University as part of the MLS curriculum. I had just completed my BA and I was fortunate to have Alan Pratt as an instructor in Introduction to Data Processing at IU as I began my MLS education. I learned important concepts that I find useful to this day. Older librarians, including some directors were in my class because they were getting their PhDs and this was the new thing and required for them to lead their libraries back home to be libraries of the future. I was actually born as an MLS degree librarian in August 1973. I went directly from my undergraduate degree to library school. I’m not as old as you might think.

Most of us have now worked with personal computers or Macs for decades as well as all of the basic and not so basic software that they run. We have been on the front lines of helping create, beta testing, and adopting early library systems and several generations of systems after them. We welcomed the library systems that automated many functions of acquisitions and serial control. We have bought and used numerous commercial databases, and created them ourselves. There are new things, materials and concepts coming along all the time. We strive to keep up with them.

As acquisitions librarians we have had to learn a lot more business and economics than was once the case. Buying books was once a gentlemanly pursuit. I happened to get the opportunity to work for a subscription service in Europe and one in the U.S., so I can claim real world business experience which at one time just didn’t happen. Working for serials businesses and learning the basic concepts of business was better education for what I do.
than what I learned in library school, considering
that absolutely nothing about acquisitions
was actually taught. Many times I thought that
some actual accounting classes would have
been helpful. I learned the hard way. What I
did, working in a library business, was some-
what groundbreaking at the time. I worked for
libraries before and after my business stint and
was able to put in perspective how businesses
operate and how libraries do. Licensing of non-
print library materials called “products” was a
concept unknown when I came out of library
school but a commonplace in acquisitions now.
Certainly a basic knowledge of contracts would
have been helpful to have had.

My first job was in a small, quaint public/research library called Willard Library
in Evansville, Indiana, my home town. It
is haunted and has a Ghost cam (http://www.
willard.lib.in.us/about_willard_library/ghost.
php).

Then I worked for a large county wide public library, Indianapolis-Marion County
Public Library System. They were vastly dif-
erent libraries, but the materials and methods
were not. No ghosts at IMCPL that I know
of. There were books, magazines, scholarly
journals standing orders, but mostly books at
both kinds of libraries. Granted there were
filmstrips in school libraries and a large film
collection (on reels) at IMCPL. Willard
had genealogical and historical research materi-
als that would make a great database. Book
cataloging still involved a typewriter and “see”
references. The magazines and journals were
checked in on Kardexes. We have come a long
way since those days. Library systems and the
databases that make accessible enormous col-
lections of primary research materials at one’s
fingertips are great improvements.

I started out as a cataloger — book in hand, Sears subject headings, Dewey classification,
and AACR II — and that’s it. I then changed
to other areas. Most catalogers however went
through the LC cards, OCLC, MARC and
numerous automated systems. Cataloging was
once seen as boring but has become the really
interesting area in my opinion

I had no idea of such a thing as metadata
until just a few years ago, or how dominant
it would become in libraries and in Technical
Services. Now it appears all the open positions
are for metadata librarians. Where I am we
have a wonderfully gifted and knowledgeable
Head of Cataloging and Metadata, Richard
Wisneski. He can manage the logistics of a
cataloging department, as well as be in the
forefront of the metadata world.

If I were reborn as a librarian today I
would be a Metadata Librarian. Metadata is the
growth industry in Technical Services, no
doubt about it. Competent metadata librari-
ans are revered. I have heard enough and
been in committees enough to know there are
standards, such as Dublin Core, encoding,
and collections of information from which the
metadata is extracted. I am not well versed
on much else in the field, but my colleague
Rich is. The specific information that follows
comes from him.

If you are not a metadata expert already, or
if you want to learn it the way it should have
been taught, if it could have been, the following
suggestions are as good as they come. Here
are links to some metadata standards that are
fairly well-known and useful to know for those
new to metadata.

1. Have a working knowledge of XHTML, CSS, XML, and XSLT.
2. Dublin Core Metadata Initiative: http://dublincore.org/. Be able to distin-

   guish between qualified and unqualified Dublin Core metadata.
3. Metadata Object Description
   Scheme (MODS): http://www.loc.
gov/standards/mods/
4. Metadata Encoding and Transmission
gov/standards/mets/
5. Encoded Archival Description
groups/ead/
6. Visual Resources Association
   Core (VRA): http://www.vraweb.org/proj-
ects/vracore/index.html

There are other metadata standards, but these are ones typically referenced. The main
point is for one to distinguish between adminis-
trative, descriptive, preservation, and structural
metadata. Also, it would help for someone
to have familiarity with metadata harvesting,
especially the Open Archives Initiative Prot-
ocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH),
digital library principles, and digital manage-
ment systems (e.g., CONTENTdm, Fedora,
and DSpace).

News Flash — Just In

I have just returned from the 2009 con-
ference of the OVGTSI, or Ohio Valley Group
of Technical Services Librarians, for those
few of you not familiar with the acronym. The
theme was “Opening doors, Opening Minds:
The Impact of Access and Open Source.” It
was held in Indianapolis, IN from May 6-8,
2009. This is only the second time in my career
I have attended this conference and both times
were excellent — I spoke at the first one I at-
tended, eight years ago — enough said. Two
specific presentations provided me with that
excitement I sought. I will pursue them in
some shape or form when I return to my library.
Both, however, involve pushing aside sacred
concepts of copyright and preserving old
cows for new cows.

The first keynote address was given by
Amy Beeg De Groff, Director of Information
Technology at Howard County Library,
Maryland. This presentation actually is the
title of the conference itself, and rightly so.
In 2005 when Amy Beeg De Groff went to
Howard County Library as the IT head, she
was working for the library she had known
since a child. (I did that too, and was chagrined
to find an unfinished summer reading map of
the states of Maryland in the children’s reading
room files. This is way off the subject)! Amy
Beeg De Groff had as her task the job of seeing
how much money she could save by using open
source methods. The result was that Howard
County Library does not use Windows for its
main operating system (70%), but is an Ubuntu
shop using GNU-Linux. All of the patrons and
60% of the staff use Ubuntu. Using Firefox,
which we do at my library, is important, but
using Ubuntu lets patrons into a huge world of
open source software. The patrons are happy,
the staff members are listened to and money
is saved. The speaker was amusing, inspiring
and truly excited about what she had done at
her library. She encouraged everyone to try
Ubuntu, and I am certain she would give infor-
mation and advice to anyone who contacted
her on this subject.

The second “wow” session for me was a
Concurrent session called “Tag Clouds: Are
User Generated Tags in Your Library’s Future?”
It was given by Barbara Albee a Lecturer at
Indiana University School of Information
and Library Science, and Marijke Visser,
finishing up an MLS at IU while also working
for ALA as a Policy Analyst in the Office
for Information and Technology Policy. The talk
explored the subject of tagging in general and
specifically “tag clouds,” which are related
clusters of tags. Tags are social Website users’
self-made descriptors for books, URLs, music,
photos, games, and other things. They are a lot
like keywords in libraryspeak.

Tag clouds can be visual depictions of
terms, larger font ones indicating much
use, smaller less use for example which show
frequency of use. A lot of new vocabulary was
engendered from this talk, for me, for
example folksonomy. One of the red flags for
some catalogers coming from the onset of this
phenomenon of social tagging and its possible
use in a library catalog is its complete unknow-
ning disregard for authority work. Who but a
cataloger knows about authority work? Both
presenters were excellent and were astonished
that they had an overflow crowd in their room.
I think many like me hadn’t a clue about a lot
of this and were intrigued and learned a lot. I
thought the tag clouds from Library Thing,
Authorstream and others looked like concrete
poetry which I studied as an undergraduate at
Indiana University. There are many refer-
ences in the library literature to Tag Clouds
and you could contact the presenters of this
talk who had an excellent PowerPoint pre-
sentation.

Here are a few social tagging Sites to
explore.

Delicious —— http://www.delicious.com
Flickr —— http://www.flickr.com
Library Thing —— http://www.librarything.com
CiteULike —— http://www.citeulike.org/
Connotea —— http://www.connotea.org
Digg —— http://www.digg.com/
ESP Game —— http://www.gwtap.com/
gwp/gamesPreview/espgame
Technorati —— http://www.technorati.
com/
YouTube —— http://www.youtube.co/
Wordle —— http://www.wordle.net/
Frassle —— http://www.frassile.org

82 Against the Grain / June 2009