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People Profile: Bernard F. Reilly

Editor

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able to provide long-term, free public access to information as well as libraries can.

Few government agencies have information access as a primary mission and even those that do face multiple barriers to assuring permanent, free access to usable digital information. The **National Archives** is a prime example. While **NARA** has an explicit mission of making records available “in perpetuity,” it is constrained by technology, budgets, and recalcitrant agencies. Put simply, it has too much to do and not enough funding to do it. In an honest attempt to deal with these realities, **NARA** is turning to the private sector to make information more readily available, effectively privatizing the public record. The **GPO** likes to claim that there has been “a paradigm shift in preservation of depository materials” but you will look in vain in the **GPO Access Act** of 1993 (107 Stat.112), on which it bases these claims, for the words “preservation” or “long-term” or “permanent.” There are good intentions, but no mandate; there are inadequate budgets and no guarantees. Even **GPO** recognized this in its early policies to implement this “paradigm shift” when it said it would maintain information online only “as long as usage warrants.”

Agencies that have information access as a secondary mission or provide information as a by-product of some other function will not have the inclination, ability, or budget to provide long-term access to their information. And, as the missions of agencies change or are split among new agencies, and as agencies are dissolved or subsumed by other agencies, information will be lost.

But even if one assumes that the government will eventually overcome these problems, there are still other problems. Chief among these is that no one can keep everything forever. Whether it is superseded information, out-of-date information, embarrassing information, expensive-to-keep information, or low-use information that no longer “warrants” keeping, *everyone* will weed something sometime. The question we should be asking is, “Who will be in charge of weeding?”

Society needs different libraries with different collections that respond to the needs of their user-communities (no longer necessarily geographically-based) when making decisions on the value of information. A society without digital libraries will be relying only on federal budget priorities and the market to decide what is worth keeping. Having different collections meeting the needs of different user-communities will better ensure preservation of the information that society as a whole needs. A law library will make different decisions than a medical library and both will make different choices than a library that caters to historians of science. This is a good thing. It builds robustness into preservation and access.

Finally, the e-government movement is reshaping government information policies to be more flexible and interactive. In practice, this means that government will value information transactions more than it values instantiating

against the grain people profile

Bernard F. Reilly

BORN AND LIVED: Born in Philadelphia, PA, lived in Washington DC (1977-1997); Chicago, IL (1997-present).

EARLY LIFE: Curator, art historian.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Research libraries and museums throughout.

FAMILY: Yes.

IN MY SPARE TIME: What spare time?

FAVORITE BOOKS: Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*; Coetzee, *Disgrace*; Franzen, *The Corrections*.

PET PEEVES: Don't get me started.

PHILOSOPHY: Cynic.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Growing CRL.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: A global CRL.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Research libraries will still provide essential support to academic research and teaching, but will have a smaller brick and mortar footprint. 🍄

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information in a preservable, re-usable form. Such changes will value current information, but will devalue “out-of-date” information. In such an environment, agencies will find it difficult, if not impossible, to justify preserving last year’s annual report, much less something from ten years or a hundred years ago.

Conclusion

For those who believe that information should just remain in the possession and control of producers and for those who view the Web as a virtual “library,” the idea of digital library collections naturally seems unnecessary and even anachronistic. For those who value long-term, free, public access to information, leaving control of information in the hands of those who will control use, limit access, and charge fees is anathema. If libraries choose to have no digital collections, it will almost certainly result in licensing constraints, **DRM** constraints, loss of information, loss of free access, loss of usability of information, and more.

Society needs institutions that select that

information that deserves preserving from the plethora of information that surrounds us; it needs institutions that then acquire, organize, and preserve that information and that provide trusted, free, privacy-respecting, secure access to and service for that information. Society needs institutions that have the complete mix of all of these roles as their primary mission (not a secondary mission or a by-product of publishing, or dissemination, or making money). In the case of government information in a participatory democracy it is particularly important, even essential, that society has such institutions. We call them libraries. 🍄

Endnotes

1. **Böhner, Dörte.** “Digital rights description as part of digital rights management: a challenge for libraries.” *Library Hi Tech* Vol. 26, no. 4 (2008): 598-605 (Accessed on March 20, 2009) <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/10.1108/07378830810920923Internet>.

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Jacobs points to the recommendation by the **Federal Depository Library Council** by the **GPO (Government Printing Office)** “prepare depository libraries for a digital Federal Depository Library system that is not centered on collections.” Says **Jacobs**, “The Council is suggesting that government depository libraries should focus on services *instead of* collections. ... it seems counter-intuitive to claim that the best

future we can imagine for libraries in the digital age is ‘libraries without collections.’ ... [And] ... it is not clear that government agencies have or should have the role that the Council wants for them. “I couldn’t agree more.

Continuing to speak of preservation. I think that we are heading down the wrong path if we totally discard paper for electronic and this article in the April 10, 2009, *Chronicle of Higher Education* gives us a small glimpse of why.

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