

November 2001

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Rodger (2001) "Public Prayers-The Reverant Wishes and Desires of A Public Library Collection Development Librarian,"  
*Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 5, Article 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3235>

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# Public Prayers: The Reverent Wishes and Desires of A Public Library Collection Development Librarian

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When I started my career in 1972, a solid periodical collection served as the core reference resource for most public libraries. Made accessible by the **Readers' Guide** and other specialized indices, a lengthy list of current paper subscriptions and a healthy backfile of indexed titles was like money in the bank. With smiles on our faces, we proudly led users needing information on the latest medical developments, companies and corporations, literary criticism, almost anything, to our indices, loose issues, bound volumes, and microforms. In the 1980s, and even into the 90s, as we tried to broaden and deepen the quality and quantity of information we were offering our community, our library added a wide variety of professional and research based journals in subject areas like business, engineering, and the sciences. Periodical rooms were the holy inner sanctums of public libraries. Obviously, times have changed.

The digital and Internet revolutions have changed everything. PCs now sit on every public service desk, offering our staff and patrons quick and easy access to a variety of general and specialized databases, plus a universe of subject specific Websites. These new electronic resources have proven to be accurate, reliable, and increasingly indispensable. Users are now unwilling to search through volumes of print indices, consult holdings lists, locate bound volumes, or load a reader-printer. Yet my public library, like many others, has maintained an impressive list of "important" print subscriptions. Cabinets continue to fill up with microforms. Because our collections contain fewer research journals, we have not faced the budget crises that have struck academic libraries. And the willingness of so many public library funding sources to provide additional monies for electronic resources has allowed us to ignore the growing irrelevancy of our large general research periodical collections. But even my relatively well funded institution can no

longer afford to provide a wide variety of electronic resources and a comprehensive print periodical collection.

In the upcoming months our Periodicals and Reference Staffs will be doing a title by title review of our periodicals collection. **Our goals are:**

1. Establish a core collection of titles which are essential to the cultural and intellectual record of our community. We will maintain current subscriptions, print or microfilm backfiles, and provide electronic access. Included in this collection will be titles such as **Time**, **Scientific American**, **Business Week** and specialized titles of local importance like the **Journal of Southern History**.
2. Establish a secondary collection of specialized subject-related titles of interest to our community, like the **Journal of Accountancy** or the **Journal of Educational Research**, for which we will try to establish some degree of electronic access. We will not maintain current print subscriptions or any backfiles to these titles. We believe that our access to subject related Websites and our online periodical databases will provide us with adequate resources to respond to infrequently asked questions about the subjects covered by these publications. We will be willing to pay for electronic access not included in any of our current databases to only a limited number of these titles. We will also consider various document delivery and pay per view solutions to requests for the specialized information covered by these titles. We are not retreating from any commitment to respond to the legitimate and important research, analysis, and opinions contained in these publications. We just will no longer collect and accumulate their physical volumes.
3. Establish a browsing collection of popular leisure reading titles with current subscriptions and backfiles limited to one or two

years of unbound print issues. Again, we trust our online periodical database and subject specific Websites to fill any needs we have for electronic access to and archiving of these titles.

In the end I do not foresee a significant reduction in our current subscriptions budget. We plan to roll any savings realized from the cancellation of marginal research titles into new subscriptions for leisure and hobby titles. I do hope that there will be a large reduction in our microfilm budget. But the most important result of all this effort will be a more responsible, realistic periodicals collection. Our collection will be a true archive of the print core intellectual record of our community. Our staff will be tending and caring for only items essential to that record. For everything else, in electronic we trust.

So these days as I fade in to sleep, I find myself praying for:

- Periodicals and Serials Librarians everywhere! God bless them and multiply their numbers. May they have always the knowledge, wisdom and patience to straighten the crooked and maximize accessibility in all their wonderful ways.
- Peace, love and cooperation among publishers, aggregators, database vendors. Please, can't you all just get along together and produce stable, consistent databases on which we can depend. We desperately need to be able to base our planning and budgeting on a stable title list.
- Simple, universal patterns of access to individual electronic subscriptions.
- Publishers, if you provide it and we have paid for it, why does it have to be so hard?
- The continuing patience, common sense, and good advice of our basic periodical vendors everywhere. Here's to the good old fashion subscription agent. Long may they live! 🌸

## Drinking From The Firehose from page 88

ticides, or more recently - stem cell research). Often the so-called "solution" has unexpected side effects that compromise the situation. The **Library of Congress's** attempt at mass deacidification is a perfect case in point. No one faults them for trying to solve the problem, but once it became clear that the solution (DEZ) was worse than the problem, they needed to back off when instead they persisted. Another historical solution offered in Baker's book, the use of mummy linen wrappings as a substitution for linen and cotton rags to make paper, whether a joke, a myth or a fact, totally con-

vinced me that people are industrious beings who will come up with totally surprising ways to solve problems. It's great, isn't it? Well... sometimes not. Somebody had to come up with the insidious methods that achieved the efficient genocide tactics during World War II, and they applied their talents and creativity eagerly to that task. Just because a solution to a problem is found, that does not mean it is good for the planet.

You may wonder why I am focused on these ideas. What it comes down to is this: we need to be thinking in a big picture kind of way. Has the World Wide Web solved anything or simply added to the complexities of our lives? How DO we capture the valuable content that resides there?

How do we keep the electronic content we're

creating? Will anyone care if we do? Are the solutions being developed now going to make any difference in the future?

I think it's all bigger than us, today and in the future, and we have to be savvy enough to know that. Far too often our leaders make pronouncements that something recently developed will solve all our problems regarding [fill in the blank] and we know, yes, we KNOW, that is NOT TRUE.

And so, I ask you to read **Nicholson Baker's** book, regardless of what you think of his premises, his writing style or his credentials. So many of my colleagues have dismissed **Doublefold** out of hand, mostly because of the library media hype (mostly negative) and the

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