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## Curating Collective Collections -- Prospectus for a New ATG Column

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# Curating Collective Collections — Prospectus for a New ATG Column



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Cooperative management and development of collections are an elusive holy grail of librarianship. Many approaches have been tried from realizing the promise of collectively offering physical and intellectual access to a broader scope of resources than is possible individually, to cooperating in ensuring the long-term preservation of the record, and to systematically helping each other save space and contain costs. Today the availability of digital surrogates for an ever-increasing proportion of the materials in our general collections is re-framing this noble aspiration, asking us to consider: can we collectively manage our print general collections more cost-effectively as a formal, national shared resource than is possible by continuing to manage them as individual, isolated collections informally knit together by a loose patchwork of retention and resource-sharing agreements?

Equipped with new technology and nascent examples of radical collection cooperation, and motivated by the most serious economic pressures in generations, libraries appear to be on the cusp of an ambitious move towards cooperative collection management at a national scale.

“Shared print archiving” and “collective collections” are the terms currently in use to describe the move towards a national network of collective print collections. They are used interchangeably to denote carefully coordinated efforts among libraries to reduce the footprints of their on-campus general collections by withdrawing redundant print holdings in favor of secure digital access, within the context of regional and national schemes for sharing systematically archived print copies of these materials. For background on this movement, check out the November 2010 issue of *ATG* (v.22#5) for a special feature on shared print archiving edited by **Roger Schonfeld** with six very useful articles, including profiles of some promising early initiatives, e.g., **WEST, UK Research Reserve, Association of Southeastern Research Libraries**.

The aims of this new bi-monthly column — **Curating Collective Collections** — are to keep librarians current with issues and developments in shared print archiving, and to broaden the conversation about how we can collectively and thoughtfully re-select (and de-select) and care for our massive print general collections for which digital surrogates exist. Articles will focus on emergent efforts to ensure preservation of and access to a sufficient number of print copies regionally and nationally of materials withdrawn locally, i.e., *curating collective collections*. Yes, the word *curating* is overused today, but for reasons I’ll outline in a future piece, it fits the bill.

Each article will present both news and commentary on the growing movement to collectively curate our print collections in the national interest. News from the field will include reports on programs, best practices, publications, and professional development opportunities. Commentary will explore the nature of the safety net being fashioned today

to ensure that mistakes are not made that we will regret tomorrow. Some articles will report and comment on the emerging infrastructure — technical and institutional — designed to manage what promises to be an unprecedented level of resource sharing and interdependence. Others will offer advice and perspective on thoughtfully managing collections locally within the framework of regional and national initiatives to curate collective collections.

The pieces in this column will be journalistic rather than research-based in approach. In keeping with *ATG*’s editorial style, the news will be fresh and eclectic, and the articles lively and often provocative. While I will write some of the articles myself, many will be co-authored or written by others. Perhaps you’d like to propose a piece?

This introductory article provides an outline of issues in shared print archiving for those new to the conversation, and suggests the range of possible topics for future articles. This is a far broader scope than one small column can possibly cover, **so you, dear reader, are invited to participate in shaping this column today by suggesting three topics for articles over the coming year**. Keep this in mind as you peruse this outline of the many complex and challenging facets of *re-developing*<sup>1</sup> our collections as collectively curated, shared resources.

## Premises

The following underlying assumptions provide the seemingly inexorable impetus to shared collections, and to more radical collaboration generally:

- U.S. academic libraries hold about 1 billion print volumes and are growing at a rate of 25 million print volumes per year;
- budgetary constraints are forcing libraries to reduce their staff and physical footprints, branch libraries are closing, and there is pressure to convert high value central campus collection storage space to user services space;
- most academic libraries, including the 80+ high-density storage facilities, are already at or are quickly approaching storage capacity;
- increasing reluctance to build more space for books;
- about 6% of print holdings account for 80% of print circulation<sup>2</sup>;
- digital surrogates are available for a significant and growing portion (e.g., median duplication rate between HathiTrust corpus and ARL libraries is at 45%<sup>3</sup>) of the contents of an academic library; making it unnecessary to retain redundant copies of lesser used print materials;
- the annual cost of central campus storage and preservation of print is much higher than the cost of digital storage.<sup>4</sup>

Are these assumptions sound? What are we not thinking about as we move towards irreversible collective action as a long-term strategy for addressing these challenges?

## Promises

What promises will libraries make to their constituents as they move to realize cost-savings by sharing their print storage, keeping only several copies nationally or regionally and withdrawing redundant print holdings? Our long-term promises to society should include:

- Long-term preservation of and access to a sufficient number of complete versions of our print and digital cultural heritage of books and journals to meet national needs for generations to come;
- There will be tangible benefits for library users, including sophisticated discovery systems offering improved intellectual access and delivery options, and that address ever-changing expectations for new approaches to pedagogy and research, such as support for new forms of serendipitous discovery, for social learning/networked intelligence, and print-on-demand.
- A robust, nationally coordinated service program that provides friction-free, instantaneous delivery of digital texts and speedy delivery of print originals when needed;
- A sustainable trust network that guarantees each participating institution will uphold its commitments to the national trust over many generations.

Can we deliver on these promises? Who will coordinate and support an ambitious national cooperative program, and how? How can we guarantee enduring discovery of and access to sufficient print copies once we have discarded the redundant holdings?

## Programs and Partnerships

Operationalizing the conceptual shift from curating local collections to conducting collection management as a system-level collaborative effort will require a range of local, regional, and national programs. These must be carefully knit into a coherent whole. The initial building blocks of a nationally coordinated program are under development today in programs that will be profiled, and articles will track developments such as:

- Evolving archiving models, such as:
  - Optimizing and managing existing high density storage facilities to serve as nodes in a national collection;
  - Establishing new centralized facilities, for dark and light storage, based on risk management parameters;
  - Distributed archiving, or “archiving in place.”
- Regional business and governance

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- models, and ownership and retention agreements;
- Regional and national service models that build on and extend existing resource-sharing capacity;
- Policy-based leadership structures to shape and coordinate a national infrastructure for collective action that engender trust among the regional partners, operate on sustainable budget models for shared investment in a shared collection, and provide mechanisms for governance, commitment, and risk management in the national interest;

What are the most promising elements of existing programs and partnerships, what are their deficiencies, and what models (inside and outside academia) can we learn from in fashioning a national trust/collective collection? What roles will liberal arts colleges, public and special libraries play in shaping collective collections?

### Collection Models and Curatorial Practices

Creating collective collections will require us to extend, strengthen and re-imagine our traditional collection management and cooperative collection development models and practices, including:

- Models for shaping collective collections, e.g.,:
  - Publisher-based collections
  - Discipline, domain, or area studies-based collections
  - Format or genre-based collections
  - Geographic-based collections
- Collection analysis and decision support software;
- Developing and applying selection and risk management criteria;
- Optimal number of copies to retain based on risk and disciplinary differences/needs; robust “last copy” agreements.
- Synchronizing digital preservation and print preservation across multiple collective collections;
- Assessing condition and completeness (validation standards) of materials retained;
- Policies and options for disposition of materials withdrawn;
- Developing relationships between commitments for print archiving and for prospective collection development.

How do we work together to ensure a conscious, thoughtful and careful process of curating collective collections to ensure that mistakes are not made? What methods, best practices and cooperative strategies are emerging, and how well are they working?

### Infrastructure

Accomplishment of the above-mentioned essential activities to achieve responsible cre-

ation and stewardship of a collective collection will require a robust set of infrastructure elements, such as:

- Nationally adopted and uniformly applied protocols for disclosure of
  - holdings of journals and other materials in series,
  - retention commitments,
  - copy-level usage data, and
  - holdings of the nation’s high-density storage facilities;
- Registry of print archives repositories;
- Certification of reliability of print and digital repositories;
- Systems to ensure privacy of users and avoid unwanted surveillance;
- Malleable text, i.e., provision of digital content that can be “skimmed,” underlined, and excerpted;
- Easy access to print-on-demand;
- Resolution of copyright (e.g., orphan works) and other intellectual property issues related to use and management of shared collections.

### Challenges and Perils

The profession must guard against a temptation to sweep difficult issues under the carpet in a rush to address short-term pressures. As a form of collective risk management analysis, a number of nettlesome issues and concerns inherent in shared print archiving must be aired forthrightly, even when there are no definitive answers. Among the issues are:

- There is a tension between access and archiving goals. For example, for materials “archived in place” (i.e., “distributed archiving” or commitment retention agreements to retain materials in open stacks), what are the risks of inherent in these copies serving both access and archiving purposes, and how are these risks mitigated? Similarly, as the number of print copies in the nation shrinks, the remaining copies of some items may accrue considerable value, making them vulnerable to theft;
- Some libraries may succumb to the temptation to conduct stealth weeding and transfer operations because it seems easier than dealing with stakeholders. How can we structure constructive campus conversations to listen to concerns and learn from advice and perspective from stakeholders in the scholarly record?
- What mistakes might we make as we “manage down” our local collections and rely increasingly on a national collective collection? What missteps have we already made on this path, and what can we learn from them?
- Over a period of centuries, how vulnerable and reliable is a system wholly dependent on uninterrupted electrical supply?
- Concentration of valuable scholarly assets in a few locations is counter to the principle that “lots of copies keep stuff safe.”

140,000 E-BOOKS  
Out of Print Searching  
Paperback Binding  
Pre-Processing

Books  
5 million item database  
Attentive Customer Service  
Foreign books/media  
Courteous and Professional Sales Force  
FedEx Ground Shipping  
OCLC WORLD CAT PARTNER  
Green Practices

Visit us on the beautiful Seneca Lake Wine Trail  
Visit us on the beautiful Seneca Lake Wine Trail  
Visit us on the beautiful Seneca Lake Wine Trail

EDI/FTP Interface with all ILS Systems

Customized Collection Development Lists  
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- In making this conceptual and operational shift, are we vulnerable to a “present-mindedness” that is based on the present obsession of our culture — digital access — that may upset an essential balance among the communication forms on which we rely?
- Worries about disposition of materials that only accrue historical value years after they

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are published, for example public library materials such as self-help books, popular fiction and biography, etiquette, and other genres that later become invaluable sources for cultural historians.

- What if we start down this road but find part-way there that the political will and/or financial resources necessary to do the job well are not forthcoming?

### Other Big Questions

Another facet of **Curating the Collective Collection** will be thoughtful essays wrestling in a public forum with some of the larger questions attendant to this remarkable conceptual and operational shift from managing individual institutional collections to reliance on a cooperatively curated, shared national collection. Some of obvious questions include:

- What is the political economy of a national shared collection? Who will own and have access to materials? What are the long range cost and power implications of the structures we establish for sharing? Who might be left out? Will shared print archiving ameliorate or exacerbate inequitable access to scholarly materials?
- How can we build sustainable trust networks that will endure for generations?

- How do we coordinate shared print archiving nationally and internationally?
- What existing models outside librarianship and higher education might inform the development of the social and technical infrastructure?
- What voices outside librarianship need to be heard and what ideas and concerns need to be grappled with as we systematically and strategically (or not!) “drawdown” “redundant” library holdings?

### Invitation to Participate

While those already active in shared print archiving will read and contribute to this column, a primary purpose is to engage a broader spectrum of librarians in thinking about and discussing these issues. You are invited to help shape this column by:

- Offering opinions, ask questions and suggest topics for articles. **Remember, please send me a note now suggesting three topics you’d like to see covered in the year ahead.**
- Proposing to write or co-author articles on relevant issues about which you are passionate and knowledgeable.
- Commenting on and contributing to a possible **Curating the Collective Collection** blog.

Stay tuned and be in touch! 🌱

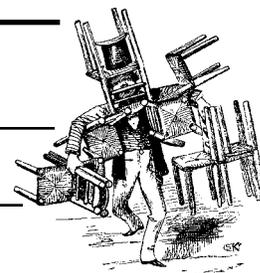
### Endnotes

1. Thanks to **Bob Kieft** of **Occidental College** for this apt turn of phrase.
2. OhioLINK Collection Building Task Force, **Julia Gammon** and **Edward T. O’Neill**. 2011. *OhioLINK–OCLC Collection and Circulation Analysis Project 2011*. Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-06r.htm>
3. **Constance Malpas**, *Cloud-sourcing Research Collections: Managing Print in the Mass-digitized Library Environment* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2011), p. 66 <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-01.pdf> reported a rate of 31%, which has now increased to 45% as announced by **John Wilkin** at the **HathiTrust Constitutional Convention** on October 8, 2011.
4. **Courant, Paul N.** and **Matthew “Buzzy” Nielsen**, “On the Cost of Keeping A Book,” in *The Idea of Order: Transforming Research Collections for the 21st Century Scholarship*. CLIR Publication no. 147, June 2010.

## Collecting to the Core — Financial Crises

by **Peter Z. McKay** (Business Librarian, University of Florida Libraries; Economics Subject Editor, *Resources for College Libraries*) <pzmckay@uflib.ufl.edu>

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**Column Editor’s Note:** *The “Collecting to the Core” column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the Resources for College Libraries bibliography (online at <http://www.rchweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD*

**“Money will not manage itself, and Lombard Street has a great deal of money to manage.” — Walter Bagehot, Lombard Street<sup>1</sup>**

In 1873 the British journalist, political commentator, and economist **Walter Bagehot**, the long-time editor of *The Economist*, published *Lombard Street: A Description of the Money Market*.<sup>2</sup> At the time, London was the financial capital of the world and Lombard Street — home to the Bank of England, private banking houses, joint stock banks, and bill brokers — was the epicenter of finance, much like today’s Wall Street. **Bagehot’s** book was based on a series of essays published in *The Economist* beginning in the 1850s. In addition to a lively portrait of the contemporary money market and leading personalities in mid-nineteenth century London, the book forcefully argued that the Bank of England must play the key role of *lender of last resort* in stemming a banking panic. Today, *Lombard Street* is widely regarded

as the original crisis management manual for central banks. This essay discusses some of the fundamental works covering modern financial crises, from nineteenth-century Lombard Street to twenty-first century Wall Street.

Founded in 1694 to finance the War of the League of Augsburg against France, the Bank of England grew to become the de facto issuer of British currency and the country’s central bank. In addition to its role as the government’s bank, it became the bankers’ bank and the keeper of Great Britain’s currency and reserves, colloquially coined “The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street.” When the **British Parliament** officially established the gold standard in 1821, the Bank of England was required to redeem all of its notes in gold on demand. In contrast to today’s “fiat money” system whereby money

has value based on government decree and is intrinsically useless, the Bank of England’s ability to create money was restricted since new note issues had to be backed by gold. For a comprehensive history of gold and its role as both an economic unit and a mythologized object of human desire, see financial historian **Peter Bernstein’s** *The Power of Gold: A History of an Obsession*.<sup>3</sup> While the Bank of England performed many public functions, such as establishing the gold-backed legal tender and purchasing government bonds, it remained privately owned. There was an inherent conflict between its role as a private institution whose primary constituency was its shareholders and its public role to promote financial stability. In a crisis, the key question was whether the Bank of England would preserve the wealth of its private shareholders or help rival banks in order to preserve the public financial system. The nineteenth century saw frequent, frightening financial crises that intensified this tension. As **Carmen Reinhart** and **Kenneth Rogoff** chronicle in *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, the United Kingdom alone experienced banking crises in 1810, 1815, 1825, 1837, 1847, 1857, and 1866.<sup>4</sup>

These frequent financial crises highlight how the banking system functions as a con-

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