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Oregon Trails--Out of Sight, Out of Mind

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And They Were There from page 63

Jill Grogg (The University of Alabama Libraries); **Jonathan Harwell** (Rollins College); **Michael Levine-Clark** (University of Denver); **Robert H. McDonald** (Indiana University); **Rebecca Seger** (Oxford University Press)

Sessions: Panel 1- Ebooks: Key Challenges, Future Possibilities
— Presented by **Michael Levine-Clark** and **Rebecca Seger**;

Panel 2 -Transitioning from Legacy Systems to Cloud Infrastructure — Presented by **Jill Grogg** and **Robert McDonald**;

Panel 3 - Lightning Round: Alternative Serial Distribution Models for Libraries — Presented by **Jonathan Harwell** and **Jim Bunnelle**; **Depth Perception in Academic Libraries: A Two-Dimensional Model** — Presented by **Rick Anderson**

NOTE: Advanced registration was required for this limited seating session.

Reported by: **Ramune K. Kubilius** (Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library) <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>

The 2014 conference featured some changes affecting Saturday afternoon programming that for many years concluded with a Rump Session. In 2014 a “registration required” event called “Charleston Seminar” was offered after the concluding conference sessions. Begun first with a buffet lunch, the session started with an introduction by moderators **Watkinson** and **Arthur** and proceeded into a two-hour session that incorporated a list of speakers (some speaking in tandem) invited to talk outside the box and engage attendees in discussions. As happens with experiments and innovations, a few bumps were likely not anticipated in planning this session. For example, it turned out that not all of the speakers (and attendees as well) were able to commit for

the whole time block, so there was a “Grand Central Station” feel to the session. Still, during their allotted times speakers made interesting observations and proposals about key challenges and best practices. **Levine-Clark** and **Seger** ably overviewed key challenges of eBooks: multiple models, platform sustainability concerns, libraries’ core value aims regarding permission to loan, preservation, and course adoption. One conclusion? We need more publisher and library communication. **Harwell** and **Bumelle** likewise provided an interesting landscape view of serials: the shifting role of serial vendors, article level acquisition, supply, revenue and pricing, discovery standards. One audience member made the apt observation that the ArchiX repository (in physics) has become the communication vehicle while journals have become the archive. **McDonald** talked about some decision points for libraries of moving to the cloud and **Grogg** talked about negotiating change (“If it’s not terrifying, it isn’t true change”) and suggested that we should be modern day samurai (utilizing “ordered flexibility”). **Anderson** concluded with observations taken from his article “Depth perception in academic libraries: a two-dimensional matrix model.” He offered spatial and temporal vectors and questions which we can ask ourselves to properly position the missions (and quadrants) of our host institutions, the library’s, and our preferences and inclinations in order to see how they align. In essence, the three choices he offered were: stay and sublimate (stay and work to change), try to undermine, or leave. For 2015 and beyond, the **Charleston Conference** planning committee will have some choices to make after examining and evaluating the 2014 Saturday afternoon session and how successfully this type of session does (or doesn’t quite) fit into the larger conference ecosystem. 🐻

Well this completes the reports we received from the 2014 Charleston Conference. Again we’d like to send a big thank you to all of the attendees who agreed to write short reports that highlight sessions they attended. Presentation material (PowerPoint slides, handouts) and taped session links from many of the 2014 sessions are available online. Visit the Conference Website at www.charlestonlibraryconference.com. — KS

Oregon Trails — Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Column Editor: **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Retired, Eugene, OR 97404) <oskibear70@gmail.com>



“I told you so,” I said to no one in particular as I read the front page story in the September 23, 2015 issue of the *New York Times*. It did my heart good. “The Plot Twist: E-Book Sales Slip, and Print Is Far From Dead”

For decades the death of the book has been predicted with great certainty and almost gleefully, as if we were about to be freed from oppression. One of those false prophets, an innovative leader in library automation, was sure that the book would be gone by the 1990s. Project Gutenberg, a crude data-input method of creating electronic texts (they aren’t really books, are they, these digital pretenders?) seemed to be showing the way. **Google** followed with its senseless (but monetarily driven) and still necessarily crude scanning method devoid of consistent quality control as it attempted to digitize every book in the world, aided and abetted by librarians who should have known better, fair use or not as the courts would have it. Was it a fool’s errand? There was no quality control over the digitizing but also no quality assessment of what ought to be digitized. Everything in print was equal even though we know it isn’t. Who are we to judge? I hear the naysayers now but just as publishers do not publish every manuscript sent to them,

knowledgeable librarians do not order every book that is published and would not even if they had the money and space to do so. We are educated in order to exert critical judgements — critical as in critical thinking, that too elusive beast that all colleges promise to teach.

I feel vindicated as I think about the future of the codex, the print book, and about the eBook as an alternative to that perfect technology. As the *New York Times* story suggests, at least for now, the eBook is just that, an alternative, one to be used for certain books and certain times, and not a substitute for the real thing. I can think of a couple of reasons why interest in digital books has abated and why print books will remain the dominant form for many years to come, if not forever, and certainly within my lifetime.

There have been many improvements since those early digitized books made available by **Project Gutenberg** and **Google**. eBooks became digitally-born, and with the advent of the **Kindle** and the **Nook** devices and dirt cheap prices, reading eBooks on those devices became cool and an ostentatious way to announce that one was an early adopter. Why lug that heavy, ungainly paperback aboard an airplane, when you could carry hundreds of

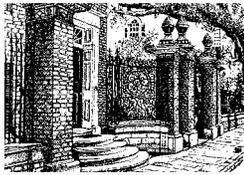
eBooks on one slender, lightweight device? It sounded appealing in concept and the design of the apparatus was appealing, too. But you can read only one book at a time, even though those hundreds or so volumes are available while your print library is 30,000 feet below and many miles away. Ironically, those very devices are themselves somewhat threatened by applications loaded onto smart phones and tablet computers.

I never bought a **Kindle** or a **Nook**, but I have both applications on an iPad mini and have downloaded several books for each app. I have even read several of those books, mostly German language Krimis (mysteries) that were not readily available in the U.S. A large selection of titles is available now for all varieties of electronic readers so I could, in fact, find reading material appealing to me, but reading books (I hesitate to call those collections of pixelated words books) on an electronic device is not really enjoyable, even though it can be fun flipping the pages and wondering how it does that. If I had the appropriate reader, I could presumably mark my place and annotate certain passages that I want to go back to but pleasant experience or not, what was I to do

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Despite what some people might call hoarding but I call collecting (I am a reader and a bibliophile and cannot, by definition, be a hoarder simply because I accumulate books in the hundreds), I am constantly winnowing my library as interests change, for some of my collections are ephemeral by design. I give an increasing variety of books to one of my grandsons and occasionally to others when I know there is interest. I sell or trade what

I can to a couple of favorite booksellers, and I donate the rest to **St. Vinnie's**, my favorite charitable organization. Despite such thinning, I am chronically short of shelf space and stack and double shelve books just to keep them off the floor, but not off desks and tables.

I am a bibliophile; therefore, I collect books. My book shelves are lined with good intentions but I have more books than I could ever begin to read. I don't belong to Bibliophiles Anonymous because, even if there were such an organization, I don't want to kick my habit.

eBooks? Sure, they are inexpensive and easy to download, but are they handsomely bound (photos of dust jackets and covers don't count)? Can I download a signed or inscribed first edition? What about a finely printed and bound, numbered and signed book by a favorite author? I can't download a second-hand copy with a certain provenance and some marginalia that somehow binds me to a stranger with whom I share a common interest, be it subject or author.

I would like to think that when I am gone, as we all must go, my grandson will have kept some of the books that I have shared with him. He'll be sitting near a book case and his eyes will settle on *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*, for example. He will take it off the shelf, blow real or imaginary dust off the top edge, open it, and remember, as he begins reading, that his grandfather had enjoyed that very same copy.

He'll smile and suggest to one of his children or grandchildren that he or she might enjoy a vicarious adventure on the high seas and hand the book on to another generation.

I wonder how many of those downloaded books ever get read, never mind about getting rid of them. Out of sight, out of mind. The few eBooks that I have on my readers just sit there or do whatever 1s and 0s and pixels do when no one is watching.

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As I write this, I look around my small, book-filled office. Two of my book cases have to be moved soon to allow workers access when replacing one of my windows. I will be boxing several hundred volumes, carefully handling each one, so it will likely be a slow process. I'll hate to see them disappear, but on the bright side, I can look forward to unpacking them, light streaming though my new window, as I lovingly re-assemble that part of my library and feel the room warm with their renewed presence. 🐾