February 2017

A Vision for an Integrated System for Open-Access Regional Publishing

Sanford G. Thatcher

Penn State University Pres, sgt3@psu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

A Vision for an Integrated System for Open-Access Regional Publishing

by **Sanford G. Thatcher** (Former Director, Penn State University Press) <sgt3@psu.edu>

*Abstract: This essay explores the potential for building a system for open-access regional publishing from the ground level of local historical societies and public libraries working with citizens in their area, up through a state university library and press collaborating on publication of scholarly research in books and journals, onto the national level of the **Digital Public Library of America**, and eventually worldwide. The idea is based on experience in running the Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing at **Penn State University**.*

Keywords: regional publishing / open access / DPLA / ODSP / Penn State / enhanced ebooks

I have a dream — well, not so grandiose and significant as the one **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, talked about in his famous speech of August 1963, but a dream nonetheless for the betterment of advancing knowledge in the U.S. first of all but in the whole world eventually.

I focus on university presses located at state universities because they have an extra mission that goes beyond the mission that all presses have of "disseminating knowledge — far and wide," to quote the classic phrase of **Daniel Coit Gilman** in setting up **The Johns Hopkins University Press** in 1878. Besides publishing scholarly works in fields where it has chosen to concentrate, a state university press must make some effort toward serving the citizens of the state in which it operates. This mission may take the form of special book series that publish writings, usually for a more general audience than the main scholarly list serves, about the art, culture, economics, environment, history, literature, and social life of the state and even the region of the country where the state is located. These books are often nonfiction, but some presses also venture into publishing fiction and poetry of a regional orientation and into reference book publishing as well, as the presses at Georgia and North Carolina have done with their state encyclopedias.[1] Those presses that publish journals may also include one or more focusing on their states, as we did at **Penn State University Press** with our *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*.[2] Presses at private universities may do some publishing about their own schools' history or even that of the cities in which they reside, but rarely venture more widely into what has come to be known as "regional publishing." **Rutgers**, for instance, is where regional publishing is done in New Jersey, not Princeton.

Regional publishing has its own special challenges and advantages. Among the obvious challenges are a market restricted mostly to one part of the country and a distribution system that goes well beyond the libraries (public or academic) and retail bookstores to include, for example, general stores in towns throughout the state and sometimes even high schools. Often successful marketing will require a staff member traveling to customers that are seldom served by private university presses. One offsetting advantage, however, is that the books published for regional audiences include popular items like bird guides, cookbooks, novels, photography, poetry, and reference works that can sell to the mass public often in considerable quantities, thus providing a nice return on investment the surplus from which can be used to help subsidize more low- and slow-selling academic titles. And these books can command more attention in the local media than mainstream academic books can usually do. The *Dallas Morning News*, for example, regularly commissions reviews of books issued by the numerous university presses in Texas.

But the dream I have cannot be realized by the traditional print-oriented publishing model university presses have used for nearly a century and a half now. It requires taking full advantage of modern computer technology and the Internet and can probably only be realized completely with an open-access (OA) approach, or so I will argue. My argument will be built upon experience I had as director of **Penn State University Press** when we joined with the Libraries to set up a jointly operated Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing (ODSP) in 2005.[3]

It was my ambition from the start of the ODSP to have it used, in part, as a platform to advance regional publishing. Before I retired in mid-2009 we had realized some portions of that plan, such as the Metalmark Series of books in the public domain about Pennsylvania housed in the Libraries' Beaver Collection. A panel of advisers, including at least one professor from the History Department and one general writer of popular books about the state whether affiliated with the University or not, was appointed to select a half-dozen titles each publishing season, which would then be digitized by the Libraries in such a way as to make the files useful not only for on-screen viewing but for issuing as "print-on-demand" books in paperback through Lightning Source as the POD vendor. This was a mixed OA/POD model, which was patterned on the model pioneered by the **National Academies Press (NAP)**, which began posting all of its books for free viewing on its website beginning in the mid-1990s.[4] Income derived from sale of the POD paperbacks was split equally between the Press and the Libraries. The ODSP site also included access to back issues of Pennsylvania newspapers, which were digitized with funding from the **National Endowment for the Humanities**, and back issues of the main scholarly journals about Pennsylvania history including, besides the Press's own journal, the highly regarded *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* and *Western Pennsylvania History*.[5] The Libraries also housed the Pennsylvania Center for the Book, which among its most popular innovations was a digital Literary and Cultural Map of Pennsylvania.[6] As the site advertises, "On the map you'll find writers of novels, plays, short stories, technical manuals, legislation, children's literature, just about anything you could imagine connected to writing. We have used this geographic method of organizing our authors to show the breadth of places in Pennsylvania that have fostered the writers of the state, not only our greatest cities, but the rural hamlets in the mountains and every place in between."

With all of these rich resources already in place, I had hoped to go an extra step or two. The vision was to build a digital network in Pennsylvania starting from the ground up all the way to the state level, and then beyond to the national and eventually international. At the lowest level public libraries would cooperate with local historical societies to reach out to citizens in the area who might have family or business correspondence and records in their possession as well as personal items like diaries and memoirs. Citizens would be encouraged to rummage through their attics and closets to locate such documents and consult with local history experts and public librarians in order to determine which might be of most value to society generally and which, therefore, might deserve to be digitized — a task that, with proper local funding, might be carried out by the library or historical society or both. Such a collection, once established, could then be made known to scholars who are experts on the state's history and culture through their professional societies or journals, or a central state library like the **Penn State Libraries** system could serve to aggregate all the local collections and be the access point for the entire set. These rich and varied digitized resources would form the lifeblood of new scholarly books and journal articles. A good example of a book that used just such resources (though not yet digitized) to provide a revisionist history of Pennsylvania's economic development in its early years is *A Country Storekeeper in Pennsylvania: Creating Economic Networks in Early Pennsylvania, 1790-1807*.[7]

Such scholarly books would, in turn, become the basis on which both high school and college textbooks could be written, serving to inform and instruct students using the best new knowledge available as vetted by the scholarly

community. Also, these new interpretative analyses could be filtered into writing for popular audiences in general trade books, thus enlightening the public at large. The vision included the networking of these different types of publications through a national central system like the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)** where they could be linked with similar cultural and historical resources contributed by other states.[8] Eventually the linkage could be extended internationally, and the **DPLA** has already been working with its European counterpart, Europeana, to begin the long-term job of extending the network of digital library resources worldwide.[9]

How does open access figure into the equation? Although it may be too much to expect that the books at the peak of the pyramid intended as trade books for the public would ever be made available as OA publications, including regional trade books published by university presses that are an important source of revenue now, one can readily envision all the other levels working on an OA model, even including textbooks, which would follow the increasing interest in developing Open Educational Resources (OER). At the base level all of the digitized local collections would be made OA by written agreements with the citizens who contributed original documents. These might even be integrated into university institutional repositories, preferably with all linked into one central system like the state's flagship university. The university presses publishing the monographs drawing on these resources could follow one or another of the OA models already in existence at Amherst, California, Michigan, Penn State, Purdue, and elsewhere. And the journals could be developed to use the Gold OA approach. What copyright status to assign to these different types of OA materials can be debated. As I have argued elsewhere, I think the CC BY-NC-ND license works best for the humanities and social sciences.[10]

This dream of an integrated system for regional publishing has yet to reach fruition even at just the state level anywhere I know about.

But there are encouraging signs that progress is being made. On April 16, 2016, for instance, the Penn State Libraries announced a new online service hub called PA Digital through the **DPLA**. The press release explained: "DPLA is a platform that brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives and museums, and makes them freely available to the world. The new Service Hub, called PA Digital, launched on April 13 led by the State Library of Pennsylvania, **Temple University**, **Penn State**, the **University of Pennsylvania**, the **Free Library of Philadelphia**, the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, the Health Sciences Libraries Consortium, the Interlibrary Delivery Service of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Consortium of Special Collections Libraries, and a variety of cultural heritage institutions from across the Commonwealth. The Service Hub includes select digital collections from partner libraries ranging from academic to K-12 to special collections and archives."

The publication of what is commonly called "enhanced" eBooks also has a place in this system. The ODSP had hoped to produce such editions. For example, in the Romance Studies series the idea was to be able to include links in citations of French novels quoted and discussed in English in the monographs to OA editions in French of these novels held in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. And in the social sciences where a rich set of social survey research underlay the findings of a book, it was our hope to make these results available as a linked database.[11] Alas, too many competing priorities and insufficient time and money to pursue them all left these dreams unfulfilled. But the day will arrive, I feel confident, that this kind of dream too will come to pass. 🐾

***Sanford G. Thatcher** was director of **Penn State University Press** from 1989 to 2009. He was president of the **Association of American University Presses** in 2007/8. In retirement he serves as an acquiring editor part-time for books in political science for **Lynne Rienner Publishers** and the **University of Rochester Press**.*

vetting has occurred and medical evidence proves these cases. I have argued — to no avail of course — that if these individuals are truly so emotionally unstable as all that, should they be allowed in public, much less in a high stress arena such as a college or university where their anxiety is likely to be forced upon them regularly, every semester, at least four or five times, if not weekly? The inquiry was underappreciated and not answered.

I know I must appear callous and uncaring. I do not wish it so. Nevertheless, I do find it hard to comprehend why young people today are given so much latitude when it comes to

emotional upset (the recent election an outstanding case in point). While the "suck it up and be an adult" approach has its own inherent problems, it did have the distinct advantage of helping those of us under its tutelage to understand that the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune are part of regular life. The sooner one adapts to it, learns to cope with it, and moves on, the better.

Not so anymore. We coddle students today; we become their enablers for a legion of disgruntlements and whatever real or imagined ills they have. Those of us charged with helping these young people to become functioning adults make it certain that the unforgiving "real world" awaiting them in four, five or six years, is one they are decidedly *not* prepared for. 🐾

Endnotes

1. *http://www.ugapress.org/index.php/books/new_georgia_encyclopedia/ http://uncpress.unc.edu/books/T-6125.html*

2. *http://www.psupress.org/Journals/jnls_PennsylvaniaHistory.html*. Strictly speaking, **Penn State** is a "state-related" university, which combines features, legally, of both private and public institutions. But this nicety is not relevant to the publishing done by the Press, except perhaps with respect to copyright law (whether, for instance, it could appeal for Eleventh Amendment protection as a state entity against suits for damages).

3. The background to the establishment of the ODSP is covered in my article "Open-Access Monograph Publishing and the Origins of the Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing at **Penn State University**," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 46/3 (April 2015): 203-223. The creation of the ODSP in the spring of 2005 led to the full administrative merger of the Press and Libraries by December of that year.

4. *http://www.psupress.org/books/series/book_SeriesMetalmark.html*. These books were reproduced as facsimile texts. Another series that used the combined OA/POD model was Romance Studies, which was a fully branded academic monograph series overseen by faculty from two foreign language departments at **Penn State** as well as the Press's regular editorial board: *http://www.psupress.org/books/series/book_SeriesNewRomStu.html*. The main differences between our model and **NAP's** were that we did not sell an enhanced PDF version in addition to the POD edition and that the chapters of our Romance Studies books were all done as separate PDF files, with only half of the chapters able to be downloaded and printed out, thus incentivizing purchase of a POD by people who wanted to read the whole book in print form, whereas **NAP** set up the pages of its books so that, although the entire books could be printed out, they could be printed only one page at a time and were in a very low DPI (dots per inch) form that resulted in the pages looking like bad newsprint.

5. *https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/digital/journals.html*

6. *http://pabook2.libraries.psu.edu/palitmap/litmap.html*

7. *http://www.psupress.org/books/titles/978-0-271-03412-6.html*. The author, **Diane Wenger**, happens to teach in the same department that my father, **Harold W. Thatcher**, chaired for over twenty years from the mid-1940s until 1965.

8. When the idea for the **DPLA** was still being debated via email, conferences, and workshops in 2011 and 2012, before its formal establishment in 2013, I offered this vision as one possible scenario for the **DPLA's** functioning. *http://dp.la/info/about/history/materials/*

9. *http://www.europeana.eu/portal/*

10. **Klaus Graf** and **Sanford G. Thatcher**, "Point & Counterpoint: Is CC BY the Best Open Access License?," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 1/1 (2012): eP1043. *http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1043*.

11. One such book is **Marcelo Bergman**, *Tax Evasion and the Rule of Law in Latin America* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009): *http://www.psupress.org/books/titles/978-0-271-03562-8.html*.