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Curating Collective Collections-The PALCI Shared Print Program for Reference Back Runs, A Work in Progress

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Curating Collective Collections — The PALCI Shared Print Program for Reference Back Runs, A Work in Progress



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Column Editor's Note: *With this guest column by my onetime Tri-College colleague Amy McColl, I'm circling back to my early days with collaborative collections projects during the twenty years I worked at Haverford College. Beginning in the 1990s, the TriCollege Consortium received a series of grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to explore possibilities for treating our collections as one. Under those grants and building on local traditions, librarians with technical services, reference and instruction, circulation, and collection development responsibilities looked at sharing acquisitions of new print monographs, developing consortial roles for staff, purchasing electronic resources, and various ways for taking responsibility for older stack materials. With Amy and others, I was also engaged in early discussions about what came to be the PALCI shared science journal collection.*

In addition to happy memories of my TriCollege years, I have a soft spot in my heart for reference works in that I grew up in libraries at a reference desk and was general editor of ALA Publishing's Guide to Reference. I have therefore followed the work of TriCollege colleagues over the years since my departure from Haverford, including the reference sets project. I'm glad Amy agreed to write about it for this column, if only because shared collections discussions are dominated by journals and monographs and to a lesser extent electronic or government publications. As readers of ATG well know, reference collections have undergone transformational change in the last 20 years, and that change, along with incentives to repurpose library space away from housing as much print, has prompted a shift in the perceived value of, as well as plans for relocating and treating differently, the publications that dominated the practices of print-based reference.

We librarians don't like to throw things out, and for good reason. Our stacks or storage facilities house the evidence of the hoarding we do of superseded editions and previous issues of reference works — after all, a run of World Almanac (1868--) is a majestic and satisfying sight as well as a browser's delight! As they amass into clumps of encyclopedia editions and long runs of reference serials ("current edition in Ref, previous editions in Stacks," as the catalog advises), some of these titles in fact achieve research and teaching utility not present in, or at least a utility different from, the single latest copy in the reference section. Granting that some of this reference information is online now and almost all historical information of this sort is of interest to small groups of teachers and scholars, these printed works, like other volumes, need to be preserved as part of the cultural and historical record. Like so many other widely-collected 19th and 20th-Century publications, though, the community of libraries probably do not need to preserve the number of copies in which individual libraries have retained them.

The joint TriCollege-PALCI story about sharing print reference sets foregrounds the hybrid, fish/fowl nature of print reference collection materials in that some act like monographs (a 6-volume encyclopedia, successive editions of a language dictionary) and some like serials (annuals, directories, almanacs). In completing the article, Amy corresponded with other consortia and ferreted out the complexities of talking about and tracking shared print for reference in that she found out about work not as visible as PALCI's because reference titles are subsumed by shared print projects for monographs or serials. — BK

The idea to begin a shared print program for reference back runs arose out of a smaller pilot project begun in 2012 by the TriCollege Consortium, consisting of **Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges**. The Colleges have long had a close relationship: we have shared an ILS since 1990; we circulate materials freely among the three campuses via van delivery twice per day (we are lucky to be

located within 11 miles of one another); and we instituted a shared TriCollege print approval plan in 2004. In the past 15 years, we have tried as much as possible to ensure that all title duplication (and in some cases, triplication) is deliberate and not accidental in order to expand our holdings and conserve our budgets. It therefore made sense to extend this close collaboration to include de-duplication of older print periodical runs, and more recently, to serial (largely annual) reference sets.

Even in this small consortium, we faced many challenges when we embarked on the project. Some of the questions that arose included:

- What constitutes a reference set? Some titles seemed to be no-brainers (*Who's Who*; *The Times Almanac*; *The Statistical Yearbook*), but others were housed in the regular stacks in some libraries (*Mental Measurements Yearbook*; *The Year's Work in English Studies*) or in the government documents collection (*Pennsylvania Abstract*) for others.
- Getting accurate holdings data was difficult, and in many cases this required library staff going into the stacks and hand-checking each title.
- Gaps in holdings had to be recorded in a spreadsheet, which was not an ideal tool for this purpose.
- Decisions about whether to keep entire runs together or use a distributed model were problematic. In some cases, a TriCollege library wanted to keep its back run in the stacks, and if there were gaps in the run, another library in the consortium had to send the missing volumes to the holding location. This required work by library staff to retrieve items, ship them to the holding library, and then change the item record information on arrival.

We forged ahead and completed most of the project, employing our rented shared storage space for most of our consolidated sets of back runs. But some details have yet to be settled, for example, ensuring that check-in records are updated for accurate locations and double-checking that runs are as complete as possible.

The Pennsylvania Academic Libraries Consortium, Inc. (PALCI, <http://www.palci.org/member-list/>), whose membership extends from NYU on the East across New Jersey and Pennsylvania to **West Virginia** and **Marshall Universities** on the west, had been in discussions since about 2005 regarding the potential to archive members' print collections collectively as more and more resources moved online. An initial program for serials from three science publishers (**American Institute of Physics, American Physical Society, and American Chemical Society**) was formally initiated in 2009, with further projects discussed by the PALCI Cooperative Print Collections Committee (CPCC). In 2013 **Peggy Seiden**, College Librarian at **Swarthmore College**, was elected President of the Board of PALCI, and she brought the idea of expanding the TriCollege reference project to the larger PALCI membership, with the goal of allowing PALCI members to withdraw little-used reference sets while also preserving these important print runs in several locations around the four-state PALCI region. In mid-2014, the CPCC was reorganized into the PALCI Distributed Print Archive (PDPA) Steering Committee, and a survey of the membership was completed in September 2014, followed by personal interviews with 46 PALCI member staff. As a result of the survey, in October 2014 the PDPA Steering Committee established two PDPA project teams for journals and reference sets, charged respectively to continue projects for additional journals/serials title archives and to evaluate and initiate a shared print archive for reference sets. I was asked to coordinate the reference sets project, and a team of volunteer librarians from PALCI

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member libraries was assembled. **Chris Martire** of PALCI was the co-coordinator and liaison to the PDPA Steering Committee.

A kickoff meeting of the PDPA Reference Sets project team was held in December 2014 at **Swarthmore College**. At that meeting, we discussed the survey results and the issues that had arisen during the TriCollege pilot. Some further questions arose:

- Should we have a distributed or consolidated model, and if consolidated, how many sets around the PALCI region do we need?
- Should we have light archives, dark archives, or a mix?
- Should we include government documents and indexes?
- How do we provide reference service for the stored sets, which researchers may want to consult on-site?
- What sort of business model do we need to cover the costs of storage, staffing, shipping, etc?
- How do we handle ILL of the stored materials and how do we assess the associated costs?

Most in the group agreed that we should consolidate several sets of materials around the PALCI region. We tentatively agreed that, ideally, we would want a western location, an eastern location, and a central location. Another consideration had to do with the availability of a reading room for researchers who might want to consult an entire set on-site. In terms of title choice, to make things a bit easier, we eliminated government documents and indexes from our pilot title list, and we also considered the availability of online access. In the long run, again ideally, we wanted to include titles that had what we considered to be stable online access, preferably with participation in **Portico**, **CLOCKSS**, or **LOCKSS**. We recognized that in many cases, PALCI institutions had already withdrawn print copies of these sets, so timeliness was important in order to preserve multiple complete sets around the region.

At the end of the meeting, we determined that our next steps included coming up with a list of pilot titles to test our process, and to report actual item-level holdings of a sampling of PALCI institutions in a spreadsheet in order to get a sense of how complete the holdings would be at different types of libraries. Several members of the group were tasked with compiling this data. The question of how to track gaps in holdings and communicating that information to others in the consortium also came up. We realized that using a spreadsheet was far from perfect, and we agreed to explore some of the tools in use by other shared print projects around the country. We also agreed that after we had put our procedures into place for the pilot, we would write a “best practices” document for retention and withdrawal of reference sets.

The group identified the following twelve pilot titles, attempting to represent various disciplines:

- *American Men and Women of Science (including various subparts)*
- *Book of the States*
- *CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*
- *Current Biography Yearbook*
- *Europa World Year Book*
- *Mental Measurements Yearbook*
- *Physicians' Desk Reference*
- *Statesman's Year Book*
- *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers*
- *Whitaker's Almanack*
- *Who's Who in America*
- *World Almanac and Book of Facts*

We decided to check holdings in a variety of PALCI institutions, including ARLs, private colleges and universities, small liberal arts colleges, and state universities. Using institutional OPACs, volunteers checked specific issue and volume holdings and recorded findings in a spreadsheet shared via Google Sheets. We also recorded info about online access, including **HathiTrust** and otherwise digital archive

availability, publisher information, and frequency of publication. Surprisingly (or perhaps not), the most complete runs were generally found at the smaller schools. At this stage, we were not able to check the condition of volumes, but we surmised that the condition would perhaps be better for volumes housed in the smaller institutions due to lower overall use.

The next big questions for the group included how best to communicate holdings information to the larger PALCI community, and what tool we would use to serve as gap-filler software. Everyone agreed that a shared spreadsheet would not be efficient. **Chris Martire** agreed to investigate existing tools and report back to the group. The two options **Chris** explored were Journal Retention and Needs Listing (JRNLI) from the Florida Academic Repository (FLARE) and Print Archives Preservation Registry (PAPR), a project of the Center for Research Libraries (CRL). We also considered developing our own gap-filler software with the assistance of the PALCI Technology Task Force. In the end, the existing systems either incurred expenses that would require approval by the PALCI Board or did not address our specific needs. Moreover, the Technology Task Force did not have the resources available to develop a PALCI-specific tool — so we stuck with spreadsheets.

Despite the lack of a gap-filler software tool, we continued discussions through the winter and spring of 2015, and topics included ILL recommendations, specific requests to locate back runs at a few different member institutions, and retention commitments. Our recommendations to the Steering Committee were issued in May 2015 and advised that:

- Identifying core reference sets to archive on behalf of PALCI member institutions is a worthwhile project to pursue and would allow many of our institutions to deaccession these titles as they deem appropriate in order to free up shelf space.
- PALCI create a distributed archive of three sets across the region, two light archives that will include services for researchers, and one dark archive; consider locating the dark archive at the proposed Iron Mountain site to be built for PALCI members' use (*project was later abandoned*); determine location of the light archives based on holdings and facilities/personnel but assume that large research universities, such as **Penn State** (State College), would be the likely candidates.
- Archive Holders make a retention commitment of 25 years.
- The project team make recommendations on a service model in consultation with the Archive Holders and the Steering Committee.
- The program start with twelve core titles as a pilot (*see above*) and expand with input from the membership after completion of the pilot.

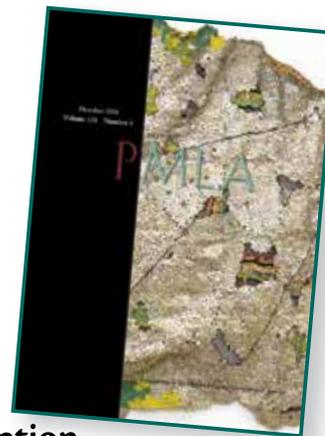
As I thought about reporting the PALCI experience with reference sets for this column, I reached out to the members of **CRL's** Print Archive Network (PAN) to ask specifically about reference set archiving practices and would like to thank all of them for their responses. I found that many existing print archiving programs include some reference sets as part of larger archiving efforts. **Emily Stambaugh** of the **California Digital Library** said that while neither Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST) nor University of California Shared Print Program has specific guidelines regarding reference sets, each includes some. For the WEST program, titles in LC class Z had been excluded, but that rule has been relaxed recently and it is expected that reference titles which fit certain publication types or publication frequencies will begin to be archived by WEST. **John Burger** reported that the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) has a pilot set of archived reference titles that are treated separately from journals in that retention commitments run through 2020 rather than 2035 and participants agree to provide expedited/expert reference service from them; he also said that not all of the libraries participating in the journal archiving program participate in the reference program. **Bruce Hulse** of the Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC) noted that WRLC members agreed to establish a policy of retaining only two copies of any circulating monographic editions and included reference works in this policy. WRLC catalog records show that approximately 36,000 reference titles have been given retention status in WRLC's Shared Collections Facility.

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The **Center for Research Libraries** has specific guidelines and a title list for reference sets with a fairly heavy emphasis on such “librarian-focused titles” as *ALA’s Membership Directory*, *Books in Print*, *Ulrich’s*, etc. (<https://www.crl.edu/archiving-preservation/print-archives/crl-administered/reference-book-archive/title-list>). **CRL’s** title list does not include other core titles such as *Who’s Who* or almanacs. Following a rationale consonant with its general shared collections mission, **CRL’s** Reference Book Archive exists to gather and preserve artifactual materials that will not experience much use in the local library setting and thereby enable **CRL** members to capture local stacks space for other materials.

Searches of shared print databases such as **CRL’s** *PAPR* and the Five College Library Shared Repository Collection online catalog reveal that core title sets such as *Who’s Who in America* and *The Statesman’s Year-Book* are already housed in shared print archives facilities, most likely as part of a larger serials archiving initiative. It is logical that reference sets that have a regular (usually annual) publication schedule would be included in a serials archiving program. But what of titles with irregular publication frequencies, finite sets (encyclopedias, for example), government documents that also serve as reference works, and other anomalies? It is a challenge to come up with guidelines that address all the variables of publication types. Several **PAN** librarians suggested that a core list of reference titles to be archived would be useful, with ISSN/ISBN as required data elements for identification and analytics purposes.

For our **PALCI** pilot, the lack of a suitable, affordable gap-filler software proved to be a significant roadblock, and our momentum stalled. Due to staff changes at **PALCI** in 2015 and 2016, the project team decided, in agreement with **PALCI** staff, that we would shelve the reference back run project until **PALCI** staffing had stabilized and the

PDPA Steering Committee had a chance to reassess the project. We still feel that the goals of the project are worthy, and, after doing my scan of current practices with regard to reference sets, I am convinced that **PALCI** should reassess and reboot. A new **PALCI** Collections Advisory Council has just formed to discuss how we might leverage shared print and electronic collections, and perhaps the reference set shared print project will see new life in 2017 — stay tuned! 🐼

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I get slandered, libeled; I hear words I never heard in the Bible. And I’m one step ahead of the shoe shine. Two steps away from the county line. Just trying to keep my customers satisfied.” 🐼

Mike is currently the Managing Partner of Gruenberg Consulting, LLC, a firm he founded in January 2012 after a successful career as a senior sales executive in the information industry. His firm is devoted to provide clients with sales staff analysis, market research, executive coaching, trade show preparedness, product placement and best practices advice for improving negotiation skills for librarians and salespeople. His book, “Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success” has become the definitive book on negotiation skills and is available on Amazon, Information Today in print and eBook, Amazon Kindle, B&N Nook, Kobo, Apple iBooks, OverDrive, 3M Cloud Library, Gale (GVRL), MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBSCO, Blio, and Chegg. www.gruenbergconsulting.com