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Bob Kieft
rhkrdgzin@gmail.com

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Curating Collective Collections — E Pluribus Unum

Column Editor: **Bob Kieft** (688 Holly Ave., Unit 4, St. Paul, MN 55104) <rhkrdzin@gmail.com>

Those who have followed this column since its inception by **Sam Demas** in 2011/12 have read about any number of kinds or aspects of collections collaboration. I took over the editorship from **Sam** in 2014 and have decided that this column will be my last. I am taking the valedictory opportunity the column affords to reflect on current developments in shared print collections, particularly of monographs.

I had thought to conclude my editorship otherwise and less personally by fingering friends in the shared collections community and challenging them to address a request from that proverbial “man,” or, in this case, librarian from Mars, who, having kept close watch on the library collections scene here on Planet Earth through their biblioscope, wants to understand better the future of shared (print) collections in the USA. Instead of asking to be taken to our leader, the Martian seeks to speak with the many leaders that collaborative collections work at once and requires them to share their thoughts on 1) the state of play, 2) where they see the state of play in 10 years, 3) what’s missing from the current game, and 4) other thoughts as to the means, materials, or goals of shared collections. For bonus points, my Martian contact is interested to know how the U.S. library community thinks about the international shared collections picture and the conditions under which it will fill in.

Having had this bright idea, I quickly realized I had fingered my friends often enough for contributions to this column and decided instead to respond unsystematically myself to this extraterrestrial request before Elon Musk colonizes the Red Planet. As my title suggests, I take as my text the motto on the Great Seal of the United States of America as it appears on the verso of the \$Ones in your wallet or wadded in the bottom of your pocket or handbag — money being the root of a lot of possibilities as well as much evil and always a question when it comes to library collections, shared or otherwise.

“Out of many, one” is, of course, a lovely and inspiring idea, but as the history of the country has amply demonstrated and the most recent presidential election proved, and continues to prove daily, we’re all pretty sure we in the USA are many according to any number of dimensions along which we might arrange human differences. We have a lot of trouble understanding who or what is included in “one,” let alone how “one” comes about. Although shared or collective library collections and their management may not rise to the level of consequence for the history of the planet as defining a polity in which “manyness” is productive of unity, the future of teaching and scholarship depends to a large extent on the individual and collective efforts of libraries

and archives to preserve and give access to the many formats that record potentially useful information. A vision of unity or at least sharing and cooperation has informed the aspirations of U.S. libraries since the later 19th Century, but the realities of being run by a species that is territorially, hierarchically, and competitively minded means that libraries have made as much messiness from manyness as they have unity.

In a column about the role of open access publishing in librarians’ thinking about shared collections (September, 2016, 28:4, 87), I cited a book chapter I co-authored with **John McDonald** in which we suggested ways and means for achieving a shared model for collections.¹ I’d like to refer readers to that chapter as well as to an essay I wrote for another book, *Rethinking Collection Development and Management*,² and a couple of pieces I wrote with **Lizanne Payne**³ for lengthier treatment of some of the issues enumerated below. Here’s a want-list, though, for whose fulfillment I will be watching from the safe distance of “life after *ATG*.” I also take cues in compiling my list from the questions with which **Susan Stearns** and colleagues concluded a piece for this column on their work in EAST (November, 2016, 28:5, 88).



1. We⁴ need to untangle what we mean by “books and “reading” in order to better talk about the use cases for books and the implications for those cases of digitized text, off-site book housing and access, electronic systems for discovery and browsing, etc. I had thought at one time to write a piece for this column entitled “The Tyranny of the Book” in which I would discuss how the success of the bound printed codex has made thinking otherwise about the packaging and use of long-form content almost impossible for a great number of readers. From this perspective, the book is a lesson in how a successful technology can limit, or even preempt discussion of, how that technology fits into changing circumstances, affects experimentation, or impedes adjustment to new institutions and cultural practices or forms. The naturalization of the printed book has established it in a culturally privileged position and produced a certain sense of what we do when we read, how we interact with information, and how the act of reading relates to our body and mind. Books have effected wonderful results for vast populations in the last 650 years and more; at the same time, the very naturalness of what we do when we read with a book hampers our exploring what and how we might do otherwise with long-form texts, including housing them in libraries.

2. In order to encourage historical scholarship, we need to establish efficient, cost-effective methods for metadata creation, recording, and sharing that allow a) libraries and library groups to manage collections in the context

of national holdings and disclosed retention commitments, and b) researchers to discover individual copies that suit their needs according to accurate and complete holdings, usage, condition, and related artifactual data. **CRL** has been making the case for accurate and complete serials holdings data, and **Andrew Stauffer** and colleagues at **UVa** have been working on ways to include copy-specific monograph metadata in library catalogs, but the community has yet to agree to working on this kind of data because at first blush it seems to be cost-prohibitive and to take time away from other activities seen as more important. We need more experiments and more data about metadata strategies, and we need **OCLC**, as a membership cooperative, to make services available to its members on terms that are attractive and geared to encouraging scholarship. As a bonus, we need to Amazonify the catalog so that, whether using the texts available in the **HathiTrust** digital library or purpose-created sample text, readers can more readily browse and select from the library on the local shelf, where a good many of the books are out on loan, and the vast distributed library housed elsewhere.

3. Based on the work that **Ian Bogus (University of Pennsylvania)** and colleagues⁵ are pursuing in the print preservation community, we need to integrate the traditional concerns of that community for single objects and the risk analyses by which they prioritize treatment of those objects with the concerns of the shared print community for large-, even national-scale alignment of local collection and space management practices. **Bogus** and colleagues have engaged **Candace Yano** of **UC Berkeley** to extend to monographs the optimal copies work she did for Ithaka S+R on journals, and the group’s interests in withdrawal policies and technologies for testing materials have implications for the goals shared print projects should achieve.

4. We need a new organization or coalition of existing organizations to develop policy and governance structures and a business model for moving us from locally held and maintained to collectively held and maintained print collections. Put another way, we need to establish a national shared collection using the models now extant and determine whether local storage hubs can mature and federate into a national service network. Put yet another way, we need, on the one hand, organizations that take a membership approach and are accountable to their member “stockholders” for specific programs and, on the other, academic libraries that are funded by their home institutions, grants, and states to combine their individual interests in a common agenda that moves their desire for distinguishing themselves to grounds other than how big their circulating collection is, how many members they have, how many projects they initiate, etc.⁶

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Much easier said than done, of course, and in today's financial and political climate for higher education much harder done than ever before perhaps. But I will be looking to such collections partnerships as **SCELC**, **University of California, Big Ten Academic Alliance**, **EAST**, **CI-CCI**, **MI-SPI**, and **ALI/PALNI** for successful examples as institutions find their way toward more expansive and inclusive programs and such efforts as the **ASERL/WRLC Scholars Trust** and the **Rosemont Group** for journals coalesce smaller programs. The **FDLP** has always been to an extent a distributed shared print collection, albeit a highly duplicative one. It will be interesting therefore to see the effects over time of the growing influence of electronic publication and access coupled with such centralizing programs as **ASERL's Collaborative Federal Depository Program** and the **FDLP's** own preservation stewardship program.

For the last several years, I have participated in a group consisting of representatives from library organizations and scholarly societies who have been trying to design among scholars and librarians a collaborative future for the preservation of and access to print monograph collections.⁷ Our proposal is ready for a more public phase, and at the very least we hope it can help to catalyze a national approach in the absence of an organization charged to do so and in the presence of many organizations that have promoted the cause of shared collections.

5. Libraries need to move beyond the current concepts of resource sharing that depend on ownership models favoring local readers and treat all libraries' readers equally in order to make good on the promises of shared collections. Evidence about materials access logistics from **ReCAP** and **Emily Stambaugh's** suggestions about delivery methods will support achievement of this goal.

6. In this column, **Jake Nadal** (December 2016/January 2017, 26:6, 61) stimulated us to think about the prospects for moving from off-site storage as an expedient for relieving the pressure on stuffed stacks to the creation of regional collection centers whose services and efficiencies would not only enable at-scale preservation of print but an array of cost benefits to libraries and readers. We should follow **Jake's** argument to come up with business models for "repositories of record" that collaboratively serve the inventory and access functions of libraries and also provide readers the physical access many of them need to bodies of material as well as individual (known) items.

7. Academic libraries need to partner with public libraries to engage them in shared collection collaboratives and secure materials that publics typically collect and academics do not. The **Maine Shared Collections Cooperative** has done so, and **OCLC** research has pointed us to the importance of public library holdings in megaregions. We need to develop among all academic libraries, which already participate in resource sharing networks with publics, ways

of taking into account the holdings of public libraries in our thinking about the collective collection.

8. We need to financially encourage the many current experiments in open access publishing, the systematic digitization of books, and the use of tools for quickly determining the possible public domain status of orphan works according to the protocols developed by **HathiTrust**. Doing so will enlarge the electronically accessible full-text library that necessarily complements the shared physical library, facilitate use cases for books that print does not, and may, just may, pressure a copyright regime that, though it protects the interests of authors and publishers, does little to encourage access to texts by broad swaths of readers.

9. We need to think harder about how our investments in collection analysis can assist consortia, as in the case of **VIVA** with monographs or the **UC** system with some journals, in prospective management and preservation of newly published materials, be they print or digital.

I began working on interlibrary collections collaboration when I joined the **Haverford College Library** in 1988 and a then fifteen-year-old program between **Haverford** and **Bryn Mawr** to acquire new monographs through a joint approval plan. The purchase of a library system with **Bryn Mawr** and **Swarthmore Colleges** in 1989 laid the groundwork for a series of collaborative collections efforts that continue today among the three colleges and expand through their memberships in **PALCI**, **PACSCL**, and **EAST**.

As I head farther into Retirement Land than I have thus far ventured since leaving my day job at **Occidental College** in July 2015, I would like to thank those **TriCo** colleagues who launched me in the business. I would also like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed during the last three years to this column as guest authors. Along with the meetings I helped to plan with **CRL's Marie Waltz** for the **Print Archive Network (PAN) Forum** at **ALA** meetings, editing this column has offered the opportunity to document the activities of the shared print, and more generally, shared collections community. For **ATG** readers who want to follow collaborative print and related topics, **PAN** and its archive of presentations (<https://www.crl.edu/past-meetings>) will serve well as a surrogate for this column.

I want especially as the greenish pastures of retirement beckon to thank **Ivy Anderson**, **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer**, **Kathleen Fitzpatrick**, **Chuck Henry**, **Constance Malpas** and her colleagues at **OCLC**, **Jake Nadal**, **Lizanne Payne**, **Bernie Reilly**, **Susan Stearns**, **Jeremy Suratt**, **Mark Sandler**, **Emily Stambaugh**, and **Andy Stauffer** as well as colleagues on the 2014/15 **HathiTrust** shared monograph collection task force for the many intellectual and professional stimuli and kindnesses over the course of my shared collections involvements. I would like to wish them and colleagues from **PACSCL**, **PALCI**, **SCELC**, and the many others whom I've come to know in the last 10-15 years a rich future of curating collective collections. 🍷

Endnotes

1. 2016. "Risk, Value, Responsibility, and the Collective Collection," with **John McDonald**, *Shared Collections: Collaborative Stewardship* (ALA Editions, edited by Dawn Hale).
2. 2014. "Beyond My People and Thy People, or The Shared Collections Imperative," *Rethinking Collection Development and Management* (Libraries Unlimited, edited by **Diane Zabel**, **Becky Albitz**, **Chris Avery**).
3. "Collective Collection, Collection Action," with **Lizanne Payne**, *Collection Management*. 37: 3-4 (2012); "A Nation-Wide Planning Framework for Large-Scale Collaboration on Legacy Print Collections," with **Lizanne Payne**, *Collaborative Librarianship*, 2:4 (2010), <http://collaborativelibrarianship.org>.
4. I use "we" in this list to denote the librarians, scholars and students, publishers, institutions and organizations, funding bodies, and the great variety of readers whose interests come to bear on the creation and management of the resources libraries gather and make available.
5. This group is informal and self-regulating and convened first in January 2014 in Philadelphia as the Regional Climate Summit. They do not have a web presence, but reports of their work circulate through **ALCTS/PARS** and a mailing list.
6. Such other means for achieving distinction might include the richness of their partnerships, their access methods and who can gain free access, the extent to which they contribute special materials to common access, how much they devote to funding collaborative efforts that address benefits to all readers.
7. <https://printrecord.mla.hcommons.org/about/>. This group needs a new name that better defines its focus.

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*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*