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Ensuring Access to Government Information

Shari Lasiter

Arizona State University, shari.laster@gmail.com

Lynda Kellam

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, lmkellam@uncg.edu

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Ensuring Access to Government Information

by **Shari Laster** (Head, Open Stack Collections, Arizona State University) <shari.laster@gmail.com>

and **Lynda Kellam** (Social Science Data Librarian, University of North Carolina at Greensboro) <lmkellam@uncg.edu>

In the United States, the dominant paradigm of research libraries as *content managers* for print government documents and *access portals* for digital government information and data took a substantial turn in late 2016. With the change in Presidential administration, academics, journalists, and other constituencies whose work relies on uninterrupted access to federal information expressed concern about the specter of political threats to data and information produced and disseminated with public funding. In particular, public access to climate and environmental data was suddenly seen as fragile and vulnerable.

The response over the past year has been, frankly, remarkable. Longstanding library work to



collect, describe, and preserve federal government information in print and digital formats, much of it in partnership with the **U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO)** and other government agencies, received renewed attention, even as new energy poured into experimental and transformative models for capturing digital content at risk for loss from trusted public sources.

News outlets featured and valorized the work of library and information professionals in safeguarding the public's right to know, even as libraries and public advocacy groups scrambled to organize hundreds of enthusiastic volunteers eager to save government information.

This issue of *Against the Grain* is an attempt to capture the network of projects and relationships

that connect a specialized group of publishers — government agencies — with libraries as content stewards. Libraries are collaborating with partners to explore new methods and approaches to solving a persistent problem: how can we ensure that government information will be freely available to the public for the foreseeable future?

The **Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP)** continues important work that is now over two centuries old. Implemented by the **GPO**, the **FDLP** serves as a model of distributed access to print federal documents, one that has resulted in *de facto* preservation. Participating libraries agree to accept copies of information dissemination products, and in exchange make them freely available to the public for as long as the materials are in their

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If Rumors Were Horses

REMINDER!!!! We have moved. Our Citadel mail will NOT BE FORWARDED TO US ANYMORE! Yesterday, I got three renewals from companies that should have used the new address! They know about it. **If you use the wrong address in the future, your mail will probably be returned to you or trashed! THE NEW ADDRESS IS PO BOX 799, 1712 Thompson Avenue, Sullivan's Island, SC 29482!** Thanks, everybody! And HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

We are starting 2018 with some column editor changes! Listen up!



Joyce Dixon Fyle and her posse during the *DineArounds* at the 2017 Charleston Conference!

Tom Gilson our long time editor of *From the Reference Desk* has decided to give it up and devote more time to *ATG*, the **Charleston Conference** and *ATGMedia* our new venture. **Tom** began and edited this column for 20 years! Thank you, **Tom**, for your many reviews!

Just off the phone with **Nicolette Warisse Sosulski** of the **Portage Public Library** who will take over *From the Reference Desk* beginning in April. What a delightful conversation we had! **Nicolette** is from Louisville (can't say it the way she does)! She is the Business and Reference Librarian at **Portage District Library** in Michigan, as well as

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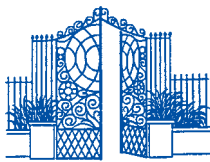
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lectured in MLIS programs on these topics. Her other passions/pastimes include **cookbook collecting** and wrangling her two sons, **Peter** and **Nick**, and two dogs, Pandora and Penelope. Wow! Looking forward to April! And many thanks to **Dave Tyckoson** and **Tom Gilson** for recruiting **Nicolette!**

Regina Gong, our incredibly efficient and industrious **Monograph Musings** book reviewer, is stepping down after three years with the June 2018 issue of **ATG**. **Regina** has just been formally accepted into the **PhD Program in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)** at **Michigan State University (MSU)**. This is her dream. She starts in the fall 2018 semester. **Regina's** research fellowship from the **Open Education Group** was a big help to her in making this decision. Needless to say, we are disappointed to lose **Regina** but are happy that she is taking the opportunity to pursue her dream. **Regina** did a great job, bringing a truly professional approach to **Monograph Musings** in each and every issue. **Regina** plans to guest edit a future issue of **ATG** on **OER**. And perhaps another possible topic for her is the role of academic libraries in adult and lifelong education

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Ensuring Access to Government ... *from page 1*

collections. Some libraries with notably rich historical collections have kept this promise for well over a century. Of course, libraries can only preserve what they have been able to collect, and as **James R. Jacobs** writes, vast numbers of fugitive documents have resulted from both accidental and deliberate gaps in the mechanisms used to identify and disseminate official content. For content managed in a smaller network, as with state government information, these gaps can be exacerbated by funding issues and other challenges inherent to scale. **Susanne Caro** identifies many of the ways in which print and digital state information can become at risk of loss.

Partnerships among federal depository libraries are making important strides in access and preservation for federal information. The **Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL)** has developed its own network of libraries that are building focused, comprehensive depository collections. According to the Coordinator of **ASERL's Collaborative Federal Depository Program**, **Cheryle Cole-Bennett**, the benefits of this project are accruing throughout the region. The **HathiTrust Digital Library** has launched a focused program for building its collections of digitized federal documents, work described by the Program Officer for Federal Documents and Collections, **Heather**

Christenson. By leveraging **HathiTrust** and relying on long-standing close consortial ties among **University of California** libraries, the **UC** system is adopting a new approach to managing its government documents collections. **Jesse Silva** describes the **Federal Document Archive** or **FedDocArc**, which encompasses both print and digitized volumes and aspires to be a comprehensive collection for all **UC** campuses.

Other partnerships do not rely on consortial ties, but instead bring together those able to do important work with those willing to help. The **End of Term Project**, discussed by **Mark Phillips** and **Kristy Phillips**, is a collaborative effort with university, government, and not-for-profits partnering to capture a comprehensive snapshot of the federal web presence at the end of every Presidential administration. **Data Rescue** became an enormous success in late 2016 and early 2017 as it brought the work of collecting federal data products to researchers, students, and members of the public who wanted to help save government information. **Margaret Janz** describes the development of **DataRefuge** and highlights the accomplishments of this movement.

Among Canadian data librarians, a focused project succeeded in reuniting data with the information needed to interpret and use it. The model outlined by **Kristi Thompson** demonstrates the benefits of cooperating with data producers. Similarly, the **University of California Curation Center (UC3)** is pilot-

ing a mirror of the U.S. government portal for datasets. **UC3** Director **John Chodacki** describes the rationale for **Data Mirror**, which also backs up the datasets cataloged in **data.gov**. Finally, many government information professionals and others have recognized the need to continue conversations about issues with electronic government information, especially with stakeholders outside of libraries. **Roberta Sittel** in her article on the **Preserving Electronic Government Information (PEGI) Project** discusses an **Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)**-funded program to coordinate and conduct national discussion forums bringing together librarians and stakeholders, such as historians and scientists, to discuss possibilities and challenges.

Throughout these articles a common theme is the need for both targeted and widespread partnerships to tackle barriers to long-term public access to government information. The dissemination and preservation of government information is not only a concern for government agencies or documents librarians. Research libraries should be concerned as well: after all, if public information is no longer available to the public, the research that depends on it will no longer be possible. As stewards of our informational heritage, libraries need to develop and implement proactive and collaborative measures to ensure that government information will continue to be available for all. 🌱