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Robert H. Kieft

Occidental College, kieft@oxy.edu

Bernard F. Reilly

Center for Research Libraries, breilly@crl.edu

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Regional and National Cooperation on Legacy Print Collections

Robert H. Kieft (kieft@oxy.edu)
College Librarian at Occidental College

Bernard F. Reilly (breilly@crl.edu)
President, Center for Research Libraries

Abstract

This reports on a meeting convened by the Center for Research Libraries on July 10, 2009, in Chicago for representatives of more than a dozen library consortia and other organizations with an interest in shaping a national approach to long-term preservation of and access to print collections.

If not the Holy Grail, then collaboration on collections is at least the Black Tulip of library cooperation. Lending books to each other--easy enough, buying expensive microform sets or gathering specialized research materials--not too hard, and jointly licensing electronic databases collectively--well, almost as easy as proverbially falling off the log. But jointly acquiring and sharing general collections materials, not so fast, "pardner;" we have a philosophy department whose appetite for Hegel criticism is as voracious as yours, and we can't possibly let you do United States history while we do the European (even though 80 percent of those volumes have no measurable use!).

The arduous, variegated, and occasionally distinguished history of collections cooperation on scales large and small is as old as Melvil Dewey, with interest in the last ten years moving from the periphery of specialized materials to the heartland of electronic journals and reference works. This interest now seems poised to move from that heartland to the back yard of librarians' everyday work on the development of circulating collections. Since "day one" of the modern era space and budget "crises" have been cited as reasons why no library could house locally all materials its users might want. Combine this element with sweeping cultural changes in information production, distribution, and use to create conditions for radical change.

Into the late 1990s the only way for a local researcher to access a lot of information quickly was for their library to assemble large collections of printed materials on campus. That is no longer the case, if only because large amounts of information that libraries once held locally are now available on the Internet, some of it publications like journals that libraries kept in their stacks and much of it publications that libraries never were able to acquire or manage easily. Moreover, the presence of consortial information and materials-delivery systems makes resource discovery and sharing easier. In fact, users often prefer online texts, images, and data to printed resources. Couple these usage phenomena with economic constraints, the cost of and competition for campus real estate, and the ongoing mass digitization of books and serials, and it becomes clear that the library community today enjoys conditions that favor large-scale cooperative work on print collections and, in particular, conditions that favor the creation of new, collective ways to manage, preserve, and ensure adequate access to legacy print collections. In recognition, then, of the costs of maintaining large, duplicate collections of low-use older materials, the library community is discussing the prospect of a complete redevelopment of local collections into regional and national collections. This redevelopment will involve collective, as opposed to individual, decisions about which library holds or retains which publications, and it will create a structured –

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instead of a laissez-faire network--"cloud" of libraries that will be the repository of printed texts held in smaller numbers and collectively or cooperatively managed

In 2003, prompted by these changes and the related concern that, in responding to them, libraries acting individually might dispose of materials not widely held, the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), with support from the Institute for Museum and Library Studies (IMLS), convened "Preserving America's Print Resources" (PAPR). The agenda set by PAPR (<http://www.crl.edu/content/PAPRreport.pdf>) and the planning required by the nascent Cooperative Collection Management Trust has occasioned continuing work by CRL and organizations not formally affiliated with CRL such as OCLC Research/RLG Programs, Ithaka, and other consortia around the country--all seeking to sort out the issues of collective action in this arena.

The need for inter-consortial cooperation prompted Bernard F. Reilly, President of CRL, and Robert H. Kieft, College Librarian at Occidental College, to convene "The Role of Regional Consortia in a National Strategy for Legacy Print Collections" on July 10, 2009, at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. Having recently been awarded major funding by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to increase its support for local and regional collection development and planning, CRL convened the meeting as part of an effort to determine how it could best support and promote the regional and state-based archiving and access efforts that benefit its libraries.

The event brought together roughly thirty participants who represented more than a dozen organizations (see roster of participants below). Reilly welcomed the participants and described CRL's interest in the meeting. Kieft moderated a reporting session during which representatives from the consortia in California; the Pacific Northwest; Colorado; Illinois; Ohio; Ontario; Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C.; the South-

east; and the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) briefly described current programs. Representatives from JSTOR, OCLC Research/RLG Programs, Ithaka Research, and the Law Library Microform Consortium (LLMC) then described digitization and research projects that influence the development of a collective approach to collections.

The reports demonstrated that models for and pieces of a comprehensive collective approach to print library collections exist around the country. They also created inter-regional awareness of projects and planning efforts that might be coordinated to yield national and international benefits. State and regional networks provide strong foundations on which to build collections cooperatives because they have memberships that cross library sectors and have communication infrastructures in place through materials purchasing and resource-sharing programs. In many regions, existing single-campus or multi-institutional storage facilities could serve as the basis for the collective collection. The beginnings of the policy and governance structures needed for the long-term collective preservation of printed collections have been sketched or are under investigation.

The next step will be to reach consensus on the information, tools, standards, services, business arrangements and policies that are needed to create and to sustain a national program of print preservation, in which academic, independent and public libraries will play a role. To this end, CRL will work with interested consortia, libraries, and other appropriate organizations in order to determine how both to reduce the costs systematically and significantly and to increase the accessibility of heavily redundant serials holdings within the next three years. CRL's effort will be designed to produce three deliverables in time for discussion at ALA Midwinter 2010:

- An Internet framework for the information base needed for informed planning

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and decisions on goals, standards, risks, and costs;

- community consensus on the scope, content, scale, and nature of a national/international serials print archiving system achievable within the next three years, the services connected with same (including digital and traditional delivery), and the level of investment the community will make in that endeavor;
- a corresponding action plan and time-frame for achieving these significant goals and for realizing an appropriate return on investment to the participating organizations.

For further information about this endeavor you are welcome to contact Bernie Reilly (reilly@crl.edu) or Bob Kieft (kieft@oxy.edu).

Participants

Ivy Anderson (California Digital Library)
Kim Armstrong (CIC)
Kyle Banerjee (Orbis Cascade Alliance)
Martha Brogan (University of Pennsylvania)
John Burger (ASERL)
Tom Clareson (Lyris)
Kim Douglas (Cal Tech)
Sharon Farb (UCLA)
Leslie Firth (Carleton University; OCUL)
Rachel Frick (IMLS)
Julia Gammon (University of Akron)
Catherine Hamer (UT Austin)
Bob Kieft (Occidental College)
Michael Levine-Clark (University of Denver; CARL)
Constance Malpas (OCLC Research/RLG Programs)
Emily McElroy (Oregon Health and Science University; Orbis Cascade Alliance)
Lizanne Payne (WRLC; UKRR)
Bernie Reilly (CRL)
Kathleen Richman (LLMC)
Judith Russell (University of Florida)
Mark Sandler (CIC)
Karen Schmidt (Illinois Wesleyan University; CARLI)
Roger Schonfeld (Ithaka)
Brian Schottlaender (UCSD)

Peggy Seiden (Swarthmore College)
Michael Spinella (JSTOR)
Dona S. Straley (Ohio State University; OhioLINK)
Tom Teper (University of Illinois Campaign-Urbana)
Melissa Trevvett (CRL)
Catherine Wilt (Lyris)