1-2022

Print Collections Reconsidered

Rebecca Lubas

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A Winding Road: Becoming a Semi-Feral Map Cataloger

By Laura Kane McElfresh

Hello again, *Technicalities* readers. It has been a while. This column addresses the winding road that led me to my current position and how I came to write for *Technicalities* again.

In summer 2012, I left my job as assistant library director at OSU-OKC, Oklahoma State University's Oklahoma City satellite campus. That fall I tried to write about my new position as technical services librarian at Cape Cod

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Community College, but found that I had nothing more to say, and I sadly quit my column, "Good Things Come In Small Libraries."

In the nine years since then, I have changed positions twice more, with each move taking me to a different state. The job transitions have had me working in a variety of integrated library systems (ILS) platforms, too: Ex Libris Voyager, III Millennium, Voyager again, OCLC WorldShare, and now Ex Libris Alma. I have performed an ILS migration as project leader from the library side, coordinating with vendor-side counterparts on the implementation. This included a change of platforms for interlibrary loan and course reserves, necessitating reconstruction of the library's reserves collection. As a bonus, the new ILS

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Over the past few months, many of us gradually restored or fully returned in-person services in our libraries. We began working in our library buildings more hours a week after a year and a half of concentrating on providing print alternatives to our students and faculty. Reaching remote users and reaching users with remote library staff was an all-consuming challenge. Of necessity, we had to put aside thinking about physical spaces and tangible collec-

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nearly all libraries. In fact, card catalogs and catalog cards have, for the most part, passed into history and craft projects. If you are interested in exploring the topic further, I recommend a lovely and delightful book, *The Card Catalog: Books, Cards, and Literary Treasures*, compiled by the Library of Congress with a foreword by Carla Hayden (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2017).

Changes with 2022

I welcome a new regular contributor, Laura Kane McElfresh. Laura is a former columnist who is returning to *Technicalities* after a hiatus. She replaces Sheila S. Intner, whose last column appeared in the December 2021 issue.

We have decided to provide Digital Object Identifies (DOI) where we can. A DOI is a string of numbers, letters, and symbols that uniquely identify an article, book, etc.—and provide it with a permanent URL.

Kudos

I congratulate our regular contributor, Dr. Gregory Leazer, who has been awarded the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Research Agenda Pilot Grant. Dr. Leazer's project will address the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Children and Families section of the ALSC Research Agenda and seek to answer the following questions: What are the barriers to library patronage and participation for underrepresented children and families? How are libraries bridging these barriers? The project will aim to understand the relationship between the lack of library services and how that contributes to the lack of literacy, and to social and civil isolation. The research will be conducted in consultation with Candice Wing-yee Mack, Los Angeles Public Library, and Robert Montoya, Assistant Professor of the Department of Information Studies, University of California Los Angeles.

References

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2. Melville Dewey, "Library Handwriting," reproduced from *Library Notes* (March 1887): 273-82; 11.
3. Jensen, "A History of Library Hand."
4. New York State Library*, Bulletin* 66; *Handbook of New York State Library School* (Oct. 1901): 422.
5. Ibid., 426.
6. Dorcas Fellows, *Cataloging Rules with Explanations and Illustrations*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1922).

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tions while meeting user needs during a time of remote teaching, learning, and research. Interaction with print usually meant some scanning—or a lot of scanning. Electronic delivery was paramount.

It is time to start thinking about print again. As we have been returning to our offices and reopening our library doors, we have had the chance to look at our stacks with fresh eyes. We may have noticed the congestion that we stopped seeing because it was a lower priority than other issues. We may have noticed the shabbiness (or as I like to say instead, the "well-loved-ness") of the volumes lining the shelves. We may have wondered, "Why did we not weed that Apple II+ manual from 1981 before now?" as we walked by that shelf on the way to our offices.

There are a few big projects that one can engage with for your print collections, all of which often get pushed down the priority list because they are too big to think about tackling, require too many library staff hours, or require an outlay of funds, like a membership commitment. It is hard to break inertia. Let us look at a few ways to set the momentum in motion.

A Well-Tended Collection: Weeding and Pruning

The idea of trimming books from the collection is usually one that is blocked by obstacles of what *really* needs immediate attention. Unless you have a true space crisis where you cannot add a book without taking one away, it is difficult to justify starting.

Think about "pruning" in addition to "weeding"—it is more than a

euphemism. Pruning is a more subtle art. Weeding is something you do because you no longer have a choice, the garden is overrun, and it will be suffocated without drastic action. Pruning is what you do to a tree to encourage growth, and it even makes it aesthetically pleasing. In reality, you may need to do a bit of both, depending on the condition of your collection.

While there are those of us who have the space, mission, and resources to have a comprehensive collection of record, most of us need to be more targeted with our collections. Whether your collection is a mighty oak or a bonsai tree, the core idea is the same. Grow and shape the kind of collection your institution needs. If you need to recover space quickly, you might need to figure out the low hanging fruit of outdated works in areas of study where information does not age well and where you can use basic reports in your library system showing straightforward data such as publication date or number of checkouts. Reviewing your institution's curriculum can provide much clarity; when programs have been eliminated there may be areas with some easy maintenance decisions.

After picking out some of the easier projects, the sense of accomplishment will help propel the more difficult decisions requiring more time and multiple data points. Trends in academic fields, popularity of courses, and the research interests of recent faculty hires can and should all be considered.

Sharing the Work

The start of the 21st century saw the rise of collective print collection efforts. These projects sought to leverage shared catalogs and systems linked to consortia and existing inter-library networks to provide more powerful borrowing and lending amongst institutions. The growth of cooperation in these projects reached a critical mass, and usually (with notable exceptions like HathiTrust) center on regional hubs. Participation in a shared print program can provide a way to address many collection dilemmas at once. It can help identify what to keep and what can be let go, and it can help focus purchase plans. It also can strengthen existing cooperative relationships and expand new ones.

A foundational activity upon entering a shared print cooperation initiative is to do a collection analysis, comparing your institution to the others in the program. The Partnership for Shared Book Collections (https://sharedprint.org) has created an infographic defining shared print and its advantages.[1] The Partnership offers a number of tools to explore when considering starting this process.[2] A shared print program usually has a preferred tool for consistency. Joining a project also may give advantageous pricing for new members. This process highlights a library's collection strengths and may uncover areas that you did not realize you had. The process allows you to mark what titles you wish to "contribute" to the collective. While the blunt approach to shared print is "we do not have to keep this title because 20 other libraries have it," undergoing this process can help focus and narrow down areas for weeding and pruning. If your library has an area of strength, you can preserve and even enhance it.

There is much discussion in the shared print world about return on investment. Shared print does cost resources at the outset. The collection analysis tool may have a one-time or ongoing cost and serious staff time is involved in reading the analysis and drawing conclusions and actions from the data. However, if a shared print project can be viewed as means to multiple ends, it can be just the thing to break inertia in collection tending. The analysis can provide targeted areas for weeding and identify major contributions to a bigger network.

Sometimes Less Is More, Sometimes More Is More

Over the past decades, libraries have gotten very good at being frugal and have carefully tried to not have redundancies in their collections to their networks. The downside of non-duplication is that this has sometimes been at the expense of not purchasing a core title in an area and making a faculty member or student borrow something that would be good to have on the local shelves. Focusing the collections on the strength of the institution can help inform these decisions, even if it feels counterintuitive to purchase copies of a commonly held title.

Elevating and Celebrating Print

Collection analysis also can help with diversity and inclusivity work, uncovering where collections may most need diversification. Results of collection analysis can create great opportunities for discussion with academic departments from fresh and engaging angles.

Through a collections analysis, the strengths of the collection also can

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be uncovered, creating opportunities for virtual and physical exhibits and opportunities to celebrate the history of the institution in an interactive manner. Exhibitions can draw community interest and contribute to reestablishing the library as a physical intellectual hub as we return to in-person activities. Print collections can invite users back into the library, reminding them of the scope of resources the library provides, resources that they may have done without for a year or more.

Revisiting the Value of Print to the Library Program

Investing resources in a collection analysis can yield a better understanding of the state of the collection, strengthen networks, and point to clear pathways for growth. It can be the foundation for a more relevant print collection.

Emerging from the pandemic with a fresh look at the print collection is more than an opportunity to revitalize print. It is an opportunity to reconnect the needs of the institution and its community with all aspects of library resources and services. After more than a year of being reactionary out of necessity, we can look at services holistically and proactively again. Engaging with print through analysis, maintenance, and programming is one way to reestablish relationships with our library users.

References

1. Partnership for Shared Book Collections, "What is Shared Print?" [v.2], https://sharedprint.org/wp-content/uploads/What_Is_Shared_Print_Infographic.pdf (accessed Nov. 22, 2021).

2. Partnership for Shared Book Collections, "Tools," https://sharedprint.org/resources/tools (accessed Nov. 22, 2021).

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included an electronic resource management (ERM) system, which I got to implement! While I did mostly finish populating our knowledge base and got COUNTER harvesting started, I was not there quite long enough to finish fine-tuning the harvester—or to manage the transition from COUNTER 4 to COUNTER 5.[1]

Outside of systems-type work, I have acted as project leader on a comprehensive, urgent, and drastic print collections weeding project. Perhaps this should have happened before the ILS migration, but there was not time for it back then. This was followed by a shelf reading, shelf listing, and inventory project. One might think the inventory project should have come before weeding; I certainly did! But it actually worked out fine that way and, in this case, it turned out even better than a "sensible" order of operations probably would have. Additionally, my responsibilities included several phases of print serials inventory, weeding, and conversion to e-only, which took place before, during, and after the larger weeding project.

It Has Been Quite a Journey

I do expect to write more about my adventures (and misadventures) along the way, especially in weeding and ILS implementation. For now, though, I would like to start at the last part—at the intersection of my latest job transition and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As I mentioned,