

Remarks of Superintendent of Documents Judith C. Russell

Depository Library Conference St. Louis, Missouri April 18, 2004

I want to join Bruce [James, Public Printer], Sara [Parker, Missouri State Librarian] and Dan [Barkley, Chair of the Depository Library Council] in welcoming you to St. Louis for this meeting of the Depository Library Council. It is a pleasure to be with you again and to continue our discussions on the future of the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).

I am delighted that so many of you have made the effort to be here, and particularly to see so many library directors here to help us address some very important issues. I am also conscious that many of our colleagues were not able to be here with us. I urge you to take home all that you learn from this conference and share it with others in your institution and in your community. Encourage them to review the documents that we are discussing and submit their comments to GPO. It is important that we include the entire library community – not just the depository libraries – in these discussions and provide them with an opportunity to participate and make their views known.

The highlight of this meeting will be the Public Printer's remarks tomorrow afternoon, which will be the first public presentation of the initial results of the strategic planning process that Bruce James began when he arrived at GPO 16 months ago. We are concluding the first phase – the fact gathering phase – and preparing to use the facts as a foundation on which to build the strategic plan for keeping America informed in the 21st century and beyond.

In keeping with Bruce's presentation, the overall theme of the meeting is planning for the future – and the various reports and initiatives that we will discuss over the next few days will help us set priorities and keep our forward momentum, even as we continue to work on the strategic plan. I look forward to some lively discussions and expect to go back to Washington with lots of good ideas.

As you can see, we have an agenda that is filled to overflowing. I want to take a few minutes to talk briefly about several topics that we will discuss in depth later in the meeting. The first of these is the set of initiatives that relate to preservation of and improved access to the legacy collection of tangible items in your libraries.

PRESERVING PRINT RESOURCES

Last summer I had the privilege of participating in a conference hosted by the Center for Research Libraries and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The topic was Preserving America's Print Resources, aptly called the PAPR conference. One statement that was made at that conference was that Federal and other government documents were among our most at risk printed resources because we were relying

merely on the multiplicity of copies to preserve these documents. Everyone is counting on someone else to take care of these materials. The speaker elaborated, saying that our libraries were not doing active preservation of most government documents, although some collections were better protected than others because they were in closed stacks or had some temperature and humidity control. He felt that we were running the risk of losing many – if not all – of the printed copies of some documents more or less simultaneously from neglect. (The picture that was left in my mind was of lemmings rushing toward and plunging off of a cliff.) That comment was not made by me or by someone affiliated with a depository library – it was not even made by a librarian – and yet once it was made, everyone in the room was struck by the truth of the statement. And everyone encouraged GPO to take a leadership role in addressing the issue and seeking solutions.

I had already begun to talk with the library community about the need to better manage the legacy collections in depository libraries both for improved public access and for preservation, but the PAPR conference increased my sense of urgency.

For almost two hundred years the U.S. government has sent its documents out to the people and, as a result, we have an incredible national asset in the collections that your libraries house and the expert staff that have evolved to assist the public to use the materials effectively. We have an opportunity – and an obligation – preserve that asset, even as we plan for a 21st Century digital depository library system, that respects the foundation of the current program, but is not constrained by it, and that takes optimum advantage of the enormous volume electronic resources that are, and will become, available.

One of the strengths of the current system is that no single natural or man-made disaster can wipe out the collective record of our democracy because it is housed in hundreds of libraries throughout the nation. We must find creative ways to reduce the burdens of the large historical collections in our regional depository libraries and other large selective libraries, while preserving a reasonable number of sets of the print publications and maintaining a distributed system that protects these assets and ensures permanent public access.

Several of the sessions this week will focus on efforts that are planned – or underway – to address the management and preservation of the legacy documents collections. One is the movement toward shared repositories, or shared housing agreements, that would allow multiple libraries to eliminate some of the redundancy in their collections. These initiatives, which are still in the early stages, will help us move toward a smaller number of comprehensive sets of print publications that can be more readily preserved. We are not going to preserve every government document in every depository library. We can't even afford to fully preserve the 53 sets in our regional depository libraries. But we do need to decide as a community how many sets of tangible documents should be preserved and take the necessary steps to establish – and support – consolidated collections that are as comprehensive as possible, so we can actively preserve a reasonable number of sets.

Decision Framework for Trusted Repositories

Tonight at 7:00 p.m., Melissa Trevvett from the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) will present a decision framework for federal repositories that CRL has prepared for GPO. Once completed, this framework can be used to evaluate the level of assurance provided by print repositories based on their physical characteristics, resources, governance and other factors. In order to establish repositories that consolidate our assets and focus our preservation efforts, each participating library must have the assurance that the repository can fulfill its obligations. The decision framework will help us decide on the essential characteristics for trusted repositories. [The discussion draft of the decision framework is available at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/decisionmatrix.pdf.]

Collection of Last Resort

In that same session, we will discuss the draft plan for establishing a Collection of Last Resort – a secure "dark archive" that will become, overtime, a comprehensive collection of tangible and electronic titles that will backstop the regional collections and shared repositories. In reviewing other initiatives, like JSTOR, it has become clear that multiple "light archives" are not sufficient to protect these assets. The highest level of assurance comes from a collection of last resort that – as the name implies – is not used unless all other resources have failed. Archivists will tell you that the best way to preserve a tangible asset is to house it under ideal conditions and avoid all use because every time you use it, you put it at risk and subject it to wear and tear. [The draft plan for the Collection of Last Resort is available at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/pubs/clr.pdf.]

DIGITIZATION OF THE LEGACY COLLECTION

These initiatives – shared repositories and a collection of last resort – do more for preservation than they do for public access. So the third, and essential, leg of the stool is the commitment to digitize the entire legacy collection of U.S. government documents – an estimated 2.2 million print publications totaling approximately 60 million pages – and make sure that those documents are available, in the public domain, for permanent public access. The intent is to make sure that the entire collection is digitized for preservation purposes, with a variety of access files derived from the digital preservation masters.

Monday morning we will discuss several aspects of the digitization initiative. Last month GPO hosted a meeting of experts on preservation digitization to discuss current specifications for the creation of digital preservation masters. The report on that meeting includes a proposed set of minimum specifications for digitizing documents from the legacy collection. GPO is seeking feedback on that proposal. And we expect to hold a similar meeting in May to discuss metadata standards for the digitization initiative. Both specifications are essential to building a true collection, rather than a random set of digital objects. GPO will also develop a proposed governance plan and make it available for review. [The report of the meeting of experts on preservation digitization is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/about/reports/preservation.pdf>.]

Priority Titles for Digitization

GPO also recognizes the need to develop a list of priority titles or series that should be among the first materials to be digitized, so we are conducting a survey to identify, and then rank, the titles, so libraries will have some guidance as they select projects. In recent discussions with the working group leading the Association for Research Libraries (ARL) initiative to collaborate with GPO on the legacy digitization project, there was some discussion about the characteristics of titles for the initial digitization projects. There was general agreement among that group that we needed some early successes to build confidence in the overall project and excitement about it, so priority should be given to titles that were of high interest to one or more types of libraries, in good condition and available to be guillotined for relatively rapid, low-cost digitization. Priority should also be given to titles that, if digitized with sufficient quality and made accessible, some libraries would be willing to give up in tangible form, thus freeing their paper sets for deposit in shared repositories or the collection of last resort.

At that meeting one of the ARL directors said, "We need to signal clearly that we have started and that we are not going to stop until we finish digitizing the entire collection." The enthusiasm for this project has been enormous -- in libraries of various sizes and types and in federal agencies that also want preservation of and improved access to their historical publications. The session on Monday is your opportunity to influence the criteria that will be used for selecting the priority titles to begin this project and the specifications that will be used to create the digital preservation masters.

FUTURE OF THE GPO SALES PROGRAM

Last fall, Bruce asked the Council and the attendees at the October meeting in Washington, DC, to help GPO determine the boundaries of free public access through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), outside of which GPO might develop a new economic model for the Sales Program that could generate \$30 to \$50 million in additional revenue annually. The model must be one that is acceptable to publishing agencies, complements free public access through the FDLP, and avoids inappropriate competition with commercial publishers – a tall order to say the least. Last month, GPO convened a meeting of representatives from the library community, the information industry and federal publishers to discuss the feasibility and characteristics of such a model. That report and the report from the Council to the Public Printer, which includes a substantive discussion of this topic, are the subject of the session that will begin at 3:30 p.m. this afternoon. This is a topic that is sure to generate some energetic discussion. [The report of the meeting on the future of the Sales Program is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/about/reports/preservation.pdf>.]

Before I hand this over to TC [Evans, Deputy Superintendent of Documents], I want to give you a quick update on several others issues.

DEPOSITORY SERVICES CONSULTANTS

We have nearly completed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Library of Michigan that will let us place the first depository services consultant out into the community to provide training and work directly with local depository libraries. We have several other proposals in-house or promised, and we are eager to move forward to fill the 12 positions that we have allocated for this purpose. These will be GPO employees, and their salaries, benefits and travel expenses will be paid by GPO, but we are hoping that each consultant will have a sponsoring depository that will provide office space and other support, as the Library of Michigan is doing.

The MOU will be posted once it is completed. Although there may be variations depending on the circumstances and requirements of other hosting institutions, this will serve as a template. You can share the MOU with your general counsel or others in your institutions who are reviewing hosting issues. Similarly, several libraries that have submitted proposals are willing to share their documents.

If you are interested in serving as a consultant or offering to host a consultant, or just need more information, please talk to Kevin [O'Toole, Director, Library and Customer Relations], TC or me.

5-YEAR RULE

A number of libraries that have left the program and many selective libraries that remain in the program have expressed dissatisfaction with the statutory provision requiring that every title, once received, must be retained for a minimum of 5 years. GPO has proposed replacing that requirement with a provision that would allow retention criteria to be established by the Superintendent of Documents. Dan is chairing an ad hoc committee to develop guidelines that will support implementation of the proposed amendment by defining the criteria to be issued by my office in lieu of the current statutory mandate to retain all tangible items for a minimum of 5 years. The default requirement is to retain tangible items for a minimum of 5 years as currently provided by statute. Therefore, the guidelines only need to define criteria that are to be applied to tangible items considered for disposal prior to the end of the 5-year retention period.

I have asked the committee to:

- Develop criteria for evaluating items for disposal prior to 5 years. For example: An electronic copy is available that is suitable for substitution
- Identify categories of materials eligible for disposal before 5 years. For example: Ephemeral materials, such as posters, pamphlets, calendars, bookmarks (providing specific item numbers as examples)
- Reiterate the current exceptions to the 5-year rule. For example, superseded titles.

The intent is to have a document available for review and approval at the summer meetings of ALA and AALL. Once we have approved criteria, and the support of the major library associations, GPO will ask the authorizing committees to amend the statute.

ESSENTIAL TITLES FOR PUBLIC USE IN PAPER FORMAT

Last year I accepted a request from the AALL to reinstate paper distribution of the Supreme Court slip opinions, but I made the paper slip opinions available only for law libraries and regional libraries. At that time, I asked for recommendations for additional titles that that were deemed essential for libraries of various sizes and types. GPO received some recommendations, but none with a sufficient volume to warrant action. This summer, once the survey on priority titles for digitization is completed, I will initiate a similar survey on essential titles for public use in paper format. There will be an opportunity to recommend titles for consideration, followed by a period of voting to identify titles that are of sufficient interest to warrant action.

GAO REPORT

A major part of the fact gathering for the GPO strategic plan was a report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) that the Congress requested on behalf of GPO. The data gathering for the report has been completed, and GAO has briefed GPO about the results, which are extremely helpful and reinforce data gathered from other sources. GAO has given GPO a set of PowerPoint slides that outline the findings, and Congress has concurred that GPO can accept those preliminary findings and proceed with the strategic plan. GAO expects to publish its report in June or July and make it available to the public at that time.

WEBCAST

After the fall council meeting last year, GPO received a number of requests to web cast portions of future Council meetings. We explored the feasibility and cost of web casting Bruce's presentation tomorrow afternoon, so it could reach a broader audience. In the end, we decided not to offer a web cast, primarily because this is the initial presentation of the fact gathering and Bruce expects to make adjustments to it based on feedback from this audience. Also, he wants to present it to the Congress and other audiences in person, so he has the opportunity to gage their response and answer their questions.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Finally, let me explain to you that I have asked the Council to focus on two major topics at this meeting: management of the legacy collections and planning for the future of a 21st Century digital depository library system. I have already mentioned a number of specific reports and issues that we will be discussing and debating over the next few days.

We have a lot of work to do to sustain the momentum on these important issues. I do not want Council distracted by operational issues that are better addressed in other ways. We have a general open forum scheduled on Tuesday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. and a *GPO Access* open forum scheduled on Wednesday morning at 10:30 a.m.

I urge you to take any operational issues to the committee. I assure you that the Council and GPO will review and respond to operational issues that you bring forward, but Council will not be focused on operational issues except through its committees. I would also like to remind you that the HELP link on *GPO Access* [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/help/index.html>] will provide you access to the new knowledge base of frequently asked questions and allow you to submit your questions and comments for review and response by GPO staff. A request submitted through the HELP link will receive prompt attention and be tracked to make sure that you receive a timely and accurate response.

CONCLUSION

We have an exciting year ahead of us. GPO will continue to work with the library community to encourage and facilitate the establishment of shared repositories into which tangible collections can be de-duplicated and provided with active preservation. We will expand our efforts to obtain materials from the community for the Collection of Last Resort. GPO will work with you to begin the digitization of the legacy documents collection for both preservation and access. We will begin cataloging of the retrospective (pre-1976) materials by conversion of our shelf list and other means, and we will pursue other initiatives to help you better manage the retrospective materials and make them more accessible to users in and outside of your libraries.

Simultaneously, we will be working with you on an orderly, but accelerated, transition to a digital FDLP, which will continue to cause depository librarians to change from managers of collections into managers of electronic services, a trend in libraries that is not limited to government documents. This will change the ways that GPO acquires, preserves and provides access to electronic files. It will also require GPO to offer different services to depository libraries, including increased training and other support. We are eager to learn about services that you would like to have from GPO in the future.

Finally, the impact of the transition to a digital FDLP is already substantial and will become more substantial with the passage of time. So we have an urgent need to plan for the future of the Federal Depository Library Program and of GPO in order to ensure public access to authentic government information, now and in the future. We must “get out of the box” and take a fresh look at the mission we share and determine the best means to accomplish it. This meeting is an opportunity to explore options and begin to shape the future. I am looking forward to our discussions.

TC...