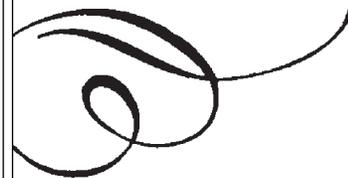


DOCUMENTS LIBRARIANSHIP IN INDIANA: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

by Lou Malcomb



topic of conversation and concern during ALA Midwinter was the announcement by Judith Russell, Superintendent of Documents, that "GPO will produce and distribute *only* 50 titles in print, those listed on the "Essential Titles for Public

Use in Paper Format." Everything else will be distributed to depository libraries in electronic format only.¹ This decision had been mentioned at previous meetings of U.S. Federal Depository Librarians but never with a firm date for implementation, October 1, 2005. With all federal government information available on the Internet, will all librarians become "government information librarians" or will the specialist, "the documents librarian," become even more important within the profession in order to maneuver the maze of our government's actions on the information super-highway? This article provides a preliminary historical overview of how the specialty of government information grew within the profession with emphasis on its development within Indiana. Perhaps understanding its beginnings will assist in assessing future directions for this area of librarianship.

One expects changes, but part of the charm of government information has always been its stability. Budgets are annual. Treasury (or the State Board of Accounts) reports record the expenditures and income. Congress and the Indiana General Assembly consider bills and pass some. Censuses must be done every 10 years for apportionment of the House. Presidential speeches must be recorded, and even some of the Governor's are retained. Laws, as passed, must be available so the citizen can obey them. Patterns of publishing have been amazingly consistent over some 200 years. Quirks and changes have evolved to meet the needs of the government. Even in the Internet age copies can be pulled up in full, once found among the more than 231,000 federal document titles and more than 2400 federal interactive databases now on the Internet.

HASSE AND THE BEGINNING OF DOCUMENTS LIBRARIANSHIP

Our country was barely 25 years old when Congress first realized the usefulness of libraries and the dissemi-

nation of documents to libraries. Following the burning of Washington during the War of 1812, the government realized its losses included numerous documents, so Congress passed the first Depository Library Law in 1813. It mandated the distribution of important documents to libraries, with the primary intent to provide assurance that these documents would be preserved in case of future disasters in the nation's capitol but with a secondary purpose to establish a way for citizens to access this information and thus ensure an informed citizenry. Several articles detail the changes in the law and give the history of government publishing and the development of the U.S. Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).² I will not duplicate that detail here, but do want to note the importance of the Printing Act of 1895 to the development of documents librarianship.³ It established the Superintendent of Documents office, headed by Mr. F[rancis] A. Crandall, who hired some critical support staff, including John H. Hickcox as Chief of Cataloging. Hickcox's principal task would be the production of the *Monthly Catalog*. At age 63, Hickcox was well suited to the work. He possessed 10 years of editorial experience with his own private bibliographical venture: *U.S. Government Publications; A Monthly Catalogue* (1885-1894). Mr. Crandall also hired Adelaide Hasse as librarian, charged to collect, arrange, and classify the government's vast output.

Nelson and Richardson note in their article about Adelaide Hasse that "Clearly, Hasse's career coincides with the beginning of documents librarianship."⁴ Ms. Hasse fully describes the early work required of a documents librarian as gathering and distributing documents in a little booklet entitled *The Compensations of Librarianship* in 1919. It provides a description of her responsibilities during those early days: "My duties as librarian were to care for the current documents after they had been recorded by the cataloguers and to collect all other documents. The Richardson Bill gave to the Superintendent of Documents the authority to remove to his custody from all the departments all the accumulations of documents not in use for the business of the departments. The removal of these accumulations fell to me. I dare say never had a young

collector been given such an opportunity to revel in a very orgy of collecting.”⁵

She goes on to describe a trip to the Interior Department to retrieve documents,

There was a tradition in departmental Washington that a sort of Captain Kidd treasure in the way of documents was buried somewhere in the Interior Department..... We went down a long, dark, damp corridor at the end of which was said not to have been opened for sixteen years. We could not open it now. The door opened inwards and it was impossible to squeeze in and so much as wink at the treasure....what I saw was a solid wall of books, from floor to ceiling and from side to side of the room—nothing but books.⁶

Hasse is best known in the documents field because she is credited with the creation of the SuDocs Classification System. All librarians who claim or desire to be documents librarians need to read Hasse’s volume. It provides a sense of dedication and persistence that I have always found as characteristics of true documents librarians and is perhaps where the tradition comes from.

This diligent commitment by documents librarians to provide access to public documents (often whether the government wants it or not) is evident in so many stories but is probably best summarized in the history of GODORT.⁷ Another record of this characteristic can be found in the notes and minutes of the Council of Depository Librarians where during various periods of history the documents librarians have insisted on specific actions by the Public Printer and won frequently and consistently.⁸ A most recent example occurred last summer when the Department of Justice tried to “recall” three public documents from federal depositories. While depository library librarians were requested to destroy the documents, one flatly said he would not, protested to Justice and GPO officials, who re-studied the issue and rescinded the order.⁹

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM FOR FEDERAL DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTION

Government publishing and the distribution to citizens and libraries has seen continuous change since Hasse’s day but the one that cannot be overlooked is the quantity. Until the 1940’s, federal documents disseminated to libraries ranged in the five to nine thousand range. For instance, IUB indicated that it received 9359 federal documents in 1949 in its annual report for that year. By 1984 GPO reported that they had cataloged 58,000 documents and for 1994 had distributed 55,000 tangible items to depository libraries.¹⁰

Documents librarianship, in many libraries, grew out of this quantity. Before but especially following World War II, many libraries designated staff to specifically handle the increasing number of documents. Specialized documents staff were designated to handle cataloging or processing as well as public services. *The History of GODORT* notes that “there have been groups and individuals working in the field of government documents since the 1930’s” and summarized the growing interest by the profession.¹¹ There were many librarians that didn’t want to deal with the specialized nature of documents— laws, regulations, military standards, and statistics: “There is a popular belief that public documents are dry and uninteresting. Strangely enough this view is too often held by librarians themselves.”¹² Even documents librarians have often seemed defensive about the value of documents. “While not as fascinating as a novel, a department report has economic and historical value, not merely for the investigator but for the public at large.”¹³

LIBRARIANSHIP IN INDIANA

In Indiana, librarianship as a profession began emerging in the late 1800’s. As of 1899, only one librarian in the state was counted as having graduated from a library school, but by December 1910, “there are 49 librarians who have had a one or two-year course, and 91 who have had a summer school course, making a total of 140....”¹⁴ W. I. Fletcher noted the qualifications of librarians in his January 1907 article: “...let me say that I regard the oncoming ‘bull of progress’ with complacency, because it has always seemed to me that in the constructive period of the library movement we have been so occupied with devices and schemes, with the technical side of the work, that we have laid altogether too much stress upon it, and have not realized that our work is essentially professional and not technical. We must know books from the inside and cultivate intellectual relations with our patrons, rather than merely to ‘run’ a library.” Fletcher saw scholarship and intellectual curiosity as essential to the profession: “The librarian should be the philosopher and friend to all who need help. I do not decry professional expertness, but I should like to see every librarian and library attendant first of all as scholar, an ardent seeker after knowledge and wisdom, living among books with delight, content with nothing short of absolute familiarity with them, a linguist in some fair sense of the word, if books other than the vernacular are at hand, and at the same time eager and able to help and guide others. Such a one will use all good apparatus, but will know that the best apparatus is but a clumsy and rough-shod aid in a work which must be, first of all, one of intelligence and scholarship.”¹⁵

In the field of documents librarianship, Indiana appears to have followed the national trends with some consistent tardiness but usually accepting the directions that the federal program was taking, patterning its programs by those in surrounding states. One of the most interesting story lines can be traced in the short articles throughout the *Indiana State Library Bulletin* about the development of state libraries in Iowa, Nebraska, and others until funding was appropriated by the state for the building of the Indiana State Library in 1929.

The Indiana State Library has always played an important role with federal documents and also with distribution of Indiana State Documents.¹⁶ While the history of federal distribution of documents is well known, a program to distribute Indiana State Documents didn't come into formal existence until 1974 when the state passed our current depository law.¹⁷ Even so, it is evident from the numerous articles within the *Indiana State Library Bulletin* and the *Library Occurrent* that state publications were distributed throughout the state to libraries of all sizes by the State Library and at the request of state agencies since the early 1800s. Citizens have placed an importance on the State Library since statehood: "The first official mention of a state library for Indiana is made in the Journal of the Constitutional Convention, when on June 28, 1816, the following resolution was adopted: 'That it be recommended to the general assembly of the state of Indiana, to appropriate the money voluntarily given by the citizens of Harrison County to the state, to purchase books for a library for the use of the legislature and other officers of the government.'"¹⁸ The Kokomo Public Librarian, Eva M. Fitzgerald, noted in January 1906 that "it may be safe in saying that only with the last decade have we really had a 'State Library.' Up to the beginning of 1895 we had a 'State House Library.' The clearing house for magazines, the monthly bulletins, the gathering of materials for an Indiana biography, these all are bringing the State Library into closer touch with the Public Libraries and through them with all the people of the State."¹⁹ As noted above, the year, 1895, also saw the passage by Congress of a renewed depository system within the federal government.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIANA STATE PUBLICATIONS

John A. Lapp, Chief of the Legislative Reference Department at the State Library in Indianapolis, noted in 1910 that "Public documents are issued primarily for public use and their value depends upon the extent to which the public actually uses them. They are issued as official records and for educational purposes." But Lapp gives the librarian the responsibility of measuring their usefulness for their specific library: "careful discrimination must be made by the librarian in selecting documents. Not all are of use in every library. Again

it must be a question of relative values. The limited space in most public libraries prevents the accumulation of more than a small percent, of the documents issued, and it is needless to add that the ones selected should be the best. The librarian should, however, be familiar with all public documents of the city, state and nation in order that these sources of information may be supplied if the desired documents are not at hand."²⁰

Librarians did not always appreciate receiving documents. In fact documents have often carried a negative reputation, as described in June 1910 of the *Indiana State Library Bulletin*: "There has been some complaint that the smaller libraries in the state do not need and cannot give shelf room to all Indiana Documents. This is regrettable... If any of the librarians who now receive all the reports sent in the State Library's distribution believe that they cannot use them and that they would give better service by receiving only those which they are certain they could use."²¹

Another notice in the *Bulletin* scolded librarians for their handling of documents describing the displeasure of state officers when they discover that libraries were not making the documents readily available:

A State official has reported to the State Librarian that he had, on inquiry at a public library, failed to find the report of his office. On investigation, we have found that the library in question had received and accepted for the distribution of the State Documents of the year asked for.

This opens the question of the value and distribution of the State publications to the various town libraries. If they are worth receiving, they are worth cataloging, or at least arranging on the shelves so that they may be easily accessible.²²

The State Library recognized the importance of this cataloging and access and reported in 1905 that "all the public documents have been classified and cataloged according to the decimal classification, and a large portion of the miscellaneous books and pamphlets have been re-classified and re-cataloged according to the same classification. The completion of this work is now in sight and the Indiana State Library will soon be in harmony with all modern libraries. ...Many thousands of copies of valuable State documents have been arranged in chronological order and can be reached in a moment's time."²³

Lapp acknowledged the librarian's importance in the role of educating the public but also in making public officials realize the importance of distributing documents to the public. "The librarian has an important function to fill as an educator in opening up the public documents for wider usefulness. In this way, too, there will be a reaction upon the officials. When

they once know that their reports are of wide interest, and that they are used, commended, and criticized all over the state, there will be a striving for better, more educational reports. The public officer owes it as a duty and will fulfill it if the people show an intelligent interest in his work."²⁴

CHANGES IN THE 20TH CENTURY

In 1962, the depository law was changed to designate some libraries "selective" but also designated at least one library within each state or region as the "regional."²⁵ Regional Depository Libraries assumed significant responsibilities, including agreeing to retain all publications received through the depository system forever while selectives could select to dispose of documents after five years, if the Regional agreed to the disposition. For specifics about the responsibilities of regionals and selectives, see guidelines at: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov>.

The distribution of state and federal documents, the ever increasing quantity of documents, and various political events including World War I, economic depression, World War II (where libraries served official roles for distributing information via "University Key Centers of War Information") required libraries to provide staff that had special knowledge and expertise with public documents.²⁶ The first training of librarians on documents within Indiana seems to have been November 7, 1911 when discussion of the "use of government documents" was given at the 4 p.m. meeting of the Indiana Library Association in Indianapolis.²⁷ For a short time, during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a discussion group within ILA/ILF, the Government Documents Discussion Group, but because of limited membership, this was abandoned in the mid-1980s. In 1976 the Indiana State Library Advisory Committee organized a meeting with the documents librarians around the state (representatives from federal depository libraries), to discuss and develop a state plan for documents, which had been requested of all states by GPO.²⁸ Additionally, the documents librarians formed a small separate organization, INDIGO, which meets biennially to discuss documents issues and to plan programs and actions that they deem needed for continued access to government information.²⁹

CONCLUSION

So how is the specialty, documents librarianship, changing with technology and the Internet? Many of us celebrate the fact that we no longer have to rummage the basements of agencies, as did Adelaide Hasse, to collect the documents. They are all available on the Internet...or many of them are. It is perhaps the quantity of government information going onto the

Internet that will require documents librarians. It is very easy to find OSHA regulations on hazardous chemicals in laboratories on GPOAccess if you know to look for Title 29 of CFR Section 1910.1450 and if you happen to know what OSHA and CFR are. But can every librarian know how to search all aspects of the deep Web especially when everything becomes available full-text on the Internet? Does not the content and depth of information require some specialization so that the occasional user of the information can inquire of librarians who are more aware of the specifics?

Documents librarianship is changing, in some ways more quickly than some other specialties within the profession and in others more slowly. The Internet and other technologies are changing the way we instruct library users to identify and locate information and the way they find it themselves directly, the methods we use to locate answers to reference questions as well as the methods we use to catalog and house the information, and the way information itself is generated and retained. It is critical that all librarians become familiar with basic levels of government information, kind of beginning documents librarian but that we also continue to treasure those few, those brave among us that have chosen and who will choose in the future to specialize in government information. With or without receipt of huge numbers of print publications through depository systems, we need to nurture professionals who are aware of the complexities of statistics, laws, regulations, agency histories and more so that they can open the door to the Internet room where thousands (if not millions) of government documents are hidden.

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Lou Malcomb (malcomb@indiana.edu) is head of Government Information and Microfilm Services at Indiana University's Main Library. This article was written in recognition of all the documents librarians in Indiana, but in special memory of Alice Wickizer, who cataloged many public documents at the Indiana State Library 1957-1968, and served as Head of the IUB Government Documents Department from 1971-1996. Alice willingly talked about her knowledge of the development of documents librarianship during interviews in the Summer of 2004, before her death last fall.