Survey of Current Retrospective Cataloging Practices

Pre-1976 Government Documents in Regional Depositories and the Importance of Access to Holdings

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Among regional depository libraries in the United States, most collections include a large number of government documents published prior to 1976. Much of this material may remain uncataloged because of several factors, including the sheer volume of material that was published during the mid-twentieth century prior to the advent of online catalogs. The availability of the US government's indexing systems, which allow discoverability through the Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification and Government Printing Office's (GPO) Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (CGP), has also prompted some depositories to postpone cataloging their older materials, and lack of staffing in many government-documents departments makes retrospective cataloging a lower priority. A survey of regional depository librarians sought to learn about the current retrospective cataloging practices and plans for these materials at various institutions. The survey responses indicate that the majority of regional depositories that responded are working on or already have completed retrospective cataloging for pre-1976 materials. Those that are not cataloging these materials are relying on CGP and library shelf lists to locate materials with SuDoc numbers.

Cataloging of these collections provides greater control over these materials and increases their use through the online catalog and interlibrary loan. But it will also assist libraries and GPO in the identification of materials regarding recent Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) initiatives, the Preservation Steward Program, the FDLP Regional Discard Policy program, and Guidelines for Establishing Shared Regional Depository Libraries. *Also of consideration is the "Regional Depository Models: A Vision for the Future" presented by the DLC Regional Models Working Group in April 2016, which outlines the benefits of a fully cataloged regional. It can also assist libraries to determine materials for possible in-house digitization by identifying titles that have few holdings in OCLC and that have a relevance to the institution or state.*

The Federal Depository Library Program managed by the US Government Printing Office (GPO) distributes select federal agency publications at no charge to libraries throughout the United States and its territories, designated as Federal Depository Libraries. Governed by Title 44 Chapter 19 of the US Code, the program includes both regional and selective libraries, defined by the percentage of materials they collect with the regional libraries collecting and preserving for the long term all of the materials distributed through the program.[1]

The regional depository collection in Oklahoma is housed at the Edmon Library Library at Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater, a land-grant university. Materials in the collection published before 1994 were classified using an in-house system devised by Ellen Jackson, a librarian at OSU in the mid-1940's. This system collocated materials published by government agency, similar to the Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) system, but using a different letter and number scheme, with each agency having its own classification number. The system's purpose was to include state, federal, and international government publications within one classification system.

There are now difficulties with this unique system. Almost all other federal depository libraries are using the SuDocs classification, meaning that SuDocs and the *Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* (CGP) cannot be used as indexing for the older materials in the OSU collection. Fulfillment of requests for uncataloged materials, both by patrons and other depository libraries, is made more complicated. The shelf list for government documents collection is comprehensive but not complete,

so it cannot reliably serve as an index either. Reclassification to SuDocs is not an option, as there are close to a million items in the collection that are classified in Jackson. That said, many thousands of the pre-1976 federal titles remain uncataloged, in part because of the time-consuming practice of creating a call number for each piece and the complexity of agency changes and many of the series, so the retrospective cataloging project, which began many years ago, continues today.

To put goals and current cataloging practices into perspective, and to potentially identify materials in light of two recent Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) initiatives, the FDLP Regional Discard Policy program, and *Guidelines for Establishing Shared Regional Depository Libraries*, librarians working with the OSU regional collection decided to conduct a survey of other regional depositories, inquiring about their retrospective cataloging practices. Its purpose was to gain information that would bolster or clarify the argument for the retrospective cataloging of the Oklahoma State regional collection in its entirety, and partly to learn any useful knowledge that other libraries might have to share. We were also curious about the ways that other depositories handle this pre-1976 material and how many were still cataloging it. Also, we estimate that HathiTrust has digitized about two-thirds of our printed federal documents collection, and we have access to the HathiTrust database, which provides us with catalog records for the digitized versions of these older titles. We wanted to inquire as to how many other regional depositories have access to the HathiTrust database and include HathiTrust records in their own online catalogs and how this impacts their cataloging perspectives.

Literature review

Although there does not seem to be a great deal of literature concerning retrospective cataloging of government documents collections, the information available does tally with the experience garnered in our own retrospective cataloging project. In 1983, Graham described the situation that led to a backlog of government documents in many regional depositories around the country. "The question of cataloging government documents has become more urgent in recent years because of their enormous proliferation. In 1900, perhaps 440 items were distributed to depository libraries by the U.S. government. By 1930, the figure was 4,300; by 1960, the annual average was over 12,000; and by 1976, the 1,216 depository libraries were receiving on average over 22,000 items apiece."[2] Obviously, this enormous amount of materials must have resulted in a tremendous management problem for many depositories, and may have resulted in many documents not being cataloged

in a timely fashion. However, although the GPO did not begin making machine-readable cataloging available until 1976, OCLC copy was eventually found for 99 percent of all titles.

In 1985, Plaunt wrote about the advantages of actually cataloging government documents, observing, "The USGPO document holdings of many libraries constitute a large portion of total library holdings. This is especially true of medium-to-large size depository libraries. The noticeable lack of cataloging for documents found in some libraries leads to relatively little use or circulation of this large segment of its holdings."[3] Government documents cataloging presents some problems not present when dealing with other types of materials. Lynch and Lasater pointed out that decisions have to be made when retrospective cataloging regarding "ephemeral material." They found that about 35 percent of the titles received in 1987 were shorter than ten pages and took more time than expected to deal with.[4]

Lynch and Lasater also described other problems specific to government documents. Some irregularly published serials may have separate, unique SuDoc numbers assigned to each issue. Also, many serial titles may change format from paper to microfiche, then return to paper after a few issues. Agency name changes and GPO's inconsistent series-tracing practice make authority work difficult, as well as necessitating numerous title changes. Despite all of these difficulties, Lynch and Lasater concluded that "government publications can be difficult, time-consuming publications with which to work, but their presence in an online catalog dramatically increases use and gives a library better control over the collection."[5]

Much more recently, Reynolds and Lundgren agreed with this assessment. "Unsurprisingly, the increase in borrowing and loan activity for these stored documents demonstrates that exposure through the catalog is already leading to greater use of this material."[6] However, they reported having to devise a solution to a problem raised by a twentieth-century binding practice during their retrospective cataloging project. "Many of the documents had been bound together so that providing book level access to circulation information to the parts of the series had to be contrived using a field that linked the records for all the titles in each volume to the first book record in each volume."[7]

Lynch and Lasater also described that, "but the presence of government documents in an online catalog dramatically increases use and gives a library better control over the collection."[8]

Method

Because there are a relatively small number of regional depositories around the country, we understood that the survey

population would be correspondingly small, and could be reached via the REGIONAL-L mailing list. To get as many responses from this limited group as possible, we kept the number of survey questions and their complexity low. Ultimately, there were nine survey questions sent to the mailing list via a form generated by MachForm, most of which required brief essay answers. MachForm software is a web-based form builder and form management tool. It can be used to create a survey: once a form is created, a URL is generated for the form that can be sent to participants. Results from responses to the form can be cumulated and generated as a spreadsheet, making it easy to tabulate data and determine trends or patterns.

In addition to institutional name and email address, we began the survey by asking, "Are you or do you have plans to retrospectively catalog your pre-1976 or earlier federal collection?" We wanted to get a clear sense of the number of regionals that intend to completely catalog their federal collections to compare with our own situation.

The second question dealt with possible alternatives to cataloging the older materials: "If you will not be cataloging the collection what finding aids are you using for these materials?" We assumed that many of these institutions organized these older materials using the SuDocs classification, but we wanted to confirm that this is the case, as that would mean that they could depend on the CGP as an index and finding aid. So our third question was, "Are your materials organized by the SuDocs system?"

Because we knew that there are many older federal documents available in the HathiTrust database, we asked, "Are you incorporating or linking to records from HathiTrust?" Our purpose was to get a sense of how many depositories are aware of and have access to HathiTrust, and thus may be providing access to the digitized versions in their online catalogs.

The fifth question was intended to get a sense of the numbers of staff devoted to cataloging documents within each regional depository in 2017, some of whom may be doing retrospective cataloging for at least a percentage of their time: "How many and what type of library staff are engaged in cataloging government documents?"

Because the Edmon Low Library has a large number of monographic series in our federal documents collection that are bound together and require linked catalog records to indicate that they are within single volumes, we asked, "How are monographic series bound together handled in your library?" We wanted to explore how other libraries have handled printed monographic series, both physically and within their catalogs.

The seventh question was, "Is there a specific year of publication beyond which your older materials are not cataloged?"

Our purpose was to learn if any depositories might have decided to limit cataloging of older material by publication date to concentrate their efforts on getting records for newer materials into the catalog.

We wondered whether some depositories might be using their catalog or shelf list cards as a tool in a retrospective conversion project, as was frequently done in the 1980s when many libraries began to shift to online catalogs. So we asked, "If your depository has a current retrospective cataloging project going on, are catalog or shelf list cards being used?

The final question involved inquiring as to participation in a GPO partnership program that requires a complete inventory of materials. "Are you cataloging materials for possible contribution to the FDLP Preservation Steward program or for the Regional Discard Policy program?" We wanted to see if this might be an additional motivation for the retrospective cataloging of older materials in some institutions.

Survey Results

Using the REGIONAL-L list, which is limited to the forty-six regional depository libraries in the United States, we distributed the survey on September 29, 2017. After a follow-up email on October 27, we closed the survey in early November. (See appendix A.) Responses to the survey numbered sixteen (35 percen) and included the Oklahoma State University (OSU) Library's response.

Reviewing the survey results:

1. Are you or do you have plans to retrospectively catalog your pre-1976 or earlier federal collection?
   o Most libraries are making efforts to catalog the pre-1976 materials, although approaches vary widely.
   o Several libraries catalog materials as they are requested by patrons or are important to the research taking place on campus.
   o Others are selectively cataloging the materials by agencies that have a significance to the campus or region or the state.
   o One library is coordinating cataloging with other libraries in the state to create a statewide regional.
   o Other libraries are cataloging the materials but did not describe any specific approach.
   o One library is working through the agencies in order from the physical beginning of the collection to the end in each location—main library and off-site storage.
   o With staffing and time limitations, materials are processed when possible. Three of the libraries are not cataloging their collections.

○ Three libraries are close to having completely cataloged these collections, although some records are brief in format.

Despite of the very different approaches, these responses indicate that all of the libraries are working to process these older materials in some way. This is also important as presumably libraries are adding their holdings to the OCLC database, making their collections known and available for loan to other libraries worldwide. In the recent FDLP initiatives for regional libraries, discussed in the "Analysis" section below, this will play a critical role.

2. If you will not be cataloging the collection, what finding aids are you using for these materials?

Reponses to this question were fairly uniform. Most libraries are using their shelf lists and/or the CGP in paper or online to identify materials not yet cataloged. Some libraries are also using the WorldCat database and others, including ProQuest Congressional. Other indexing tools in paper include the *Catalog of the Public Documents 1893–1934*, the *Checklist of U.S. Public Documents 1789–1909*, and the *Cumulative Subject Index to the Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications 1900–1971*.

3. Are your materials organized by the SuDocs system?

All but one library responded "yes" to this question. Only the OSU Library among the regional depositories uses an in-house classification system for materials published until 1994, after which all new materials were classified in SuDocs. Not using a uniform system has created problems with material identification, location, and resource sharing.

4. Are you incorporating or linking to records from HathiTrust?

The responses to this question present a mixed picture. Six (37 percent) of the responding libraries are not incorporating or linking to HathiTrust records. The remaining majority are and do so in various degrees. Three of the libraries are including HathiTrust records in their catalogs, but these are separate from the print records, which creates two records for patrons to review. One of the libraries is providing links to HathiTrust from their print records. They are also including the HathiTrust records for which they do not have print

holdings. Three of libraries responded "yes" without including any additional detail.

5. How many and what type of library staff are engaged in cataloging government documents?

Most libraries participating in the survey have a mix of staff working with government documents cataloging, some part-time, and librarians who do some supervision. Most of the staff are in positions that are dedicated to processing government documents. Students are also involved in copy cataloging. In addition to government documents librarians, other titles of professionals participating in the cataloging process include serials, metadata, online engagement, and electronic resources librarians.

6. How are monographic series bound together handled in your library?

There were ten responses to this question from the sixteen responders, about 62 percent, and the responses varied widely. One depository restricts their cataloging to "only those titles in the volume that they need." They don't specify what type of materials are needed, or why. They disregard the other titles in each volume, so could be said to be partially analyzing their bound monographic series. They also disbind volumes when only one title is requested. Another library simply responded, "Do not circulate." Our assumption, therefore, is that these materials remain uncataloged in their collection. The third responder indicated that they catalog each title in the volumes separately, but the item records have no barcodes. The volumes are barcoded only if circulated. This seems to indicate that the records are not linked. The fourth response included two URLs for catalog records, showing full, linked cataloging for all titles in each volume. Another library fully catalogs and links their records, but also comments that they have disbound volumes in some cases and cataloged each title separately. In another case, they describe their bound monographic series as "selectively analyzed" and linked through item records. Three additional depositories are not addressing bound monographic series at all, describing them as an "issue" or a "problem." One of these responders stated, "They are mostly ignored for now." Clearly, "bound-with" monographic series are an issue that libraries are continuing to grapple with.

7. Is there a specific year of publication beyond which your older materials are not cataloged?

Just less than half of the libraries responded that pre-1976 titles were the materials that remain uncataloged in their collections. The other libraries responded "no" to the question. We would assume that a reason for this is because the GPO did not begin to make machine-readable cataloging available until 1976, thus making it easier to catalog the newer materials. It is encouraging to note that about half of the responding depositories apparently have already cataloged their pre-1976 materials.

8. If your depository has a current retrospective cataloging project going on, are catalog or shelf list cards being used?

Three of the libraries are using shelf list cards for their retrospective cataloging projects. Most of the libraries, however, had a comment very similar to the following, that they began using shelf list cards and then found that working with the items directly from the shelf was a better option. "We did a test with shelf list cards and found that the process was slow. Rather, we pull publications directly from the stacks and are able to complete many more per month." Many libraries' shelf list cards from this time were OCLC REMARC records or OCLC Replacement Records. These records were converted from the Library's shelf list and contained only a subset of the data elements.[9]

9. Are you cataloging materials for possible contribution to the FDLP Preservation Steward program or for the Regional Discard Policy program?

Half of the libraries responded with "yes" and the others "no." Three responded "perhaps," or that they were still exploring this option. One library noted that the effort to comprehensively catalog the retrospective collection led to the idea of contributing to the Preservation Steward program, as one of the requirements for the program was "Ensure the item(s) is cataloged and if it is not, create a record using at least minimum level cataloging."

Prior to this survey, an email message sent to REGIONAL-L on March 3, 2017, concerning how libraries were approaching their backlogs and the number of staff that were devoted to this provided additional insights from colleagues at regional depository libraries. This information from colleagues was useful to put the work we were undertaking at Oklahoma State into perspective. (See sppendix B.) Questions included the following:

1. Are you working through entire agencies or selecting certain series/sets on which to focus?

2. If you have a HathiTrust record in your catalog for an item are you linking your holdings to this record?

3. Do you have full-time staff devoted to this?

Responding to question 1, most libraries appeared to be handling their retrospective cataloging in ways very similar to this response: "the approach is to work on entire agencies in some cases and certain series in others." Some libraries are dividing duties among students and more experienced staff, having students handle items that require only copy cataloging while the staff are handling serials, etc. Yet this requires a filtering through first to determine who works with what, demanding additional staff time. Questions 2 and 3 were also addressed in the later survey instrument.

Analysis

The rationale for this study was to determine how our own efforts to comprehensively catalog the backlog of federal depository materials published prior to 1976 compared to that of other regional depository libraries. Did other regional libraries have a backlog? Were they continuing to process it or were they relying on finding aids instead to allow them to locate materials by the SuDocs classification?

Almost all respondents, in addition to using the SuDocs classification, are working to catalog their pre-1976 materials. This assists us in the justification of our efforts to our administration but also helps us and the GPO identify materials regarding the Preservation Steward Program, the FDLP Regional Discard Policy program, and *Guidelines for Establishing Shared Regional Depository Libraries.*[10]

For the Preservation Steward program, all items submitted for a collection to be preserved must be cataloged. For the regional discard policy, government publications authorized for discard by regional depository libraries must meet several criteria, one of which is that a title exists in tangible form with at least four tangible copies distributed geographically within the FDLP. The knowledge, then, of which regional libraries hold what materials, gained by cataloging these items and adding holdings to OCLC, is critical for this approach.[11] These criteria are the same for the shared regional model.

GPO has not recognized HathiTrust records as official versions, so these may not yet be considered, but this is something that may come into play in the short term.

In "Regional Depository Models: A Vision for the Future," presented by the DLC Regional Models Working Group in April 2016, one of the potential models for regionals is a fully cataloged regional in addition to more multistate regionals. For fully cataloged regionals, the goal is to have all tangible regional

collections fully cataloged and inventoried. Benefits include the following:

- provide better access to government information
- would allow regionals to create comprehensive needs lists
- would eliminate the need for selectives to create discard lists
- would allow for a national inventory of tangible documents held by regionals[12]

Possible steps to a fully cataloged collection were also outlined in the presentation. Also reviewed were fully and partially cataloged regionals and how these collections overlap and/or complement each other. This is another consideration for the cataloging of the materials in a regional collection.

Digitization

This process allowed us to determine materials for possible digitization by identifying titles that have few holdings in OCLC and have a relevance to the institution or state. These titles will be digitized in-house, placed in the institutional repository, and then contributed to either HathiTrust or the Digital Public Library of America.

Conclusion

The responses received from the survey of regional depositories indicate that the majority are cataloging or already have cataloged their pre-1976 materials. These libraries have concluded that they need to provide catalog access to these materials, even though they are indexed and can be found using the SuDocs classification. Their depository collections are almost all arranged by SuDocs, which was developed in the 1890s and available since the early twentieth century.

A mixture of staff, students, and librarians are doing the cataloging work, which implies that depositories are not hiring special staff to do their retrospective cataloging projects, but rather that regular staff are doing it as time permits. Nearly 40 percent of responders don't have access to the HathiTrust database, which has a large digitized collection of US federal documents, but those that do either add links to their print records or add separate records for the online versions to their catalogs.

Some libraries catalog and link all monographic series titles that are bound together, and others do not. Some approach these "bound-with" materials by cataloging only the titles that are requested or have specific subject matter. Some catalog all the titles but don't link them. There doesn't seem to be a uniform approach to this cataloging problem among the regional

depositories. The majority of the libraries are not using existing shelf lists to help them with retrospective cataloging, but half of the responders do report that they are participating in or considering the FDLP Preservation Steward program, which requires complete cataloging for a collection. The snapshot the survey presents is of a work in progress, of libraries that find value in older federal documents and fully intend to provide access as soon as possible.

The cataloging of these collections will provide greater access to these materials and can also help to determine titles for digitization that have few holdings in OCLC and that have a relevance to the institution or the state. Importantly, this effort will assist libraries in participating in the recent FDLP initiatives, which will be vital as GPO continues to explore additional enhancements to the Federal Depository Library Program structure, especially in light of the revision of Title 44 Chapter 19, which is the foundation for the structure of the Program.

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Appendix A: Cataloging of Collections at Regional Depository Libraries (Survey Text)

Cataloging of Collections at Regional Depository Libraries

Dear Regional Depository Librarians,

The regional at Oklahoma State University is working to comprehensively catalog its pre-1976 federal depository collection. Information on cataloging processes at other regional depository libraries will be very helpful to provide a rationale for this initiative and also to provide an overview of these processes nationwide.

If you would please take 10–15 minutes to answer the following questions we would be very appreciative.

Results will be published. Please request if you wish that information be kept confidential.

- Institution
- Email*

1. Are you or do you have plans to retrospectively catalog your pre-1976 or earlier federal collection?
2. If you will not be cataloging the collection, what finding aids are you using for these materials?
3. Are your materials organized by the SuDocs system?
4. Are you incorporating or linking to records from HathiTrust?
5. How many and what type of library staff are engaged in cataloging government documents?
6. How are monographic series bound together handled in your library?
7. Is there a specific year of publication beyond which your older materials are not cataloged?
8. If your depository has a current retrospective cataloging project going on, are catalog or shelf list cards being used?
9. Are you cataloging materials for possible contribution to the FDLP Preservation Steward program or for the Regional Discard Policy program?
10. Additional comments

Appendix B: Cataloging Federal Backlog Message (Email), March 2017

Hello everyone,

I am checking to see how everyone is working to process older materials that you have not yet cataloged.

Are you working through entire agencies or selecting certain series/sets on which to focus?

If you have a Hathi Trust record in your catalog for an item are you linking your holdings to this record?

Do you have full-time staff devoted to this?

Thank you so much again,

Suzanne.

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