

Cooperation: Panacea or Myth

Address to the Conference on “Consorting with the Future: Issues and Opportunities for Consortia of Academic, Research, and Special Collections Libraries”
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I have subtitled my remarks today, “Special Collections, St. Crispin’s Day, and Prospects for Consortia.” If the picture I am about to draw seems a bit overwrought, please just smile and indulge me. I’m a devoted play-goer who is currently under the influence of Shakespeare’s King Henry the Fifth.

You all remember Shakespeare’s much quoted account of the famous Battle of Agincourt. Taking advantage of political contentions within France, the historical Henry tried to regain territory that he thought rightfully England’s. Scholars who have studied documents now in library special collections find his claims less than convincing. Nonetheless, he transported 2,000 men-at-arms and 6,000 archers from Southampton in 1415, captured Harfleur in France, and turned towards Calais. On the way, however, he found his way blocked, on St. Crispin’s Day, October 25, by a sizeable French army. Despite Henry’s initial success, his own force had been decimated by dysentery. Even the Englishmen who could still fight were tired, wet, and hungry, and numbered only about one-fifth of the opposing French force.

I have worked enough with special collections myself to know that special collections librarians often see themselves in a predicament similar to that of the

struggling soldiers in what was left of Henry's army. In budget battles and grant competitions, special collections libraries are often out-gunned. And in recent times, battles for funds within research libraries have been exceptionally severe, with difficult consequences for special collections.

Never mind that special collections libraries preserve for all posterity the rare books, the manuscripts, the letters, the photographs, the maps, the prints, the drawings—the prized *original* documentation of humanity's heritage. Never mind that original research depends on such documentation, that the creation of new knowledge starts with primary sources, that exhibits of originals thrill and educate thousands of visitors to our libraries, and that, every year, books that broadly advance human understanding are written using special collections. It's the resulting books and readers' desires for them, not the underlying sources, that tend to get attention at budget time.

Libraries tend to be ranked less by the richness of their original materials than by the volume of books in their holdings. Because more people check out books or study them in reference rooms than undertake research in special collections, the latter get branded as elitist, a service for just a few. Even if a relative handful of scholars produces our culture's major new insights, budget allocators tend to put the money where they find the most users, whatever the quality of use. This leaves our special libraries a bit like Henry's bedraggled bowmen as they looked up at the gleaming ranks of mounted knights in heavy armor opposing them.

What to do to overcome this discrepancy? Internal institutional budget allocators often turn special librarians away with admonitions to find donations outside, including foundation grants, to finance the development, the preservation, and the provision of

access to their collections—access that, in our time, increasingly comes online from collection digitization. In turn, when special collection librarians approach foundations, they often are told that their chances of receiving foundation funding will be better if they form, and submit grant applications as, special collections consortia. The quite sensible argument is that libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies can serve their audiences more effectively in a given region by coming together in collaborative efforts.

The future of such consortia is what we have now come together to consider. At the risk of seeming as belligerent as King Henry, I would like to suggest that the kind of consortia we often form may not, for the future, be the most effective.

Here in the Philadelphia area, where you have so many rich collections, the consortium you have formed seems impressive. The membership of PACSCL—the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries—now numbers at least 24, if I am informed correctly. These include academic libraries, independent libraries, historical societies, museums, a branch of the National Archives, and other institutions, interested in a wide range of subjects in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. You have succeeded in interesting foundations in highly valuable projects. With help from the Pew Charitable Trusts, you are building a single-search online database uniting catalogs of member institutions. With help from the Delmas Foundation, you are providing access to members' finding aids and creating new ones. With help from Pew and the William Penn Foundation, you are providing a catalog and exhibit of the rich holdings that your member institutions have of illuminated manuscripts. Clearly regional consortia can win external support and produce great benefits.

But do consortia always have to be geographic, composed of institutions within a given region? In the future, I would suggest, there may be even greater advantages in consortia of special collections that have common interests in themes, formats, and genres.

In Washington, D.C., for example, the Folger Shakespeare Library, with its large collection of rare books and manuscripts in British literature and culture, has more in common with the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, than with such nearby neighbors of the Folger as the Smithsonian Institution's Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives of African art and culture or the extensive local history library of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. The latter library has more in common with the substantial library of the Chicago historical society, among others that support studies in American urban development, or, in terms of preserving genealogical collections, with the Allen County, Indiana, Public Library, in Fort Wayne, well known for its Historical Genealogy Department. And the Elisofon Photographic Archives has more in common with the George Eastman House in Rochester, in terms of photographic collection preservation, or, in terms of African art, with the library of the African Art Museum of the Society of African Missions Fathers in Tenafly, New Jersey.

If we look at consortial possibilities less from the standpoint of institutional convenience and more from the standpoint of user service, consortia based on themes, genres, or documentary formats may have more advantages than consortia based on geographical proximity. For a long time we have recognized how important it is to scholars to identify multiple locations of research resources for their particular, special fields of study. In bringing together information about the remarkable illuminated

manuscript collections available in the Philadelphia area, and calling attention to them through an exhibition, PACSCL is doing an immense service to scholars, students, and the public. Think how much additional value such a consortial service could have—for researchers here as well as elsewhere—if the consortium embraced collections of illuminated manuscripts more widely in the country or, indeed, the world.

Such consortial endeavors are exactly what digital technology and Internet access now make possible beyond anything of the kind that we could have before. Already many of us have digitized our individual catalogs for access through our Web sites. Already many of us have digitized parts of our collections for electronic transmission. Already some research libraries are building online collections in collaboration. One thinks of the “Making of America” collection, a digital library of primary sources in nineteenth-century American history developed by the University of Michigan and Cornell. One thinks of the National Science Digital Library, funded by the National Science Foundation, to which multiple libraries contribute in support of science education. One thinks of the “American Memory” project in the Library of Congress, which now contains more than seven million digital items from collections of LC and other libraries across the country.

These well-known examples, however, cover only broad themes, providing widely ranging materials through which scholars search for resources relevant to their specific research topics. One can imagine making tremendous inroads in helping scholars find rare and important materials if there were a concerted effort to catalog and digitally convert retrospective records pertaining to specific genres, such as nineteenth-century

women authors, cookbooks, jeremiads, or plays, or pertaining to specific research themes, such as immigration, family life, or (remembering King Henry) Shakespeare in America.

Do special collections libraries therefore need to re-examine priorities? Do we need to pay more attention to bibliographic description, not only so that scholars and researchers know what we hold in our collections, but also so that we can put together useful consortial programs, including programs online?

We do not collaborate, after all, for the sake of collaborating but for some purpose, to achieve some important end less achievable individually. We may collaborate to make our operations more cost effective, by sharing off-site storage, as five New England college libraries in a consortium are doing. We may collaborate in creating a joint online research-quality collection, as Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore here in Pennsylvania have worked towards in their Tri-College Library Consortium. We may collaborate to barter know-how for material, with smaller institutions providing collection data to larger ones that can provide technological expertise, enabling both to improve services to patrons. All these kinds of consortia may best be regional.

But we also may collaborate to identify common needs and share the costs of technological research and development, as the 36 institutions coast-to-coast in the Digital Library Federation do. They, including the Library of Congress, have additionally started consortially to build a distributed open digital library—the DODL, they call it for want of a better name—providing users with one point of entry to multiple, digitized collections. Moreover the Digital Library Federation hopes to layer services on top of this distributed library that may include not only a deep finding system but specialized portals to help scholars locate material for their individual fields and specific studies. Such

consortia will transcend regions to concentrate on topics, themes, genres, and formats, including material in special collections.

Before the day ends, you will hear from from the Association of Research Libraries, the Center for Research Libraries, the Research Libraries Group, and the Institute of Museum and Libraries Services about other consortial efforts to take advantage of digital technologies. I merely wish to argue that with special collections as much as with libraries in general, it is important to ask, what do we want consortia to achieve? And whatever that is in any given case, will it best be achieved by consortia that are limited to regions?

From my position, I can see how the Library of Congress could become a partner in almost any special collections consortium, whether the consortium focused on a topic, a theme, a genre, a format—or a region. That is because of the great diversity of our special collections holdings. In addition to the 29 million cataloged books and other print materials in the Library of Congress, many of which are rare, we hold 56 million manuscripts, some 4.9 million maps, more than 5 million items in our music collection, and 13 million visual materials, such as photographs, moving images, posters, prints, and drawings, not to mention our 4000-year-old clay tablets bearing cuneiform inscriptions. In the digital era, we also now have collected, through a collaboration, some 30,000 Web sites.

Our special collections have materials pertaining to an incredible range of subjects. Consider, for example, the range of additions to our special collections just in our last fiscal year. We have received the papers of former Defense and Energy Secretary James Schlesinger, 69 autographed letters of 15th United States President James

Buchanan, a manuscript containing selections from three operas by George Frideric Handel, the 1507 Martin Waldseemüller map of the world, one of the first books printed by Muslims using movable type, issues of the first newspaper published in Afghanistan, a library of materials in multiple languages about Ethiopia, 100 digital photographic prints documenting the 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center, and 58 documentary photographs of destruction at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and at the 9/11 plane-crash site near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

The Library of Congress is, in fact, participating in numerous consortia or otherwise collaborating with libraries across the country and in the wider world. One of the performance goals of the Library Services division, for which I have responsibility at the Library of Congress, is, and I quote—

. . . advancing the Library's mission to acquire, describe, preserve, and serve a universal collection through the use of new and emerging digital technology with the support of collaborative and private sector partnerships.

The acquisition of Web sites I mentioned took place through a Web preservation project called MINERVA, for Mapping the Internet Electronic Resources Virtual Archive, which is a collaboration of the Library of Congress with the Internet Archives and WebArchivist.org. Also we have a project called Web Access to Works in the Public Domain, which links bibliographic records for selected works that the library holds in print to the full-text electronic copies in trusted repositories; it resulted from cooperative agreements with Indiana University and the University of Michigan.

We have contributed collections to the Cultural Materials Initiative that the Research Libraries Group is assembling from digital resources of participating members. And we are developing a global cooperative project, called Global Gateways, to digitize the library's international collections along with treasures from other institutions around the world.

More familiarly, our Cooperative Acquisitions Program is a collaboration of the library's field offices with other U.S. libraries, and we exchange publications with libraries that we have designated official exchange partners across the world. We participate in the Cooperative Online Serials program, or CONSER as you probably know it, which has 41 members. You also know our Program for Cooperative Cataloging, operating now for more than a decade, in which member institutions contribute bibliographic and name authority records to an international pool of shareable cataloging created according to mutually agreed-upon standards. We collaborated with OCLC and the Deutsche Bibliothek to test a model for a virtual international authority file.

Our well-known Center for the Book has a network of affiliated centers in 47 states plus 97 organizations that serve as national reading promotion partners. The Veterans History Project is a collaboration of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress with the American Folklore Society and the Oral History Association, working with 450 official partner organizations to document the experience of the nation's living war veterans. And we are collaborating with the Internet Archive and the University of Maryland to build the International Children's Digital Library.

The Library of Congress also is involved with the Federal Library and Information Center Committee, abbreviated as FLICC, and its cooperative interagency

network, FEDLINK. We collaborated with others, under the auspices of the National Information Standards Organization, to develop a national standard for the digital talking book. We have entered into formal collaborations for testing digital media with the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the National Archives and Records Administration. The list of consortial activities in which the Library of Congress is involved sometimes seems endless. And often, I admit, these collaborative efforts have been more expedient than strategic.

In a sense, however, our consortia building may only be beginning. Two things cause me to say that.

First, the United States Congress is giving the Library of Congress \$100 million for NDIIPP—the National Digital Information and Infrastructure Preservation Program—of which \$5 million supported a plan that drew widely on expertise from outside the library and has been approved by five Congressional committees. Congress called upon the Library to consult widely with other stakeholder organizations, including many libraries, in the planning for the program, which we did. And the program's implementation will be impossible without a collaborating network of stakeholders nationwide. The library is now using an additional portion of the appropriation to collaborate with the National Science Foundation in funding research through a call for proposals that will result in cooperative agreements early in 2004. Thus we are beginning a national collaboration on digital preservation with many institutional partners.

The second area in which collaboration involving the Library of Congress is growing is in digital content building. I call attention again to the Digital Library Federation—to its decision to construct a digital library, drawing upon the

individual collections of its members, including the Library of Congress, that will seem unified to the users who go online to access it. Digital technology is beginning to make it possible to support scholarship not just within our institutions, not just within our localities, not just within our regions, but across the nation and, indeed, around the world. That is to say that through consortial arrangements, special collections at the Library of Congress—and also special collections at the member institutions of the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries—can be made available, if digitized and shared online, to anyone on the globe with a networked computer.

Unlike Henry the Fifth invading France, I do not underestimate the obstacles to this kind of endeavor. Technology that enables our institutional computer systems to interoperate is not fully there yet. Ways to secure, authenticate, and validate digital information are not complete. Methods of preserving fragile digital resources for long-term access are frightening lacking. Copyright restrictions on intellectual property access stand squarely in the way of access development. And perhaps most of all, the willingness of libraries to share their holdings electronically—that is, libraries' willingness to transcend the mindset that their prestige comes from the size and nature of their holdings rather than from the access services they provide their patrons—may remain a formidable obstacle.

However, equally formidable obstacles, in the form of French armed knights, did not deter Henry's little army at Agincourt. You remember the famous lines in which he there rallied his beleaguered band:

. . . we in it shall be remembered,—

*We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he today that sheds his blood with me,
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England, now a-bed,
 Shall think themselves accursed, they were not here;
 And hold their manhoods cheap, whiles any speaks,
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day.*

Would that I had such eloquence. But let me just say to you here today, what if we few—we happy few!—were to try to overcome the obstacles to federating our libraries for universal access? What if we fully recognize what we have already learned from digitizing books, journals, and special collections hardly ever used in our print collections—namely, that making access easy increases use? What if special collections librarians, along with others, took on the cause of supporting scholarship everywhere through digital, online availability of their holdings, rich and rare? What if this became a major purpose of our future consortia? What if, in fact, we used consortia to produce the library of the future, the digital library of the world.

Well, if we did that, I think those who failed to help would be like Henry's stay-at-homes and think themselves accursed they did not join. You do recall, I trust, how the battle came out, how Henry's massed archers totally routed those French knights, who had smugly enclosed themselves in heavy, outmoded armor. Shall we in our individual libraries be like them? Or shall we recognize that, to take advantage of the service opportunities made possible by the digital era, the future of consortia and the future of

libraries may be one and the same? Cooperation is not an option. It is the route to a glorious future of expanded library service.

Thank you very much.