

SAA-CPR Business Meeting

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My name is Cass Hartnett and I am U.S. Documents Librarian at the University of Washington Libraries, where I also select materials in Women Studies and Gay & Lesbian Studies. Three weeks ago, I became the immediate past chair of the [American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table](#) or GODORT. GODORT has approximately one thousand members within the larger 65,000-member ALA. I'm here as an ambassador from the world of government documents librarians.

It seems unusual to start off a conversation with regret, but that's exactly what I'm doing. I have been a government documents librarian for 20 years, and I'm feeling my share of mid-career "ah-ha" moments. One of them is encountering my relative ignorance of archives and archivists. Don't get me wrong: I have baseline awareness, and feel confident that I've done passable referrals to archives when appropriate. The most common referrals to archives from our Gov Pubs department at the University of Washington Libraries are to our own Special Collections, to our Regional NARA, to our Washington State Archives, to various city archives, and to military archives or Presidential libraries. But I don't spend enough time in our own Special Collections, and I imagine the same is true of many government documents librarians. I do feel regret when I think of how much more I could have learned during my formative librarian years, particularly in terms of Congressional papers.

My awareness of archives grew when I took on the responsibility for Women Studies selection and encountered students wanting all kinds of primary resources pertaining to women's everyday lives (diaries, letters, photo albums, other artifacts). As I work with these contemporary scholars who crave both digital and tangible artifacts, I see firsthand they don't care whether something is considered an *archival* resource or a more conventionally published *library* resource. A finding guide, a bibliographic record, and a Wikipedia entry all serve the same purpose in their eyes as the interim step that gets them via one click to the resource they want. Today's scholars don't care at all about other long-held distinctions from the print-on-paper world, such as serial or monograph. In order to be an effective librarian at all, I am going to have to have close ties, close conversations with archivists and cultural heritage experts, to understand collections I may have overlooked. In this past year, I have been hearing the phrase "hidden collections" with more and more frequency. The memorably-titled 2008 report from OCLC is "[Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums.](#)" At my own institution, our Associate Dean for Special Collections has had the phrase "Museum Collaborations" added to his title. None of us in LAMs can afford to operate in silos anymore. And there is especially fertile ground for GODORT librarians, many of whom work with Congressional publications in our daily jobs, to learn about the work of SAA-CPR archivists. We all agree that, from an historical perspective, elected officials' work lives are absolutely vital to understanding the history of our democracy. People interested in Washington State history would be remiss if they didn't explore the UW collections of the papers of [Brock Adams](#), [Henry "Scoop" Jackson](#), and [Warren Magnuson](#), three of our U.S. Senators, whose papers have been processed and partially described thanks to a grant from our Legislature. The

archivist involved with those collections, the now retired Karyl Winn, helped found this Round Table in the mid-1980s. She says hello to all of her colleagues. She misses you people!

Who are the typical users of Congressional pubs in a federal depository library and university setting? First, students who just find material on a subject via the UW Libraries catalog, and the item in question just happens to be a government document and just happens to be Congressional, typically a hearing (example: keyword search Endangered Species Act gets you 386 results, mostly Congressional). Even this basic access can't be taken for granted, as our library did a major push in 1994 to catalog all our federal depository documents, 1976 to the present, as well as the ongoing depository acquisitions. My boss, Eleanor Chase, was instrumental in this effort. This costs a lot of money. We are now embarked on a multi-year project to catalog our pre-1976 federal depository library collection. A good solid chunk of these materials – I would say as much as 20% -- are Congressional. As documents get catalogued, they are used; no surprise, as a similar reality exists for finding guides. Spend the money, do the guides, your collection gets used. Not a complex formula, is it? But to this day, many of the over 1000 federal depository libraries do not have their pre-1976 holdings represented in their online catalogs.

Another category of users are those students who need three primary sources for a paper, or three government documents. Although these folks rarely have a burning passion for the material, we use teachable moments to generate sparks of interest in Congressional lit. Hearings, the Serial Set, or the Congressional Record generally satisfy these kinds of assignments. Our work lives are enriched by visits from junior high and high school groups in History Day and related competitions, and walk-in visits from members of the general public, our bread and butter for a depository library mandated to serve the public. Local law firms frequently send couriers to retrieve or photocopy our materials as well.

Grad students are probably our most thorough users, as there is nothing like a doctoral dissertation to compel exhaustive research. We mostly see grads in PoliSci, Public Affairs, International Affairs, Urban Planning, Environmental Sciences, Social Work, Library Science and History using our Congressional collections. And then there are the faculty and historians writing books. Our collection is also used by a nationally significant project called the [Policy Agendas Project](#) which codes Congressional literature into about twenty simple categories, allowing researchers to watch Congressional attention to various topics rise and fall over the decades (for example, the consumer protection movement).

What tools do we use? Beyond our print & microfiche depository collection, we still use the archival quality silver halide microfiche Congressional collections [produced by CIS](#) with the corresponding online index, now known as [LexisNexis Congressional](#). For plain English summaries of Congressional action, we rely on CQ publications, and we now subscribe to the complete run of [CQ Almanacs digital edition](#), as well as [CQ.com](#). As you know, there are two competing online editions of the US Congressional Serial Set, by [LexisNexis](#) & [Readex](#), both quite expensive. If you are lucky to subscribe to either, you, your users and your coworkers will be amazed by the depth and scope of material included in 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century Congressional reports. LexisNexis is also offering a fulltext online hearings product, a Congressional Record product and an ongoing collection of Congressional Research Service reports. For referral purposes, it is very important to know which libraries and archives in your geographic area have these subscriptions. Again, as you undoubtedly know, the Google Books project has run into major

problems in digitizing published hearings, which contain much copyrighted information such as newspaper articles.

There's another stellar commercial product held by many law libraries: [Hein Online](#). The people at Hein Online have digitized the entire Congressional Record and its predecessors, along with Statutes at Large and published legislative histories. Words fail me when I try to explain how much these digital resources have opened up the published Congressional literature. These riches truly mark our entry into a new era of Congressional research. As GPO Access makes its welcome transition to its Federal Digital System or [FDsys](#), free public searching of contemporary Congressional publications (going back to 1994) becomes much more sophisticated. Consequently, what we used to call librarian-produced "handouts" or guides have gotten considerably longer, for example my own [Congressional handout](#) is now 22 pages long, as we try to capture the old and new resources.

In GODORT, we trade tips about this cornucopia of Congressional resources. Two of our efforts were reflected in 2008 in our flagship journal [DttP \(Documents to the People\)](#). The theme of the Spring 2008 issue was: What Difference does it make what Congress Published? That was a follow-up to a 2007 program co-sponsored by GODORT, RUSA History Section, and ACRL-RBMS. It includes a piece from Jessie Kratz, Archives Specialist, NARA's Center for Legislative History, on "Recovering the People's Voice: Unpublished Petitions and Their Impact on Publications, Legislation, and History." Our Summer 2008 issue featured Karen Munro and Jesse Silva of UC-Berkeley's piece on "Mashing Congress: Using Web 2.0 Tools to Teach about Congress." Berkeley librarians in general do an excellent job teaching about Congressional literature online, using Adobe Captivate to serve up [brief videos of Congressional search tips](#). One of my favorite articles by a GODORT author is Karen Hogenboom's "[Going Beyond. gov: Using Government Information to Teach Evaluation of Sources](#)" portal: *Libraries and the Academy* - Volume 5, Number 4, October 2005, pp. 455-466. Hogenboom has also written on *Three Models for Teaching Government Information Sources*. I am currently writing a library science textbook on government documents (along with my colleague Eric Forte). Please let me know if there is specific content I could include that would be especially valuable to this community.

Linda Whitaker, whom I thank for bringing me here, spoke about the question of appraisal. Documents librarians don't use the term, but we do the activity, especially those of us in either actual or perceived collections of last resort. Our collections tend to be redundant, distributed as they were through a depository program that, at its height, included 1400 libraries. Still, unless designated a "full" or Regional depository, libraries can withdraw materials after 5 years, provided they followed the legal guidelines. Also, in the 1980s, many libraries withdrew their printed Congressional committee hearings, reports and documents when silver halide quality microfiche became commercially available. Decades later, many librarians are trolling around the Offers lists to replace these printed volumes. So for serious documents collectors, the activity becomes one of checking holding lists, [needs and offers](#). In 2009, there are a shrinking number of depositories. How many redundant tangible copies of any one particular Congressional publication are needed?

Because material becomes lost or stolen, or improperly discarded by space-hungry zealots, Congressional documents collections are *not* the same across the country. When an archivist acquires a

Congressional papers collection, I cannot imagine their doing the appraisal without assistance from a knowledgeable government documents librarian. (An experienced librarian would be essential; I doubt an entry-level librarian with less than two years' experience would be up to the task.) Some items that look "published" – like printed bills – were never widely distributed outside the halls of Congress and could be considered rare. One type of information missing from the published record is a real sense of the *daily proceedings* of a committee or sub-committee, beyond the bare bones calendars and the fully published hearings, reports, documents, and prints.

The future of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is being hotly debated, especially the system of regionals and selectives, and the operational burdens of being a regional federal depository. As so-called "legacy collection" of all extant tangible materials distributed through the program become digitized, what will it mean to be an institution that specializes in government or Congressional publications? Is there any value in preserving printed hearings as physical artifacts? How about Members' copies of the *Congressional Record*, sporting colorful edging and marbled endpapers?

To help solve such riddles, the [Association of Research Libraries](#) (ARL) and the [Depository Library Council to the Public Printer](#) (DLC) are busy hiring consultants to propose to the library community new models for a future FDLP. ALA is holding association-wide forums on "Government Information: A Topic For All Librarians." Like SAA, we have spoken up in support of the PAHR legislation currently before Congress. Linda Whitaker and I are planning a program at ALA for this June entitled "Librarians & Archivists: Together We Can Save Congress." Our hope is that GODORT and CPR can continue to work together in meaningful ways. What do you all need from us?