

From the Chair



Looking Back on California, Onward to Colorado

Cass Hartnett

What a pleasure it is to be writing a column again and to have the bright, airy feeling of the Anaheim conference to look back on. Both of our pre-conferences, on elections data and Web 2.0 applications, were resounding successes,

as was our program on local government resources for business and our GODORT Update. Speakers contributed their expertise and eloquence, and attendees walked away better educated and ready to try out new tricks when they returned home to tend their libraries and websites. Certain speakers have stayed in my mind, and I don't even need to consult my notes: Rhodes Cook, an elections expert who provided insight into the past and present process; John Wonderlich, who is busy reinventing access to contemporary congressional materials through the OpenHouse Project; and a charged-up Tim Byrne, who educated us about the impressive tools at Science.gov. Two former Superintendents of Documents, Francis Buckley and Judy Russell, circulated through our gatherings, willing to share their well-informed perspectives.

The conference center is the second most beautiful I have seen (I make no secret of my partiality to the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle). The Anaheim facility is ringed by a grove of palm trees welcoming visitors, and features an interior space that is a snap to navigate. The GODORT hotel worked out well (thank you, Conference Committee and Yvonne Wilson) and our reception in front of Chapman University's Leatherby Libraries was as fine a California night as one could imagine. Award recipients and those introducing them expressed gratitude for life itself and for the passion and inspiration of GODORT members. The setting that night was unique, an amphitheater-style seating arrangement that forced us to look out at each other. Of course, those attending represented only a fraction of our total membership, but I felt pride and satisfaction looking around that group. There were graduate school students, retirees, and everyone in between. The young members do a fine job of making us feel old, with their sharp brains, flexibility, and energy. Our corporate sponsors, whose advertisements grace this magazine, are full of individuals sharing our love of government literature, many of whom have worked in the trenches as librarians, some of whom have led GODORT.

Just weeks before Anaheim, the Government Printing Office (GPO) released *Regional Depository Libraries in the 21st Century: A Time for Change? A Report to the Joint Committee on*

Printing. GODORT leadership responded to the draft outline of the report (after consulting you, our membership), but then the timing of the full report's release happened to be hilariously bad for ALA conference-goers. (With a sigh we acknowledge that the world does not revolve around us.) The weeks immediately before the Annual Conference always see an exponential increase in e-mail communications, and most of us are able to do little more than tie up our local commitments before leaving town. We praise GPO for releasing its report in a timely fashion as required by the congressional Joint Committee on Printing, and for extending the deadline for comment, albeit to a day when many librarians would be returning home from the Annual Conference. Many GODORT members *did* respond to the report as individuals, and its theme was discussed in many meetings conference-wide.

But I am left with a peculiar feeling that, as a community, not enough of us have read this vital report—carefully, slowly, and thoughtfully—as this situation requires. Although the comment period has long passed, this will be one of the defining reports of our era, so we need to discuss it in our state groups this fall and come to Midwinter having reflected on it some more. Certainly, the plight of regional federal depositories, or large collections of last resort of any kind, will be a central theme in designing depository systems and user services of the future. Here's an example close to home: I almost didn't finish this column in time because of an all-consuming work project. My library is involved in accepting a very large set of Canadian, federal, and state materials from a neighboring depository with a mandate to downsize its collection. The care we put into these collections, and the relationship of the collections to our cataloging, preservation, and reference work, is incredible.

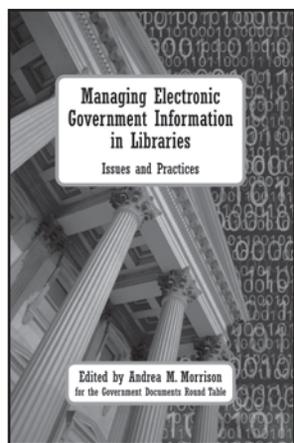
So Anaheim is already a distant memory and we turn our sights to Denver for the 2009 Midwinter Meeting. We now need to jump with both feet into our strategic planning process. Where do we see ourselves, even in a short-term future beyond our easy imagining? I started out this chair year drawing parallels between the kind of organization needed to keep GODORT running and that needed to run a neighborhood church. In both cases, if an individual member is inspired, moved, and nourished by a community, that spark will have a chance of turning into a sustaining flame. In both cases, the institution needs a message—something about which members evangelize (no need to be afraid of the word in this context). Some of the deepest evangelizing in GODORT comes on a

personal level, when individuals find our preferences, programs, updates, online resources, and published materials of high value and spread the word. Our message has to be something about which we can freely say that we think it, we speak it, and we hold it dear. What's our GODORT message? Is it our Bylaws? Our Procedures Manual?

No, our message, which we will refine together in our strategic planning process, comes from our very existence, the need that led to our founding nearly forty years ago. We are a part of the American Library Association. Our focus is libraries. We are more than an affinity group for those with a fetish for yellowing microfiche and dusty pamphlets. We are more than a loose affiliation of people who value cataloging, accurate record-keeping, and blogging. We are more than quaint types who believe that the most profound American literature comes

from the *Serial Set* and congressional hearings. Sure, it is fun to look at ourselves, but as Bernadine Abbott-Hoduski and others have pointed out, we are not the American Librarians's Association. We represent our libraries when we participate in ALA and in GODORT. So GODORT's special spark—the flame we get to guard together—is the intersection of government information and libraries. Ten years ago, we would have said “government information *in* libraries.” But because the government information we steward, preserve, describe, teach about, and provide access to cannot and will not be contained within any library's four walls, we have got to state it as the *crossroads of government information and libraries*. We've got other flames we like to keep an eye on, but that's our special, GODORT-guarded flame. And when you're a flame-guarder, the idea is to keep the light shining. Let's do just that.

Managing Electronic Government Information in Libraries: Issues and Practices



Edited by Andrea M. Morrison, for the ALA Government Documents Round Table (GODORT)

Written by government information practitioners, this practical guide to managing electronic government information is a must-have for librarians, library administrators, scholars, students, researchers, and other information professionals. This volume details the benefits, challenges, and best practices of managing digital government information for librarians in academic, public, special, and school libraries.

Price: \$55

ALA Member Price: \$49.50

232 pages

6" x 9"

Softcover

ISBN-13: 978-0-8389-0954-6

ISBN-10: 0-8389-0954-X

May 2008 from ALA Editions

www.alastore.ala.org

