



Comments by John Burger, ASERL Executive Director

University of Kentucky Celebration of WPA Center of Excellence

September 5, 2012

Thanks, Sandee. I am very pleased to be here today.

First, a quick commercial for ASERL, for those of you who don't know us: The Association of Southeastern Research Libraries is a consortium of 40 research libraries in 11 southeastern states. ASERL has been around since the 1950s, with a long history of developing programs to address emerging needs for our member libraries. In those 11 states you'll find more than 25% of depository libraries in the country. We currently have an array of active programs, many focusing on collaborative collection management issues such as this. I'll also note that David Ferriero was a member of the ASERL Board in 1999 when they hired me as their first full-time staff person – I'll be sure to update his Wikipedia entry to include this vital information!

So – How did ASERL get into the workings of documents collections? The issue came up periodically in conversations among ASERL library deans and directors starting about 8 - 10 years ago. Our Collaborative Federal Depositories Program came into existence in 2006 as a result of a confluence of events and factors:

- A desire to make better use of our libraries' investment in these collections, which had historically been underused and overlooked;
- User expectations were rapidly shifting to a preference for digital access to information;
- A desire to improve discoverability and user access to federal information;
- Ever-increasing demands for re-purposing space within libraries;
- A desire to build comprehensive collections while acknowledging that all depositories could not be all-comprehensive – we had to divide up those responsibilities somehow;
- Not to be overlooked: Judy Russell retired as the Superintendent of Documents at GPO, and her “retirement job” was as the new Dean of Libraries at University of Florida. She's now on

the ASERL Board of Directors. This brought her tremendous expertise and influence to bear, making sure this issue remained a priority at the dean/director level;

- Even Hurricane Katrina played a role – the documents collection at Tulane was wiped out in the storm, raising issues of how they could serve a user community when they no longer had a local collection.

As MaryBeth noted, the kernel of this program was the brainchild of Sandee McAninch and her colleagues here at the University of Kentucky. It was UK who first brought the proposal to ASERL in 2006 for adoption, where it was approved unanimously. That launched the project's Steering Committee – many of whom remain on the Committee to this day. We started with two pilot sites to develop the “centers of excellence” concept, creating comprehensive-as-possible documents collections by federal agency. Today there are dozens of such Centers under development, at various levels of complexity – although as MaryBeth mentioned, we have a long way to go to get 100% coverage of the corpus.

More importantly, this project has firmly established that documents collections are important information assets to the citizens of the 11 states served by ASERL. And we are quite pleased that this program has helped launch other efforts to better manage documents collections within depository libraries in other parts of the country.

We've faced some challenges and critics over the years, most of whom have since been won over to see the long-term value of this effort.

I want to recognize the work of Cheryle Cole-Bennett, the program's coordinator. She has done an outstanding job of managing volunteers, keeping us focused on delivering specific outcomes, and juggling many different kinds of issues that come her way. And of course I'd like to recognize the members of the Program's Steering Committee – too many to mention here, but they are listed on the project's website. While I'm giving out thanks and praise, I must thank our colleagues at IMLS for their support of this project. Later this month we will mark the end of our 3-year IMLS grant. As a demonstration of the importance of this work, last Fall ASERL members agreed to tax

themselves to continue program staffing for this effort after the grant ends, to ensure this program continues to grow and flourish. I think that's a remarkable commitment during a time of very difficult budgets in libraries.

For the future, we are developing a handful of software tools to help manage the detailed inner workings of this project – one tool to help libraries identify gaps in their center of excellence collections, and a tool to help fill those gaps using materials offered by Selectives that are weeding their collections. And ASERL has launched a similar project to share responsibility for archiving legacy print journal collections. In the near-term future, we envision creating niche projects to divvy-up responsibility for archiving print materials among libraries with common interests – the first of these is to divide up agriculture-related content, both agriculture journals and agriculture-related federal documents. We expect to create other subject-based niche projects, and are hopeful that we may be able to include some national libraries – such as the National Agriculture Library – as partners in this process.

In closing, I want to thank our colleagues at UK for their thought leadership, for being excellent partners with us in our first IMLS grant, and for their fine work in establishing this Center of Excellence Collection for WPA materials. Today is a great day at UK Libraries, and I'm very pleased to be a part of it!