

Preserving the Serial Set: Takeaways on being a Preservation Steward partner with GPO

Jenny McBurney (jmcburne@umn.edu) & Sara Westdal (smith813@umn.edu), University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, Government Publications Library

Background

The University of Minnesota Government Publications Library signed an agreement with the Government Publishing Office (GPO) in 2018 to become a Preservation Steward for the U.S. Congressional Serial Set. We selected the Serial Set because our collection was already relatively comprehensive, and because it is an essential government publication - GPO has called the Serial Set "one of the Nation's most treasured publications."

Addressing Preservation Needs

GPO staff have helped advise us on a number of preservation and condition questions. Preservation Stewards must maintain an inventory that includes a condition code for each volume. The minimal condition level for a preservation copy of record is "good." However, the earliest sheepskin volumes of the Serial Set are hard to come by in good condition. Our preliminary inventory identified which volumes were less than "good," and since then we have worked to preserve and improve the condition of these fragile volumes in a variety of ways. Some have been repaired in-house by our Preservation Dept. Others required enclosures to protect them from further deterioration. We applied for and received an internal Strategic Programmatic Initiatives Award in 2023 to purchase custom enclosures for 333 volumes. We continue to do followup repair work as needed.

Department vs. Congressional Volumes

One of the main challenges in working with the Serial Set is understanding the complex history of the title and the different ways it was issued by GPO to FDLP libraries over time. At various points, some volumes were issued either as a congressional series volume or a departmental edition, or both. Departmental issues, even when officially part of the Serial Set, were never shelved with our Serial set collection and instead classed by issuing agency. In order to determine which volumes we still needed as part of our official Preservation Steward Serial Set collection, we used a variety of resources such as the 1909 Checklist and the Schedule of Volumes to identify the correct gaps and needs. We then documented what we learned into our internal inventory for our own use. By incorporating department issued volumes with the congressional series volumes, we are nearing a complete run of volume numbers.

Filling Collection Gaps

The Serial Set is an enormous title and not all volumes were distributed to all depositories, so we still have gaps we are working to fill. We maintain a Needs list in FDLP eXchange to automatically find matching offers from other libraries, as well as one in [spreadsheet format on our website](#).

When we post our Needs in eXchange, the system should automatically find any matching Offers. Unfortunately this can be more complicated for the Serial Set because the call number can be written a couple different ways: Y 1.1/2:#### vs. Y 1.1/2:SERIAL #####. GPO staff help alert us to offers that don't automatically match in eXchange, and to offers they learn of through other means.

As part of our Preservation Stewardship agreement, GPO covers the cost of shipping Serial Set items, and helps coordinate shipping with other libraries to make sure that we are able to fill as many of our remaining gaps as possible.

By the Numbers

Starting number of Serial Set volumes: **12,973**
Current number of volumes: **over 14,000**
Total enclosures purchased: **348**
Volumes on our Needs list: **4021**
Volumes GPO provided postage for: **over 1,000**
Duplicates offered since 2018: **566**
Matches completed in eXchange: **97**

Advice to Other Libraries

- Preservation Stewards must provide an updated inventory of your collection to GPO twice a year. Use their provided [inventory template](#), which lays out all required metadata.
- For complex titles like the Serial Set, we recommend documenting everything! We created an internal inventory separate from our catalog to record dates, condition, historical notes, and details such as preservation work done or whether the item has its original binding. This internal inventory has become our go-to resource for our Serial Set collection.
- Work closely with GPO and don't be afraid to ask questions. Each title will have unique needs and issues.