

# Snapshots of the Federal Depository Library Program



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While the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) have been intertwined for over one hundred years, providing Government information to selective libraries antedates the founding of GPO.

## **BEGINNINGS - FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

In the Act of 1813 [3 Stat. 140], Congress first authorized legislation to ensure the provision of one copy of the House and Senate Journals and other Congressional documents to certain universities, historical societies, state libraries, etc. At that time, the Secretary of State assumed the responsibility for distributing publications. The earliest known depository was the American Antiquarian Society (1814).

The Printing Act of 1852 provided for the appointment of a Superintendent of Public Printing within the Department of the Interior, and the election of public printers for the House and Senate. The Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) was empowered to mediate certain disputes between the Superintendent and the Printers, and to use any measures necessary to remedy neglect or delay in public printing.

The responsibility for depository distribution was changed to the Secretary of the Interior [11 Stat. 253] in 1857. He was also authorized to designate libraries to receive publications. By a joint resolution of Congress in 1858 [11 Stat. 368], each representative could designate a depository from his district as well as the delegates from each territory. In 1859 [11 Stat. 379], each Senator gained the authority to assign one depository each in his state.

In order to ensure prompt and accurate records of Congressional proceedings, a proposal to create a national printing office was made in 1818 but nothing substantial came of it until almost a half century later. In the intervening years, various Congressional committee investigations complained about private printers' rates being too high, profits too large, printers' wages too high, etc.

## **THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE IS BORN**

The 1860 Printing Act authorized the Superintendent of Public Printing to execute the public printing himself, and to purchase the necessary buildings, machinery, and materials for that purpose. The JCP was directed to set standards for paper purchases and to approve major procurement of supplies by the Superintendent.

GPO, a part of the legislative branch, was inaugurated the same day as Abraham Lincoln, on March 4, 1861, in order to consolidate Congressional printing. Prior to that date, printing had been handled entirely by private firms, including Gales and Seaton, Blair and Rives, to name a few.

In 1869, an appropriations act established a Superintendent of Documents within the Department of the Interior [15 Stat. 292]. This position was the forerunner of the current Superintendent of Documents. An 1876 law changed the title of the "Superintendent of Public Printing" to "Public Printer" and the office became a presidential appointed position, subject to Senate confirmation.

In the 1870's, debates in Congress "to strip GPO of its public printing monopoly and return to the free enterprise system,"<sup>1</sup> were ongoing. The "printing and binding for the Executive Departments should be done under the control of the heads thereof, with the authority to contract for the same upon the most advantageous terms to be obtained through the processes of competition...."<sup>2</sup> The report was not adopted then but some of the same arguments are used today.

## **THE PRINTING ACT OF 1895: REFORM**

The Printing Act of 1895, the direct antecedent of Title 44, United States Code, collected and organized all of the extant printing laws. This landmark legislation, the most recent, comprehensive, and substantive revision of the public printing laws, was passed in order to eliminate wasteful and disorderly distribution practices of the day. Each agency looked out for its own special interests, maintained mailing lists for its own publications, and distribution was haphazard. There was no organization of material or bibliographic control.

Major impacts of this Act were the centralization of printing, the transfer of the office of Superintendent of Documents to GPO from the Department of the Interior, the addition of executive department publications to depository distribution, and the addition of libraries from the executive departments and military academies. The Monthly Catalog first appeared in 1895. Back then the Superintendent of Documents had to remind each agency about the requirement to provide copies of their publications for entry into the Monthly Catalog. Today, we still face this problem.

Between 1895 and 1903 the Superintendent of Document (SuDocs) classification system was developed by GPO Librarian Adelaide Hasse. Based on publishing agency, the SuDocs system still arranges documents in most depository collections today.

## THE DEPOSITORY SYSTEM GROWS

In 1895 there were 420 depository libraries. The Printing Act stated that each designated depository "must contain 1,000 books other than those issued by the Government; that the publications forwarded shall be made available for the free use of the general public and must not be loaned outside of the institution or disposed of, except as the Superintendent of Documents shall direct."<sup>3</sup> A library could be removed from the list of depositories "... for failure to meet the requirements of the law."<sup>4</sup> Today, the minimum number of volumes exclusive of Government documents is 10,000.

The first depository shipment, on July 17, 1895, contained eleven Congressional publications. Originally, return receipt postals were enclosed in the documents. On March 23, 1897, that practice was discontinued. Instead, libraries received a cumulated list of documents sent to them about six times a year. Librarians were required to check off the list, sign and return the receipt to GPO. That practice was discontinued in 1942 as a war measure. The modern shipping list, or packing slip, began about 1950. In January 1943, the way that libraries knew which publications were shipped to depositories was the addition of the bullet and the item number to the Monthly Catalog record. Prior to September 1947, Monthly Catalog indexes referred to a page number. That year, individual entry numbers were adopted to more easily locate a document record.

There were two other depository programs that the Superintendent of Documents was responsible for back then. In 1887, over 600 geological depositories received U.S. Geological Survey monographs, bulletins, and folios. Up to two depositories were allowed per Congressional district. That allotment was doubled in 1895. Also in 1895, over 800 patent gazette depositories were created with up to eight permitted in each Congressional district. As far back as 1909, the Superintendent of Documents complained about the waste to the taxpayers. These gazette and geological depositories were discontinued in 1924.

For many years, the GPO Style Manual has been the final arbiter on spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, etc., for Government documents. In 1906, the Simplified Spelling Board gave its endorsement to the simpler of two spellings: ax instead of axe, tho in place of though; fixt instead of fixed, etc. It also gave acceptance to the American spellings of catalog without the British ue; program instead of programme, etc. President Theodore Roosevelt ordered their adoption by GPO in all Federal documents. There was such an outcry, led by the New York Times and other prominent newspapers, that the proposal was never implemented.<sup>5</sup>

On March 1, 1907, land-grant colleges became depositories. Because of segregation in the Southern states, there were two land-grant designations per state.

From time to time, Congressional staffers ask why their Member of Congress cannot name a depository in the district and take away the designation of another library. Prior to the Act of 1913 [38 Stat. 75], an existing depository could be displaced at the discretion of a Senator or Representative. This legislation definitively made permanent the existing depositories and any designated later. The Superintendent of Documents, however, has the statutory authority under 44 U.S.C. 1909 to delete an existing depository if the Government publications supplied have not been maintained or are not accessible to the public.

Until 1922, all designated depository libraries received all publications, but that was changed in language of an appropriations bill for fiscal year 1923 [42 Stat. 436]. Even then, libraries complained about waste, lack of space and staff, and lack of use of materials. As an alternative, a Classified List of United States Government Publications was developed. Each library received two copies, annotated and returned one copy to GPO. This list functioned the same way the annual item selection update cycle does today, to allow selection in advance of publication.

In 1923, there were 418 depositories, two less than in 1895, including one in the Philippines, at that time a U.S. territory. When allowed to choose, only 48 of the depositories selected everything, causing consternation as some states had several complete collections while others had none.

In 1945, there were 555 depositories and 1417 SuDocs class stems. The Superintendent of Documents in his annual report stated:

"[I]t is believed that this breakdown is too fine, and that equally acceptable results could be realized with perhaps one-fourth as many classes. The reduction of selections to approximately 300 classes corresponding to the issuing offices would greatly simplify the procurement and distribution problems. Work toward this goal is being undertaken at present, and it is hoped that a procedure which will be acceptable to the depositories can be developed."<sup>6</sup>

After World War II, GPO revised the mailing of materials. Under the old arrangement, every publication was mailed separately, an average of 8 mailings a day per library. The new procedure consolidated shipments to 1 package per day per library.

Annually "[M]ailings were cut from more than 5 million to 200 thousand. In addition to saving labor in the Division, the new method ... resulted in substantial saving in penalty-mail charges, and decreased work of libraries in receiving and checking... [i]t cut approximately 12 days from the time required to get the work out."<sup>7</sup>

In 1947, the first Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries was conducted. Back then, GPO required the notarized signature of the librarian on the questionnaire. Librarians complained about the documents being printed on perishable paper stock, mimeographed, etc. They even admitted that many documents were not on shelves, that they were unable to keep complete comprehensive records of depository material because of lack of staff and rapid turnover of personnel. They complained about missing issues of magazines not printed at GPO and they had to write to the agency for copies.

## DEPOSITORY LIBRARY ACT OF 1962 USHERS IN MODERN ERA

From the beginning of the Program until the Depository Library Act of 1962 (PL 87-579), libraries had to retain what they selected forever unless superseded. Until 1962, depository libraries paid the postage on the materials they received. That year there were 594 depositories and the law was revised, doubling the number of depositories permitted per Congressional district (from 1 to 2). The new law added libraries of independent Federal agencies, eliminated payment of postage, authorized regional libraries, and provided for distribution to depositories of non-GPO publications.

In 1977, there were over 1,200 libraries. In 1972, the highest appellate courts of the states were added to the Program, and they are the only category of depository exempt from providing public access to Federal documents [86 Stat. 507, 44 U.S.C. 1915]. In reality, the majority perform public service because they are required by their state to do so. In 1978, law libraries entered the Program under a new law [92 Stat. 199, 44 U.S.C. 1916] which exempted them from the numerical limit of libraries per Congressional district. The law did not exempt them from the requirement to provide public access to depository materials.

In 1976, there were approximately 3,000 item numbers. Today, there are over 7,400 and counting, due mostly to breaking out individual titles or series in order to have more focused collections, save shelving space, and cut costs, rather than a large increase in Federal publishing.

To increase communications with the depository community, volume 1 #1 of the irregular newsletter, Public Documents Highlights, began in May 1973. Administrative Notes, begun in September 1980, was a regular issuance and filled the gap when Public Documents Highlights was discontinued in September 1983. Since June 1993, Administrative Notes has been a feature on the listserv GOVDOC-L. The Administrative Notes Technical Supplement made its debut in January 1994. LPS adopted GOVDOC-L as a method of e-mail communication in March 1994.

Today, there are 53 "regional" depositories which receive all publications distributed through the Program for permanent retention to ensure that archival resource collections of Government documents remain available throughout the United States. Regionals may permit the disposal of depository materials from selectives after retention for five years.

The remaining "selective" depositories may choose to receive only specific categories of publications in a variety of formats to meet local needs of their clientele and Congressional District. In return for receiving Government material at no cost, the depository libraries **must** make the information available to the public, and provide appropriate assistance to users.

From the very beginning of the Federal Depository Library Program, the purpose and goals have been rooted in these underlying principles:

- A well informed citizenry, cognizant of the policies and activities of its representative Government, is essential for the proper functioning of democracy; information provided by government documents is a primary means for citizens to keep informed;

- The public has a right to information contained in Government documents, which have been published at public expense; the Government has an obligation to ensure availability of, and access to, these documents at no cost. These documents are a permanent source of Federal information; and
- The Federal Government benefits by realizing efficiencies afforded by a centralized distribution system, such as the Federal Depository Library Program, which ensures wide availability of Government publications; individual agencies are able to satisfy much of the public demand for their publications without incurring the costs associated with responding to individual requests for free copies.

Agencies are required by 44 U.S.C. Sections 1901, 1902, and 1903 and now OMB Circular A-130 to make all of their publications, ("informational matter which is published as an individual document at Government expense, or as required by law") regardless of the printing or procurement source, available to the Superintendent of Documents for distribution to depository libraries, except those which are:

- determined by their issuing components to be required for official use only or for strictly administrative or operational purposes which have no public interest or educational value [data entry forms, personnel forms, etc.;
- classified for reasons of national security; and
- so-called cooperative publications which must necessarily be sold in order to be self-sustaining [many of the National Archives and Library of Congress materials].

Agencies are not responsible for the printing and binding costs or CD-ROM replication for depository library copies if the publication or disc is printed or procured through GPO. If deliverables are not printed or procured through GPO, the agency must pay for the printing and binding costs, software licensing, etc., of depository library copies. In all cases, GPO bears the expense of distributing the publications.

Depository copies are ordered for all agency publications not falling within the "exception" categories mentioned earlier. Ordering procedures vary according to the printing or procurement source of the publication. In most cases, GPO provides the most cost effective format, not necessarily the most favored.

## **FEDERAL PRINTING TODAY**

Federal printing today is less massive than it once was due to deliberate and specific actions to reduce the amount of paperwork and to lower government expenditures. Particularly since passage of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings legislation during FY 1986, funds for printing and publishing have been hard hit in an effort to gain control over a runaway Federal budget. Even if appropriations remain the same, they do not buy as much due to increasing costs.

In conjunction with this overall drive to curtail Federal expenditures, a hard look, government-wide, has been taken at publications. As Federal agencies must justify their printing needs, thousands of Federal publications have been subjected to scrutiny in order to identify the core that serve a real and demonstrated need. Over the last dozen years, there has been a noticeable decline in the total number of titles available. Titles have been terminated, others have been consolidated, and still others are now only available on Internet, electronic bulletin boards, or off-line products.

In the past, it was anticipated that government paperwork would continue to expand, and that the price asked for producing that paperwork in the form of books, pamphlets, and periodicals would be the price paid. This is just not the case anymore. GPO's workload, and therefore its revenues, have dropped significantly. GPO has been experiencing the fallout from the reduction in agency funds for publishing. GPO is no longer the focal point for the printing and distribution of Federal publications. With desktop publishing and electronic formats, competition from the National Technical Information Service and the private sector, etc., GPO's centralization and control of printing has deteriorated. Additionally, agencies are doing less printing internally and issuing fewer titles overall. Simply put, the absolute number of Federal publications has been reduced.

Budgetary constraints have given GPO another unforeseen challenge, that of providing the American public access to information available from the government within the limits of our Congressional appropriation. Since 1980, while our appropriation has either increased or remained static, the buying power has diminished due to inflation. Our funding must last for five years, the legal "life-cycle" of a given appropriation, to cover the printing of the Serial Set, Treaties, etc. What has permitted GPO to distribute millions of publications each year is microfiche.

### **MICROFICHE, ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS, AND THE FUTURE**

GPO proposed studying the feasibility of making Government publications available in microfiche in 1970. Back then, there were approximately 1,000 depository libraries saying "Do something - we can't live with the massive amount of hard copy." When GPO received Joint Committee on Printing approval, it began distributing microfiche to libraries in 1977. By then, the librarians were saying "What took you so long?" Libraries realized that microfiche was attractive as a space saver and that as a result of its existence more access could be provided to little-used research materials. With increased pressure on the budget, GPO and Congress discovered that microfiche considerably lowered printing, binding and distribution costs. With nearly two-thirds of our distribution in microformat, now many librarians are saying "Where are we going to put all this microfiche?"

The 1970's consternation about microfiche is being reenacted today about electronic deliverables and on-line databases. They save space, provide access to information available previously only on magnetic tape, and the data can be manipulated electronically. For those who feel like road kill on the information highway, it is a difficult transition.

Instead of purchasing microfiche reader/printers and cabinets, libraries must acquire "robust" computer work stations, laser printers, software upgrades, storage cabinets for CD-ROMs and diskettes, Internet connections, etc. Staff training is more complicated than changing paper or adjusting the focus in a reader/printer or unjamming a photocopier. The need to provide patrons with assistance in using electronic access services must be balanced with providing access to historical Government information in print and microformats. Library budgets not keeping pace with inflation and higher salaries for staff expertise will affect service levels. In the electronic environment where the FDLP is free to all, public service [the "intermediary" role] becomes the defining characteristic of a depository.

Optical disk storage, on-demand printing of images, World Wide Web and its successor, on-line searching and downloading, and technology not even envisioned yet is the future. Libraries which intend to continue as depositories should have a strong commitment to public access.

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## ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Government Printing Office. 100 GPO Years 1861-1961: A History of United States Public Printing (Washington, 1961), p. 53.
2. Ibid.
3. U.S. Superintendent of Documents. Official List of Depository Libraries Consisting of Designated, Geological and Official Gazette Depositories (Washington, 1909), p. 3.
4. Ibid., p. 4.
5. 100 GPO Years 1861-1961, pp. 86-88.
6. U.S. Superintendent of Documents. Annual Report, fiscal year 1945 (Washington, 1945), p. 4.
7. U.S. Superintendent of Documents. Annual Report, fiscal year 1946 (Washington, 1946), p. 5.