Facing Change: A Perspective on Government Publications Services in Canadian Academic Libraries in the Internet Age

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Abstract: This paper provides a librarian’s perspective on government publications services in Canadian academic libraries over the past two decades, a period of profound change in libraries. The impact of the internet and online access is examined. The importance of library services for government collections and the critical role of the government publications librarian are discussed. Government policies affecting library access to Canadian government publications and the challenges facing Canada’s Depository Services Program and National Library and Archives are also examined. An overview of the significant challenges facing the Canadian academic librarian providing government information support is presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the role of the academic library in preserving and ensuring access to government information.

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Introduction

The provision of government publications services in Canadian academic libraries has undergone a remarkable and rapid transformation in the past two decades. The explosion in Internet access and the subsequent delivery of government information online have prompted major changes in the way academic librarians in Canada provide services for their collections. Over this period, librarians specializing in Canadian government information have been confronted with a bewildering range of government information and access policies. Canada’s Depository Services Program (DSP) and National Library & Archives (LAC) currently face major challenges in fulfilling their mandates to facilitate current and future access to government information. In addition, Canadian university libraries have been forced to deal with severe funding cuts. Staff and acquisition budget reductions have affected the academic librarian’s ability to build government publications collections while providing exemplary reference support for these complex resources.

These major changes have presented significant challenges to academic librarians assigned to provide effective government information support to their user communities. This paper will provide an overview of these changes and discuss their impact, primarily focusing on relevant events prior to April 2013.
The methodology used in its preparation includes a survey of applicable library literature, a review of relevant electronic discussion lists and interviews with librarians working in the field. A literature review revealed significantly more scholarly work on the situation in the United States than in Canada. A number of the current issues related to Canadian government publications have not been documented in the published scholarly literature to date. It was therefore necessary to synthesize recent developments by reviewing primary source material represented by relevant government publication and library electronic discussion lists. These included:

- INFODEP, which is maintained by the DSP and provides communication between DSP staff, management and subscribers;
- CLAGIN, the communication tool of the Government Information Network of the Canadian Library Association (CLA);
- GOVINFO, which serves as a forum for librarians working with government information in Canada and is not restricted to CLA members;
- GOVDOC-L, a discussion forum about government information and the Federal Depository Library program in the US.

Selected websites, press releases and other information from government agencies were also reviewed. The insights and support of librarians I contacted in the course of my research were invaluable in completing this work.

The Impact of the Internet and Online Access

Electronic access protocols of the 1980s and early 1990s such as WAIS, Telnet, and Gopher provided the early means to access a varied collection of selected government document files. Beginning in the mid-1990s, a significant shift to electronic dissemination resulted from the widespread adoption of the Internet. Web-based information delivery has rapidly transformed a system previously based on paper and concurrently shaken the traditional preservation system based on this format. Today, nearly all Canadian and US federal government information is not only available online, but is increasingly born digital. At the same time as access to government information appears to have improved, government information policies have had a negative impact on this access. Kirsti Nilson (1999) discusses this possible outcome in her article on public access to information in Canada in the electronic age. She warns that government information as a corporate resource has already overridden the concept of public rights to that information, concluding that present government policy does not suggest that government will provide open and universal access to all of its information in the new environment.

Over the past century, libraries have taken an active role in ensuring access to information. A complex system of cataloguing has been developed to assist users in efficiently identifying and locating published information. To date, much of this effort has focused on print resources. Now librarians are faced with the challenge of assisting users to locate government information in an ever-changing online environment. Powerful search engines such as Google can be useful in locating government
information online and may provide valuable information about the documents themselves. Nonetheless, studies have illustrated some of the challenges faced by users of search engines. An extensive five-year study of how people conduct research in the digital age reveals that the simple use of Web searching does not ensure relevant, accurate or authoritative results (Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research 2008). Connaway, Dickey and Radford (2011) argue that users value convenience and do not want to spend long periods of time prospecting for information resources. Numerous authors have demonstrated their concerns about our reliance on online search engines to achieve the best research results (Carr 2008; Faucher 2011; McClure and Clink 2009). In addition, even the most powerful search engines are unable to successfully locate the vast amounts of information contained within the databases, archives and websites known as the ‘deep web’ (Bergman 2001).

As the amount of government information available online increases, issues of quality access need to be addressed. Simply releasing government information online is not enough. This information must be easily findable, indexed and presented in user-friendly formats. The point is not to overwhelm people with information. It should be to present, maintain and preserve in a truly accessible fashion.

Formats used to deliver government information have changed rapidly in recent years, from HTML and PDF documents to blogs, wikis, audio and video files, and social media websites. The government information professional faces the difficult challenge of cataloguing, archiving, preserving and providing access in a shifting landscape. Government websites may even be revised over time and not reflect events as they were originally posted. This is disturbingly illustrated by Althaus and Leetaru in their study of the alteration or deletion of key White House documents on the 2003 American invasion of Iraq (2008). In a New York Times article warning about the wholesale disappearance of materials on US federal agency websites, Robert Pear observes that government information is often deleted simply due to the lack of a plan or mechanism for preservation (2008). Even the apparently easy availability of government information can be misleading. Jacobs, Jacobs and Yeo observe that the rapid dissemination of such popular single titles as the 9/11 Report masks the lack of a secure infrastructure for long-term preservation (2005, 199).

Critical issues related to the integrity of and access to government information have not gone unrecognized as many sectors, both public and private, seek to ensure that government information remains available in accurate digital format in perpetuity. These efforts include the digitization of historic, paper-based documents, web archiving and systematic attempts to preserve born-digital content in perpetuity.

A number of digitization projects have been undertaken by government and academic institutions, as well as for-profit companies. Examples are varied and numerous. Early Canadiana Online, an expanding online collection of early Canadian print heritage, holds over three million pages of content. The University of Toronto Libraries currently

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3 Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), accessed October 9, 2013,
host mass-scale scanning projects, which include government publications, as part of its contribution to the Internet Archive. In the United States, a partnership between Google and the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) specifically focuses on US federal government documents, which are stored at the HathiTrust Digital Library.

As more and more organizations tackle the immense task of digitizing government publications, it has become critical to keep track of these projects to avoid duplication and ensure resource discovery. The US Federal Depository Library Program maintains an outstanding directory listing of US Government publication digitization efforts through its Digitization Projects Registry. Unfortunately, a similar registry does not currently exist in Canada.

Web archiving is the process of creating an archival copy of a web site, thereby creating a snapshot of how the original site looked at a particular point in time. The US Library of Congress supports a vigorous web archiving program. Such a program is not currently supported by Library and Archives Canada. Archive-It, a subscription web archiving service from the Internet Archive, assists organizations in Canada and the US, to harvest, build and preserve digital content collections.

Meanwhile, efforts are underway to preserve born-digital content. The acronym LOCKSS refers to the simple term “Lots Of Copies Keep Stuff Safe.” The LOCKSS program is an open-source, library-led digital preservation system that utilizes web harvesting, a distributed storage structure, and an open URL resolver to acquire, preserve, and provide access to digital files in perpetuity. It was originally established as a Stanford University-led consortium of libraries to protect digital journals vulnerable to computer crashes, tampering and disappearing digital content (Haven 2010). Starting in 2008, a private LOCKSS network of 37 libraries and the Government Printing Office has focused on US government documents. The Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS network (CGI-PLN) was established in the Fall of 2012 and is currently composed of eleven member academic institutions. The initial collection for preservation is an e-archive provided by the Canadian Depository Services Program.

Collaborative efforts to enhance access to government information are also underway. A prime example of collaboration among sectors to make government information available

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in the Internet age is the award-winning National Security Archive\textsuperscript{11}, hosted by George Washington University (GWU). The non-profit Archive was founded in 1985 by journalists and scholars seeking to challenge rising government secrecy. As well as serving as an investigative journalism centre and research institute on international affairs, this institution serves as a library and archive of declassified US documents acquired under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). All material is available for personal use at GWU’s Gelman Library. Selected items are freely available online and a carefully curated collection is available via subscription to ProQuest’s Digital National Security Archive.\textsuperscript{12}

The dramatic shift from a largely tangible paper collection to an online web of government information has had many effects on libraries. Formerly distinct documents collections and services can now be part of every librarian’s domain. Google’s powerful search capability can be utilized to assist in the discovery of formerly obscure print government documents, now widely available online. Nonetheless, the many intricacies and nuances of government information continue to demand the vital skills of librarians extensively trained in their use (Frazer 1997, Cheney 2006).

**Library Services for Government Collections**

Government information serves as a window onto society and its history. Libraries are repositories of government information and as a result of depository library agreements, have assumed responsibility to not only store these documents, but to make them accessible. Librarians serve as experts in locating requested government information from the simple to the obscure. The challenges are significant.

Forte, Hartnett and Sevetson ably illustrate in their recent book on mining, finding, evaluating and using government information that government information reference work encompasses countless unique resources requiring special expertise, information skills and strategies (2011). Government Information librarians focus on where information comes from. Government departments and agencies produce publications as a result of activities determined by their legislative and regulatory mandates. This does not necessarily produce the subject-based information resources library users often seek. Consequently, a subject filter applied to government information will produce resources produced by several different organizations. In addition, government departments and agencies are subject to restructuring over time, including the ongoing dissolution of some and the creation of others.

As academic reference librarians we assist our users in the discovery of relevant, quality information. Government publications, which cover a comprehensive range of subjects, can often provide exactly this type of information. Therefore, reference services that most effectively support the research and teaching activities of academic institutions should

\textsuperscript{11} National Security Archive, accessed November 8, 2013, \url{http://www.nsarchive.org}.

include, if possible, staff with a knowledge of both the structure of government and the intellectual content of documents produced by multiple, over-lapping and evolving authorities over a long period of time. These skills have an important place in the provision of quality reference service.

Because government materials are organized by authoring agencies, government librarians must frequently consider where a required document may have originated. A question regarding the health of Canada’s native population will send the knowledgeable government information librarian to Health Canada, Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development and Statistics Canada resources. A question on a specific piece of Canadian legislation, should, depending on the time period, lead to Canada’s parliamentary website or the library’s print parliamentary collections. Researchers tracing the origins and history of a government policy will need to use a variety of sources such as discussion and policy papers, ministerial statements, news releases, and House, Senate and Committee debates and reports. Knowledge of governmental structures and processes are essential.

The increasing availability of government information online has clearly improved access. However, finding details such as the status of legislation, accident statistics, an obscure technical report or the government’s 1942 policy on native land claims requires specific knowledge, skills and tools beyond those provided by a search engine. According to Mix (2012), not surprisingly, many non-documents specialists express uneasiness and a lack of desire to deal with government document inquiries.

In response to serious budget constraints, academic libraries have frequently achieved staff reductions through the merging or elimination of library units. These major changes have also been initiated in response to such factors as new service demands, changing library priorities and space shortages. Many library government publication and reference service points in the US and Canada have merged as part of this process. The impact on the quality of government services has been well documented (Kendall and Sisson 2008). A case study of the Iowa State University Library revealed a decrease in use of the government documents collections, decreased user satisfaction with government reference, and a perception of less willingness to support user needs (Van de Voorde 1989). Olsen (1996) provides ample evidence that such a merger at Brigham Young University has decreased the quality of reference service.

In a posting to GOVDOC-L on the subject of merging library government information departments, Linda Johnson (2011) of the University of New Hampshire summarized issues identified by respondents to her request for perspectives on merging Reference and Government Information departments. Respondents identified the need for extensive training, the loss of expertise and specialized knowledge and the necessity for former government information staff to carry an additional load by supporting both general reference and government information. In an earlier posting, former documents/map librarian Michael Fry (2010) observed that from the standpoint of users wandering aimlessly through unstaffed government documents collections, the lack of readily available, skilled librarians merely contributed to their perception of library irrelevance.
Fry observed, “But if libraries are so terribly afraid of becoming irrelevant, why reduce our opportunities to prove otherwise? We are only relevant to users when we interact with them and communicate our knowledge and expertise. When we close a service point, we contribute to our own irrelevance. Worst of all, we send users one very clear message: Find it yourself.”

The advantages of working daily with government information cannot be overestimated. Familiarity with a print collection’s organization, unique cataloguing practices, online resources and the knowledge gained through constant exposure to governmental reference questions serves to reinforce and improve the librarian’s skill level in this area. However, for most libraries, the separate government information desk is a library service of the past. Extensive specialized training of Reference staff is clearly required. At the University of Toronto, a merger of the Reference and Government Publications units at the Robarts Library was implemented in 2008. Under pressure to reduce training time for new Reference Desk staff, the time allocated to the use of government resources has declined dramatically. Over 22 hours of dedicated government publications reference training for new reference desk staff has been reduced to 11 hours at the new merged desk.

Part of the process of redefining government publications services has included the merging of general and government document print reference collections. At the University of Toronto’s Robarts Library the integration of service points was followed a few years later by a major weeding of the merged reference collection with selected books designated for off-site or stack locations. Whether a reference item had been used in the past year was determined to be the key factor in determining its value as part of the reference collection. Government publications are challenging resources with which to assist users. Documents are most frequently organized for the internal operations of the originating government body and not for public access, are rarely indexed in traditional sources and are infrequently made available through usual publication means. Online research guides for government publications ideally provide a short list of the most helpful sources available to meet the needs of the majority of users. They are not a substitute for a well-chosen, easily accessible print governmental reference collection. The complexities of locating governmental resources, especially historical documents and publications, must be considered. In a research library, scholarly needs should determine collections and their accessibility as much as possible. Ideally, experienced government information librarians should be relied on to make appropriate decisions regarding the disposition of governmental collections.

Government publications must be available and they must be findable. The integration of government information into other reference areas has expanded the knowledge base of all affected reference staff. Armed with an expanded understanding of government information as a resource for research and analysis, librarians are more likely to recommend their use (Cheney 2006). Including government information adds a valuable component to research and reference services. However, it is important to acknowledge the reality of a role for government information specialists within the merged reference service point.
Government publications librarians face the ongoing challenge of educating their colleagues about the importance of providing access to their historical government publications collections and the complexity of preserving documents in permanent formats. As revolutionary as the migration to online access to government information has been, the complexities of providing access remain and have in fact expanded. Understanding the fundamentals of government information is essential to providing exemplary service in this area.

**Policies Affecting Library Access to Canadian Government Publications**

Changes to Canadian government publication distribution began to take place in the early 1990s. In September 1993, Part III of the *Canada Gazette* ceased publication in print and the cessation of other print parliamentary publications such as bound versions of the House of Commons *Journals and Committee Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* quickly followed in 1994. While outlining these changes in the context of financial constraints and new technology, Land (1994) was already questioning their impact on public access to government information. Within twenty years, many Government of Canada (GOC) departments and agencies had moved exclusively to born-digital publishing.

Over the past two decades, Canadian federal departmental libraries have struggled to operate with dwindling resources. In 2009, the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) faced a staggering 70% budget cut. According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Library Association (2012), most federal departmental libraries have either faced massive budget reductions or complete closure. These closures include among many others, libraries at Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Natural Resource Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada. Important specialized collections have been disbanded and discarded. Valuable historic and contemporary collections and the accumulated knowledge of a network of experienced documents librarians have been lost. Jordan and de Stricker’s exploratory study of information management (IM) principles and practice in the Canadian federal government includes an examination of the important role government librarians play in meeting and anticipating needs for authoritative information. In examining the impact of federal library cuts, they show that although the federal government prides itself on being a knowledge organization and librarians are valued for their skills, federal libraries as information repositories and librarians as knowledge professionals are being marginalized (2013, 16). They conclude that in the Government of Canada, “it appears that other priorities are taking precedence over libraries and information management practices. Libraries are being closed or drastically cut with their contents dispersed or discarded, archival units are being downsized, digitization staff are being let go, ILL is disappearing and so forth. The consequences in the long term cannot be predicted in detail but, based on the interview responses, it would not be surprising that the GC [Government of Canada] in the future is without access to large parts of its institutional memory and leaders are without access to the information needed for strategic decision-making” (2013, 36).
Statistics Canada has also faced severe budget cuts. Controversial recent decisions have included the elimination of the mandatory long-form census and the elimination of key surveys including the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. Statistics Canada recently announced that the 2012 Canada Year Book would be the last edition. The Year Book has chronicled in statistical form the demographic, social, political and economic life of Canada and its people for 145 years. The announcement posted in the online Daily by Statistics Canada (2012) assured Canadians that “Statistics Canada will continue through other means to keep Canadians informed about their social and economic life.” No further information was provided about exactly how this would be accomplished. Serious concerns about the reduction in reliable data collection and analysis by Statistics Canada have been expressed by a wide range of Canadians and institutions from the public, academic, media and business sectors, as well as the former Chief Statistician of Canada (Sheikh 2013).

According to Statistics Canada’s latest posted web archiving directive,13 it is committed to providing relevant, reliable, comprehensive and timely statistical information on its website and to preserving online content for the future. As a result, archived content is to be retained on its website, while so-called “legacy content documents,” those that have been revised or superseded, are removed from the public site and retained on the Statistics Canada internal network for recordkeeping purposes. This approach to so-called “legacy” content demonstrates a lack of concern for the value of point-in-time information as a critical source for economic analysis and scholarly and historical research. With the passage of time archived off-line documents will likely be forgotten and readers will simply not think to request them. Those seeking known legacy documents will be unable to find them. It is essential that all content remain findable and accessible.

In April 2012, the Depository Services Program (DSP) announced that it would stop supplying publications in print to depository libraries by 2014. The number of print titles distributed was to be reduced gradually over the coming year.14 According to the Minutes of the DSP’s Library Advisory Committee meeting of January 2013, the proposed new Treasury Board Communication Policy would not allow government organizations to produce print publications other than specific cases, required under legislation or by virtue of Deputy Minister approval.15 By July 2013, the Treasury Board of Canada had announced that the Government of Canada (GC) would be making electronic publishing its new standard for all documents, thereby officially making print publications the

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exception. With no comprehensive governmental policy on digital integrity, preservation or long-term access, these announcements are alarming, especially in light of David Brown’s 2012 study on the unfulfilled promise of information management in the Government of Canada. Brown demonstrates that there is an undervaluing of information as a public resource and increasingly poor management of that resource in the electronic era in the Canadian government.

In light of the Government of Canada’s ongoing push towards the cessation of the production of print format documents and its concurrent lack of any born-digital retention policies, Amanda Wakaruk of the University of Alberta Libraries put forth an urgent call to the Canadian government information library community in April 2012 to establish a Canadian Government Information private LOCKSS network (CGI-PLN). The initial goal of this network would be to preserve and provide perpetual access to original content published by federal agencies in Canada. She proposed that this LOCKSS network operate similarly to the successful LOCKSS partnership between the Government Printing Office (GPO) and academic institutions in the United States (Wakaruk 2012). The Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS Network (CGI-PLN) was quickly established and now represents a successful partnership of the Canadian Government, represented by its Depository Services Program (DSP), and Canadian academic libraries to ensure access to digital content into the future. The initial collection for preservation is an e-archive provided by the DSP.

The Canadian Depository Services Program in Transition

The Depository Services Program (DSP) was originally created in 1927 by an Order in Council. It provides a central distribution source for published Canadian government information for academic, college, legislative and public libraries, as well as federal Parliamentarians and departmental libraries. It has traditionally collected government publications produced by various federal departments and agencies and distributed them free of charge through its network of approximately 800 libraries. These libraries in turn provide bibliographic access, preservation, reference, and inter-library loan services that support free public access to published government information.

The DSP operates, in conjunction with other publishing directives, under Treasury Board guidelines. If departments do not supply documents, the DSP may request, but not demand, free publications for purposes of deposit. According to Monty (1996, 492), “The Treasury Board Communications Policy Guidelines are at best weak; nothing in them has the force of law, and many consider that they even lack strong moral suasion.” In contrast, in the United States, access to government information through the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is legally mandated in Title 44, Chapter 19 of the US Code. To assure distribution to depository libraries, federal agencies are required, by law, to supply the US Superintendent of Documents with their publications, thereby

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enshrining the principle that citizen access to government information is a right (Prophet 1999). In 1996, Monty pointed out that the US bias is strongly towards more access, the Canadian towards less. Today, even the historic American orientation to no-fee public access to government information as a public right is threatened. In a digital environment, does the mere dissemination of government information online fulfil the US government’s responsibility under Title 44 to deposit information products with depository libraries? Has the responsibility to actively seek and gather government information been shifted to depository libraries? How does stated US government information policy in fact defer from reality? Issues related to the collection, preservation of and perpetual free access to government information in the US are discussed in the blog Free Government Information.18

Prior to 1995, the DSP collected and distributed Government of Canada (GOC) print publications only. This changed in 1996, when the DSP began presenting Statistics Canada e-publications on its site as part of a pilot project. These e-collections were initially restricted to DSP library sites via IP address registration (Ramage, Mowat, and Hjartarson 1999). In 2006, this restriction was finally removed. Thereafter, as a matter of policy, the DSP would not host government e-collections that required restricted access. Until 2000, the DSP’s e-collection was relatively small and comprised of a number of different file formats. Subsequently, PDF became the preferred file format for acquisition. Today as a rule, the DSP will not catalogue, link to or host HTML editions of government publications due to technical difficulties in retaining all features of the original, significant problems of persistence and document integrity. In addition, the DSP no longer links to author departmental servers because government departmental site links are not stable.19

As a result of these restrictions, an alarming number of government electronic publications are not hosted on the DSP’s website. Examples include such valuable government annual reports as the Statutes Repeal Act Annual Reports, which are only available in HTML format and therefore have not been added to the DSP collection. If an issuing department stops making its titles available in PDF format, the DSP simply stops providing access on its site. In the case of Statistics Canada’s popular serial title, Juristat, this is exactly what has happened. This publication is still available on the originating Statistics Canada website, but no longer available on the DSP site where it is simply listed as not available in PDF format after 2008. This has resulted in such anomalies as complicated access to Foreign Affairs and International Trade’s publication Trade Policy Research. This title is listed on the DSP site as only available in print. In fact, it is available online on the Department’s website. The wide range of exceptions to the DSP’s collection policies, has led to many problems in locating federal publications using its site.

Prior to September 2005, the DSP did not catalogue free Statistics Canada publications because Statistics Canada had mounted its own e-archive. This understanding was eventually reviewed and from this date on, the DSP agreed to catalogue and list all

Statistics Canada publications. A DSP retrospective project was initially scheduled to capture previously excluded titles, but was derailed by funding issues. The only exception to the DSP’s PDF-only format rule was to be Statistics Canada publications. It was understood at one time, that Statistics Canada’s URLs and HTML content would remain stable. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be the case and as a result DSP website PURLs to PDF versions are stable and those to HTML versions are much less reliable. To this day, access to Statistics Canada publications remains a challenging process involving searching both the DSP and Statistics Canada websites to ascertain the existence and history of these publications.

In December 2006, the Treasury Board approved the establishment of new standards, Common Look and Feel 2.0 (CLF2), for all Canadian government websites. A subsequent review of the required changes led Publishing and Depository Services (PDS) staff to recommend the merging of two separate web sites, the Government of Canada (GOC) website which provided access to GOC publications directly to the public and the DSP site which provided e-collection access to DSP libraries. This major change was implemented in July 2010 and the earlier DSP web site decommissioned in December 2011.

These decisions led to an opportunity for the DSP to improve its website. The DSP had maintained access to its e-publications in PDF format through existing Uniform Resource Locators (URLs). It was able to transition these records to Persistent Uniform Resource Locators (PURLs), thereby improving permanent link access. Catalogue search capability and response time were improved. A new visually appealing layout was implemented and an online list of serial titles by government department was added. The DSP also began tackling the confusing practice of cataloguing annual publications as monographs. Increasingly, annual titles were correctly re-catalogued as serials. Most of the DSP content migrated to the new site with no intervention required on the part of depository libraries. However static serial pages could not be moved. Catalogue record or web page links to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Statistics Canada, and Library of Parliament serial title URLs had to be replaced with new master record links. These were provided to Depository Libraries as URL update files. For many libraries lacking technical knowledge and/or staff resources, these new PURL files proved difficult, time-consuming and even impossible to upload.

Since April 2006, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has been creating download files of MARC 21 bibliographic records for each issue of the DSP’s Weekly Checklist of Canadian Government Publications. The records in the downloadable files are in the form of continuous delimited text files intended for importation into catalogue applications that support the MARC 21 data format and MARC editors. These records can be added, as appropriate, to local library catalogues and have greatly enhanced online access to government publications that are catalogued and distributed through the Depository Services Program.

In April 2012, the Government of Canada announced that all publications issued by its official Publishing Program and those publications provided by departments to the DSP
would be completely transitioned from traditional print to exclusively electronic format within two years. By 2014, the DSP would no longer be producing, printing or warehousing hard copies of publications, but would continue to provide electronic access through its website. At this time it was announced that the sale and distribution of print items would be managed by the department or agency that publishes them, thereby placing an additional burden on Canadian libraries wishing to obtain federal documents in print. Previously, this function had been performed by the DSP on behalf of its depository libraries.

This major announcement will result in a critical reorganization of the Depository Services Program and Government of Canada Publications as they shift from print distribution to e-resource access. It presents an opportunity to provide services in new areas. The DSP could develop and deliver reference and training services that focus on the discovery and use of government information. Improved access to the DSP’s e-collections through enhanced content, search tools and improved record quality would certainly be welcome. A strong DSP role in serving as a clearinghouse for research guides and digitization projects for Canadian federal documents would be very useful. Developing and maintaining a permanent online collection of Canadian government publications is another potential role. However, these services do not fall within the current mandate of the DSP and it is not funded to provide them. Are they more appropriately located within Library and Archives Canada? Either way, adding new services during the current period of federal deficit reduction will likely prove challenging, if not impossible.

**Developments at Library and Archives Canada**

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) was formed in 2004 through the merger of two existing institutions, the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada. The mandate of LAC is to acquire, preserve and facilitate public access to Canada’s documentary heritage. It serves as the permanent repository of publications of the Government of Canada and its related records.

As described above, the Government of Canada began using the web to convey information in the mid-1990s. Recognizing that much of this information had been lost, changed or collected in scattered sources, LAC began to harvest federal websites in December 2005. Snapshots of individual sites and their archived links, although not always stable, would provide critical point-in-time content. It has been promised that as resources permit, this harvesting activity will be undertaken on a semi-annual basis. In fact this critical undertaking appears to have been discontinued. The last web-crawled sites in the Government of Canada Web Archive available to the public are currently dated November 2007.

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Library and Archives Canada is currently in the midst of a crisis. Recent cuts to staff and programming at LAC will have devastating effects on this country’s ability to acquire and preserve its history. On April 30, 2012, 450 LAC staff members received affected notices, with 215 positions scheduled to be eliminated. Among the many positions remaining unfilled are government documents specialists. Public access to crucial on-site and on-line services is currently being drastically reduced. The Canadian Library Association, in a press release, has raised its concerns about the effect of these cuts on LAC programs such as archival work, reference and loan services, cataloguing and digitization. LAC’s inter-library services ended in December 2012. Requests for digital reproductions of known items are available for a per-document fee and exact details for each document must be provided. In order to physically view LAC collections, users must now travel to Ottawa. On-site reference services are offered by appointment only.

Cuts to services have been justified by promises that digitizing LAC’s material and online access will make up for the reduction in on-site services. However, the April 2012 cuts reduced digitization staff by 50%. Based on an LAC internal estimate that 0.5% of LAC’s holdings have been digitized to date, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has concluded that it will take LAC 300-700 years to digitize its pre-2004 holdings. This estimate does not reflect the costs involved in cataloguing and preserving this material once it has been converted into a digital file format.

In May 2012, the Association of Canadian Archivists officially withdrew from LAC’s Pan Canadian Documentary Heritage Program, citing LAC’s violation of its legislated mandate to support Canada’s archival communities. Subsequently, the Association of Provincial and Territorial Archivists of Canada and the Canadian Council of Archives also withdrew from the Program.

These drastic changes have not gone unnoticed. Prof. Ian MacLaren of the University of Alberta argued passionately in a September 2012 letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper...
and others: “The cuts to LAC’s budget have been so deep and capricious as to suggest that those doing the cutting have no understanding of what the library should be, and the result will be devastation of what Canada is, first as a concept and an idea, and then as the very real place in which we are leading our lives and raising our children. To dismantle a nation’s library and archives is to shoot a bullet through its temple.”\textsuperscript{29}

In response to these devastating cuts in services and collections, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has mounted an active campaign to “Save Library & Archives Canada.”\textsuperscript{30}

In 1994, Marianne Scott, National Library of Canada’s National Librarian at the time, in an article in the short-lived Canadian open access journal \textit{Government Information in Canada}, emphasized the importance of government information as a national resource and described the Library’s strong commitment to acquire, preserve and make accessible its collection of Canadian official publications, the largest held anywhere. She described the challenges faced by users and staff alike in dealing with the complexities of government publishing and access tools. In calling government information a national resource, vital to the country’s social, cultural and economic development she emphasized the need for equitable access to this national treasure for all Canadians (Scott 1994). Today this national treasure is threatened.

\textbf{Conclusion}

A healthy democracy thrives on open, free, easy access to information produced by its government. Government information – from land-transfer documents to parliamentary reports, from the latest census statistics to Toronto’s latest transit debates, from UN reports on Namibia to European Union analysis of the Greek monetary crisis – must be preserved for the use of current and future generations. An increasing amount of public information continues to move from traditional print to digital formats. In the absence of active archival programs, we are facing a crisis in future access to the government information of this millennium. How will future generations hold up a mirror to our society? Total loss is the norm with the rapid turnover of government information. Born-digital government documents and publications must be identified, preserved and made accessible today and in the future.

The best way forward may include a range of governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions with a stake in the creation, preservation, organization and dissemination of government information. Appropriate legislation and funding will be required to make this happen. Such an example exists in Great Britain, with the April 2013 announcement of a joint project of government and academic libraries, mandated by law to collect, preserve and provide long-term access to the increasing proportion of the

\textsuperscript{29} Professor Ian MacLaren: LAC Letter, accessed November 8, 2013, \url{http://bibliocracy-now.tumblr.com/post/31286743756/professor-ian-maclaren-lac-letter}.

\textsuperscript{30} Save Library & Archives Canada, accessed November 8, 2013, \url{http://www.savellibraryarchives.ca/default.aspx}.  

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nation’s cultural and intellectual output that appears in digital format, including the entire UK web domain.\textsuperscript{31} While the Canadian government and Library and Archives Canada have chosen the path of selective, minimal digital preservation, it is encouraging to hear that the British government has recognized the critical importance of preserving our present record in all its formats.

The establishment in 2012 of the Canadian Government Information Private LOCKSS Network, ably supported by colleagues at the LOCKSS Network at Stanford University, is an impressive example of collaboration between Canadian academic libraries and a Canadian government partner, the DSP. This Network helps to ensure access to Canadian government digital content in the future. It represents a furthering of our libraries’ traditional responsibility to preserve, organize and provide access to collections. Contributing to the preservation of government information and providing continuing access ensures that this essential role continues during this critical period of transition. In discussing government information in the digital age, Jacobs, Jacobs and Yeo (2005, 26) passionately argue that libraries abrogate their responsibility to others at their peril, “not just to their own continued relevance, but to democracy itself.”

Canada’s major research libraries are so much more than lending libraries. Their primary purpose is to acquire, preserve and support access to the scholarly and historical record of our times. This process is not limited to the most popular current information and must support resource discovery for today’s users and users of the future. Our libraries serve as repositories of human knowledge from a distinctly Canadian perspective and are a weapon against collective societal amnesia. In the current climate of governmental abdication of responsibility, our academic libraries must play a particularly strong role in providing support for government information and an active part in advocating for and participating in preservation, service and permanent public access to this national treasure.

\textsuperscript{31} British Library, Click to save the nation’s digital memory, accessed November 8, 2013, \url{http://pressandpolicy.bl.uk/Press-Releases/Click-to-save-the-nation-s-digital-memory-61b.aspx}.
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- CLAGIN, [http://www.cla.ca/Content/NavigationMenu/CLAatWork/Networks1/GovernmentInformation1.htm](http://www.cla.ca/Content/NavigationMenu/CLAatWork/Networks1/GovernmentInformation1.htm)

**Websites**

- Depository Services Program (Canada), [http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/programs/aboutDsp.html](http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/programs/aboutDsp.html)
- Digitization Projects Registry (US), [http://registry.fdlp.gov](http://registry.fdlp.gov)
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Sherry Smugler began her career in libraries as a library technician at a number of Canadian universities including the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario. From 1981 to 1986 she worked in the production and marketing departments at UTLAS (University of Toronto Library Automation Systems). Sherry obtained her MLS degree from the University of Toronto and subsequently began her librarian career at the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library. She has been a Government Publications and Reference Librarian at the University of Toronto’s Robarts Library for twenty-three years and will be retiring at the end of December 2013.
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