Cooperation and Change: Archives, Libraries and Museums in the United States

Robert S. Martin

Ph.D. U. S. Institute of Museum and Library Services
Washington, DC, USA

Abstract:

The U. S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is an independent federal agency that serves and the primary source of federal grant support for the nation's museums and libraries. Grant funds provided to libraries through both the state library agency grants and the competitive National Leadership Grants program have strengthened the infrastructure of libraries to provide enhanced access; have encouraged innovation and creativity; and have especially fostered increasing collaborations between and among libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions. Digital information technology has dramatically affected the way we now perceive the differences and similarities of such institutions and have blurred the boundaries between them. Some projects funded by IMLS provide illuminating examples of these changes in the landscapes of libraries and museums.

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The U. S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is an independent federal agency that provides the primary source of federal grants for the nation's libraries and museums. IMLS grants to museums and libraries build institutional capacity, support core library and museum services, and encourage excellence. Since its inception, the IMLS has done much to expand the role of libraries as cultural institutions; to encourage the development of cultural partnerships of libraries, especially with museums and archives; to expand the use of library buildings as community cultural centers; and to promote the important role of libraries in changing cultural environments.

IMLS was created in 1996 by the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA), which restructured the existing Federal programs for supporting the nation's museums and libraries. The Act transferred the library programs from the administration of the Department of Education, where they had been since their inception in 1956 with the Library Services Act, and grafted them on to the independent Institute of Museum Services, which itself had begun in 1975 with the Museum Services Act (MSA). The subtitles of the MLSA are the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), and the Museum Services Act (MSA), and they are often cited by those subtitles.

This restructuring resulted from the simple recognition on the part of some members of Congress that museums and libraries share a fundamental mission to support education and learning. Thus the mission of IMLS is to build the institutional capacity of museums and libraries to provide the resources and services that support learners of all ages. In short, IMLS is dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners.

Funding for the IMLS in FY 2003 totals about $245 million: $181.7 million for library programs, $29 million for museum programs, and about $35 million in directed appropriations. The majority of our funding for libraries is distributed in formula grants to the state library administrative agency in each state. In most states LSTA funds are used in a variety of important ways: supporting resource sharing, providing training and staff development opportunities, and statewide licensing of digital information services. Most of the remainder of the library funding is distributed in a competitive grant program called National Leadership Grants, which fund projects in four broad categories: education and training, research and demonstration, preservation and digitization, and model programs of museum and library collaboration.

It is important to note that fostering collaboration between and among libraries and museums is inherent in the IMLS statutory mandate and is reflected in our structure and programs. Although archives are not explicitly mentioned in the IMLS statutes, it is clear that in pursuing our mandate we must perforce include archives in many of our collaborative efforts. This is especially true in the digital arena. The statute explicitly charges IMLS in funding digitization and preservation projects to "give priority to projects emphasizing coordination, avoidance of duplication, and access by researchers beyond the institution or library entity undertaking the project."[1] This of necessity requires that we include archives within our funding schemes for digitization projects.

Today it is common to consider museums, libraries and archives as very different kinds of institutions. All three may be considered cultural institutions in the broadest sense of the term (in Europe the preferred term in "Memory Institutions," but this term has not yet taken hold in the United States). All derive their mission from the collections of objects, artifacts and documents that the collect and preserve. But they apparently have different social roles, are managed with very different professional practices, and exhibit different organizational cultures. Upon close examination, however, these differences are revealed to be more apparent than real, and are the result of convention and tradition rather than substantive differences.

Historically the distinctions between and among libraries, museums and archives have not always been so sharp and clear. The earliest libraries known to history were in fact archives. What are often called "temple libraries" or "palace libraries" were in fact collections of texts (usually cunieform tablets) that documented the official religious

activities of the temple or the government transactions of the palace court. Later, collections of other kinds of texts were in fact called "museums," in that they were buildings dedicated to honoring the muses. The great library of Alexandria, for example, was in fact called the Museon, a temple to the muses. In practice, there was little practical differentiation between library and museum until the early modern period, when the development of typographic printing resulted in a dramatic increase in the volume of texts available, and these were differentiated from the collection of objects, library from museum. The practice of separating official records from other kinds of documents also arose around the same time, developing from the rational bureaucratization of governments.

The point is simply that the distinction between library and museum and archives that we now accept as common is really a matter of convention, a convention that has evolved over time. That convention is predicated on a perception that libraries and museums collect very different kinds of things. In fact, however, from one perspective or frame of reference—one school of thought—libraries, museums and archives all collect precisely the same things. They all collect documents.

As David M. Levy has pointed out in his recent book *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age*, our traditional notion of a "document" is bound up with writing and paper. But now in the digital environment we are using the word "document" to refer to all kinds of other things, like text files, audio files, image files, even multimedia presentations and Web pages. The old concept of a document no longer makes sense.[2]

Levy draws on the formative work of Paul Otlet, one of the founders of the documentalist school of thought. In 1934, Otlet offered a definition of the idea of a document to include natural objects, artifacts, objects such as models, and works of art, as well as the conventional notion of document as text. The term "document" was used as a generic term to denote "informative things." In 1951, Suzzane Briet further extended the definition of document to be "any physical or symbolic sign, preserved or recorded, intended to represent, to reconstruct, or to demonstrate a physical or conceptual phenomenon." Briet even asserted that an antelope could be construed as a document. An antelope in the wild was not a document; but once it had been captured and placed in a zoo, it became a document because it then became evidence of a phenomenon.[3] Drawing on the work of Otlet and Briet, as well as Michael Buckland, Levy asserts that we need to redefine our notion of what documents are, and he then offers a simple but profound definition. "They are, quite simply, talking things. They are bits of the material world – clay, stone, animal skin, plant fiber, sand – that we've imbued with the ability to speak."[4] When viewed from this perspective, in the digital world, the boundaries between museum, library and archive disappear.

In the past two decades, libraries, museums and archives alike have begun to use digital information technology as a valuable tool to carry out the central work that each does. The most dramatic use of this technology, beginning almost forty years ago, has been to centralize some of the work that libraries do in organizing their collections, and simultaneously enhancing dramatically access to information about those collections. The work of bibliographic utilities transformed not only the process of cataloging library collections, but also access to bibliographic information.

More recently, digital technology has enabled the creation of large-scale digital surrogate collections, which has again dramatically enhanced knowledge about, and access to, library collections. This has had an especially noteworthy effect on access to unique materials held in rare book, manuscript and special collections.

Archives have also adopted digital information technology. In recent years, with the advent of the MARC AMC format for cataloging archival materials, bibliographic information about archival materials has been significantly increased. Recent development of the Encoded Archival Description standard for archival finding aids has ushered in a new era of access to information about archival materials. And archives have joined libraries in creating digital surrogates of some of the most important and/or popularly used records series.

Museums have been slower to adopt new technology, but they too have recently joined the procession. Museum information systems are now used to register and track collections. And museums too are now creating not only online exhibitions, but in fact digital representations of their collections, including even three dimensional objects.

With this increasing development of digital surrogate collections accessible through the World Wide Web, a transformation in the use of materials from library, archival and museum collections has occurred. People who formerly used such materials on-site in the respective institutions are now frequently (if not exclusively) consulting them online. Even more important, large numbers of individuals who heretofore made little or no use of these materials—who perhaps were even unaware of their existence— are now frequent users of the digital collections. And these new users do not care, and may not even be aware, whether the original materials are in a library or a museum.[5] The boundaries between libraries, museums and archives are blurring.

When we move from the physical to the digital world, the distinctions between text and image, object and artifact appear to diminish. In the digital world, all of the objects that we can access via the Web have been imbued with the ability to speak. Whether the object in question is a text file, an audio file, an image file, or a web page— all have the ability to speak. They all carry a message of some significance. In converting them from physical to digital form, we have expressly delegated to them the ability to speak.

This leads to the inescapable conclusion that, in the digital environment, the distinctions between libraries, museums and archives that we take for granted are in fact artificial. These distinctions are not conceptual; they are conventional. If our distinctions between library and museum are based on the nature of the materials they collect, if that nature is not as different as we may have supposed, then the distinctions blur. And if the nature of those collections is transubstantiated in the digital environment, then the distinctions cease to have meaning at all.

IMLS sponsors an annual conference called WebWise that focuses on digital library and museum projects, many of them funded by IMLS.[6] At these conferences we have heard consistent reports indicating that in the digital environment, libraries are beginning to behave more like museums and museums are behaving more like archives. In the traditional non-digital environment, libraries organize their collections and present them for use in response to a users specific need or inquiry. A user comes into the library

and asks "what do you have on German impressionists," or "Native American ritual objects," or "Paleolithic protozoa."

Conversely, museums traditionally organize selections from their collections in topical or thematic interpretive and didactic exercises we call exhibitions. (Some museum professionals call them "voluntary learning environments.") A user comes into the museum and looks at what the museum staff has selected, presented and interpreted. A museum-goer would not normally come into the museum and say "show me all of your paintings by German impressionists," or "show me all your Native American ritual objects," or "show me all your Paleolithic protozoa."

In the digital environment, these behaviors are almost precisely reversed. Museums for the first time can present their entire collection, cataloged and surrounded with metadata, retrievable in response to a users specific interest or inquiry. And libraries have begun to organize selected items from their collections in thematic presentations that tell a particular story, and even call these presentations exhibitions.

This blurring of Boundaries between cultural heritage institutions provides a useful environment for exploring collaborative endeavors. At IMLS we believe that collaboration is emerging as the strategy of the 21st century. It is aligned with how we are thinking about our communities as "holistic" environments, as social ecosystems in which we are part of an integrated whole. The kind collaboration we wish to encourage is not a joined-at-the-hip symbiosis, and it certainly is not a parasitic relationship. Instead it is a mature and reflective recognition of intersecting nodes of interest, activity and mission. It is the potential for creating synergy out of cooperation, building a structure in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. At its best, collaboration results in a new, compelling energy entering the life of an institution, creating temporary experiences that inspire permanent change.

Librarians have a consistent history of collaboration. Sharing resources is fundamental to the practice of the profession. Indeed, the concept of sharing underlies the very foundation of the modern library as a social agency. Libraries were established in order to pool scarce resources for the common good. The society libraries of the American Colonial period arose from the simple fact that books were too scarce—and too expensive—for any one individual to be able to acquire access to all they needed, so readers brought their individual collections together to share them in common. This ethic of sharing has remained strong in the practice of American librarianship ever since.

The museum and archives communities do not share the same tradition of interinstitutional collaboration and cooperation. Although museums often share their collections for exhibitions, educational programming and research, they have not found the imperative for collaboration as persuasive as libraries. Until very recently, archives have typically been even less likely to value such activities.

Collaboration between and among libraries, museums and archives, therefore, is not easy. It requires that we—as individuals and as institutions—behave in ways that are not "normal," that feel unnatural. One definition of collaboration that I have recently heard offered is that collaboration is "an unnatural act, practiced by non-consenting adults."[7] The dictionary, in fact, offers the following as one definition: "cooperating treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one's country." This notion may be at the heart

of some of the difficulties that we encounter in attempting to collaborate. A better definition for our purposes is "working together in a joint effort."

Differences among institutions, however, can be profound. The assets and personnel, academic preparation of professionals, even the very vocabulary we use to describe operations, can be dramatically different. The characteristics and proximity to the communities served can vary widely. Values and assumptions of mission and service can be different.

In short, the cultures of organizations can differ dramatically. These differences are challenging and they do not go away. It is imperative that these differences be recognized forthrightly. Over time, they can evolve into sources of synergy rather than contention. One goal of successful collaboration is assurance that the integrity of each institution is sustained by the partnership.

IMLS has provided a strong incentive to overcome these barriers and develop the potential of collaborative efforts. As Nancy Allen and LizBishoff observe in a recent publication,

> "Through IMLS funding, a growing number of academic libraries are partnering with museums, historical societies, and other scientific and cultural heritage organizations. The IMLS presented these communities with financial incentives to develop joint projects and to work together to create new approaches to meet the common goals and purposes of creating better and more accessible collections that meet the needs of a knowledge society."[8]

There are numerous examples of such projects, funded directly by IMLS, and indirectly by state library administrative agencies using LSTA funds. A few examples will suffice to give an indication of the scope and range of these projects, in terms of the size and diversity of the institutions involved, the types of materials included in the projects, and the value-added matrix in which they are embedded.

Examples of IMLS-funded Collaborative Projects:

"Connected By A River: A Collaboration of Museums, Libraries, and Schools to Create Community Based Learning Spaces." The Connected by a River project brings together museums, libraries and schools in northeastern Iowa to create materials dealing with the common geographic feature that passes through the involved communities: the Mississippi River. The partners include the Putnam Museum/Nahant Marsh Educational Center, Advanced Technology Environmental Education Library (ATEEL) of Scott Community College, participating K-12 libraries, Davenport Public Library, ten K-12 schools, the Area Education Agency, River Action, Inc., and the National Science Foundation funded Advanced Technology Environmental Education Center (ATEEC). These institutions organized a Project Advisory Team, composed of museum professional, librarian, educator, instructional designer, information technology expert, and environmental content specialist. This team brought the institutional commitment and expertise required to ensure project success.

The team developed five learning modules for use in the local K-12 schools. The common theme of these modules was the environment of the Mississippi River, and focused on the following topics:

- Life forms and habitat on the River
- The role of Wetlands in cleansing the River
- Pollution sources and their effects on the River
- The impact of man-made structures on the River (i.e., locks and dams, flood walls)
- A case study of the creation, destruction, and eventual restoration of the Nahan Marsh

The project team worked with area K-12 teachers to develop learning objectives, and then curricular materials and lesson plans to achieve those goals. Five packaged "turnkey" learning modules were developed and formatted for web-based or CD-ROM delivery. These modules were flexible in design to enable ready integration into existing courses, and include pre- and post-sample tests, teacher resources, student resources containing learning content, listing of enhancement resources available through the library, and inquiry-based projects to be completed either on-line, at the museum, or in the community. The learning modules present a visually rich, fast paced, high tempo educational experience. The learning experience incorporates video conferencing, simulations, and video streaming.

Ten classrooms were selected as testbed sites for this project. Each of the five modules were pilot tested by a minimum of two testbed sites. The classroom instructors at these sites were part of the project team and provided detailed feedback to the module design team on their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the learning module. The learning modules will be revised based upon the feedback from the testbed sites. An on-line teacher and student evaluation/feedback system is incorporated into the design of the learning site. This provides for an on-going evaluation and assessment of the utilization and effectiveness of the learning modules. The project incorporates an applied research design that will provide evidence of the success of the model.

"Worklore: Brooklyn Voices Speak" is a three-year collaborative project between the Brooklyn Public Library and the Brooklyn Historical Society. It will explore the subject of working in Brooklyn as experienced by eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century Brooklyn residents.   The project will generate an interactive, traveling exhibition drawn from the collections of both institutions will focus on four themes: Newcomers: Immigrant Workforces; African-Americans at work in Brooklyn; Women at Work; and Unemployment: Confronting Job Displacement. This collaborative project of Brooklyn Public Library's Willendorf Division and the Brooklyn Historical Society will offer free public programs and lectures; curriculum guides for fourth, seventh eighth and eleventh grade classrooms; marketing and outreach materials; and a *Worklore* web site to provide online access to exhibition texts, images, educational materials and lectures, as well as historic narratives and contemporary oral histories.

The four-part exhibition will be launched on May 1, 2003, and will be seen in its entirety at the Central Library and the Business Library. The exhibition will then travel in sections to 16 branch libraries over an eighteen month period, where additional neighborhood-specific materials gleaned from Brooklyn Public Library's Brooklyn

Collection will enrich the experience, to help library patrons make connections between the exhibition themes and the rich histories of their local neighborhoods. More than 100,000 citizens are expected to see the exhibition and participate in the programs.

The teacher section of the web site—which will also launch on May 1, 2003—will focus on broad themes related New York State's history standards (such as industrialization, immigration, the great migration, the depression, suburbanization, and the global economy) and will provide links to the treatment of these themes in the Worklore exhibition. It will also provide teachers with primary sources through which each of these themes can be explored, together with questions and guidelines on how to use these sources effectively with students. The supplementary resources section of the web site will offer a bibliography and a directory of related web sites. Also featured will be an interactive computer game, "Can You Make Ends Meet in Brooklyn in the Early 1990s?" This game allows web visitors to make choices about the types of work they might choose, and the consequences such choices might have in terms of their personal economy.

"Connecticut History Online." Connecticut History Online (CHO) is a collaboration between three institutions: Connecticut Historical Society, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut, and Mystic Seaport, the Museum of America and the Sea. The Connecticut Historical Society holds 239,000 photographs, prints, and drawings depicting Connecticut people, places and events. The Dodd Research Center holds more than one million photographs, with special strength in the areas of Connecticut businesses, towns, railroads, nursing, and education. Mystic Seaport houses the world's largest collection of maritime photography, numbering more than one million images. Connecticut History Online draws from the rich reservoir of these three collections.

Connecticut History Online is the largest collection of Connecticut historical images on the Web, offering about 14,000 photographs, drawings and prints depicting Connecticut's social, educational, political, civic and cultural life from 1800 to 1950. It serves as a resource database for teachers and students in grades 7-12 and will encourage them to make meaningful use of primary material.

Connecticut History Online is intended primarily as a classroom resource, and most training for students will be provided by their teachers in the classroom. Students have access to the lesson plans, manuals, and search tips that will help them develop research skills. While ideally suited to supporting a historical narrative, Connecticut History Online does not supply that narrative. Rather it affords access to the raw material for constructing a synthesis and/or supporting one that may come from a textbook, classroom or other source. In addition, as an online repository of historical visual material related specifically to Connecticut, Connecticut History Online can extend and deepen understanding of the past and put a personal and local face on events, trends, and topics. The materials available in Connecticut History Online are surrounded by a rich matrix of interpretive and didactic materials that add immeasurably to the images themselves. There are three basic ways to approach the materials in Connecticut History Online: Search, Journeys, and Classroom.

In the search mode, access to the images is enhanced by a powerful search engine that peruses the rich database of metadata for each image and retrieves those relevant to a

specific inquiry. A browse function allows the user to examine images by subject, title, and creator. A geographic locator provides access through a clickable map of the state, retrieving images relevant to specific geographic locations and sites.

The Journeys introduce the user to specific collection highlights, leading them through images related to a specific topic, and providing guideposts that lead to further exploration of the subject. The Classroom mode provides suggestions and interpretive materials suitable for using Connecticut History Online in middle school and high school classrooms.

The Michigan eLibrary (MeL). The Michigan eLibrary (MeL) is a user-friendly, 24-hour-a-day accessible, core set of information resources provided through the Library of Michigan, the state library administrative agency for Michigan. Available to Michigan residents everywhere in the state, the service has taken on the popular name of its acronym, "MeL." It is often cited as a "major, anytime, anywhere information gateway to selected Internet resources, hundreds of full-text journals and newspapers, and over 100,000 electronic books," the phrase "anywhere, anytime" took on new meaning in 2002 when Michigan residents were offered the option of accessing MeL databases from home or work by simply entering their driver's license or state identification number.
The virtual library includes the following segments:

- *MeL Internet*: "Best of the Internet" selected by librarians.
- *Mel Electronic Books and Magazines*: Commercial resources, such as subscriptions to FirstSearch and Gale databases. Using funds distributed by the U.S. Department of Education, the LearnATest library (A leading source of test preparation materials and interactive practice exams) was added to MeL.
- *MeL Lending Library*: Books and other resources from Michigan libraries to Michigan residents.
- *MeL Archives*: Local Michigan Resources digitized and made available on the web.

Significant portions of MeL have been funded with the state's LSTA grant, but funds from other sources, including state appropriations, have also paid for significant shares of the MeL expenditures. Specifically, LSTA funds are used for the statewide subscriptions to OCLC FirstSearch and Gale databases. The Library of Michigan is working on making the virtual library a one stop portal that will allow users to search any or all of these components and retrieve materials regardless of where the information resides.

In short, the Michigan eLibrary is an excellent example of how states use the annual grants to the state library administrative agencies to foster development of collaborative approaches to serving the needs of their users.

Another excellent example is the Colorado Digitization Program (now the Colorado Digitization Alliance). Much has been reported on this extremely successful statewide collaborative project to digitize unique resources held in a wide range of libraries (both academic and public), archives, museums and local historical societies.[9] This project was initiated with a LSTA subgrant from the Colorado State Library, and subsequently funded with a National Leadership Grant from IMLS in the Digitization or Preservation category.

Conclusion

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has played a significant role in the United States in fostering collaboration between museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions. Although such collaboration spans the field of endeavor, including traditional educational programming and outreach activities, it has been must obvious—and perhaps most significant—in the digital arena. IMLS is very proud of the work that we have done in expanding the resources available to the publics that we serve through these collaborative digital projects. These activities have done much to expand the role of libraries as cultural institutions; to network Cultural partnerships, especially with museums and archives; to expand the use of library buildings as community cultural centers; and to promote the important role of libraries in changing cultural environments.

Notes

[1] 20 USC 9162.

[2] David M. Levy, *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (New York: Arcade, 2001).

[3] Suzanne Briet, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* See Ronald E. Day and Laurent Martinet's commentary and translation at http://www.lisp.wayne.edu/~ai2398/briet.htm.

4 Levy, *Scrolling Forward*, p. 23.

[5] For another more extensive view of the relationship between museums and libraries in the digital age, see W. Boyd Rayward, "Electronic Information And The Functional Integration of Libraries, Museums and Archives," in: Edward Higgs, ed., *History and Electronic Artefacts*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207-224 (available at http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~wrayward/museumslibs.html).

[6] For links to information about these conferences see http://www.imls.gov/pubs/conferences.htm. The proceedings of the conferences have been published in *First Monday* (http://firstmonday.org/).

[7] Max Evans, oral presentation at the 2002 Web Wise Conference, Johns Hopkins University, March 21, 2002.

[8] Nancy Allen and Liz Bishoff, "Collaborative Digitization: Libraries and Museums Working Together," *Advances in Librarianship* 26 (2002): 57.

[9] See for example Allen and Bischoff, "Collaborative Digitization (2002); Nancy Allen, "Collaboration Through the Colorado Digitization Project," *First Monday* 5 (2000):6 (http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_6/allen/index.html); Liz Bishoff, "Interoperability and Standards in a Museum/Library Collaborative: The Colorado Digitization Project," *First Monday* 5 (2000):6 (http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_6/bishoff/index.html). The Alliance's web site at see http://www.cdpheritage.org/ provides extensive information.