

# Round-up: 2011 Annual Gathering of Librarians Interested in Government and Legal Information

By Chris Burns, Gail Curry, Carla Graebner, Barbara Jo May, Linda Matsuba, and Caron Rollins.

What initially started out several years ago as an annual half day workshop has expanded into a daylong event where interest now exceeds capacity and where attendees have come from as far away as Saskatchewan and the Yukon.

Attendees at this year's 'Annual Gathering', sponsored by the British Columbia Library Association's Information Policy Committee and the Simon Fraser University Library, learned about topics ranging from global information issues to long term implications on the elimination of the mandatory long form census. Discussion was lively and there was ample opportunity for Q&A with the speakers and with colleagues.

What follows is a round-up of presentations from the day.

**Promoting global transparency through the experience of building the GATT Digital Library ([gatt.stanford.edu](http://gatt.stanford.edu)) presented by Chuck Eckman, Dean of Library Services, Simon Fraser University**

The GATT Digital Library began with a research question from a faculty member:

How did membership in GATT/WTO influence the creation and power of free-trade issues...

In 1995 Stanford Library had 2% of GATT's documentary output and a basic collection. Stanford looked at what more was available. There was a microfiche subscription program of libraries of 10% of GATT documents. Also, there was another comprehensive microfiche collection only available to GATT member delegations. GATT did not have a records schedule.

In 1999 there was a series of discussions with WTO and Stanford to digitize the collection. In June 1999 there was an agreement and in July 1999 the digitization project started in Geneva, Switzerland. Scanning

was limited to July and August 1999. One copy of all records was kept by Stanford and another copy went to the WTO.

The collection held 3 levels of access:

1. Public
2. Restricted (GATT contracting party/WTO members)
3. Confidential (WTO Division Staff)

The collections targeted for scanning:

1. Archival Sources (central registry)
2. Photographic Archives
3. Documentation
4. Publications

## Privacy Issues

There was an interesting culture shock at GATT over the scanning project. A lot of the discussion of trade representatives needed to be private for certain lengths of time. However, because of the November 1999 demonstrations in Seattle, WA, GATT welcomed the digitization of its documents to improve the world's perception of its transparency.

## Status of scanned items

- Includes 2.2 million page images, 600 photographic images
- 1964: Tariff Study captured.
- The interface went live in 2004 with ten thousand documents.

~ Linda Matsuba.

## **Globalized Information Policy Trends presented by Ingrid Parent, University Librarian, UBC Library**

Ingrid Parent spoke about globalized information policy trends, a topic she is uniquely qualified to address as a long-time contributor to IFLA and as the incoming (and first Canadian) president of IFLA. Parent is currently University Librarian, UBC Library, and previously worked for Library and Archives Canada, culminating in the position of Assistant Deputy Minister.

Parent began her talk close to home with some history, from her LAC experience, about the legal depository programme for Canadian federal documents. In 2005, digital documents were brought under the scope of the Act, but there was no means to implement this technically nor much will at the pan-departmental level. She said there were slow changes to ensure that digitized documents were archived by LAC, and many discussions about bringing documents together to host in one place and also about the entire concept of Crown Copyright (i.e., who had the authority to do this?).

Parent indicated that LAC eventually decided to just quietly do this, not to ask for permission via the legislation route. She indicated that about 3% of government records are archived, and that standards and processes are still being developed. Researchers in the future will encounter lots of gaps. The federal government plans to produce their records and reports digitally (by default) in 2017, so Parent sees the policy discussions around LAC's work continuing.

She also reminded us that LAC is harvesting federal websites every six months, which is a huge project (170 million digital objects to date), but will provide Canadians with an important archives of what government was doing at a particular time. Again, this was a project that Parent says LAC just started without getting bogged down in a lot of discussion about permission. She stressed that sometimes it is important to just start projects- perhaps as "pilots" - that are important to libraries and our users, and not over-think or over-examine them.

Parent noted that making the massive amount of government data and datasets accessible (and preserving them for future use) continues to be a challenge, but the federal government has piloted six important projects. She hopes that the "open government" shift in the USA and user pressure (i.e., through citizen involvement and media) will help push our government into more of this activity. The promotion of government datasets – in a form that is easy and attractive, with immediate access – is an important global trend. It is vital for libraries to work with others in promoting this, and also to lead or collaborate on projects. Parent gave some interesting examples of what she called "sexy" data visualization (e.g., [www.informationisbeautiful.net](http://www.informationisbeautiful.net); [InfoChimps.infochimps.com/datasets](http://InfoChimps.infochimps.com/datasets)). The British/UK project, OpenGovernment: <http://data.gov.uk/> now contains 7000 sets.

Open data in GIS is resulting in some interesting projects. Parent showed us one (which can only be described as "Cool!") with an UBC connection: Vancouver's secret waterways (<http://hss.library.ubc.ca/gis-services/oldstreams/>). An audience member indicated that this project had also resulted in some public art projects.

In terms of data management, Parents indicated that CARL is leading an initiative to coordinate projects across Canada and has developed a toolkit, "Research Data: Unrealized Opportunities". CARL is working with CANARIE and some computer and research companies to build projects and access funding.

In broad terms, Parent identified the current trends in information policy as: changes in information access (to immediate, more useful and more attractive); move toward augmented and layered information; importance of mobile access; and security issues (particularly privacy concerns).

Throughout her talk and during the question period, Parent talked about the opportunities that new technologies bring to libraries to better serve our communities. She stressed collaboration and support amongst libraries, leveraging the technologies for creative and useful projects (which might be initiated by community groups or individuals), and the necessity for libraries to reach out beyond their usual constituents.

She ended by saying that libraries have a unique opportunity not just to set standards, and facilitate and coordinate projects, but to really make a difference in making important government information freely available to all. Her knowledge and enthusiasm was inspiring, and participants came away aware of what a great Canadian representative we have in the new IFLA President.

~Barbara Jo May.

### **The Life and Death of the Long Form Census, presented by Dr. Krishna Pendakur, Department of Economics, Simon Fraser University**

The May 2011 Census of Population is the first census since 1961 which will have no mandatory long-form census component. From 1961 to 2006, this census instrument was sent to 20 percent of Canadian households, with the entire population of households receiving the mandatory short form.

With more than a smattering of satirical humour, Simon Fraser University Economist Dr Krishna Pendakur briefly outlined the composition, cost, and purpose of the long-form census; described the new 2011 National Household Survey (NHS); and explained why many researchers, policy makers, and Canadian citizens in general are concerned about the demise of the long-form census.

The long-form census asked questions that some people might not want to answer, such as questions on income, religion, and the marital status of same-sex couples. It cost about a half a billion dollars to deliver, with an additional implicit cost of approximately 60 million dollars.

The various questions included in the long-form census were paid for by government departments. Adding questions to the census was expensive. For instance, the ethnicity questions cost Canadian Heritage upwards of two million dollars. The resulting data was required by the various government departments to plan their services. The private sector also relied on the data for analysis and prediction.

Because the long form census had a large sample size and was mandatory (resulting in a 99.5 percent response rate), it could be used to learn about small groups in the population. No other Statistics Canada survey provides the opportunity for this kind of analysis.

In 2011, the mandatory long-form census has been replaced by the more costly voluntary NHS, the sample rate of which is one in three households. Statistics Canada anticipates a 50 percent response rate, but the response rate is expected to vary across income levels and ethnic groups. For instance, either end of the income scale (the rich and the poor) is known not to fill out forms. Therefore, the NHS data will not be directly comparable to the 2006 long-form census, and we will have no idea how it will differ.

This leads to Dr. Pendakur's greatest concern about the loss of the mandatory long-form census. The data from the mandatory long-form census was used to rebase or reweight all other Statistics Canada surveys, allowing the use of sample data to learn about the population in the country as a whole. Because the NHS is voluntary, it cannot be used as a baseline for other data sources. The short-form census can be used for rebasing, but only for age, sex, and language. It cannot be used to rebase survey questions concerned with other elements of the Canadian population, such as income level or ethnic group.

Dr. Pendakur expects that Statistics Canada will probably continue to use the 2006 long-form census data to rebase other survey data for a while. However, the composition of the Canadian population is and will be changing, and the effectiveness of this method will decrease over time.

Dr. Pendakur spent the rest of the session using his research on the earnings attainment of Canadian-born ethnic minorities to illustrate the repercussions of the switch from a mandatory long-form Census to the voluntary NHS.

~ Gail Curry.

### FOSS GIS and Open GeoSpatial Data, presented by Daniel Brendle-Moczuk, Geography Librarian, University of Victoria

Daniel spoke about Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the availability of free geospatial data. He mentioned two free, open source GIS programs which provide an alternative to expensive proprietary systems such as ArcGIS from ESRI:

- Quantum GIS (QGIS): <http://www.qgis.org/>
- Geographic Resources Analysis Support System (GRASS): <http://grass.osgeo.org/>

At the heart of the presentation was the challenge of defining "open data". Two groups have proposed standards, but the term is used very loosely in practice:

- Open Knowledge Foundation' *Open Knowledge Definition*: <http://www.opendefinition.org/okd/>
- Open Government Data Working Group's *8 Principles of Open Government Data*: <http://www.opengovdata.org/home/8principles>

The ideal open source GIS data can is well-defined (has attribute tables/metadata); has both vector and raster data; can be downloaded; can be manipulated (you can add/change data); and the new files can be uploaded to the web to share freely with others (e.g. OpenStreetMap). Some types of so-called "open" data files are limited in important ways:

- WMS (Web Map Service): can display data on screen, but not download; no attribute

table (e.g. *BC Terrain Resource Information Management (TRIM)*)

- WFS (Web Feature Service): can save but not change data; has attribute table; vector data only; hard to find

While many government agencies are releasing free GIS data, it may not be the 'best' data or may come with strings attached. Some examples:

- Bathymetry maps of ocean floor: public files are less detailed than those available for sale
- City of Vancouver's Open Data *Terms of Use* state that "the City may, in its sole discretion, cancel or suspend your access to the datasets without notice and for any reason"
- Government of BC logs all data orders and downloads from its site

Lesson: "Open" data is not necessarily *fully* open. Read the fine print.

~ Chris Burns.

### **BC Legislative Library Records for electronic resources, presented by Penny Swanson, Cataloguing Division Head, Simon Fraser University**

This project has been previously written in the BCLA Browser, Vol.3, no. 1, (2011) "Linking the Library Landscape – Legislative Library of British Columbia MARC Records"

Since the above article was published, the provider neutral records have become available.

Penny provided an overview of the project, explaining how it evolved, starting with the Legislative Library of British Columbia (LLBC) release of the batched records on their website, the UVIC Library turning the print format records into electronic format records, then the involvement of BCCATS members to create "vendor neutral" records for the ELN site. Each record retains a note indicating the LLBC as the source of the records, and most importantly, a link to a permanent digital copy. Penny spoke about SFU's use of the provider neutral records, including how the web links are displayed in the SFU OPAC. In response to a question about selecting individual records, Penny answered that SFU loads all records made available, both serial and monograph, as does UVIC and other libraries. Thanks were extended to the Legislative Library of British Columbia.

Useful links about the project:

- LLBC Website:  
[http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/marc\\_batch/index.htm](http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/marc_batch/index.htm)
- ELN Website:  
<http://www.eln.bc.ca/view.php?id=1876>
- BCLA Browser January article:  
<http://bclabrowser.ca/index.php/browser/article/view/224/296>

### **Update: BC Government Documents Digitization Initiative, presented by Gail Curry (UNBC), Marilyn Carr-Harris (LLBC), Susan Paterson (UBC), Caron Rollins (UVic)**

At last year's Annual Gathering, attendees were introduced to a new initiative from the British Columbia Research Libraries Group which, if approved, would digitize important historical British Columbia government publications. At this year's workshop, the group returned to provide an update and to let everyone know the project is moving forward.

In March 2010, a task group was formed by the British Columbia Research Libraries Group (BCRLG) in conjunction with the Legislative Library of British Columbia to draft a proposal to digitize BC historical government documents. Amongst the recommendations delivered to the BCRLG in January, 2011, was to prioritize the digitization of the first ten years of the *BC Sessional Papers*, the *Government Gazette* and the *BC Newspaper Index*.

The rationale for the selection of these materials being that each of these:

- Is of a manageable size
- Has research value
- Is not currently included in other digitization projects
- Offers a good 'proof of concept' potential as being exemplars for Parliamentary Privilege publications and expired Crown copyright publications.

The Task Group determined that the digitization for the proof of concept project will be undertaken by the University of Victoria library and that the publications will be supplied primarily by the Legislative Library. Simon Fraser University library will supply server space for the resources digitized during this project.

Currently, the BCRLG has requested Parliamentary clearance to proceed with digitizing the *Sessional Papers* and is waiting for a response. The *Gazette* is less problematic in terms of permissions and has been placed in the digitization queue at the University of Victoria library

The Task Group decided that given the nature of the physical format of the BC Newspaper Index, it will not be scanned as is but has recommended that it be transformed into an accessible database. UBC has done preliminary work on creating an interface for this resource and will continue to work on this project.

~ Carla Graebner.

### **Annual Gathering 2012:**

Calls for expression of interest in presenting or for submitting ideas for the 2012 Annual Gathering will go out on various lists in November of this year.

Thank you very much to the following people for contributing write-ups on this year's event:

*Linda Matsuba is the Liaison Librarian for Marketing Programs and is the Collections Coordinator at the BCIT Library.*

*Barbara Jo May is the Adult Collections Librarian for Okanagan Regional Library.*

*Gail Curry is the Instruction/Data Librarian at the University of Northern British Columbia.*

*Chris Burns is the Research Support & Data Services Librarian at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.*

*Caron Rollins is the Librarian for Government Publications, Political Science, European Studies at UVic.*

*Carla Graebner is the Liaison Librarian for Archaeology, Economics and Government Information at Simon Fraser University.*