Expanding Access: Loan of Original Materials in Special Collections

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The interinstitutional loan of special collections for research purposes has the potential to expand significantly access to the unique documentary resources of the nation's libraries. However, most special collection librarians would argue that because of the uniqueness of their material, one should not take unnecessary risks with it. Although they would see temporary loans as risky, precedents do exist, including the long-term success of several statewide archival networks which freely exchange unique materials between members. Additionally the development and implementation of the RLIN AMC format was initiated in order to broaden bibliographic accessibility nationally. It seems that these two concepts are complementary. It also seems that the sharing of unique materials is a responsible way of fulfilling the goals identified in the ALA/SAA "Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials."[1] The issue should be addressed in the context of the research library's role in broadening access to materials in both printed and manuscript form. It can also be viewed as an effort to integrate special collections more fully into the mission of the research library.

Traditionally, archives and special collections have been viewed as separate entities within the research library. This identification has often been sustained by special collections curators themselves. As a result, these departments have been largely ignored in the major changes affecting both technical services and public services in the past twenty-five years. In many instances, an adherence to nonstandard descriptive practices has made special collections ineligible for consideration in the major retrospective conversion efforts of the past decade. Be-

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cause special collections cataloging is often not in machine-readable form, it cannot be included in online public access catalogs, nor disseminated through bibliographic networks. As a result, information regarding the holdings of individual programs is not only unknown nationally, but can be difficult to locate within the institution itself.

Advances in public service have often come in tandem with broadening access to bibliographic information, and here too special collections have suffered. Interlibrary loan (ILL) conventions and expanded services have developed with little special collections involvement, and the exclusion from the *National Interlibrary Loan Code*[2] of rare and valuable material including manuscripts has been interpreted to cover all material from archives and special collections. Similarly, increased bibliographic instruction has tended to omit those library materials located in special collections. As a result, library consortia, based on the principle of shared resources, have often viewed special collections as secondary to their goals and priorities.

Special collections distinguish research libraries as the jewels in the crown, and yet in administrative planning and the allocation of resources, they have suffered from their "splendid isolation." Special collections are essential to research libraries. They represent a valuable part of the national collection. But they must come to terms with fòrces affecting the future directions of research libraries. Becoming active partners in shared resources programs is an essential step which will both strengthen the library as a whole and serve the interests of special collections themselves.

Broadened access to bibliographic information and the generation and sharing of photocopies and microfilm editions should serve as the primary means for resource sharing. The loan of original material is a legitimate option when the use of originals is vital, and mechanisms are in place which can assure their safety.

Precedents do exist within the library, museum, and archival communities for the temporary loan of materials, including unique and valuable items. Starting with the obvious, American libraries have been lending books to other libraries since the beginning of this century. In fact, interlibrary loan was the first instance of library cooperation and, beginning in the 1970s, ILL became a basic function of library service rather than an esoteric practice of the few.[3] ILL works. Few books are lost or damaged, and policies are well defined. Faculty and students have become highly dependent on this service. At Cornell, ILL requests have grown fantastically in a very short time. For Olin Library, the graduate research library, the number of requests to borrow grew from 2,451 in 1980/81 to 6,500 in 1987/88, an increase of 165 percent.[4] ILL has become sufficiently central to library operations that within state and national consortia, ILL agreements influence all sorts of library decisions, from collection development to preservation. Existing methods are effective, but, both in procedure and practice, they have not addressed the special needs of unique materials.

Museums on the other hand do lend unique items. In 1855, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London began the regular circulation of exhibits from their collections, and, by the turn of the century, many other museums had followed suit.[5] Today, art museums, historical societies, natural history museums, and others lend items in their collections for exhibits, research, and training. Although the American Association of Museums has not formally endorsed standards and policies for temporary loans, the registrars' committee of AAM two years ago adopted a policy on transporting objects, and will be disseminating in late 1988 a statement on standards for facility reports.[6] The AAM's *Professional Standards for Museum Accreditation* includes in its on-site evaluation a check list of questions covering loans from the collection.[7]

To summarize, libraries have regularized interlibrary loans but discourage the lending of unique items; museums lend unique material, but only on a limited and individual basis and the professional association has yet to adopt uniform standards covering such loans.

Special collections fall somewhere in between, and the two professional associations, ALA and SAA, have in part addressed the issue of temporary loans. Most special collections departments will lend single items for exhibits. In recognition of this practice, the Executive Committee of RBMS in 1984 appointed an ad hoc Committee for Developing Guidelines for Borrowing Special Collections Materials for Exhibition. Their draft document, "Information for Prospective Borrowers," was published in the Spring 1987 issue of *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship*, and the committee encourages reader comments and suggestions. The Committee is in the process of submitting guidelines to ACRL for formal adoption.[8]

The Society of American Archivists has considered the issue of temporary loans, for research purposes, in several important publications. SAA's *Evaluation of Archival Institutions* includes a guide to self-study which asks the repository to "describe the archives' policies and procedures for lending records," clearly indicating that this is an acceptable practice.[9] In the 1986 report, *Planning for the Archival Profession*, the Society's Goals and Priorities Task Force chose as one of its highest priorities to "identify and promote the use of models for inter-institutional use of original archival materials or reproductions."[10] The "Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials" of ALA and SAA, adopted in 1979, states that while normal practice confines use of original material to an institution's own jurisdiction, "under special circumstances, a collection, or a portion of it, may be loaned or placed on deposit with another institution."[11] The "Statement on Access" is currently under review by the

RBMS ad hoc Committee on Guidelines for Manuscripts and Archives and the Joint Committee of ALA/SAA; however, in the new draft, the statement on the loan of materials remains the same.[12]

The temporary transfer of original materials between members of a few statewide archival networks has been common practice for a decade or longer. The Wisconsin network, founded in 1951, consists of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and twelve Area Research Centers, located on university and college campuses throughout the state. Intercampus loans have been available since 1961. Archival and manuscript material is transferred within the network by Society or university staff members. Approximately 600 collections or archival series are transferred each year.[13]

The most systematic loan program is found in the Missouri network. Material from the Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society may be used on any of the four campuses of the university. Requests are normally filled within forty-eight hours and material is sent via the university's daily courier system. Material has been lent since 1978 and not one item has been lost or damaged in transit. In 1986/87, 275 collections were used by patrons at other campuses.[14]

Some of the fears of special collections curators and archivists could be eased if information on existing interinstitutional sharing arrangements were better known, and if they themselves participated in the development of policies designed to protect their material.

Procedures for the temporary loan of unique materials should be based on two general conditions:

1. **MUTUALITY**. All participants must have an equal stake in the success of the arrangement, must benefit from participation, and share in the obligations of the system.

2. **EQUITY OF ACCESS**. The loan of material must not depend solely on personal contacts between curators or between a curator and a researcher. While a sense of mutual trust is beneficial, the system should rest on well-defined interinstitutional commitments.

If these conditions are met, then practical considerations can be addressed:

1. All procedures must be written, clearly defined, and mutually binding on all parties. Security of material in transit and while in the custody of the borrowing institution is paramount. This necessitates a dependable system not only for transfer but for requesting, recording, and verifying all steps in the transaction. ILL offers a good model for such administrative arrangements.

2. A clear statement of liability must underlie all such arrangements. Liability includes such factors as insurance, condition reports, packaging and transit requirements, and the responsibilities of the borrowing and lending institutions for the care of the material.

3. The ultimate decision to lend or not to lend specific items rests with the curator.

The statement prepared in 1986 by the Access Sub-Committee of the RLG Task Force on Archives, Manuscripts and Special Collections, and adopted in 1987 by the Board of Governors of RLG, addresses these concerns.[15] This statement was initiated by a request from the RLG Public Services Committee, asking the Task Force to address the tendency to exclude special collections materials from the shared resources programs. The committee's concern focused on the inconsistencies surrounding access to special collections. While some institutions were responsive to outside research inquiries, others rejected outright any request for access to materials housed in special collections. These refusals were usually based on general prohibitions against photocopying, microfilming, or lending. The Public Services Committee sought affirmation that special collections subscribed to their library's commitment to shared resources. More specifically, the committee sought a statement which required special collections to provide item-specific answers to inquiries, and which also included procedures acceptable to the special collections community for the interlibrary loan of photocopies, microfilm, and, where appropriate, originals.

The document, "Additional Guidelines for Access to Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections," which was reviewed by special collections curators and accepted, with minor revisions, by the Public Services Committee, was incorporated on a provisional basis into the *RLG Shared Resources Manual*. It does reflect the common commitment of member libraries to meet the research needs of the network. It also reaffirms the statement in the *Shared Resources Manual* and the *National Interlibrary Loan Code* that some special collections material is inappropriate for interlibrary loan because of rarity, monetary value, uniqueness, or fragility. However, these guidelines recommend the case-by-case treatment of requests and that "in the spirit of the RLG compact, special collections interpret their lending policies as generously as possible."[16] Specific sections include "The Responsibility of Borrowing Libraries," "The Responsibility of Lending Libraries," "Shipping of Special Collections Materials," "Use of Materials in Borrowing Libraries," and "Guidelines for Liability."

A draft was distributed to member institutions for comment by special collections librarians in late 1986. Twelve institutions responded in writing. Of these, one opposed the guidelines and two stated serious reservations. The other nine indicated strong agreement in principle, and most indicated that these guidelines did not mandate procedures significantly different from those already in practice at their institutions.[17] The RLG Board passed the "Guidelines" with a provision that, after one year, September 1987 to September 1988, a survey evaluating the effect of their implementation would be conducted. This survey will solicit responses to six questions which were prepared and distributed last summer. It is not expected that significant impact will be reported this year: change is likely to be gradual.

Five of the six questions cover the effects on the numbers of transactions and on the work load of curators and ILL staff. The sixth question is surely the most important: "Do you feel that the enactment of these guidelines has led to increased availability of research materials for the faculty, staff, and students of your institution?" Considerable resources have been devoted to the acquisition and care of special collections, and curators must live up to their custodial responsibilities. Nonetheless, it is in the research use of these materials that their efforts come to fruition. Interinstitutional cooperation will broaden research access. Curators must implement responsible procedures to safeguard their collections, while enhancing their availability to the research community.

NOTES

1. "Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials," *College & Research Libraries News* 40 (April 1979): 111–112.
2. "National Interlibrary Loan Code, 1980," as cited in Virginia Boucher, *Interlibrary Loan Practices Handbook* (Chicago: ALA, 1984), 139.
3. Ibid., ix.
4. At the same time, the number of requests to borrow from Cornell was around 30,000 in 1987/88. Statistics provided by Patricia A. Schafer, memorandum, 30 June 1988, to H. Thomas Hickerson.
5. Anna Cocks, *The Victoria and Albert Museum: The Making of the Collection* (Leicester, England: Windward, 1980), 12; Michael Darby, et al., *The Victoria and Albert Museum* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 3–4.
6. Telephone conversation, Anne R. Kenney with Carol Schmiegel, head of the AAM's Registrars' Committee, 30 June 1988.
7. American Association of Museums, *Professional Standards for Museum Accreditation* (Washington, D.C.: AAM, 1982).
8. Ellen S. Dunlap and Kathleen Reed, "Borrowing of Special Collections Materials for Exhibition," *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 27–37. See the most recent draft in the December 1988 issue of *College & Research Libraries News*.
9. Society of American Archivists, *Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self-Study; Report of the Task Force on Institutional Evaluation* (Chicago: SAA, n.d.), 40.
10. Society of American Archivists, *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: SAA, 1986), 34.
11. "Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials," *College & Research Libraries News* 40 (April 1979): 111–112.
12. "Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials in Libraries, Archives, and Manuscript Repositories," in Draft, August 1987, "Guidelines on Access to Manuscripts and Archives," Part I.

13. Richard A. Erney, "Wisconsin Area Research Centers," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 11–22; "Survey of Archival Networks, Wisconsin," *Midwestern Archivist* 6, no. 2 (1982): 121.

14. "Policy Statement on Loans, Joint Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts." Statistics from telephone conversation, Anne R. Kenney with Kenn Thomas, Senior Manuscript Specialist, Joint Collection-St. Louis, 28 June 1988.

15. RLG memorandum, 11 May 1987, to Board of Governors from Sarah How and Jamie Ingram; RLG memorandum, 17 July 1987, to RLG Task Force on Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections from Sarah How and Jamie Ingram, which includes a copy of "Additional Guidelines for Access to Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections."

16. "Additional Guidelines for Access to Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections," *RLG Shared Resources Manual*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Research Libraries Group, 1987), 39–43. Reprinted as the Appendix on pp. 126–30.

17. RLG memorandum, 5 January 1987, to Public Services Steering Committee from Patti McClung, which includes copies of the twelve letters.