

Shepherding the LAMs: Archives and Collaboration

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Cultural institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs)¹ share numerous activities, goals, and concerns. Although professionals in all three fields have long recognized the commonalities among cultural institutions, the last decade has seen a decided increase in the discussion and implementation of collaborative projects. Shared challenges, including changing user expectations, increased financial pressures, and new opportunities introduced by the digital environment, have led some to theorize that LAMs may best serve their missions by working together, and may indeed be on a path toward institutional convergence.² In their report for the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), Diane Zorich, Gunter Waibel and Ricky Erway envision collaboration as a continuum that ranges from basic contact among institutions to convergence, an ingrained and complex interdependency that allows institutions to transcend their original missions and roles.³ This description of LAM collaboration has been widely repeated, but Zorich, Waibel and Erway acknowledge that the term is often used to denote any "process in which two or more groups work together toward a common goal by sharing expertise, information and resources."⁴ Collaborative projects range from informal discussions of professional issues to the coordination of long-term projects such as exhibitions, publications, or digitization.

The library and museum communities have embraced the concept of LAM collaboration and are contributing substantially to the professional discourse on this topic. Although archives continue to play an important role as partners in collaborative projects, they have remained relatively reticent about

1 In the current literature on this subject, the acronym LAM (library/archive/museum) is widely used. To avoid confusion, I have kept with the standard way of referring to such institutions, even though this paper's focus is predominantly on archives.

2 Diane Zorich, Gunter Waibel, and Ricky Erway, "Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives and Museums," Report produced by OCLC Research, 2008. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2008/2008-05.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2010), 10-12.

3 Zorich, Waibel, and Erway, "Beyond the Silos of the LAMs," 10-12.

4 Zorich, Waibel, and Erway, "Beyond the Silos of the LAMs," 10.

LAM collaboration in the archival literature.⁵ Archivists can fill this gap and take leadership roles in LAM collaboration by recognizing archives' close relationship to libraries and museums, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and advocating for archives within collaborative projects.

Archives: Just One of the Flock?

The shared LAM missions to acquire materials of enduring value is perhaps the most recognizable commonality among the three types of institutions. In her recent article on integrated access systems for archives, libraries and museums, Katherine Timms proposed a "double-hybrid cultural heritage complex" demonstrating holdings overlaps in digital and traditional media.⁶ She observed that museums primarily hold materials with artifactual value, while archives and libraries hold materials with informational value. Even so, the holdings of archives often include unique materials whose physical properties are intrinsic to their informational worth, granting many archival records artifactual well as an informational value. Furthermore, most LAMs now include both digitized and born-digital resources, and traditional collecting boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred. In his description of the 2006 RBMS conference, Christian Dupont quoted a museum professional's take on the overlaps: "[A]s the conference progressed it became abundantly clear that collection-based definitions of libraries, archives, and museums are not valid, have never been valid, and never will be valid. Everyone collects everything."⁷ The key to collaboration is learning to work with differences in approaches to the same types of materials.

5 Apart from a special issue of *Archival Science*, a search of the major journals of the discipline -- *American Archivist*, *Archivaria*, *Archival Issues*, *Midwestern Archivist*, and *Provenance* -- yielded only one article on LAM collaborations in between 1996 and 2008. However, the archival profession has begun to catch up, with two articles in each of the 2009 issues of *American Archivist*.

6 Katherine Timms, "New Partnerships for Old Sibling Rivals: The Development of Integrated Access Systems for the Holdings of Archives, Libraries, and Museums," *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009).

7 Christian Dupont, "Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Twenty-First Century: Intersecting Missions, Converging Futures?" *RBM* 8 (spring 2007): 16.

Archives share a number of roles and functions with libraries and museums, but this has not been recognized readily within the profession. Leo Stout, in his 2000 presidential address to the SAA, reflected on the relationships between archives and museums by placing them in opposition:

The museum has become a purveyor of stories, a venue of opinion. ... Archives, on the other hand, have consciously avoided the suggestion that we push a particular point of view. We assert that we don't tell the stories; we provide the raw materials for people to construct their own stories. In our core mission, we are not a venue for people to see something, as a tourist or a visitor sees an exhibit; we are there to facilitate the work of research.⁸

Stout's statement reveals a concept of archives as an unbiased venue for research, and a misunderstanding of museums as a subjective venue for storytelling and "opinion." Even in the intermediated space of the exhibition gallery, museum professionals have come to regard their institutions less as places to "see something" and more as information centers where communities gather in order to negotiate meaning, history, and culture.⁹ Although archivists generally hesitate to impose interpretations on individual fonds within their holdings, a growing number are beginning to recognize the cultural and personal biases inherent in their work and to discuss their own influence on the historical record.¹⁰ These ideas parallel "sense-making" theory in library and information science, which suggests that meaning is constructed and that the librarian's role is to guide and facilitate rather than to impose and interpret.¹¹ Collaboration allows LAMs to come together around the idea that cultural heritage professionals are purveyors – not of stories, as Stout suggested, but of a complete and connected cultural record.¹²

8 Leon Stout, "Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age," *American Archivist*, 65, no. 1 (spring - summer 2002), 9-23.

9 Leonard Witt, "Museums as Information Centers," *Museum International* 46, no. 1 (Jan/Dec 1994): 20-25; Deborah Wythe, "New Technologies and the Convergence of Libraries, Archives, and Museums," *RBM* 8, no. 1 (spr 2007), 51-55.

10 See, for example, Tom Nesmith, "What's History Got to Do With It?: Reconsidering the Place of Historical Knowledge in Archival Work," *Archivaria* 57 (spring 2004): 1-27; Mark Greene, "The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age," *American Archivist* 65 (2002): 42-55.

11 For an example, see Brenda Dervin and Patricia Dewdney, "Neutral Questioning: A New Approach to the Reference Interview," *Reference Quarterly*, 25 (4), 506-513.

12 Gloria Meraz, "Cultural Evidence: On the Common Ground Between Archivists and Museologists," *Provenance* 15 (1997): 10.

While archivists think of recordkeeping, evidence, and accountability as being primarily their purview, museums fulfill these functions as well. In 1997, Gloria Meraz argued that the recordkeeping and memory functions of archives were not mutually exclusive, coining the term “cultural evidence” to suggest this duality.¹³ Even the presence of artifacts within the museum can serve a recordkeeping function: collections of natural history specimens, for example, form a record as powerful as any written work about the processes and practices of nineteenth-century science. Similarly, captured or looted artifacts offer mute testimony to hegemony, colonialism, and conquest. Although Stout congratulated archivists for avoiding the controversy and “soul-searching” in which museums were then involved, the fact that there are two paradigms of archival practice, administrative and cultural, points to a deep split within the profession that may affect the way archives interact with other LAMs.

Others have seen the roles of archives and museums as more closely aligned than did Stout. Gerald Beasley, former director of the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University, offered a tongue-in-cheek observation on the differences in the organizing functions of LAMs in a 2007 *RBM* article: “It is sheer hubris on the part of librarians to believe they organize knowledge. They do not. Archivists do that, and museum curators do that, but librarians do not.”¹⁴ While the intent of Beasley’s comments is humorous, their underlying assertion is valid. While archivists have traditionally shared organization and description tools such as MARC with librarians, the principles that guide such work have more in common with those of museum curators. Archivists and museum curators organize and describe the raw materials of history in order to draw out and preserve their inherent coherence, relying on the related principles of provenance, cultural context, and the primacy of the creator to inform their work. Their approach to materials places them in sympathetic, if not entirely shared, territory, and it distinguishes them from librarians, who most often deal with materials that are not unique, and that are published (“pre-organized,” in Beasley’s words).

13 Meraz, “Cultural Evidence: On the Common Ground Between Archivists and Museologists,” *Provenance* 15 (1997).

14 Gerald Beasley, “Curatorial Crossover: Building Library, Archives, and Museum Collections,” *RBM* 8, no. 1 (spring 2007): 24.

Opportunities for Collaboration: A Survey

In the current climate of collaboration, opportunities for archives abound. The following is a summary of five ways archives can contribute to and benefit from such projects, drawing on the literature on collaboration to identify current and past efforts.

Funding

The creation of IMLS in 1996 as part of the Library Services and Technology Act has proven to be one of the most important forces moving institutions toward greater collaboration. In a recent article on LAM convergence, Robert S. Martin, director of the IMLS, argued, "The boundaries between types of cultural heritage institutions that we now accept as common are simply lines that we ourselves have drawn. And we can re-draw them ourselves if we choose to do so."¹⁵ The IMLS favors collaborative projects for its National Leadership Grant, for the reason that "involving carefully chosen partners with complementary competencies and resources can create powerful synergies that extend project impact."¹⁶ More than half of the National Leadership grants awarded in 2000 went to collaborative projects, and this source of funding has been the impetus behind a marked rise in collaboration among cultural heritage institutions.¹⁷ Proponents of LAM collaboration also point out that such projects are more cost-effective, as staff, equipment, administration, and other infrastructure costs are shared.

Programming

Public programming offers the longest history of LAM collaboration and the richest array of opportunities. It involves the least amount of risk to the collaborating institutions, as it draws on the

15 Robert S. Martin, "Intersecting Missions, Converging Practice," *RBM* 8 (spring 2007): 82.

16 "National Leadership Grant," IMLS website, <http://www.imls.gov/applicants/grants/nationalLeadership.shtml> (accessed April 15, 2010).

17 Liz Bishoff, "The Collaboration Imperative," *Library Journal* 1/15/2004, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA371048.html> (accessed April 14, 2010).

types of activities and relationships in which most LAMs are already engaged, and it may be accomplished with minimal additional resource investment. Throughout the literature, LAMs report collaborating on exhibitions, lectures, workshops, educational materials, courses, festivals, and many other types of programming initiatives.¹⁸ What is important to note is that programming collaboration allows LAMs to increase their audiences, cultivate a wider appeal, and meet specific community needs. The most recent issue of *American Archivist* highlighted a collaboration among public libraries, academic special collections libraries, and historical society archives to provide programming in support of amateur historians in the Minneapolis area. The project identified a need, assembled the required information through institutional collaboration, and transcended the reach of any one of the partners.¹⁹ In one particularly innovative collaboration in Warwickshire, England, the British Museum and a local archives mounted exhibitions of historical artifacts in bookmobiles owned by the public library system, which then toured in underserved rural areas.²⁰ Project partners reported serving people who were “too shy” to visit a museum or archives, but whose interest in history and culture attracted them to the exhibition.

In spite of these examples, a recent study of collaborative projects in the United States and England found that American projects tended to be less historical, and more geared toward art and literature, than those in the U.K. This result may stem from the fact that the study focused on library-museum collaboration, perhaps with the assumption that most archives in the U.S. were associated with libraries. However, if this perceived lack of historical programming in the U.S. is a reality, it reveals a distinct opportunity for archives to fill the gap.

18 For examples: Marcia Reed, “Blurring the Boundaries: Collaborative Library and Museum Exhibitions in Los Angeles,” *RBM* 8, no. 1 (spring 2007), 45-50; Lawrence Pijoux, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: A Case Study in Library, Archives, and Museum Collaboration,” *RBM* 8, no. 1 (spring 2007), 56-60.

19 John Lawton and Heather Block Lawton, “Public-Academic Library Collaboration: A Case Study of an Instructional House and Property History Research Program for the Public,” *American Archivist* 72 (fall/winter 2009): 496-514.

20 Alexandra Yarrow, Barbara Clubb, and Jennifer-Lynn Draper, “Public Libraries, Archives and Museums: Trends in Collaboration and Cooperation,” IFLA Professional Report no. 108, 2008, 13.

Professional Issues

Like programming, discussion of professional issues involves relatively little risk or cost, but may enrich the work of all three types of institutions. Such discussions have taken place at a number of conferences to date. The Research Libraries Group (RLG) and the Rare Books and Manuscripts (RBMS) section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) each sponsored conferences on collaboration issues in 2005 and 2006, respectively.²¹ Museums sponsored similar events at the 2004 Choices and Challenges Conference and the 2008 Cultural Heritage Information Professionals (CHIP) workshop.²² The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the American Association of Museums (AAM) sponsored a joint Museum and Library Day at the AAM annual meeting in 2005.²³ OCLC and the Joint Committee on Archives, Libraries, and Museums (CALM) also sponsored panels at the 2009 annual meetings of each of the LAM professional associations, including the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Archivists, however, have yet to host their own conference or workshop on LAM collaboration.

Professional education has emerged as one of the primary ways in which the LAM professions can collaborate. The 2008 CHIP workshop was one of the first major discussions of professional education, and it proved so fertile that it spawned not one, but three special journal issues entirely devoted to LAM collaboration. Published in the fall of 2008, the issues of *Library Quarterly*, *Archival Science*, and *Museum Management and Curatorship* contain fourteen articles in all, including three on

21 The RLG event was entitled "Libraries, Archives, and Museums—Three-Ring Circus, One Big Show?" and was held in Minnesota and New York. Presentations are available online at the former RLG website, <http://worldcat.org/arcviewer/1/OCC/2007/08/08/0000070504/viewer/file997.html> (accessed April 12, 2010). The RBMS conference was held in Austin, Texas, and was entitled "Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Twenty-First Century: Intersecting Missions, Converging Futures?". The conference website is online at <http://www.rbms.info/conferences/preconferences/2006/index.html> (accessed April 12, 2010). A series of follow-up papers were published in *RBM* in 2007.

22 Elizabeth Yakel, "Choices and Challenges: Cross-Cutting Themes in Archives and Museums," *OCLC Systems and Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2005): 13-17; Cultural Heritage Information Professionals (CHIPs) Workshop Report, 2008. http://chips.ci.fsu.edu/chips_workshop_report.pdf (accessed April 12, 2010).

23 The day's program and summaries of the presentations are available at the IMLS website; see "IMLS and AAM Host Museum and Library Day May 3, 2005 at Annual Meeting in Indianapolis," <http://www.imls.gov/news/2005/041505.shtm> (accessed April 15, 2010).

the education and training of LAM professionals.²⁴ The workshop was dominated by the faculty of information schools, many of whom were archival educators, with museum professionals and a scattering of librarians making up the balance.²⁵

A third area of opportunity for archivists is in the development of standards. The museum community is currently in search of a flexible data structure standard for the classification and description of the entire breadth of formats and materials which museum holdings encompass. Archivists have developed just such a standard in the past ten years: Encoded Archival Description (EAD). Museum professionals have in fact proposed adapting EAD for use with their own data content standards, and they have done some preliminary studies and testing on the feasibility of this project, but it has not yet been adopted as an official standard.²⁶ As the library standards community wrangles internally over AACR, RDA, and the future of MARC, archivists are well positioned to provide leadership and guidance in the development of this allied standard.²⁷

Digitization

The advent of digitization only increases the opportunity for LAMs to provide a fuller and richer view of history, and most LAM projects include some sort of digital component. During the past decade, LAMs have participated in so many digitization collaboratives that it is impossible to survey them all here. There is evidence that partnering on digitization projects is most beneficial to smaller

24 Richard Cox and Ronald Larsen, "iSchools and Archival Studies," *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 307-326; Jennifer Trant, "Emerging Convergence? Thoughts on Museums, Archives, Libraries and Professional Training," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 24 (2008); Joyce Ray, "Sharks, Digital Curation, and the Education of Information Professionals," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 24 (2008).

25 Cultural Heritage Information Professionals (CHIPS) Workshop Report, 2008, http://chips.ci.fsu.edu/chips_workshop_report.pdf (accessed April 12, 2010), 18-27.

26 Richard Rinehart, "Cross-Community Applications: The EAD in Museums," *Journal of Internet Cataloging* 4, no. 3-4 (2001): 169-186. Some museums have adopted EAD independently; for an example of rationale see Rachel Perkins, "Collections Descriptions @ the Natural History Museum: a Practical Approach," *Catalogue & Index* 153 (summer 2006), 8-11.

27 Archivists are starting to look at these issues. See Jean Riley and Kelcy Shepherd, "A Brave New World: Archivists and Shareable Descriptive Metadata," *American Archivist* 72 (fall/winter 2009): 91-112; and Nancy Kunde, "Getting It Done—Collaboration and Development of the Digital Records Conversion Standard," *American Archivist* 72 (fall/winter 2009): 146-169, for a case study of collaboration with records management to develop standards.

institutions, which may not have the resources otherwise.²⁸ This advantage is especially important for archives, which are more likely than libraries and museums to exist with a single professional on staff.

Digitization may be allowing LAMs to return to historical institutional and educational models, which stressed an interdependency between cultural heritage professions rather than narrow specialization.²⁹ This is undoubtedly good for users, allowing them to bring materials from many different institutions into proximity, but it is unknown whether such projects benefit institutions by increasing interest and use among the public. Online content blurs boundaries among cultural institutions, and users may not realize whether the photograph they are viewing online comes from an archive, a library or a museum. This namelessness, along with the lack of control in the digital environment, may justify fears that LAMs will lose their distinctiveness. As Susan Allen of the Getty Research Institute noted in the title of a conference presentation in 2002, “nobody knows you’re a dog (or a library, museum, or archive) on the Internet.”³⁰ Increased outreach and public programming in concert with digitization initiatives may help to keep the public informed about the roles of archives in particular.

Collaboration in digitization projects can follow several different models. Institutions can partner to purchase digitization equipment, hire staff, or create digital infrastructure locally. Conversely, several states have developed programs in which IMLS funding is redistributed through a central agency, and digitized materials either reside with the original institution or are hosted through a centralized digital asset management system.³¹ Waibel and Erway suggest that the second option is the

28 Liz Bishoff, “The Collaboration Imperative,” *Library Journal* 1/15/2004, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA371048.html> (accessed April 14, 2010).

29 Lisa Given and Lianne McTavish, “What’s Old Is New Again: Reconvergence of Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age,” *Library Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (January 2010): 7-32; Juris Divelko and Lisa Gottlieb, “Resurrecting a Neglected Idea: The Reintroduction of Library-Museum Hybrids,” *Library Quarterly*, 73, no. 2 (April 2003):160-198.

30 Susan Allen, “Nobody Knows You’re A Dog (or a Library, or Museum, or Archive) on the Internet: The Convergence of Three Cultures” (paper presented at the 68th IFLA Council and General Conference, August 18-24, 2002).

31 Some discussions of digitization projects: Nancy Chaffin Hunter, Kathleen Legg, and Beth Oehlerts, “Two Librarians, an Archivist, and 13,000 Images: Collaborating to Build a Digital Collection,” *Library Quarterly*, 80, no. 1, 81-103; Nancy Allen and Liz Bishoff, “Academic Library/Museum Collaboration: I’m OK, You’re OK,” Proceedings of ACRL 10th National Conference, March 15-18, 2001, 59-69; Liz Bishoff, “Interoperability and Standards in a Museum/Library Collaborative: The Colorado Digitization Project,” *First Monday* 5, no. 6 (June 2000), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/764/673> (accessed April 14, 2010); Kathleen Foulke, et al, “The Power of Partnering: The Cooperative Creation of Digital Collections,” *Journal of Digital*

most effective, because “by dividing their content into small puddles of information on scattered websites, [LAMs] dilute the compelling nature of their offering.”³² Instead, they suggest that LAMs should post digitized content in places where people are already likely to visit: sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr. The libraries, archives, and museums of the Smithsonian Institution recently collaborated to digitize materials and post them on the Flickr Commons, which allows users to comment, tag, add images to their favorites, and otherwise interact with the materials. “Smithsonian Team Flickr” reports a positive response to the materials, and increased public knowledge of the Smithsonian as a result.³³

Collection Development

Collaborative collection development is a riskier proposal because it involves institutions ceding some control over their core missions to the larger group. However, some organizations are discussing the prospect. In the OCLC report, LAMs at the University of Edinburgh proposed to band together to draft a collaborative collection development vision in order to build on existing strengths. The theory behind this idea is that combining as a unit and emphasizing strengths will afford them greater visibility and importance in the eyes of resource allocators, and that a larger share of the budget will be given to collection development in future rounds of funding.³⁴

Although administrative archives would most likely not be able to engage in such an approach, this type of collaboration may be a viable possibility for collecting archives and other institutions that are all under the same administrative roof, so to speak. This approach draws on the vision of a holistic cultural record suggested by Meraz; archives, libraries and museums could combine their budgets and influence to acquire large groupings of materials that might otherwise be out of reach.

Information, 5, no. 3 (2004), <http://journals.tdl.org/jodi/article/viewArticle/141/139> (accessed 13 April 2010).

32 Gunter Waibel and Ricky Erway, “Think Global, Act Local – Library, Archive, and Museum Collaboration,” *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 24,4.

33 Martin Kalfatovic, et al, “Smithsonian Team Flickr: A Library, Archives, and Museum Collaboration in Web 2.0 Space,” *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 266-77.

34 Zorich, Waibel, and Erway, “Beyond the Silos of the LAMs,” 16-17.

Conclusion: A Call for Leadership

In their 2008 report, Zorich, Waibel and Erway identified nine "collaboration catalysts" affecting institutions' progress along the collaboration/convergence continuum and the success of their collaborative alliances. These catalysts included developing a project vision, seeking administrative moorings and mandates, and managing personnel effectively. Leadership emerged as the most important factor in determining success or failure, as they noted, "The absence of the unifying, orchestrating and directive impetus of a single administrative entity emerges as a systemic handicap."³⁵ Effective collaboration requires effective leadership.

There are many opportunities for archives to lead in the current culture of collaboration, but archivists must take an active role. Advocacy must be extended beyond resource allocators and the general community, to forge alliances with the professionals and institutions most likely to contribute critical expertise, resources, and support. By considering the roles, contributions, and opportunities for archives in collaborative projects, archivists will ensure effective and mutually beneficial alliances in which the distinct needs and potential of their institutions will be satisfied and appreciated. With the backing of funding agencies such as the IMLS, opportunities for institutions that collaborate effectively will only increase. Leadership in this area is therefore critical, both for the future of collaboration and the future of the profession.

³⁵ Zorich, Waibel, and Erway, "Beyond the Silos of the LAMs," 21.

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