

Satellite Meeting: *Up Up and Away: High density storage for library materials*
10 – 11 August 2016
Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA

PALMPrint: Lessons Learned From a Shared Print Collection

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Abstract:

PALMPrint (Preserving America's Legal Materials in Print) is a jointly-owned, shared print collection of U.S. federal and state primary legal materials. This 3-year pilot project began in 2013 as a joint effort of the Legal Information Preservation Alliance (LIPA) and NELLCO Law Library Consortium, Inc. (NELLCO). The goal of developing a proof-of-concept model for the collaborative retention of and access to primary U.S. legal materials has been achieved, and PALMPrint became a permanent entity in 2016. The collection is housed in the high-density storage facility of William B. Meyer, Inc., located in Windsor, CT.

PALMPrint has been a highly collaborative project from the outset, with a joint advisory committee engaged in creating a collection development plan, establishing a funding model, identifying institutions that were willing to donate portions of their print collection to the repository, marketing the project, recruiting subscribers, and selecting a storage facility. The project coordinators from LIPA and NELLCO worked with the Meyer staff to build a simple interface for discovery and retrieval of items.

This paper does not recap every step of the evolution of PALMPrint but instead addresses the lessons learned along the way, both what we got right and what we might have done differently had we known then what we know now. It also describes the work of the PALMPrint Futures Committee, which is helping to create the blueprint for the transition from a pilot project to a permanent repository.

Keywords:

PALMPrint, Shared print, Print repository, Storage facility, Legal materials

History

The story of PALMPrint began more than five years ago when the executive directors of two organizations set out to examine the transition in law libraries from a primarily print information environment to a heavily digital one, and to explore collaborative solutions for the preservation of and access to existing print materials.

Preserving America's Legal Materials in Print (PALMPrint) is an exciting print repository devoted to a legacy collection of U.S. federal and state primary legal materials. Developed by the Legal Information Preservation Alliance (LIPA) and the NELLCO Law Library Consortium (NELLCO), this project has just completed a three-year pilot phase intended to prove the concept of a shared, discipline-specific collection, jointly owned by the sponsoring organizations and the participating libraries.

We began talking about the idea of a shared print collection at a time when the print repository movement was gaining traction.ⁱ We recognized that with ubiquitous electronic access to nearly all primary legal material and a great deal of secondary material, our member libraries were struggling to justify maintaining redundant print collections, but were leery of discarding them without a strategic preservation plan in place. Law libraries embrace the potential of a fully digital environment, but many also see part of their role as stewards of the written record for those to come. There remains a sense that, at least for now, the printed record should be retained for the just-in-case need. One important goal of our pilot was to provide a solution that was sufficiently permanent to allow participating libraries to make different local decisions about their own library space and collections in reliance on the existence of the shared collection.

In May of 2011, we invited some of the experts in the field to come together for a two-day Summit on Print Repositories at the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago. This summit was an important step in the development of our thinking about a shared print collection, because it convinced us to change our initial collection focus from law journals to primary legal materials, which present more bibliographic challengesⁱⁱ but were viewed as more fundamental to the rule of law and therefore more in need of attention.

In fall 2011, we established an advisory committee to help us determine the feasibility and desirability of a joint pilot project to establish a shared print collection of primary, U.S. legal materials. Among the early questions the committee addressed were what the collection would contain, who would provide the materials, where it would be stored, and who would pay for it. From those discussions the committee created a collection development planⁱⁱⁱ that outlined the primary legal materials to be included in the repository collection. Because there is general agreement on what constitutes a core collection in a U.S. academic law library,^{iv} we were able to use two unique bibliographic tools^v to estimate the size of our pilot collection at around 100-120,000 items. The committee suggested that a small number of geographically proximate libraries be invited to donate these core materials from their collections to the repository. The advisory committee also designed a funding model under which LIPA and NELLCO would underwrite a significant portion of the project's initial cost, and participating libraries would provide the balance of the funding as subscribing members. The cost per library would depend upon the number of participating libraries. We presented this general proposal to our respective boards and received their enthusiastic approval to move forward.

In spring 2012 we drafted and issued an RFP to several storage facilities in the Northeast that we identified as possible candidates for housing our repository collection. Our geographic focus was determined by the likelihood of our donating libraries' being located in the Northeast and by our idea that, if successful, the project could be replicated in another part of the country. The RFP elicited three good proposals, and the advisory committee spent several weeks comparing the proposals and developing follow-up questions for each vendor. We set up site visits with two of the storage facilities so that we could see the physical plants, meet staff, and address workflow and other logistical considerations. In September 2012 we made a final recommendation to the advisory committee and selected the high density storage facility of William B. Meyer, Inc., located in Windsor, CT.

During fall 2012 and spring 2013 we busily engaged in marketing the proposal to our constituent groups as a low-cost opportunity to rely on access to important print materials. We determined that for purposes of the pilot project, subscribing libraries had to belong to one or both of our organizations. We named the project PALMPrint, designed a logo, sent mailings to library directors, held a series of webinars to describe the project in more detail, and drafted a Memorandum of Understanding that committed subscribers to the full three years of the pilot project. We needed 50 libraries to commit to the pilot in order to achieve our funding model, and in May 2013 we were able to launch the project with 65 subscribers. At this level of participation, the final cost per library was just \$1,300 per year.

The advisory committee identified four institutions (Cornell Law School, Quinnipiac University School of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School and Vermont Law School) that were willing to donate significant portions of their print collections to the repository, with the understanding that ownership of the materials would be transferred to the participating libraries. The PALMPrint collection is jointly owned under a legal theory of personal property ownership called joint tenancy. Each library, including the donor library, is a full owner of the entire collection. As such, each library can access and use the collection at will. The subscription fees and the funds that LIPA and NELLCO contributed to PALMPrint were used to pay the costs of moving and storing the materials for the duration of the pilot.

During the first year of the pilot (2013-14) we moved or shipped nearly 60,000 volumes to the Meyer facility, where staff began the process of ingesting the materials and building a simple interface to allow for discovery and retrieval of items. While the expectation is that these are extremely low use materials due to their electronic availability, all materials in the collection are available to any of the participating libraries. Materials can be scanned and delivered (if appropriate), shipped via common carrier, or used on site in a reading room at the facility. Circulation is currently a mediated process, rather than patron-initiated. Participants make local decisions about how the materials will be discovered by their users. However, we continue to work with Meyer on refining the interface, making it both more robust and more user friendly.

What makes PALMPrint Unique?

How is PALMPrint different from other print repository projects? While print repositories and shared print collections have proliferated in the last decade, several things distinguish PALMPrint:

- It is a shared collection, jointly owned by the two sponsoring organizations and the participating libraries.
- It is focused on a single discipline, which is not unique but is unusual. PALMPrint is and always will be about print legal materials.
- It has a foundational collection development plan that can and will be expanded over time as collection goals are reached. PALMPrint is a collection, not merely a storage facility.
- The collection is centralized in a remote storage facility that does not belong to any of the participating institutions.
- Subscribing libraries do not have to commit to retain any titles in their own collections, because PALMPrint is there when they need it. Libraries are able to make different local decisions about their own library space and collections because they can rely on the shared collection.
- The collection holds a single copy of each title selected, so there is no need for complex formulas to determine the appropriate number of copies to retain for specific categories of material.
- The project's goals are both preservation and access. While not a dark archive, this legacy print collection is widely replicated in digital form, so we expect low use and minimal physical impact to the materials.
- PALMPrint is a highly collaborative model, driven by two library consortia and many of their member libraries. The project would not have been possible without the work of a cross-consortial advisory committee for planning and implementation, and it relies on a similar Futures Committee to move it forward.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1 – Preliminary Planning

We began this project with a simple idea that it was important to build a collection of core legal materials that could be stored centrally and made available to law libraries. We saw a need to preserve the printed record of American legal history but also to create a collection to serve as a backup for libraries that were struggling with budget and space issues. Libraries would be able to free up space by weeding their collections if they knew materials were available in off-site storage. As we began talking with our colleagues around the country, it became apparent that we had identified an unmet need. There was and still is a real need for this collection.

The history we provided above details the scope of our planning process. We made a conscious effort to focus on the decisions that were fundamental to marketing and launching the pilot project, e.g. the collection development plan, the funding model, the solicitation of donations, and the selection of the storage facility. We left some other decisions to be made during the initial stages of the three-year pilot, addressing issues as they arose. This turned out to be the right approach. If we had tried to anticipate every concern or question ahead of time, we might never have been able to launch the project at all.

Early on we had several libraries express an interest in donating substantial portions of the materials we needed. We chose four libraries who collectively could provide a large

percentage of the corpus of the PALMPrint collection. We and our advisory committee agreed that those four libraries could join the pilot project without paying the subscription fee. That worked well, but we should have been clearer that this benefit would be for the three-year duration of the pilot project and not for subsequent years. We also did not establish a policy for libraries that became donors later on, and we received significant donations in the third year of the pilot that we didn't recognize in any meaningful way. We hope to rectify this going forward.

The executive directors of NELLCO and LIPA were the driving force behind this project and have continued to provide the staff support to keep it going. We have had good participation from our boards and our advisory members, but the demands of the project have been greater and more unpredictable than we anticipated. It is difficult to manage the workload along with all of our other commitments, particularly for two organizations with small staffs.

Lesson 2 – Technology

One of the biggest challenges of this project was anticipating and planning for the technology that would be needed to support PALMPrint. In our initial assessment, we determined that we would not aim for unmediated, end-user access to the PALMPrint materials in the first stage. Rather, we anticipated the user interface as a tool for library staff aiding patrons in the retrieval of materials. That continues to be our intent for the technology framework.

There are three technology-based processes involved in using and maintaining the collection: 1) storage and retrieval; 2) discovery; 3) delivery.

The storage and retrieval technology in high-density storage facilities is well-established. The entire system is bar-code based and fairly straight forward, regardless of what you are storing. However, at the outset of our relationship with W.B. Meyer, we made assumptions about the discovery technology that they would have in place, given the nature of the existing library collections housed in their facility. Meyer made assumptions about what we would need, based on their experience with other types of materials and different models for joint repository projects. These assumptions would continue to plague our efforts.

We understood from the start that Meyer would not be providing an OPAC experience for users. Rather, we would provide the MARC records from the various material donors to Meyer. Meyer would then strip out just the fields we needed for discovery (title, author, volume, OCLC number) and use them in a simple search interface.

However, we soon realized that the nature of print legal materials is sufficiently idiosyncratic that it makes discovery more difficult than for standard academic monographs, journals, etc. Much of the PALMPrint collection consists of multi-volume sets that span decades, have extremely long titles, lack authors, and contain inconsistent information in the MARC field for the volume identifier. Each of these created problems for discovery. For example, Meyer's original interface truncated titles after a set number of characters. That's probably reasonable for most types of library materials. However, in law, two titles could be identical until the very last word (e.g. The Consolidated Statutes and Laws of the State of [blank]). Truncating the title is not an option. We had to set aside all of our assumptions and work through each of these discovery items.

As we were realizing that the existing discovery technology was not consistent with our preconceptions, we had to make a determination about the right balance to strike between the cost of developing an appropriate solution and the actual anticipated use cases. It was a chicken and egg analysis. We don't expect these materials to be in demand, as the majority of the collection is available and accessible online. This print collection has always been positioned as a just-in-case repository. Yet, if the material is not easily discovered, is the lack of use a product of demand or discovery? We continue to work to strike that balance as we develop the next iteration of the user interface.

The delivery side of the technology has not yet been proven for this project, as there has been no use of the materials. The interface currently allows for a user to request an item for shipment by a third-party carrier (Fedex, UPS, USPS, etc.). Items can only be shipped to the participating library at the address the system associates with that library. Costs of retrieval, shipping, etc., are charged to the requesting library. The interface also allows for the user to request digital delivery; the feasibility of this remains to be seen. The nature of legal citations may make it difficult for an employee in the storage facility to decipher and deliver the precise item being requested. Again, the technology is in place, but the implementation has not been tested.

Lesson 3 – Communication and Assessment

Throughout the three-year pilot, there were many moving pieces. Although we kept open lines of communication within our organizations, participated in the Print Archive Network (PAN), and presented and published whenever possible, most of that communication was ad hoc. We failed to establish an advance plan for how and with whom we would communicate, about what and when. In the normal course of business, the Executive Directors were reporting regularly to their Boards about the PALMPrint project. But we would have benefitted from a written communication plan for reporting to various stakeholders along the way. These would include donor libraries, participating libraries, non-participating members, W.B. Meyer, outside organizations and other interested parties.

Our assessment plan was also loosely defined in advance. We established the timeline for assessment, but not the benchmarks for success or markers for failure. It's difficult to know whether a more defined assessment approach would have been helpful or even possible. In the early days, we had difficulty agreeing on what would constitute success. The theory behind PALMPrint is that these core print materials will not be in demand because they are available digitally from many other sources, but they must be maintained somewhere in the event that the print artifact is ever needed. Therefore, standard library usage metrics aren't helpful to our assessment. In the end, a fall 2014 meeting with our participating libraries, which emerged somewhat organically, was a key moment for building consensus and engaging the stakeholders in the future of the project.

Future work

In fall 2014, half way through the pilot, we held a meeting for PALMPrint subscribers to assess the project to date and make decision about the post-pilot phase. There was unanimous agreement that the pilot had proved the concept and the viability of the model that we had developed. The participants supported the continuation of PALMPrint as a sustained joint program.

We then addressed the need to continue our ongoing work identifying gaps in the collection, including major sets or titles that we had not acquired as well as individual volumes missing from sets in the collection. We also posed several questions about the future of the collection and the project. Should we expand beyond primary materials (treatises, journals, reference materials, etc.)? Should we collect foreign and international materials? Should we open up participation to others? Should we explore revenue generating streams, such as document delivery or ILL? These questions led to the appointment of a Futures Committee to help chart the course for the recent transition from a pilot project to a permanent repository.

The Futures Committee agreed that our first order of business is to meet our original vision. We will continue to fill gaps and seek contributions of materials that fit our original collection development plan to build a comprehensive collection of print primary, U.S. legal materials.

There is still work ahead. In the coming year, we hope to develop a long-term, sustainable business model for PALMPrint. The underwriting of the project by LIPA and NELLCO during the pilot was significant. As a permanent program, PALMPrint will now be sustained by the participating members. Because of the high number of participating libraries, the cost per library is minimal. However, we will develop a plan for balancing the annual costs in the event that libraries withdraw, or new libraries join.

We will also explore member interest in adding new participants or offering fee-for-service opportunities for non-members. If needed, we will develop a business and marketing model to attract new subscribers or generate service customers.

Because of the expected minimal use of this collection, there has been little focus on discovery or delivery. If our plans include the expansion of the collection to include higher-use materials, we will need to improve both the discovery and the delivery mechanisms for PALMPrint.

Our primary task right now, in addition to the gap filling work, is the improvement of the user interface. In the pilot phase, we had to strike a balance between utility and expense. We did not want to invest too much in the discovery system, knowing that the actual use of the collection would be nominal. Now we have been working closely with W.B. Meyer on a second generation user interface, and we hope to roll that out in early fall 2016.

From the start, there have been three delivery options offered: 1) deliver the physical item via common carrier; 2) scan and deliver electronically when possible; 3) use of the materials on site in a designated reading room. Each of these options has a cost involved. Retrieval and re-shelving of used materials incurs a cost. Users will be expected to absorb those costs, but we haven't yet developed the specific mechanisms between Meyer and LIIPA/NELLCO to process fees and manage billing.

Soon the work of the Futures Committee will end, as the transition from Pilot to Program is complete. The Executive Directors will continue to play an important part in the day-to-day maintenance, upkeep and assessment of PALMPrint, however, we need to develop a clear plan for the ongoing evaluation and course correction of PALMPrint in the coming years. The Boards of both NELLCO and LIIPA will continue to serve that role in some capacity,

but another working group will be needed to continuously scan the horizon, monitor the project, and provide regular reports to the Boards of Directors.

Conclusion

LIPA and NELLCO are thrilled to support this project and hope it will serve as a model for a collaborative solution to print retention of legal material, allowing libraries to make different decisions about library space at the local level. In this way, libraries can continue to be responsive to the changing needs of their users, secure in the knowledge that primary print materials are within reach and under the stewardship of the collaborative.

ⁱ The early history of the project is well documented in Margaret K. Maes & Tracy L. Thompson-Przylucki (2012): Collaborative Stewardship: Building a Shared, Central Collection of Print Legal Materials, *Collection Management*, 37:3-4, 294-306.

ⁱⁱ Primarily due to title changes of serial publications.

ⁱⁱⁱ Readers can find more information about the project scope and details at <http://www.nellco.org/?page=palmprint>.

^{iv} American Bar Association. 2014-2015 Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools, Standard 606. http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2014_2015_aba_standards_chapter6.authcheckdam.pdf

^v Hein Checklist of Statutes and Pimsleur's Checklists of Basic American Legal Publications.