

A North Carolina State Documents Depository System: An Update

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A recent perusal of the "Documents on Documents Collection" maintained by the Texas Legislative Reference Library (formerly at the Council of State Governments Library) showed that there are thirty-two states which either have a full fledged state government publications depository system or operate in such a way that there is at least an informal depository system¹. Four other states appear to be working upon a state documents depository system of some type, and fourteen states apparently have no such system at all, nor is there any evidence of planning. The "Documents on Documents Collection" was updated in 1976, although not all states appear to have participated in that update. It is possible, therefore, that the above-stated figures are in slight error, as some states which have been working toward depositories may have completed their organization, while several of the total "have nots" might have begun to plan for such systems. The state of North Carolina, for instance, would have to be placed in the "have not" column based upon the information in the current "Documents on Documents Collection" (since updated by this author), even though all members of the NCLA Documents Section are aware that we are now working toward

a state depository system, albeit, not too successfully at present.

North Carolina General Statute 147-50 appears to mandate the free distribution of North Carolina state publications to any library designated by this code section (17 libraries are so designated), but the practical application of 147-50 has been irregular at best, and even the 17 designated libraries must either request each document separately or try to have their units placed upon any mailing lists which might be applicable. Even the appropriate request does not always work, however, as an occasional agency will flatly refuse to distribute their publications free. In 1972 and 1973 the North Carolina Attorney General's office was asked to rule upon the legality of a state agency charging one of the designated libraries for documents produced at state expense. The two resulting opinions (42 NCAG 94 and 43 NCAG 93) essentially agreed that designated libraries were entitled to receive the documents in question free upon request. Yet despite this clearly stated support, several state agencies continued to require payment for their publications.

Perhaps even more vexing than the problem of free distribution is the

weakness of bibliographic control. Until North Carolina state publications appear in the checklist produced by the State Library (a bi-monthly publication) or in the Library of Congress checklist for state documents, librarians in North Carolina have no way of knowing what has been produced, and their requests might, therefore, come too late to find the documents in stock. Once acquired, the document may be classed by the special North Carolina state classification scheme and housed in a separate collection, if desirable, but such organization will provide very poor access without more traditional cataloging techniques due to the weakness of the state-produced checklist as an access tool. The checklist does, at least, provide the classification for each document listed, and a copy of *Classification Scheme for North Carolina State Publications*² can be used for those documents not found in the list.

Taken all together, the situation in North Carolina with respect to the organization and distribution of state publications does not begin to resemble an effective depository system. For those who desire to know more about the North Carolina situation, Grey Cole's article, "North Carolina Needs an Improved Depository System for State Documents" (Vol. XXXI, issue no. 4, 1973, of *North Carolina Libraries*) will provide further information.

During the 1973-75 biennium an "Ad Hoc Committee on State Documents Depository" was formed by the North Carolina Library Association and charged with the task of determining the need for a state documents depository system in North Carolina. The committee carried out a survey of 216 libraries in the state in order to determine the level of interest in a depository system and the willingness of those libraries surveyed to actually become state documents depositories. College, university, and public libraries were the main components of the survey.

Of the 124 questionnaires returned, 30 indicated a willingness to become partial or complete depositories of North Carolina state publications, that 30 including 8 university, 5 four year college, 9 two year college, and 8 public libraries. Actually, the total of 30 affirmative replies must be considered a very conservative figure due to the rather limited response of college and university libraries within the state. It is the opinion of at least one member of the ad hoc committee that many of the librarians surveyed did not fully understand what was being asked of them and probably, therefore, overestimated the responsibilities and underestimated the advantages of depository status for state publications.³

Whatever the exact figures with respect to depository support, strong support and interest in a state documents depository system is obviously extant in North Carolina, and the ad hoc committee concluded that further study was definitely warranted. The committee therefore recommended that the NCLA and the State Library jointly request that a "Legislative Study Commission" be created in order to conduct a comprehensive investigation and report its findings and recommendations, the end result, hopefully, being legislation for a state documents depository system for North Carolina.

During the first three months of 1977 several meetings were held in which the officers of the Documents Librarians Section of the NCLA, plus the State Librarian and the chairman of the NCLA Government Relations Committee, attempted to determine the appropriate makeup and goals of the proposed study commission, and legislation was framed which was roughly similar to a state documents study commission act from the state of South Dakota (the commission established by the South Dakota act did its work well enough that a depository system was

established in South Dakota) except for the membership of the study commission⁴. On June 9th this state documents study commission bill (now designated House Bill 1434) was referred to the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives of North Carolina, but ultimately was reported "unfavorably" on the very last day of the legislative session, June 30th, 1977. The assumption is that the crush of unfinished business late in the session kept the committee from ever giving the bill serious consideration, although several members of the committee reported earlier that there would be no problems with respect to passage. These expressions of good will and support were the fundamental reason why no concerted effort was made by the NCLA Documents Section membership to influence passage of the study commission bill, although the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the section and the NCLA Government Relations Committee Chairman all attempted to garner support among particular legislators.

This legislative failure will now cause a possible two year delay in the creation of a formal, state-supported study commission, due to the fact that no bill which has not already passed one house of the legislature will be considered during the interim, 1978 session of the legislature, the earliest possible date for future consideration now being the beginning of the next full session, January of 1979. It is possible, though not likely, that a state documents study commission could be created and funded by another organization, such as the NCLA or even the Documents Librarians Section of the NCLA, but such a commission could not be nearly as well supported as a state-mandated group, nor would it have equivalent "clout" in developing the necessary information, nor would its report and recommendations carry as much weight.

The success which is being, and has been, attained in other states will continue

to serve as both impetus and inspiration to documents librarians in North Carolina. The NCLA and its Documents Librarians Section will persist in the struggle for an efficient state documents depository system in North Carolina with high hopes of early success.

Footnotes

¹The "Documents on Documents Collection" is an excellent, current source of information concerning the actions of individual states in the development of state documents depository systems. The collection is available on interlibrary loan from the Legislative Reference Library, P.O. Box 12488, Cap Sta, Austin, Texas 78711.

²Classification Scheme for North Carolina State Publications (As Applied to the Documents Collection at the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of the State Library) by M. Sangster Parrott and updated by Suzanne S. Levy, Oct., 1975.

³A brief summary of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on State Documents Depository of the NCLA was published in the Fall 1975 issue of *The Docket*, the newsletter of the Documents Section of the NCLA.

⁴The report of the South Dakota Interim Public Documents Study Commission and the appropriate sections of the South Dakota code applying to the documents depository library system in that state are available in the South Dakota section of the "Documents on Documents Collection" mentioned above.

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