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From the Field

Shared Print on the Threshold: Looking Back and Forging the Future

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Abstract

This report traces the evolution of shared print from localized projects and programs to national and North American networks; in particular, highlighting the formation of federations of previously established shared print programs. The authors also describe recent efforts to transcend the historical boundaries of shared print by embedding it more completely in library services and systems. The report ends with the declaration that the future of collections will continue to include print and that the future of print will be shared.

“To safeguard long-term access to our rich print heritage, a plan for responsible, cooperative retention is the clearest path forward.”

Introduction and Background

As you read this commentary from the field, physical library collections across the U.S. may still be shuttered (or shuttered again) by a global pandemic. Access to print scholarly content will have been difficult if not impossible for scholars, teachers, and learners. Access to digital content, such as that provided by the HathiTrust Emergency Temporary Access Service has been a life-line for many as well as access to digital content from the Internet Archive or from libraries able to digitize materials on a limited basis for their local constituents. But, just as “everything not saved will be lost,” you can only digitize something that has been safely retained in print.

Decades ago, as library space strained toward capacity, select library consortia and university systems began pooling their resources to construct library storage facilities to house continually growing print collections. These early manifestations of “shared space” set the stage for extending that concept of collective action to the print resources housed therein. Today, well over 300 academic and research libraries in the U.S. and Canada participate in some form of shared print program, committing to archive or retain tens of millions of monographs and hundreds of thousands of serial and journal print titles. The growth of shared print, particularly over the last 10+ years is significant and today is
also part of a larger movement towards “collective collections” which redefine collection management for both print and digital content.

Research into various aspects of “shared print” (which we are defining here as “the collaborative effort of libraries, institutions, centers, and consortia to document, preserve and provide long-term widespread access to their print collections” - https://sharedprint.org/best-practices/shared-print-glossary/#shared-print) occurs in a variety of forms over the last decade. Participation in journal shared print initiatives was generally more common among academic libraries until fairly recently when the advent of several large, regional and national programs (SCELC, EAST, and the HathiTrust Shared Print Program) rapidly increased the number of libraries contributing to monograph shared print collections. Early adoption of serial and journal shared print initiatives stemmed partly from the widespread electronic availability in that format and the efficiency of space reclamation based on titles that encompass many linear feet of individual volumes. Further, format preferences generally support the rationale for moving serial and journal content off-site or relying more heavily upon a distributed collection. The initial focus on journal shared print supported a virtuous cycle of associated analyses, publications, policies, and development, which continue to propel those projects and programs forward. Quantitative analysis such as Yano’s 2013 oft-cited study on modeling the optimal number of journal copies and the development of tools that support the collection analysis, retention modeling, registry and exposure, and gap filling for serial and journal programs (PAPR, AGUA, JRNL) all contributed to the rapid growth of serials and journal archiving.

While serials and journals were appealing “low-hanging” fruit in the formative days of shared print, the urgency of addressing monograph collections did not disappear. Early work by Kieft and Payne offers a framework for the management and preservation of print monographs collectively and cooperatively. Understanding of the uniqueness and overlap of print books in North America was illustrated in OCLC Research’s work in 2012 “Print Management at Mega-Scale.” This research spawned the development of new tools for analyzing print monograph collections and led to much of the growth from 2013 forward as shared print monograph programs such as the Maine Shared Collections Cooperative (MSCC), the MI-SPI program in Michigan, and the Eastern Academic Scholars’ Trust (EAST) grew to include dozens of libraries.

Today, while shared print programs are content to expand their membership and new regional programs are being established, initiatives such as the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance and the Partnership for Shared Book Collections have become catalysts for broader and deeper collaboration across shared print programs. It is this work we are describing more fully below, as it begins to envision the kind of coherent collective action needed to preserve and protect the print cultural and scholarly record.

**Shared Print Thinks Bigger - The Founding of the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance**

By 2015, a number of large, regional shared print programs for journals thrived after at least half a decade of successful collaborative effort. The staying power and reach of the regional shared print collaboration was tested and found effective, and the leaders of these programs were ready to think bigger.

In October 2015, program staff and thought leaders of four of the largest regional journal shared print collaborations – the Big Ten Academic Alliance, the Florida Academic Repository, Scholars Trust, and the Western Regional Storage Trust – came together in Rosemont, Illinois for the first of several “Thinking Bigger”
conferences to imagine a future of nationally networked shared print efforts. Two core aims emerged in those first conversations: (1) to archive significantly more titles through national coordination than was possible through regional coordination; and (2) to retain sufficient copies to ensure an agreed upon preservation standard. From the beginning, the “Rosemont Group,” as they were known in those early days, also prioritized the development of technical infrastructure to support “scaling up” across regional programs.

Subsequent formative meetings of the Rosemont Group took place throughout 2016 in January, June, and November. In early 2017, the Rosemont Group established a formal governance structure and program statement and was christened the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance in honor of the original meeting location. The Rosemont Alliance is organized as a federated model, which acknowledges the autonomy of each member program while providing a structure for ongoing collaborative work in areas of mutual and community benefit.

2017 also saw the release of the Alliance’s first set of detailed strategic directions, which mapped the federation’s path forward for the initial five years (2017-2021). Over the last three to four years the Alliance has made significant progress in many of its strategic directions, while also pivoting in some others, and adding new ones as the member programs judged appropriate. In 2019, the Alliance released an updated version of its strategic directions.9 The strategic directions now include nine, specific collaborative goals:

1. Establish milestones for collection growth and retention including adding titles and copies to the shared collection for high overlap titles, and establishing policies and procedures for preserving copies of journal titles that are scarcely held

2. Align operational policies for registration of retention commitments, preservation actions, discovery of, and access to shared print journal collections

3. Engage with other shared print programs to share information and expertise and to coordinate strategies

4. Develop a participation model and eventually engage other groups in this cross-regional program

5. Develop functional requirements and potential workflows for a Rosemont analysis/decision support process, including existing capabilities (AGUA, JRNL, PAPR, etc.)

6. Consider the business case for potential workflows (for decision support)

7. Monitor the development of, and advocate for, improved infrastructure for shared print and formulate a plan to ensure that Rosemont maintains input on these developments

8. Develop donation/transfer guidelines and facility profiles with avenues to deposit with a storage facility that is able and willing to receive serials backfiles

9. Identify storage partners who would be willing to consider taking in titles (e.g., last copies or retentions from withdrawing members).

The four founding programs welcomed a fifth in spring 2018: the Eastern Academic Scholars’ Trust (EAST). After establishing a robust presence in the field of shared print monograph programs, EAST turned its considerable energy and expertise to serials and journals, making the program a natural fit and powerful contributor to the Alliance.

Five programs strong, the Alliance’s members ratified a “reciprocal retention agreement,”10 which affirms that the retention commitments of each regional program are considered part of the Rosemont Alliance collective collection. This is a significant step of trust and acknowledgement.

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of the interdependence among the regional programs, as well as an instant and significant expansion of the collective collection for each program. Reinforcing the weight of that agreement, the four programs also ratified a set of principles to provide access among the Alliance participants.

Momentum on the strategic directions continued with the Alliance member programs ratifying the last copy agreement and criteria for new participant programs; all the while continuing to build more collaboratively on regional collections, so that by January 2019, the Alliance counted its total retentions at over 100,000 serial and journal titles. Now in 2020, the Alliance is deep in the process of planning a pilot Last Copy Initiative that aims to proactively surface and preserve scarce titles across the close to 180 participating libraries.

Throughout, the Alliance actively pursued the technological infrastructure that could turn its more ad hoc collaborative efforts into systematic and ongoing workflows that cross its programs with ease. While they made some progress in establishing the outlines of a minimum viable product with partners at OCLC’s newly acquired Sustainable Collections Services – the creators of the GreenGlass® monograph decision support software – efforts lost momentum in the beginning of 2018 and soon after the Alliance pivoted its focus to the potential of augmenting locally available capabilities and tools. The Alliance convened a Working Group specifically to address decision support services and tools that would facilitate cross-program efforts. That group worked for the better part of a year to draft functional requirements, assess the capabilities of five different program-hosted services and tools, and draft estimated costs, timelines, and workflows for the two most likely to fulfill Rosemont Alliance needs. This work was presented to the Rosemont Alliance Executive Committee at the end of 2019 and, as the final section of this piece will address in more detail, set in motion a new and promising collaboration of like-minded organizations with the experience and resources to facilitate the realization of a new era of shared print infrastructure that the Alliance has been envisioning for years.

Formation of the Partnership for Shared Book Collections

While the Rosemont Alliance set the stage for collaboration across shared print programs in the U.S., its focus on serials and journals archiving made it less well suited to address the growing set of issues around retaining print monographs as part of shared print programs. The Partnership for Shared Book Collections has effectively become Rosemont’s counterpart for monograph retention.

The origin of the Partnership dates to April of 2018 when the Eastern Academic Scholars’ Trust (EAST) convened the first of two summits that brought together more than 30 representatives from existing monograph shared print programs in the U.S. and Canada as well as thought leaders in scholarly communications and preservation, a major foundation involved in funding shared print, and individual academic librarians. This first summit focused on how best to collaborate to ensure a robust future for shared print. Summit planners believed shared print to be at a transitional moment and ready to consider a broader national view. In identifying a number of fundamental questions relating to collaboration across monograph shared print programs, participants discussed the scope and contents of the corpus to be covered, desired characteristics of an organizational structure to support collective work, the critical priorities for future development, and the specific actions to be taken to bring large-scale collaboration to fruition.

The attendees identified as major themes the importance of open and broadly accessible data on shared print, the requirement for coherent and
compelling narratives on monograph retention, the need to address a variety of research questions as part of extending the shared print collection, and the importance of focusing any federation of shared print programs on those things that cannot be well executed through local action.

At the conclusion of this first summit, Working Groups were formed to focus on these themes over the coming month and in December of 2018, EAST convened a second Summit to consider and discuss their work.

The second summit participants reached agreement on preliminary statements of mission, vision, and principles for a new federated organization called the “Partnership for Shared Book Collections” and formed a Steering Committee to provide oversight during calendar year 2019 with the goal of formally launching the Partnership in early 2020. The original Working Groups continued their focus on best practices, open retention data, engagement and outreach, and risk analysis for shared print.

The relationship between this newly formed Partnership, and the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance was discussed as well and it was agreed that further study should be made of ways to best collaborate with the more established organization, recognizing both the differences and areas of commonality.

The Partnership Today

The Partnership was formally launched at the Print Archive Network (PAN) Forum held during the American Library Association Annual Conference in January of 2020. Seven founding members had formally joined the Partnership and signed the membership agreement, which included the payment of $3,000 per year for three years to support hiring of a part-time Program Coordinator.

The original Steering Committee agreed to stay on through mid-2020 as the membership grew and until a formal Executive Committee could be elected and the Program Coordinator hired. While the Working Groups focused on developing the business model, services, membership and governance were disbanded having completed their work, those engaged in best practices, risk research, and outreach and engagement continued.

Today the Partnership has grown to include the following 14 members:

- Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI)
- Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries
- ConnectNY
- Eastern Academic Scholars Trust (EAST)
- Keep@Downsview
- HathiTrust Shared Print Program
- Maine Shared Collections Cooperative (MSCC)
- MCLS/Mi-SPI
- Minnesota Cooperation Collection Management
- Private Academic Libraries of Indiana (PALNI)
- The Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP)
- SCELC Shared Print Program
- University of California Libraries
- Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC).

The primary governing body, the Partnership Executive Committee, has been formed and will be hiring the part-time Program Coordinator in the fall of 2020. The Best Practices Working Group drafted and, after discussion with a wide variety of constituents, finalized a set of best practices ranging from defining the collection scope of shared collections to disclosure of items in local systems, memoranda of understanding, and guidelines on replacing, withdrawing or transferring retention commitments. A full list
of the current best practices as well as those under development can be found on the Partnership website, sharedprint.org.

In another contribution to the shared print community, the Risk Working Group, in conjunction with Dr. Candace Yano of the University of California, Berkeley, is developing a model to help answer the question “How do numbers of copies in different initial conditions and storage environments affect the likely availability of a title over time?” The spreadsheet model being developed calculates the probability of at least one usable copy existing over a selected range of times. It is hoped that this model will allow libraries, storage facilities, and shared print programs to experiment with different alternatives and begin to provide guidance on how many copies need to be kept to ensure ongoing access to the scholarly record.

Another major focus of the Partnership has been on advocacy on behalf of shared print with a focus on engagement with the library and academic communities. The original Outreach and Engagement Working Group developed a Wikipedia article on “Collective Collections” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_Collections) as a way to provide information on shared print to a wider audience. More recently, working with the Rosemont Alliance for Shared Print, the Partnership developed a video in June of 2020 on the value of shared print even at a time when many physical collections are unavailable. Rosemont and the Partnership expect to continue to collaborate on outreach and advocacy on behalf of shared print as well as in further developing best practices and guidelines that can expand shared print.

From the first discussions on the formation of a monograph shared print alliance in April of 2018 to the work being undertaken by the Partnership today, the goal is to achieve the vision of ensuring long-term preservation of and access to print monographs for generations of researchers, scholars, and learners in the future. As shared print becomes more fully embedded in the life cycle of library collections and as collective collections of print become more prevalent, this vision can only be realized with continued collaboration and cooperation across libraries, shared print programs, and – eventually – nations.

Collaboration Writ Large

Both the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance and the Partnership for Shared Book Collections are committed to protecting and preserving the print scholarly record and ensuring it is accessible for users. As each has pursued individual goals focused on serials/journals and monographs respectively, they recognize that to further expand shared print’s reach, grow the corpus of print titles committed to being archived and retained by participating libraries, and furthering access to this content, working together is critical.

Over the last year, both organizations have collaborated in three major areas: the development of best practices for shared print, advocacy for a more robust and open infrastructure to support shared print, and communicating the value of shared print to stakeholder audiences. These areas of collaboration have been fruitful in producing the best practices documents now available from the Partnership website (https://sharedprint.org/best-practices/), in the development of a video promoting the value of shared print (https://rosemontsharedprintalliance.org/value-shared-print), and in supporting the development of new open tools for the community that can further the goal of embedding shared print into library workflows across the collection management ecosystem (see below for further information on this exciting project).
As the Partnership was being envisioned, the question arose of whether or not a separate federation of monograph shared print programs was needed when the Rosemont Alliance was already in place. And, while the current collaborative efforts described above make clear the two organizations share goals, the operational work being done by each does merit their separate existence – at least for now. One major difference between the two organizations lies in the openness of the infrastructure that supports their shared print work. Rosemont members are able to work closely with staff at the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) to register their archived and retained holdings in the PAPR (Print Archives and Preservation Registry - https://www.crl.edu/archiving-preservation/print-preservation/papr-database) database. Services offered by CRL further facilitate the expansion of the archiving of serials and journals.

While monograph shared print programs such as EAST have developed their own databases (https://east-retention-db.appspot.com/) or have worked with the Colorado Alliance to utilize their Gold Rush service for recording shared print retentions, the primary resource for academic and research libraries on the monograph side is WorldCat® from OCLC. OCLC has only recently completed development of their shared print registration service and while it is available at no cost to those libraries who subscribe to OCLC Cataloging Services, it does not provide the same level of open-ness as is true for serials and journals through PAPR. It is hoped that in the coming years, a more comprehensive approach to infrastructure for shared print will become available and incorporate shared print information at all phases of library services, from acquiring materials through discovery and resource sharing.

And, while there is overlap in the membership of Rosemont and the Partnership, their current business models are somewhat different. Rosemont has depended exclusively on volunteer services from staff at the member programs while the Partnership is in the process of hiring a part-time Program Coordinator to facilitate its broader agenda. Rosemont has no membership fees while the Partnership charges a modest annual fee at the program level.

It is also important to note that shared print for serials and journals is more mature, at least at the national level, than is the case for monograph shared print. Preservation services, perpetual electronic access and work to identify a “critical corpus” are all well developed for serials and journals. And, while HathiTrust and the Internet Archive certainly offer preservation and access services for print monographs, there remains a significant corpus of print content that is not protected and at risk of loss. These differences, particularly when combined with the lack of a cohesive infrastructure across the two print formats further argue for separate focuses by Rosemont and the Partnership today.

That said, all involved in shared print hope these barriers to the creation of a truly national program for shared print, independent of format, is feasible and possible. Efforts currently underway to develop new library databases that support re-imagined inter-library loan, expansion of vendor-provided data services, and the joint work of CRL, California Digital Library (CDL), and HathiTrust all point to such a future.

A New Phase for Shared Print

What national efforts like the Rosemont Alliance and the Partnership expose through their persistent search for the right “tools” is the necessity for shared print to transform. While ever more prolific, varied, and collaborative, shared print efforts remain awkwardly siloed – not only from program to program, but also, even more detrimentally, from other library services and infrastructure. Overcoming that siloing is the hurdle
that shared print now faces. The frameworks, participation, and collections are robust, but without more complete integration into library services, from acquisitions through resource sharing to deaccessioning, shared print will not be able to realize its full potential and value for libraries.

The Rosemont Alliance and the Partnership are powerhouses of cooperative mobilization, advocacy, and synthesis in the field of shared print, but they are also new organizations, supported in large part or entirely by the in-kind efforts of their participants. The fulfillment of their vision – the realization of infrastructure to facilitate easy local and cross-program analysis and decision-making – ultimately calls for concentrated effort by organizations with specialized experience and resources, preferably from organizations that are already part of the larger library community. As Roger Schonfeld writes, “As technology-based products have become the heart of these library systems, which increasingly serve as infrastructure for collaboration, real questions have emerged about whether they themselves should be built collaboratively.”

The CDL, CRL, and HathiTrust all took up the call for infrastructure and aim to facilitate shared print’s transition into a new phase of integration and interoperability. These organizations share similar visions, missions, and values to support the scholarly community through collaborative efforts and transformative solutions. Complementary resources and capabilities make the three organizations particularly well-positioned to push the envelope of what shared print has been up to now. CDL, with its expertise in product design and development, has specialized in the augmentation and creation of new technical solutions for librarianship. CRL has led the way in service-based shared print collection analysis informed by more than seventy years of experience building and making accessible a deep and diverse collection and continues to curate the most trusted and open shared print registry for serials and journals. HathiTrust, while a small central team in itself, is a master of building community and hosting community-driven digital collections and services.

In June 2020, the leaders of the three organizations released an announcement that communicated the vision and purpose of the collaboration:

“The future of print collections is shared. Embedding shared print within the lifecycle of library collections promotes equity of access, enriches the scholarly record, and increases opportunity for research and teaching. A well-developed, collaborative, and interoperable infrastructure ensures we will realize the full potential of our networks and their collective collections...We see an opportunity for our three organizations (CDL, CRL, and HT) to step into a facilitative leadership role, to gather the threads of the broader community’s considerable efforts and to advance shared print’s transition to a new phase of integration and interoperability.”

Greg Eow, President, Center for Research Libraries
Mike Furlough, Executive Director, HathiTrust
Günter Waibel, Associate Vice Provost and Executive Director, California Digital Library

The accompanying mission statement further elaborated:

“The California Digital Library, the Center for Research Libraries, and HathiTrust are committed to shared print’s integration into the scholarly ecosystem by developing shared, interoperable infrastructure. We see this collaboration as an opportunity to shift the shared print paradigm so that the work is not tangential to the traditional collection, but fully integrated into the life-cycle of collections (from acquisitions to discovery and resource-sharing). The work we are facilitating will be guided by our principles and centered on our assumptions.”
Looking forward, this is only the beginning. CDL, CRL, and HathiTrust have been meeting regularly since the beginning of 2020 to map out answers to substantial questions around resourcing, governance, inclusiveness, and sustainability. However, in the near-term the collaboration has also been engaging with the community around “quick wins” – small analytical, facilitative, or development projects – to build momentum, answer community needs, encourage participation, and set the stage for the larger effort.¹⁷

Concluding Remarks

The evolution of shared print is an effort of building trust and community. It began with individual libraries and small regional programs, often characterized by existing consortia or university relationships. Those efforts have grown beyond the traditional boundaries of collection management and development to acknowledge the possibility and value of national and international action in preserving print collections and making them accessible.

Now we stand on the brink of another transformative step in shared print collaboration. Though it expanded rapidly and effectively, shared print remains a specialized concept. But we can change that. We can bring more people in. With the right technology and greater integration into library systems and workflows, shared print can become part of a mindset shift centered on leveraging our collective strength. The future of library collections depends on print and the future of print collections is shared.


⁶ Candace Yano, Zuo-Jun Max Shen, and Stephen Chan, “Optimising the number of copies and storage protocols for print preservation of

Around 2011, the Center for Research Libraries and California Digital Library partnered to develop the Print Archives Preservation Registry (PAPR) (https://www.crl.edu/news/crl-and-california-digital-library-developing-print-archives-preservation-registry), which is now hosted by CRL as the largest and most accessible registry for serial and journal shared print. The PAPR development also served as the foundation for the creation of AGUA, a graphic interface that the Western Regional Storage Trust and UC Libraries both use for managing analysis and shared print workflows. In 2013, the University of Florida developed the Journal Retention and Needs Listing (JRNL) Tool, which also served as a registry with the addition of providing analytical and communication support for offering and filling gaps in retained journal runs.


8 Brian Lavoie, Constance Malpas, and J.D. Shipengrover, Print Management at “Mega-scale”: A Regional Perspective on Print Book Collections in North America (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2012), available online at https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2012/2012-05.pdf.


14 What does this collaboration look like? EAST was the first of the regional programs to actively exclude any titles already retained by Rosemont partners when making their own strategic retention selections. In their latest selection processes, WEST and ASERL have implemented similar criteria leveraging Rosemont retentions to more strategically deploy regional effort and resources.
