

Profile: Deanna Marcum



*"Perhaps the most influential librarian
in the 21st century"*¹

I was fortunate to catch up with Deanna Marcum at the summer ALA meeting in Los Angeles and to talk to her in depth about her early life, her library career and her current position at the Library of Congress. There are many librarians in the United States who consider the Library of Congress the most exciting place to work in our profession. It was my good fortune to work with Deanna for over ten years while I was serving on the Board of the Council on Library Resources. I got to know and respect her abilities.

In June 2003 the Librarian of Congress, James Billington, selected this farm girl from Indiana to hold one of the most demanding and challenging library management jobs of our day. Deanna, as the Associate Librarian for Library Services, is responsible for Acquisitions, Cataloging, Public Service and a number of other units within the Library of Congress. Running 53 Divisions with over 2,400 employees is a massive undertaking. The Library of Congress (LC) also functions as the National Library of the United States, serving the thousands of libraries throughout the country. However, LC's first priority is to serve and support the US Congress.

Deanna's finely tuned skills are critical for running the mammoth Library of Congress with its complex labor, special political status, and outside influences. Setting and developing a national strategy on the future of bibliographic control is a unique challenge involving the international community of libraries and bibliographic experts.

The next generation of bibliographic control will come from the leadership, foresight, negotiation and plain hard work of Deanna. Transforming the Library of Congress into a national digital library is one of the most exciting opportunities facing Deanna and her staff.

There has been so much written in the library literature about the current Library of Congress projects in both preservation and the future of bibliographic control, therefore the focus of this interview is to look back at the beginning of her career and to see how she got there.

Perhaps her ethic for working long, hard hours was formed in those very early years where Deanna and her family operated a large farm in Indiana. As the oldest child and with her father's strong belief in education, Deanna was destined to get a first-rate education. After high school Deanna left the farm and she never turned back. First it was an education at the University of Illinois for both her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in English.

Armed with a new Master's degree in English, she accepted a position to teach English at the University of Kentucky. There she met her first mentor in the library field, Stuart Forth, the University Librarian at Kentucky and one of the great leaders in the US library world. He later went on and served as the University Librarian at Penn State. He saw something special in Deanna and quickly convinced her to work in the library and to obtain her MLS, which she completed at Kentucky.

As a new librarian looking for a growth opportunity, Deanna accepted a position in Nashville, Tennessee at the Joint University Library (JUL) at Vanderbilt to work on a Ford Foundation Program.

At the end of three years she followed her husband to the District of Columbia where he was to work at the University of Maryland. Deanna accepted a position at the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) working with Duane Webster in Management Training, a post she held from 1977-1981. She left ARL to become first a program officer at the Council on Library Resources (CLR), and later she advanced to Vice President. At CLR she worked for another great librarian and mentor, Jim Haas, the President of the Council and former University Librarian at Columbia University. It was while working for CLR that Deanna developed her deep interest in library preservation. Also while working full time she completed work on her doctorate in American Studies at the University of Maryland.

After a very successful eight years at CLR, Deanna's next adventure was to become Dean of the School of Library Science at Catholic University. While serving as Dean she was recruited for her next position, the Director of Public Service and Collection Management at the Library of Congress, where she caught the attention of the Librarian of Congress, James Billington. Her tenure at LC from 1993-1995 was an exciting eye-opener that helped prepare her for her return to LC in 2003.

In 1995 Deanna accepted the challenge from Marty Cummings and the Board of the Council on Library Resources to return there. The Council had fallen on difficult times and was suffering from a level of political infighting. Deanna was up for the job to repair and remake CLR, and duly returned to restore the CLR to its former glory days. She had a joint appointment as President at both CLR and the Commission on Preservation and Access, and over the next two years she worked to merge the two organizations into the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and restored the relationships with the funding community.

Having been on a long road through teaching, working with the academic research community at both ARL and CLIR, leading a library school as its dean, and serving at the Library of Congress as the director of Public Service, she was now ready to accept the biggest challenge of her life. In June 2003 she accepted her new position at Library of Congress as the Associate Librarian for Library Services,

where she is responsible for running the day-to-day operations at the Library of Congress. The headaches, political battles, budget issues and employee challenges are drawing on Deanna's extensive set of leadership and negotiating skills. Every day is a new test of endurance in perhaps the most challenging library position in the world. For five years she has led the library skillfully and it looks like she is ready for another ten years.

So what else would Deanna like us to know about the Library of Congress? I asked her for some facts that many people may not be aware of. For example, how many know that the appointment of the Librarian of Congress is a lifetime appointment? In Washington most positions change with the changing of the guard. Almost all political appointees move on when there is a change in administration. On the other hand, the library is not immune from political pressure and has to fight Capitol Hill for their budget each year.

Another little known fact is that the Library of Congress runs six overseas acquisitions offices that operate around the world buying and collecting materials from hard-to-buy parts of the world for both the Library of Congress and a number of the large US research libraries. Every day there is staff working in their native language looking for library materials to collect and send over to LC. This program has a long history and few people know about the great effort that is made to collect and organize material from these very sensitive or remote regions.

Finally, Deanna would like us to know that the Library of Congress has a major role in the District of Columbia as a great cultural center that has an active program of music, art, exhibits and scholarship. Much of Deanna's time is spent in organizing or working to make the Library of Congress a great cultural organization.

Deanna has an amazing opportunity to build a national digital library at the Library of Congress and is well trained to lead this effort. She is a frequent author and much sought after speaker on these issues. I think she is perhaps the most influential librarian of the 21st century and I was delighted to interview her.

Deanna Marcum was interviewed for *Serials* by Dan Tonkery

1. Dan Tonkery, 29 July 2008