

# Foreword

Ridley Kessler, Patricia Langelier, Guest Editors

The issue of *North Carolina Libraries*, dealing strictly with public documents, comes at a crucial time for documents librarians and everyone concerned with free access to governmental information. For the last few years the federal depository library program has been under siege as the private sector and various government agencies have tried to turn over the control of the production and dissemination of government information to big business. Also, the specter of selling government information to the highest bidder and allowing the general public to use this information only on a cost-recovery basis haunts those who have spent a lifetime protecting and nurturing the concept of free access. These fundamental issues are being debated now in Congress. The fate of the Depository Library Program and the future of public access to information produced by government hang in the balance. Marie Clark's article focuses attention on this compelling concern. Read it and react. This won't affect just your patrons/clients—it will also touch you. We encourage you to fight for your right to know. Several other articles in this issue echo these concerns.

At the state level, North Carolina citizens have been guaranteed their right to free access by N.C. Gen. Stat. 125-11 (1987). This North Carolina law reorganized and improved the North Carolina depository system. It will ensure that our children's children will be able to place "hands on" the publications of their state government. This law is living proof of what good can come when concerned citizens join with an enlightened and progressive legislature towards a common goal.

The articles in this issue reflect the diverse areas of documents librarianship as well as the varied backgrounds and expertise of documents librarians. You will find practical, in-depth, and up-to-date how-to articles—see Dalton's simple recipe for acquiring, processing, and using government documents in a small library; Abbott's pathfinder to technical report literature; Scott's field

guide to maps; Kroeger's handbook of government documents in the humanities; and Strauss's best bets for business. Their articles make this issue a reference tool and resource directory of state and federal government publications and agencies.

Included in this issue are historical essays that chronicle the growth, development, and accomplishments of an important, official government watchdog—the Depository Library Council (Tulis), and that outline the career of an exceptional documents librarian (Porter) and trace the beginnings of a government publishing family (Boeringer).

Both public and technical services librarians will be enlightened by the articles by Hanerfeld and Hulyk. One describes the experience of becoming a depository for North Carolina documents; the other offers advice on identifying rare documents and provides practical suggestions for protecting the past.

We thank the authors for their expert contributions. We hope that you will be rewarded by their efforts and persuaded by their evidence. 



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