

# Papers From *The Map Library in Transition*

## Conference Opening Remarks\*

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On a blustery November morning in Chicago in 1988, thirty map librarians and archivists from across the U.S. and Canada, representing eleven different professional organizations, the National Archives of both the United States and Canada, and the Library of Congress assembled in the East Room of the Newberry Library to participate in what came to be called the Congress of Cartographic Information Specialists Associations (CCISA). The aim of the meeting was to explore ways to achieve greater cooperation and better communication within the profession. Before adjourning, the Congress had passed several resolutions. One related to the need for greater intra-professional communication, and another, in recognition of the benefits accruing from the assembly of such a diverse group, proposed holding large international gatherings of cartographic information specialists every few years. The spirit, if not the letter, of the first resolution was subsequently, and very satisfactorily, achieved by the international Internet discussion group, Maps-L, begun by Johnnie Sutherland and Jim Minton. Maps-L, with more than 600 subscribers, provides a forum that not only cuts across the many divisions within our profession but also does so instantaneously. The second resolution has proved more difficult to realize. An attempt to hold a general meeting in Chicago two years ago, in 1991, had to be abandoned, due, in large measure, to lean economic times which made traveling more difficult.

What did take place, however, was a series of planning meetings that, in a sense, set the stage for this 1993 conference. Looking back, it seems difficult to understand that the original Congress found little reason to concern itself with what is now recognized as the digital revolution in cartography. Our world has changed much since that Wednesday in November, only five years ago, when all the headlines heralded the election of George Bush. The planning meetings in 1991 established the "digital challenge" as the common thread running through the profession, and to meet that challenge, it would clearly be necessary for us to pool our collective resources. Today's meeting is made possible through fortunate circumstances—the CCISA wanted to hold a conference and so did Ralph Ehrenberg and Gary Fitzpatrick. What will occur today and tomorrow is the result of a series of conference calls made during the past year and a half, which included Ralph, Gary, and the CCISA Representatives.

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Librarianship, and especially, map librarianship is, I believe, being challenged today as never before. As serial and book prices soar ever higher and budgets are cut or grow by small amounts, libraries are faced with hard decisions, and often, that which is not well understood finds itself the victim in reorganizations or cost cutting measures. We are finding that one such misunderstood area is, increasingly, the map collection, with its specialist practitioners and substantial space requirements. It is within this context that map libraries are being forced to deal with the realities of digital cartography. This situation is hardly unique to map collections, but I believe the implications for the map collection are of greater magnitude than for the library generally, as digital document files are easily read, while digital cartographic files require high powered computers, high resolution monitors, expensive software and printers, and, of course, trained personnel. We must not forget that, since there are many digital formats, a number of software packages are needed, which, of course, increases costs and training requirements.

As cartographic information specialists, I believe that this conference will give us a unique opportunity to explore the meaning and ramifications of digital cartography in the map library, and perhaps, even reach an accord on some of the more fundamental problems that we face. For example, depository libraries in the U.S. have received the TIGER/Line files on CD-ROM. Like any other document, these must be made accessible to the public, but what exactly does that mean—simply copying the files to the user's diskette or providing, in effect, a cartographic laboratory which would be able to produce a map to the user's specifications? If we opt in the direction of the later, substantial new resources will need to be provided, and the library will have to determine where they will come from. And when, in due course, the CD-ROM is replaced by file transfer over the Internet, and the library no longer "holds" the resource in the traditional sense, will the library be rendered superfluous? What can we do now to prevent that from happening sometime down the road. Or, in a market driven economy, would we be interfering where we neither could nor should?

The contributors to this session have been chosen for their leadership within or insightful contributions to this rapidly developing field, and they have been asked to be provocative. What they will have to say can in no way be considered definitive but should serve to foster the thought and discussion which will be required as we begin to address this problem over the next few years. Never in our profession have we faced such a transformation and we, in fact, have little to go on as there is little precedence to guide us, and I have yet to find a suitable analogy to serve as a model for what lies ahead. It is hoped that the dialogue which will be begun here today can be continued as a series of such gatherings which will prepare us to meet the challenges of the coming millennium. □

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