

COLLECTIONS OVERVIEW

COMPUTER FILES

I. SCOPE

This overview focuses on Library of Congress holdings of computer files (CF) in machine dependent form, also called Direct Access Electronic Resources. These materials are defined as data or programs that require a microcomputer for retrieval, manipulation, and display. These materials include publications on CD-ROM, videodisc publications, books-with disks, and serials on or with disks and microcomputer software programs. A variety of subjects and applications are part of these collections. From 1988 through 1996, the Humanities and Social Sciences Division (HSS) served Direct Access Electronic Resources in a separate Machine Readable Collections Reading Room (MRCRR). In 1996, reference and archival holdings of electronic resources were dispersed to other reading rooms within the Library. The goal in dispersing these collections was to allow each reading room to provide access to collections deemed appropriate for the custodial responsibility or subject expertise of the specific reading room. Most of these materials were informational and data items and not software with executable programs.

The custodial location of computer files acquired by the Library is primarily the HSS Machine Readable Collection, but the ST&B Technical Reports and Standards Unit, the Geography and Map Division, the Serial and Government Publications Division, the Collections Management Division, or any other appropriate custodial divisions, including Law and custodial area studies divisions may also house them. For example, the Serial and Government Publications Division maintains a collection of US Government Printing Office CD-ROM publications as well as documents from international organizations. The Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division facility in Culpepper, VA. holds a significant collection of computer games on a variety of digital formats in their collection.

These materials have greatly expanded since 1988 with the collections increasing from 1500 items to 88,000 items. In the beginning, the collecting policy was more expansive and unlimited, but in recent years, there have been discussions to reduce the number of titles selected for the Library's collections. All recommending officers in appropriate fields are responsible for identifying computer files that are of interest to the Library's legislative, federal, and research clientele. As in the case of all other collection areas, the informational content drives the selection decision, and not the fact that the item is in the format of an electronic resource. One of the Library's goals for collecting computer files is to develop a representative sample of current computer files publishing to record and to document their scope and the technology used. The constantly changing hardware, which can make many selected titles obsolete within a few years, should encourage recommending officers to be very selective.

Materials selected for the collections must be able to be run on the Library's computers and are usually PC compatible and not Macintosh compatible. Only a small selection of software for other hardware is selected from Copyright registration or deposit; the majority of the items are

retained by HSS but materials selected by recommending officers need to assure that their divisions can care for and serve these materials.

II. SIZE

The following table provides a snap-shot of holdings in all machine-dependent formats for the selected custodial units:

Selected Statistics on Holdings

HSS Machine Readable Collection	81, 822 Total items including 39,366 Books with Disks 33,033 CD-ROMs 7,690 software packages Other items
Serial and Government Publications Division	2,500 CD-ROMs
Technical Reports and Standards	980 CD-ROMs
Geography & Map	585 CD-ROMs

The default decision for the Library is to keep one copy of a computer file; however, the Library will keep two copies of Cartographic programs assigned to Geography and Maps and music programs assigned to the Music Division. The Library also collects two copies of books with disks where the primary content is the book and the disk provides only supplementary information.

III. RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The Library's titles on CD are distinguished by the diversity of publications the Library has acquired primarily through copyright. The Library retains CDs containing primary source material, digital collections of rare items, and digital collections of not easily accessible works. The HSS Machine Readable Collection titles represent a broad selection of reference tools, including bibliographies, indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias, genealogical texts, and related works. Over half of the items are books with disks. The Technical Reports and Standards Unit collection includes CDs of conference proceedings in all science subject areas, standards, vehicle repair manuals (both for the professional and for the layman), contemporary/hot topics (e.g., emergency preparedness) or topics of particular local interest (e.g., Chesapeake Bay), manuals, diagrams, and descriptions of scientific, engineering, and mechanical operations/equipment designed for the professional community. The Unit also holds documents on CD from international organizations such as NATO and the European Space Agency. The Motion Picture,

Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division holds video games, as well as games requiring a special console. The Division also has press kits, style guides, and cartoon products, as well as QuickTime movies on DVD, CD and other formats. Stock photography of famous people and/or events and cartographic material published as a computer file are also collected.

The HSS Machine Readable Collection includes sample software products in which titles are not selected for content, but rather for their representation of the industry and as archival artifacts to represent computer and software development. This includes computer software (for example, operating systems such as Windows, Macintosh, DOS, Linux/Unix, Solaris, etc.), and software programs designed for use with auxiliary or additional devices such as personal data assistants (software for mainframe computers and minicomputers is not collected). Also held in this "samples only" category are self-help instructional material and courseware for all audiences (for example, foreign language instruction or courseware for passing computer technician exams), and sample materials to be used only with operating systems other than Windows.

IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

In this relatively new but growing collection, there are not yet areas of great distinction. However, the Library's collection is believed to be unique in what may turn out to be a transitional technology, and policies and procedures have been fairly well established to identify, acquire, organize/catalog, and service Direct Access materials. The highly critical area of long-term preservation of these physical and file formats has not been fully understood but must be in order to retain their research value to the Library community.

V. WEAKNESS/EXCLUSIONS

The rapid increase in publication of Direct Access materials resulted in their arrival through a variety of avenues and items being cataloged that should not have been added to the collections (Patent materials, disks with flash cards, personal CD-ROMs; items with no research value and items identical to the print copy). In addition, there is insufficient room to shelve the CD-ROMs and no convenient way to shelve them; the result in an inability to locate requested items. A definite decision should be made whether to seriously reduce the number of CD-ROMs selected for the Library's permanent collections or whether there will be hardware maintained to serve these materials into the future.