

DCLA 2014 Banquet  
Carmine's restaurant  
June 20, 2014  
6:00 pm

President Wilson, President-Elect Bailey, DCLA members, and honored guests, I am pleased to join in this celebration of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the District of Columbia Library Association.

DCLA is one of the first local library associations, and from its inception has promoted local library development, encouraged cooperation between the many diverse library communities in metropolitan Washington, and provided access to library resources for people in this area.

I wish to congratulate both DCLA and your new incoming President, Christina Bailey with the wonderful middle name of Miracle. She is a much valued Information Research Specialist

for the Congressional Research Service, which is also celebrating an anniversary this year—its 100<sup>th</sup>. She has contributed to our service in Congress in many areas and regularly provides both presentations to Congressional staff and reference services in digital formats.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford, one of my predecessors, was a founding member of DCLA and worked closely on one of this great organization's first major projects: the creation of the public library system in Washington, D.C. From the earliest years, LC staff have given talks before the DCLA membership and have served in leadership roles in this organization. The two longest-serving Librarians of Congress in the 214 years of our existence, Putnam and Spofford both served as presidents of this organization and countless LC administrators have also been active DCLA members. Before coming to the Library of

Congress, I had lived in the District for 14 years as Director of the Woodrow Wilson Center and I and my family owe a great deal to D.C. local libraries.

In 1988—just a few months after my installation as Librarian of Congress—you invited me to give the keynote address at your annual banquet. In that talk, I previewed for your membership my vision for the Library of Congress (and I quote), “in order for the Library to play the central, vital role in our national life that it must play as we enter the information age, there must be a broader public understanding and appreciation of what the Library is doing and might do in the next decade.”

When I was sworn in a few months earlier, I said that there were two general directions in which this already great institution had to move: out more broadly and in more deeply.

Moving out meant making the riches of the Library even more available to ever wider circles of our diverse society.

Moving in meant that the Library of Congress needed to attract more men and women to discover and use the immense treasures of the world's largest library with the aid of a diversely talented staff to help us do for the national library what all libraries have to do—collect, preserve, and make maximally accessible its human and material resources.

Our first step was to create the Library's first ever Development Office and national private-sector advisory group, the James Madison Council.

Two staff development programs were then created by private funding: The Junior Fellows Program and the Leadership Development Program.

The Junior Fellows Program brings young men and women into the Library to examine our unprocessed collections, identifying unique material that may have been overlooked. The Leadership Development Program offers specialized training to open up new advancement opportunities for staff members.

The Library of Congress was created by the Congress and has been funded ever since by annual appropriations.

### Out more broadly

The National Digital Library Program is making key American collections of the LC and other libraries accessible to the

American public. *More than 30million primary documents of American history and culture online freely K-12.*

*WDL, UNESCO, 7 languages, 83 partners, 81 nations*

In more deeply

Kluge Center supports scholarly research in the humanities and social sciences, bringing the intellectual resources of the academic community into residence on Capitol Hill. *Kluge Prize*

Congress also mandated, and the Library has built, the largest oral history archive in America through its Veterans History Project--collecting interviews, letters, diaries, photographs, and other original materials from veterans of World War I, World War II, and the Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. *WONDERFUL PROJECT FOR YOUNG*

To ensure that America's film and sound recording patrimony is preserved, Congress created in the Library the National Film Preservation Board in 1988 and the National Recording Registry was set up in 2000.

David Woodly Packard and the Packard Humanities Institute created for the Library a state-of-the-art audiovisual center in Culpeper, Virginia. Now the world's largest audiovisual center, it houses and preserves America's performing arts and entertainment heritage. *Private-public collaboration*

Since 2001, the Library has hosted the National Book Festival, a celebration of books, reading, and literacy. Held on the National Mall since 2003, the festival will move this year (August 30, 2014) to the Convention Center. The festival will feature more than 100 noted authors, poets, and illustrators. We

are again fortunate this year to partner with the D.C. Public Libraries in the essay contest “Books That Shaped Me.” Over 300 public libraries in the Mid-Atlantic region are serving as the mentoring and collection points for these essays written by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

The winners will be selected and will read their essays publicly at this year’s National Book Festival on August 30<sup>th</sup> at the Washington Convention Center. All day, and into the night, there will be surprises and I hope you all will come.

Last September, we launched the Futures Program, a new project that we hope will help us to determine the best way to provide service for the Congress and the nation in the coming years.

The Futures Plan for the Library of Congress will be completed by September of this year and implemented between Fiscal Years 2015-2016. 8 teams and 3 committees below the executive level have contributed to its formulation. Its basic task will be how the unchanging mission of the Library of Congress to serve the Congress and the American people can be sustained and strengthened in the revolutionary new world of digital content. How to preserve the values of the book culture in this new, fast-paced world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century —with which we are already so actively involved—with the traditional world of learning through print. The great American historian, Henry Steele Commager during his last visit to the Library of Congress said that America was the only world-spanning culture whose institutions were formed and shaped entirely in the age of print. We see the digital world as supplementing but not supplanting the world of learning and traditional libraries. That is the

American way—to add without subtracting. Television did not supplant radio any more than movies have supplanted plays, our digital outreach is not an end in itself—but rather a vehicle for education.

In this world librarians will be more important than ever; we are calling them Knowledge Navigators, because they must combine traditional knowledge from the world of books with the tsunami of unprocessed material in the digital world. The number of books and print materials are still rising, though not anything like the exponential and even viral way that digital information is flooding us all.

I gave a speech some time ago to the Great Plains Library Association in the heartland of America, stressing the increasingly important role of librarians as gatekeepers to knowledge in a confusing and argumentative world. An old

Native American Chieftain came up to me afterwards who was himself a librarian said to me, “You know, before all the settlers arrived with their ideas and books, we had the equivalent of a library in the mind and memory of an elder in the tribe. But we did not call him the gate-keeper, we called him the dream-keeper.”

I have used that line ever since in talking about libraries and librarians, because they—like all of you gathered here in this room—are keepers of the American dream. It is the founders’ dream of a knowledge-based democracy that provides access to knowledge and creativity for people with various backgrounds and insights that fully represent the diversity of America and of American creativity. We all have to increasingly learn to live in an a world in which knowledge is increasingly becoming the coin of the realm and the measurement of whether

or not people are going to have full and productive lives. The Library of Congress is pledged now, and will be in our Futures Program, to the cause of lifelong learning. It ranges from our new three prizes for combatting illiteracy both in America and abroad, goes through supporting K-12 education as the main focus of our online web services, and culminating in the Kluge Prize for the Study of Humanity, as a Nobel-level prize for the study of the humanities and social studies that are not included in the Nobel firmament.

From the beginning of small colonies on the east coast to our most recent experiences, new communities in America have grown up with a variety of economic activities, places of worship, even places of learning, but they almost always began around one library—a place where everyone had equal access to

knowledge. Just as the Library of Congress is our oldest national cultural institution, so the life of libraries in communities has been unifying for all people in America facing an exciting time where you all here are becoming more important than ever in making sure that the opportunity that is America is supported by the community-based libraries that are free, looked to by all people, and continue to provide the knowledge that people need to discover for satisfying lives in what Keats called “silence and slow time” amidst the wise, and hurried world we live in.

I continue to be inspired by that Native American Chief who saw the elder of a tribe as the dream-keeper before there was a modern America. I see librarians as guardians of an enduring American dream, more important in our time than ever before: our dream that so long as more people have more access to more knowledge and creativity to use in

more ways with and for other people, then, however great the problems of today, tomorrow can always be better than yesterday.