Garden and Forest’s Journey to Cyberspace

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In March 1888, the first issue of a new periodical, Garden and Forest: A Journal of Horticulture, Landscape Art, and Forestry, was received by the Library of Congress for copyright deposit. Every week thereafter, until the journal ceased publication in December 1897, subsequent issues of Garden and Forest were added to the Library’s collection.

Since the time of its original publication, Garden and Forest has provided readers at the Library of Congress—and other libraries—a distinctive and invaluable resource. Its pages contain a vast array of materials, from articles on entomology and pomology to advice on ornamental plant gardening to position statements on forest conservation policy to summaries of retail flower market prices. Every issue is generously illustrated with detailed line drawings, photographs, and landscape plans. The advertisements on the front and back cover leaves of each issue serve as a guide to commercial products and services of the time, including flower pots, seeds and bulbs, tools, glass for greenhouses and graperies, horticultural architects, nurseries, and gardeners. There are also advertisements for periodicals on agriculture and literature, and even a Pocket Kodak camera appropriate for amateur photographers who might wish to capture "snow-scapes" of "leafless trees and ice-bound streams."

How did Garden and Forest journey from the shelves of the Library of Congress, where it rested safely for a century, to cyberspace, where, in December 1999, it became the first complete serial publication digitized by the Library and released on the Internet? Three intertwining paths formed this journey and represented a confluence of issues—digital technology, historical content value, and preservation needs—central to the Library’s mission.

The Library of Congress began to explore the use of digital technology to create reproductions of historical collection materials in 1990. The goal of the early pilot program, called "American Memory," was to "get the champagne out of the bottle" in order to share the Library’s treasures with broader audiences. Most of the collection materials chosen to be digitized were nominated by Library curators, but some project ideas arose through other channels. One such instance was in response to a generous gift from Laurance S. and Mary French Rockefeller to fund digital collections about subjects of longstanding interest to them: President Calvin
Coolidge and his times and the history of the conservation movement in the United States.\(^2\)

As work got underway on the digital collection to be called "The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850–1920," Library staff were confronted with an embarrassment of riches. The Library of Congress has outstanding collections in the history of science, especially covering eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, and in the areas of gardening, horticulture, forestry, and landscape art. Among these riches, Garden and Forest stood out in several ways. In addition to primary information on scientific topics, it provided a wonderful snapshot of the cultural history of the early conservation movement in the United States. A striking number of important individuals active in the burgeoning conservation movement published in Garden and Forest, and their writing spanned the broad range of interests that impelled them, including landscape design and preservation, national and urban park development, scientific forestry, forest conservation, horticulture, and botany. Garden and Forest also published the work of a significant number of woman authors, an unusual occurrence in publications of the time.

Although interest in Garden and Forest was high, technical impediments initially prohibited its inclusion in the American Memory digital collection. Over the next several years, some of those impediments lessened, but the journal's overall size—almost 9,000 pages—and the relative expense to digitize it in its entirety remained concerns. The frequent requests for Garden and Forest by researchers coming to the Library of Congress throughout this period, however, reinforced its importance as a resource.

During the time Garden and Forest was being considered for digitizing, Library staff noticed that its paper showed signs of deterioration, including embrittlement. At that time, the Library's Preservation Directorate began to develop its digital reformatting program to provide another option for creating surrogates of original materials that might be damaged if used by readers. Garden and Forest was chosen as the first project for this new approach, and since standard procedure in preservation reformatting—with older technologies such as microfilm as well as new digital technologies—is to capture the complete work, there was no question that every volume of the serial would be digitized in its entirety.\(^3\) The Preservation digitizing approach also led to two fruitful collaborations for the Library: one with the University of Michigan, to deliver Garden and Forest on the Internet through a collaborative gateway that provides access to many nineteenth-century periodicals;\(^4\) and one with the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, to develop specialized access aids to the content, including background essays and a detailed subject index.

Since Garden and Forest was released online in December 1999, it has had a new and greatly expanded life among millions of pages of other electronic journals that provide full text access over the Internet.\(^5\) This has enabled tens of thousands of new researchers throughout the world, who might never have discovered Garden and Forest on a library shelf, to have a first-hand glimpse of a critical period in the history of the conservation movement in the United States and the development of related scientific fields.

Endnotes

1 The American Memory digital collections can be viewed at the Library of Congress web site: http://memory.loc.gov/


4 See: http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/prd/gardfor/digitizegf.html

5 See: http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/prd/gardfor/gfhome.html

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