

“The Economics of Information”

The Indiana State Library and the State Budget Process

On January 30, 2015, a story by Associated Press reporter Lauryn Schroeder appeared in newspapers throughout the state of Indiana: Governor Mike Pence’s forthcoming budget plan would include a twenty-four-percent cut—\$2 million—in the budget of the Indiana State Library (ISL). Most of the cut would be achieved by eliminating INSPIRE, the library’s online presence in the state, and the library’s entire Genealogy Division. INSPIRE, according to State Budget Director Brian Bailey, could be replaced by existing online services such as Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic Search; the genealogical holdings were already available, said Bailey, through online services such as Ancestry.com.

Reaction from across the state and throughout the Midwest was immediate. Librarians, genealogists, archivists, college professors, middle and high school teachers, and everyday users of the state library’s genealogical resources spoke out against the proposed cuts, writing letters to their local newspapers and contacting their state representatives.

State Librarian Jacob Speer, in a five-page letter posted on the websites of the Indiana Library Federation and the Indiana Genealogical Society, stated his case clearly: “The Indiana State Library is a leader in the country in providing direction and support to libraries and as a result, our library systems are innovative, cost effective and efficient. The proposed cuts will devastate the library services provided to Indiana residents.”

Speer's letter went on to detail INSPIRE's benefits: a huge collection of historical and scientific journals and newspaper articles, as well as language and business resources available online to all Indiana residents. INSPIRE, Speer noted, was used by 237 public libraries and 45 academic libraries and had been accessed by more than 1 million K-12 students in one year. The proposed cuts, he continued, would significantly reduce federal funds (tied to INSPIRE and other digital programs) to the ISL, not only for the current budget year but for all subsequent years. Finally, Speer wrote, "the resources presented as a potential replacement are lacking in scope and breadth—many do not include full text" and "over 80% of the resources on INSPIRE are not found anywhere else."

Speer also detailed the role of the State Library's Genealogy Division, which he described as "rich with unique family histories and genealogy materials that cannot be found in other locations." Almost half "of all reference questions that come into the ISL are for research from these genealogy materials," Speer wrote, adding that proposed staff cuts would compound the losses.¹

Brad Eden, Dean of Library Services at Valparaiso University, was one of many librarians statewide who spoke up against the cuts, telling a reporter from the *Chicago Post-Tribune*: "It just goes to show a lack of understanding among lawmakers. When push comes to shove it's all about information, and a lot of times politicians don't have all of the information but they make cuts. They don't understand the economics of information. Things that are produced by institutions of higher education—you have to pay for them in order to get them."²

Meeting during the last week of February, the Indiana General Assembly's House Ways and Means Committee voted to restore funds to the State Library's budget, saving, for this budget year, both INSPIRE and the ISL Genealogy Division. (The revised budget retained a proposed \$150,000 cut in the State Library's standards and certifications program.) Before the committee made its final decision, the editors of the *Indiana Magazine of History* asked a group of historians, librarians, and archivists to comment on the proposed cuts and their impact. We print their responses, unedited, in the belief that the issues raised by the controversy, while resolved for the moment, remain of continuing importance, particularly one year before the state of Indiana celebrates its bicentennial.

The Editors

¹Jacob Speer, letter of January 15, 2015, online at www.indgensoc.org.

²"Libraries Cheer Restored Funding for INSPIRE Database," *Chicago Post-Tribune*, March 2, 2015.



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Asked to participate in a session regarding libraries, historical societies, and genealogy at the 2015 American Library Association Conference in Chicago, I described the fruitful relationships among Indiana's historical organizations in Indianapolis. My career as editor for the Indiana Historical Society (IHS) spans nearly twenty years, I stated. Early on I appreciated that the IHS, a nonprofit, and Indiana's government historical agencies share responsibility for collecting and preserving Indiana's history. Around a century ago, these organizations wisely divided up collection areas, stretching meager resources to meet the needs of students, teachers, and researchers. The IHS actively collects materials on Indiana and the Old Northwest and records on particular subjects, such as businesses, women, and African Americans. The State Museum collects artifacts, and the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology helps preserve historic buildings, spaces, and the state's prehistory.

The State Archives collects materials created by Indiana's local and state governments, including military records and papers of the legislature, courts, and charitable agencies. The State Library's (ISL) Indiana Room houses directories for small and large cities, microfilm of the state's historic newspapers, manuscripts, and printed collections. The Genealogy Division collects genealogical records for Indiana and the states that populated it. This includes microfilm of county records such as land deeds and birth and marriage records; ships' passenger lists; thousands of family histories, pedigree charts, letters and diaries; more than one hundred periodicals from the country's historical and genealogical organizations; cemetery and funeral home records; and a host of other important research material.

The partnerships forged a century ago have served the state's citizens well. Hoosier students and scholars and genealogists from across the globe travel to Indianapolis to conduct research. Here they find an organized trail through the state's records as librarians at each venue guide them through their collections and on to the collections of their institutional partners. It's a great system, reaping the most benefits for Hoosiers' tax money.

After I was done speaking, someone asked what was to become of Indiana's system if the state's government cut the Genealogy Division, the

certification program that keeps Hoosier librarians abreast of new technologies and resources, and INSPIRE, which provides access to numerous full-text journal articles. We mused that people making these decisions did not understand the value of these programs or the historic partnerships that had allowed for their creation. The partners do not have the resources to collect or preserve in these areas.

The budget cutters stated that everything in the Genealogy Division was online, which, of course, is untrue. Only a fraction of the material exists there, much of it as indexes—not records—and it is very costly and time consuming to research.

In one fell swoop the budget cuts would destroy a century's worth of work forging one of the brightest library systems in the country—all because a few people did not know their history or their citizenry and its needs. Quite a waste, we all agreed. The other participants wished us Hoosiers good luck stopping the cuts, and we Hoosiers went home to write letters to our legislators.



ROBERT G. BARROWS is Professor of History at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis. He is the author of *Albion Fellows Bacon: Indiana's Municipal Housekeeper* (2000) and co-editor, with David J. Bodenhamer, of *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (1994), as well as the author of numerous articles in the *Journal of Urban History*, the *Indiana Magazine of History*, *Ohio Valley History*, and other journals. The text below is a letter sent by Prof. Barrows to his state representative, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

As you may know, the budget proposed by the administration includes significant cuts to the funding of the Indiana State Library—including the elimination of the Genealogy Division. An Associated Press story that ran a week or so ago quotes state budget director Brian Bailey as saying that “the genealogy department’s service is the same as offered on Ancestry.com.” With all due respect to Mr. Bailey, this is nonsense.

First, even if the Genealogy Division WERE offering only services duplicating what (private, for-profit) ancestry.com provides, that would be no reason to eliminate the service. That’s the equivalent of saying we should close down public libraries because people can always go to Barnes & Noble or Amazon.com for their books.

But, second, the claim that the Genealogy Division offers only the same service as Ancestry.com is patently inaccurate and can only have come from someone who has never set foot in the State Library. It is true

that the Genealogy Division collection includes census microfilm that has now been digitized and is in fact available from for-profit vendors. But that is only a small fraction of the Genealogy Division's overall holdings. These include a plethora of Indiana vital records available nowhere else (as well as indexes to those records, some of which were prepared as part of Depression-era WPA projects). And there are thousands of city and county histories pertaining to states south and east of Indiana, where most Hoosiers migrated from. The point is that the Genealogy Division collection is not valuable JUST to those who are trying to trace their family's ancestry (though it is obviously crucial to the thousands of state residents engaged in that activity). But the collection is a treasure trove for historians more generally, and the suggestion that it is merely a clone of Ancestry.com is simply uninformed.

I have sent students to the Genealogy Division to do HISTORICAL (not genealogical) research, and some of my colleagues have done the same. Many years ago, when I was giving a lecture about early American city planning at a small college in central Pennsylvania, I was able to personalize the talk by reproducing the original plat map of the town where I was speaking—a map I found in a town history held by the Genealogy Division (in all likelihood the only copy of that publication anywhere in the state).

In short, the proposal to de-fund the State Library's Genealogy Division is based on a mistaken premise. And it would do serious damage to the state's historical community (family history and otherwise) on the eve of the state's bicentennial. I hope you can be a voice of reason on Ways and Means and advocate for restoring the proposed cuts.



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I entered the Indiana State Library for the first time in 1970. Long-haired and fairly ignorant, I walked from Senate Avenue up the massive, marble staircase to the beautiful foyer. I faced the wonder of the massive card catalog and the first steps toward the accumulated sources of learning.

This Hoosier cathedral to knowledge opened its doors in the midst of the Great Depression. It's different today. The card catalog no longer

welcomes users. Some areas seem empty. The building is not the Library, of course. And the Library is not just books and papers.

Times have changed. Libraries have changed. Indeed, libraries may have changed more than most public institutions in the last half century. And they are more important now than ever.

Over the last several years our elected representatives have made cuts in State Library funding that suggest misunderstanding of twenty-first-century knowledge creation and dissemination. Do our leaders recognize what libraries do today? What do they know about INSPIRE, genealogy sources, public services, and outreach? Do they know about the sophisticated understanding professional librarians possess about information technology? Do they know that there are, in fact, books and papers in the State Library that are irreplaceable treasures and always in need of professional care?

Surely they know we cannot grow our economy and maintain our democracy with ignorance? Or simply by keying the Google thing?

When Governor Paul McNutt built up his great political patronage machine in the 1930s he fired six state librarians because they were not members of his party and had Democrats appointed in their place.

In our time, the continuing nicks in funding are more dangerous. Hoosiers young and old enter that Library, sometimes walking inside the building, sometimes clicking their keyboards at a distance. All learn in the shrine of a unique and irreplaceable state government institution.

Two histories of Indiana with my name on them appeared last year. These and many other forms of scholarship are sources of learning impossible to imagine without the Indiana State Library and the other institutions that preserve and disseminate knowledge.

If we are going to nick to death the Indiana State Library, perhaps we should just forget our Bicentennial celebration. A century from now no one will know enough to care.



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It's not very smart to get into factual disputes with librarians. The librarians know how to find the facts and will always win.

This truism was borne out recently in the Indiana General Assembly. Governor Mike Pence's Budget Agency staff decided to slash dollars for important programs of the Indiana State Library—INSPIRE funding and funds for its Genealogy Division. They declared that all the articles and other materials provided through INSPIRE were available freely through sources like Google Scholar. Likewise, they asserted that everything in the Genealogy Division was to be found online with for-profit services such as Ancestry.com. Moreover, they said, the Indiana Historical Society has all that stuff anyway.

These assertions have no basis in fact. Had the governor's budget advisors checked with librarians, they would have learned that INSPIRE furnishes full-text access to materials that Google Scholar can only tell you exists; it's just a slick index. Google Scholar cannot get you the full texts.

Similarly, a quick call to librarians would have informed the budget wizards that the Genealogy Division is chock full of guides, sources, and other information that Ancestry and other multi-billion-dollar operations haven't got. And the IHS never developed a genealogy collection to match the fine one across Ohio Street, and never wanted to.

As of the time I'm writing this, I've learned that the budget agency and legislators have been disabused of their erroneous assertions and that the INSPIRE funds have been restored. But so far, the Genealogy Division funds are still in limbo. We must hope that they are restored. The Genealogy Division is a haven for researchers of all types, not just people looking up their lineages. For example, IUPUI's faculty and students regularly cross Military Park to visit the unique Genealogy Division holdings in pursuit of information not available anywhere else. These researchers are delving into Indiana's past to suss out the state's distinctive experience. Their research enriches our knowledge and our lives.

A few years ago a notable Indiana politician, caught in support of an unsupportable position, blurted out the immortal words: "Don't confuse me with the facts. I've got a closed mind." Today, let's hope that Indiana's elected officials made smart, well-informed, fact-based decisions about the Indiana State Library, and that they left ill-informed, assumption-based, unwise, and nonfactual guesswork at the State House door.

