

FEDERAL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE WITHIN THE FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM

In 1813 the United States Congress gave the Library of Congress (LC) the responsibility of providing legislative publications to the public to insure that citizens would have the information needed to participate in the democratic process. This made LC the first federal library in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). 50 federal libraries have joined LC in providing access to information published by their agencies.

The 1813 resolution laid the groundwork for the current depository library program. It directed that “the documents published under the orders of the Senate and of the House of Representatives” be printed and distributed to the Library of the United States (Library of Congress) and the members of Congress, but also to executives and legislatures within each branch of every state and territory, each college and university, and to the Historical Society incorporated in each state. Any copies printed but not distributed were to remain with the Library of the United States (Library of Congress). [3 Stat 140 (1814)]

Even though the *Legal Requirement and Program Regulations of the Federal Depository Library Program* (2011) states “Federal agency libraries that have heightened security measures and libraries with limited public access must still provide depository access and services to the general public” (page 7 no.42), not all do. For example, the Senate Library and the Office of the President Library are each in secure sections of buildings not open to the general public, and neither library has a public website.

Just as in 1813, many people do not live close enough to a federal library to get the assistance they need. If they have a home computer they may be able to find what they need, but just a click on the Internet does not replace the help of professional librarians in federal libraries who can assist them in more intensive research. Federal librarians are still needed to provide assistance to the public via long distance assistance (phone, email, and other technological support) in order to fulfill the intent of the Congress that all of the public will be able to access government information.

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