

Digital Preservation Task Force Meets to Plan Summit

by Carol Billings

The Ithaca Challenge — that's what Dick Danner (Duke Law School Associate Dean for Library and Computing Services) dubbed the undertaking launched at Cornell Law School on August 17.

Convened by AALL's immediate past-president, Judy Meadows, and Cornell Law Library Director Claire Germain, a special AALL/Law Library of Congress task force met to plan a "summit" for

stakeholders in the preservation of authoritative versions of digital electronic information. Besides Danner, Meadows, and Germain, other task force members attending were Marie-Louise Bernal of the Law Library of Congress; Carol Billings of the Law Library of Louisiana; Jay Greco of Cornell Law School; Kevin King, MIS Director of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma; Dr. Rubens Medina, Law Librarian of Congress; Janine Miller of the Law Society of Upper Canada Great Library, representing the Canadian Association of Law Libraries; M. Kathleen Price of the New York University Law Library; and Daniel P. Rosati, Senior Vice President of the William S. Hein Co. Others on the Task Force are Nicholas Finke, Director of the Center for Electronic Text in the Law at the University of Cincinnati; AALL Executive Director Roger Parent; and Marc Wolfe of the National Archives and Records Administration.

The idea of convening a "summit" was encouraged by Claire Germain after she represented AALL at a conference sponsored by the Canadian Association of Law Libraries last November: "The Official Version: A National Summit to Solve the Problems of Authenticating, Preserving and Citing Legal Information in Digital Form." The issues raised there were simply too important not to be pursued, she contended, and President Meadows responded by appointing a task force. Although consideration had been given earlier to holding the conference in New Orleans in conjunction with the Association of American Law Schools meeting in

January 1999, participants in the Ithaca gathering decided that a spring summit in Washington would very likely attract greater participation by stakeholders and would allow more time for planning the program and carrying out arrangements.

Exact dates and other details will be announced soon.

Participants in the Cornell meeting concentrated on establishing goals for the upcoming conference,

defining issues to be tackled, and making a list a stakeholders to be invited. Because continuing public access to primary legal information is fundamental in a democratic society, the task force agreed, it is the obligation of law librarians to begin an initiative to ensure the authentication and preservation of that information. Producers of primary legal documents must be educated about the issues involved in saving them. Who shall have responsibility for preserving the information: the producers, or others to whom they assign the task?

Agreeing upon standards will be one of the most essential aspects of the authentication/preservation effort. Marc Wolfe provided the Ithaca group with a paper summarizing some of the issues involved in determining standards. "Preserving electronic information is a compound problem composed of three life cycle issues: physical media life expectancy . . . software dependency . . . and hardware dependency.," Wolfe explained. The Task Force decided that discovering and setting forth "best practices" and model legislation to aid stakeholders in implementing preservation plans will be an important part of the work.

Follow-up efforts, or "next steps," as the Task Force called them, will be an indispensable component in the success of the summit. It was suggested that stakeholders attending the conference be challenged to return to their jurisdictions, institutions, or organizations to develop

preservation action plans. AALL members would continue to serve as providers of information and advice during the implementation of the plans.

Judy Meadows is working on a long list of potential invitees to the spring summit. Many groups within the legal and government community should be represented. Every state's judiciary, legislators, bar associations, reporters of decisions, the information industry, clerks of court, law faculty, court administrators, archivists, the computer and software industries, other library associations, and standards organizations are only some of those already mentioned. Of course many AALL members will be involved in making the summit a success.

Note: This Task Force is the outgrowth of a brainstorming session at the Law Library of Congress on the archivability and authenticity of electronic records. That one-day meeting was convened in early December by Rubens Medina and Judy Meadows. Medina, Meadows, and Claire Germain also spoke at Program A8 at AALL's Annual Meeting in July: "Here Today—Gone Tomorrow? The Archivability of Electronic Records."

AALL Past President **Carol Billings** (cbilling@lasc.org) is Director of the Law Library, Law Library of Louisiana, New Orleans, Louisiana.



AALL/Law Library of Congress Task Force members who attended the Ithaca meeting. Front row, from left: Janine Miller (Law Society of Upper Canada Great Library), Judy Meadows (State Law Library of Montana), Carol Billings (Law Library of Louisiana), M. Kathleen Price (New York University Law Library). Back row, from left: Jay Greco (Cornell Law School), Marie-Louise Bernal (Law Library of Congress), Daniel P. Rosati (Wm. S. Hein Co.), Claire Germain (Cornell Law Library), Rubens Medina (Law Library of Congress), Dick Danner (Duke Law School), Kevin King (Supreme Court of Oklahoma).