

AICPA and the University of Mississippi

A 20-Year Partnership

Royce Kurtz, Ph.D., accounting curator, University of Mississippi Libraries

On a hot August day in 2001, a dozen semi-trucks carrying over 4,000 boxes rolled up to a warehouse loading dock on the outskirts of Oxford, Mississippi. It was the beginning of a partnership – now twenty years old and counting - between the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the University of Mississippi Libraries. The AICPA had decided the previous year to divest itself of its paper library in order to move more quickly into providing digital services to its members. The Institute put out a request to university libraries to submit proposals on how they would maintain the Institute’s library and its services.

What services and books were involved? The AICPA library had actually begun in 1918 with an endowment of \$150,000 to pay for collections and the establishment of an information bureau to answer member questions. The Institute also solicited gifts from members. The Detroit firm of Hollis, Tilton and Porte donated five rare accounting books, including Luca Pacioli’s famous 1494 treatise *Summa de Arithmetica*. The *Summa* contains the first published description of double-entry bookkeeping (and is now the most viewed book in the University’s Special Collections). The AICPA library’s rare book collection grew to 191 volumes, and the rest of the library finally grew to 33,000 books, 93,000 pamphlets, 1,300 periodical titles, and over 500 photographs. The library loaned materials to members and answered their reference questions.



R. Kurtz, M. Stocks, D. Flesher, and R. Elam look through AICPA materials.

When Jimmy Davis, Dean of the School of Accountancy at the University of Mississippi, received the invitation to submit a proposal to the AICPA, he saw an opportunity to add thousands of items to the university’s already large accounting collection. John Meador, Dean of Libraries, was also enthusiastic about the prospect of adding a world class collection to the library’s holdings. The two deans approached the University Foundation and Robert Khayat, then the chancellor of the university. He too was enthusiastic,

and the university’s resources were pledged to the proposal. The Robert M. Hearin Foundation was approached and agreed to underwrite part of the expenses of housing and re-cataloging the collection. A proposal was drafted, “Plan for a National Library of the Accounting Profession”.

Chancellor Khayat and Dean Meador flew to New York City to present the proposal to the executive board of the AICPA.

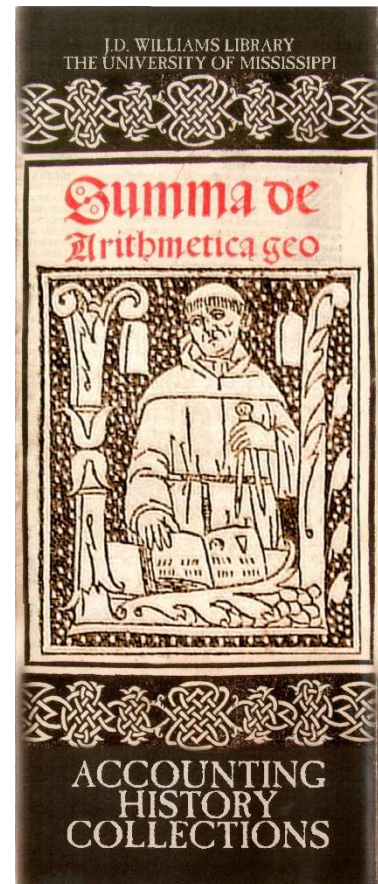
In February 2001, the University of Mississippi's proposal won the award, and the final contract was signed on June 27, 2001. After the arrival of the AICPA materials in Oxford that August, processing began. It would take the technical services division of the Library three years to catalog the new acquisition. The reference department in the J.D. Williams Library took on the task of answering AICPA members' reference questions, a challenging task for librarians not trained in accounting. The School of Accountancy lent their support by helping sort and select materials (thanks to professors Dale Flesher and Rick Elam) and by furnishing accounting graduate students to help answer reference questions and process collections. To date, the AICPA Library Service at the university library has, with the help of accounting graduate students, answered over 52,000 questions.

Soon after winning the award for the AICPA's collection, the University Library decided to pursue federal funding for a digitization program. In January 2002, with the assistance of Dean Davis, the Library secured a \$350,000 directed grant from the federal government's Institute of Museums and Library Service. The grant was to be exploratory, designed to provide an opportunity for the library to set up equipment, software, and procedures to start a digitization program.

In the summer of 2002, an informal group consisting of Dr. Bill Samson (University of Alabama), Dr. Gary Previts (Case Western University), and Dr. Dale Flesher approached the library about digitizing the early issues of the *Accounting Historian's Journal (AHJ)* and the newsletter, the *Accounting Historian's Notebook (AHN)*, both published by the Academy of Accounting Historians. This was the library's first major digitization effort. Now 40 volumes of the *AHJ*, 1974-2013, and 36 volumes of the *AHN*, 1978-2016, are freely accessible on the library's digital platform, eGrove <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/>

Having successfully launched digital versions of the *AHJ* and *AHN*, the library pursued other digital projects using the accounting collection. Old, out-of-copyright pamphlets were digitized as well as AICPA materials that were still in copyright. The AICPA material, of course, required negotiating a license agreement with the AICPA for each set of documents. *Exposure Drafts* (350 copyrighted between 1962 to 2006) and *Audit and Accounting Guides* (251 copyrighted between 1979 and 2006) were the first AICPA series to be licensed and go online.

In March 2009, Dr. Royce Kurtz, the library's accounting curator, approached the Deloitte Foundation with a proposal for a digital, web-based collection of documents that would illustrate the history of Deloitte & Touche USA (now Deloitte). The project would focus on the history of



Cover of Luca Pacioli's 1494 original *Sūma de arithmetica geometria proportioni & proportionalita*.

the Company and its predecessors in the United States from 1895 through 1983. From the early 1900s, Haskins and Sells and Touche, Niven, & Co., (both predecessor firms of Deloitte) were major forces in shaping the American accounting profession by actively publishing scholarly and professional materials, sponsoring research, and participating in the professional standards-setting organizations.

Dale Flesher and Royce Kurtz wrote the proposal and Jay Rothberg, executive secretary of the AICPA, actively supported the project. Deloitte approved the project and provided \$155,000 toward its completion. By March, 2010, 3,260 digital objects were freely available on the Library's Web page as part of the Deloitte Collection. They have been downloaded over 75,000 times by users around the world.

In July, 2012, the AICPA again approached the University of Mississippi Library about taking materials. The AICPA had retained from the original library a small Library of Record, consisting of the organization's ledger books, transcripts of council meeting minutes, semi-annual meeting minutes, minutes from public hearings, typescripts from committees, divisions and boards as well a copy of all their own publications, for a total of 354 boxes of material. These would now become part of the University's collection.

And so a new partnership began. The AICPA granted the library a license which allowed it to post digital copies of material for which the AICPA held copyright. The items had to be ten years old or older. This opened new opportunities for large and on-going digital projects.

Today the digital accounting collection on the University's eGrove platform hosts 16,000 digital objects including books, journal articles, newsletters, pamphlets, transcripts of meetings, and manuscripts. New materials are scanned in daily from our paper collections. There have now been over half a million downloads by individuals and educational and commercial organizations from across the United States and from many other countries.

The National Library of the Accounting Profession, both in paper and digitally, has been the product of many partnerships. The University Library's faculty and staff have generously helped in all the ways that it is necessary to process, maintain, and access the collection in all its formats. The School of Accountancy has offered steadfast support, particularly with its contribution of student help in answering questions and processing materials.

The partnerships have involved many from beyond this university as well. The Academy of Accounting Historians has offered important support and advice. Accounting firms, particularly Deloitte, have been generous in their support of the Library's historical and scholarly mission. The AICPA has furnished time, financial support, and resources. The AICPA has been willing to make its materials widely available to both practitioners and scholars in digital form. There are also individuals, institutions, and libraries who have contributed books and papers to the library from their own collections. Finally, there are generous donors (who wish to remain anonymous) who have contributed invaluable financial support. It is not only a partnership between the University of Mississippi and the AICPA but a partnership with the wider community of the accounting profession.