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By ANDREW D. OSBORN

The Future of the Union List of Serials

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THE *Union List of Serials (ULS)* is one of the greatest landmarks of American librarianship. After nearly thirty years of constant use it has come to be recognized as a tool of proven and indispensable value. It is a monument to Harry Miller Lydenberg and others for its promotion and planning; to Winifred Gregory Gerould for its compilation and editing on a realistic basis; and to the H. W. Wilson Company for its successful publication in the face of tremendous difficulties. Great and lasting credit attaches to all who have been associated with the work.

A thirty-year program is coming to completion this fall with the publication of the second and final supplement to the second edition of the *ULS*. Together with its supplements the second edition records, for more than five

hundred libraries in the United States and Canada, the holdings of periodicals and periodical-like publications whose first issue appeared previous to 1950. The second supplement rounds out the *ULS* as we have known it. This supplement should be bought by libraries because it will not be superseded by anything now being planned and because it has the record of wartime and postwar publications.

Impressive as the record of the *ULS* is, the full story is not told until the three complementary union lists are added: for the serial publications of foreign governments (1932), American newspapers (1937), and the publications of international congresses (1938). None of these other lists went into a second edition or a supplement, so it has been a matter of concern to librarians to realize that the union-list program has not gone ahead uniformly. Nevertheless the various lists repre-

sent a solid accomplishment, and the next generation of librarians must find the way and the means to continue a task so excellently started.

NO THIRD EDITION

The Joint Committee on the Union List of Serials, which for a number of years has been responsible for the union-list program, has decided that there will be no new edition of the *ULS* as such; likewise that there will be no more supplements. The committee realized that the breaking point had been reached, in terms of both editorial costs and the burden to contributing libraries, particularly the larger ones which have been called upon to assist the editorial work by providing much bibliographical aid in addition to the cost of checking. It was also realized that the old program involved much repetitive work, since libraries that checked for the first edition generally had to do all the work over again for the second: so a program should be sought which would permit the reporting of a title once and for all.

Accordingly the Joint Committee on the Union List of Serials has recommended that the first phase of union-list activities be concluded with the second supplement to the second edition, and that a new phase should be instituted forthwith. In this new phase the Joint Committee is lending its weight to two developments, both of which are possible through Library of Congress statesmanship and leadership. The first of these is a monthly list, cumulated at least annually, of serials that began publication on or after January 1, 1950. This work, called *New Serial Titles (NST)*, began publication in January, 1953, although a good many months had to elapse before its true nature as a union list could be realized. The second development is a punched-card file, under active discussion at the Library of Congress but still to be realized, of virtually all serial titles, new and old, in American and Canadian libraries. Once this program is well under way repetitive work should to a large extent be eliminated, and there should be adequate control over serial resources in the two countries.

NEW SERIAL TITLES

The *ULS* was conceived primarily as a reference tool for the location of sets. It is true that the smaller bulk of the individual supplements gave them added though limited

value as an acquisition tool. But it was left for *NST* to provide real book-selection value through the relatively small monthly issues. So the new publication is designed to serve both acquisition and location purposes: the former through the individual numbers, the latter through the cumulations. The plan is to supply at least one holding for each original listing, and to add further locations in the annual cumulations.

The scope of *NST* reflects the universal outlook that characterizes the new phase of union-list activities. Some types formerly excluded (e.g., annual reports and house organs) will now be comprised. But newspapers, certain categories of municipal documents as yet to be defined, and some minor types, such as comics, will still be excluded. Moreover there will be limited listing of United States government documents and United Nations documents. The Library of Congress will supply the entries for these two classes of serials and will specify that complete sets are usually found in depository libraries. One other qualification: titles which began publication prior to January 1, 1950, will be excluded, even though they were not included in any previous union list.

The Joint Committee on the Union List of Serials has introduced a new concept into the picture of serial control, namely that of primary bibliographical responsibility. As libraries report new serial holdings to the Library of Congress, one or preferably two of them will be asked to undertake the primary responsibility for maintaining a complete file and for reporting to the Library of Congress, whenever desirable, essential data relating to the file (cessation of publication, change of title, etc.). Consideration is being given to the possibility of publishing such data in *NST*. If a library accepts primary bibliographical responsibility for a given title, it should follow up more strictly than otherwise to see that its set is complete. It should have in its files some distinguishing mark for the titles it has assumed responsibility for; a distinctive color for the relevant cards on the visible index, a tab, or a tickler system of some kind. In this way work for *NST* can at the same time constitute a contribution to follow-up work, an area in which libraries have generally been notoriously weak. If a library cannot find the means to do thorough follow-up work on all its serials, it can help by paying

proper attention to the files it undertakes to maintain complete.

So the introduction of the idea of primary bibliographical responsibility is an attempt to guarantee the completeness of one or two files per title, and at the same time to have the history of an item made generally available through the cooperative interest of no more than two libraries. Since the Library of Congress is very much concerned with the problem of serial control, and since it has—very roughly speaking—about one serial title out of every two held by libraries in the United States and Canada, it naturally would be one of the two libraries accepting bibliographical responsibility in a high proportion of the cases. The other would be chosen from among the institutions that are ready to cooperate; especially a library closely connected with the issuance of a serial (e.g., a state library for the serial documents issued by its own state, or a university library for the serial publications of its own university.)

NST then has immense possibilities for extending to serials a larger measure of control than ever before. It is in effect a current union list of wide scope. And in addition it is a long awaited book-selection tool that should be checked regularly to see what new titles should be acquired by gift, purchase, or exchange. Contributing libraries must provide the entries to supplement those of the Library of Congress so the success of *NST* will be guaranteed.

THE FULL PROGRAM

Now to take stock. *NST* is gradually taking shape. Further, we have the four bibliographies produced during the first phase of *ULS* activity. These tools must be husbanded to serve libraries for many years to come. It may not be possible to replace an out-of-print volume, and it may be a number of years before the introduction of the punched-card system can provide an adequate substitute. So we find ourselves in a transition period during which we must safeguard the values we hold and actively plan for the still better years ahead when the critical problem of serial control will have been reduced to more manageable proportions.

The essence of the new program is the establishment and maintenance at the Library of Congress of a national union list of serials on IBM cards or a similar control method.

This consummation must await the procurement of the necessary funds, approximately \$1,000,000. In the formative stages contributing libraries will be asked to go through their official catalogs to report all serials they hold. That will be a less expensive process than the preparation and checking of preliminary checklists such as were used in the compilation of the *ULS*.

With such an inclusive tool in existence, libraries will still make use of the bibliographies provided in the first phase of union-list work. They may well have recourse to local and regional lists, too, before they call on the national union list in Washington. But, over and beyond this the punched-card records can and must lead to an active publication program. Probably there will never be a published alphabetical list of all titles, though it is possible to think of a number of centers in the United States and Canada where copies of the punched cards can be housed and serviced, provided these centers are ready to finance the operation. Instead of an alphabetical list, we should look forward to the continuous publication of topical, country, and regional lists, plus lists of the holdings of individual libraries. The possibilities in this direction are enormous.

A TIMELY DEVELOPMENT

Future historians may well refer to the next fifty years of library work as the age of serials. The latest annual report of the Library of Congress lends support to this possibility by saying that we are now in an era of serial publication. It says:

In the three-quarters of a century since 1876, the flood of serial publications has continued unabated. We now find ourselves in an era of serial rather than book publication. This mushrooming of serial publication may be attributed, in large measure, to the rise of popular education, the increase in the number of scholars, scientists, and technicians, all desiring to communicate with one another, and the growth of democracy with its concept of reporting at least annually to the people the progress and activities of a government, an institution, or a society.¹

Moreover, the Library of Congress estimates that 75 per cent of the publications it

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¹ *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1951-52, p. 83.*

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receives are serial in form, truly a staggering figure. And Charles H. Brown has indicated the prominent role that serials play in the field of science, by his samplings, which show that from 90 to 95 per cent of the bibliographical footnotes in scientific publications refer to articles in serial publications. More than ever, serials can be called the backbone of the research library. Harry Miller Lydenberg was right when he wanted to collect serials and current pamphlets for the New York Public Library, for he knew that out of such publications would come the monographs of the future.

In the comparatively near future we can anticipate the application of television facsimile reproduction machines to library purposes. The research libraries of the country should before too long be linked up in a network of these machines, so the resources of one can without delay be made available for all, and at a reasonable cost. When that day comes there should be a larger measure of bibliographical

control over serial publications than we now enjoy, since we can fairly anticipate that the greatest demand will fall on serials. And herein too lies part of the reason for developing the idea of primary bibliographical responsibility in the collecting of serials.

So we can see the ever-increasing significance of the union-list program. In the years that lie ahead, with their emphasis on the cooperative collecting and utilization of serials, we are fortunate in having the enterprise and leadership of the National Library in Washington to guide us. But the Library of Congress needs the full cooperation and support of the contributing libraries, for the burden is very great. We must not rest on our laurels. We must not sit back and say that the back of the union-list problem has been broken, no matter how proud we may be of past accomplishments. As far as the *ULS* is concerned our philosophy must be that the reward of good work is more work.

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