ACRL Chapters

• Lawrence E. Wikander, Williams College librarian, welcomed more than 250 attendees to the joint conference, held March 30–31, of the NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER of ACRL and the N.E. College Librarians to discuss "Alternative Catalogs: Problems and Perspectives."

Flurries of snow during this conference were a fitting complement to the flurries of comment among the conferees. There was evident frustration at the tantalizing inaccessibility of the *AACR* II text, for which ALA holds firm copyright. The much-needed educational materials to elucidate *AACR* II, indeed, are not likely to be available until January or February of 1979, according to conversation with Barbara Gates of the ALA RTSD Catalog Code Revision Committee.

Speakers and audiences alike displayed growing conviction that, with satisfactory on-line systems not possible by January 1980 and with implementation sources such as OCLC and LC insufficiently prepared to cope by that date, there may well be increasingly vocal proposals to delay implementation, despite international implications, and to push back "Day 1" until it can be approached with considerably more confidence.

Three speakers addressed the opening session on the afternoon of March 30 in the auditorium of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Maurice J. Freedman, faculty member of Columbia University's School of Library Service, began on a positive note, emphasizing that the flexibility allowed by a machine-readable data base when coupled with a system of automated authority control and inexpensive, swiftly produced computer-output microforms (COM) can, if used imaginatively, open new means of access to information for library users. From the same data base, full ISBD catalogs can be produced for networks or research libraries, while public libraries can be provided with simplified formats, more analytics, and modified subject headings. Catalogs that integrate nonprint materials and even community information (a new MARC format?) become viable alternatives.

John Knapp, Research Libraries Group, also challenged the audience to use machine-readable data bases to break out of unit-card strictures into more flexible display modes. Interweaving pragmatic experience with visionary goals, he discussed significant aspects of three alternatives to the card catalog: book, COM, and on-line.

Photocomposed book catalogs demonstrably increase ease of look-up but frequently suffer from updating problems. There will always be distaste for any system requiring users to make two searches, but absolute currency is more of a myth than a reality in existing card catalogs. COM catalogs have the distinct disadvantage of Monotype format, using a very restricted character set, but costs are less than 4 percent of the expense for book catalogs. Quarterly masters with weekly supplements are economically feasible.

Knapp predicted that the on-line catalogs of the future will involve mini-computer processors restructuring data for public service terminals. The cost for such hardware will not be prohibitive, but the unvarying high cost of software is a problem. Public service terminals need only have "read" capability and, therefore, can be one-quarter as expensive as technical service machines. The demands on public service terminals will be different: more access points, such as corporate author collocation, keyword, and Boolean search capabilities, will be possible, and weekly updating of the data file will probably suffice. COM back-up will be essential in case of down time and to cope with peak load periods.

In all three alternatives, a variety of register formats and related indexes are possible. Knapp urged that many arrangements be tried, since decisions are not irreversible when the catalog is machine-produced. He also noted that whatever the form of the catalog, the same 70 percent of cost goes into source maintenance, precataloging search, and cataloging.

Jamie Levine, NELINET, reported on a survey conducted for this conference. Three questions on current activity and three on upcoming needs were addressed to all NELINET libraries. Five libraries of the fifty-seven responding already plan to close their catalogs, while twenty-seven are undecided. A variety of alternative arrangements are being planned by the five. Although LC had indicated it expects *AACR* II to require changing 40 to 50 percent of headings, twenty-five libraries plan to work with cross-references instead of closing their catalogs.

Naturally enough, the need for education on the details of *AACR* II and on LC and OCLC plans and the need for help in dealing with conversion problems and authority file problems were cited by all libraries in the survey. Responsive to these needs, networks, which Levine surveyed separately, plan educational activities for their members. AMIGOS and SOLINET have already issued studies on COM catalogs. NELINET plans to work with OCLC "archival" tapes for the benefit of its members. OCLC itself is beginning, however slowly, to design an authority system to link old and new *AACR* forms.

A complete change of pace was provided in the late afternoon by tours of the delightful collections of the Clark Art Institute, by a reception

hosted by Blackwell North America, Inc., and the Northeast Bindery, and, still later, by a smorgasbord dinner.

After the meal, John Kountz, California State Universities and Colleges, briefly epigramized on both the "John Wayne approach" of the library willing to resist peer pressure in order to accommodate solely its own needs and decisions and the system approach, with inherent pressure to conform to someone else's authority files, formats, policies, and procedures.

Conferees gathered for Friday's sessions in the Bronfman Science Center of Williams College. The first brief panel of the morning dealt with practical details of converting catalog data to machine-readable form as a precursor to alternative catalogs. John Linford, director of NELINET, led off, posing general questions of the philosophy of conversion. He discussed the implications of four basic decisions: whether to inventory before conversion or after, whether to aim for retrospective conversion or not, whether and where to display full MARC records, whether to do the job in-house or on contact.

Lawrence Buckland, president of INFORONICS, contributed to the panel details of three projects undertaken by his firm, which involved successfully upgrading a variety of information sources to MARC II format for predictable manipulation. These included using machine-readable data bases not up to MARC II standards, LC copy, and "from scratch" bibliographies. He emphasized that OCLC member libraries should set their own high standards for updating records and normalizing holdings information if they expect to make use of their retrospective tapes for conversion projects.

A representative from Blackwell North America, Inc., Michael J. G. Moen, identified a few additional decisions to be made when planning conversion and declared that management decisions can be safely made on the basis of analysis of a 1,000-item sample from any library's shelflist. He urged the preparation of guidelines to aid editing teams and that through-put speed be emphasized over precision in bringing an individual record into agreement with an institution's holdings.

Refreshed by a mid-morning coffee break provided by CL Systems, Inc., conferees returned for a second brief panel on the topic of utilizing machine-readable data bases. Glyn T. Evans, director of library services for SUNY Central Administration, discussed two management uses that can be made of a data base: assessment of collection strengths to evaluate collection development policies and the placing of collection statistics in the context of institutional programs to provide quantifiable evaluation of funding levels.

Bela Hatvany, founder of CL Systems, Inc., confined his remarks primarily to the growing capabilities of his company's product. Marketed as a circulation system, the product has been expanded and modified as a result of user feedback until it is gradually moving toward complete catalog capability, with circulation and "hold for use" information posted to the catalog records.

The final panelist, John Kountz, informally exhorted the audience to live up to the excitement of being on the edge of a new librarianship by using this opportunity to expedite and enlarge service.

After a "dutch treat" noontime break sent conferees walking briskly to numerous small Williamstown restaurants, Maureen Hutchinson, associate librarian for readers services of the University of Toronto, was the featured speaker of the afternoon session. She traced the preplanning and development of the university's COM catalog, which uses both microfilm and microfiche formats. User acceptance has been high. A Canada Council grant has been awarded to study use and user satisfaction of the COM catalog.

Major problems encountered at Toronto have included the necessary maintenance of the old "closed" catalog, the high visibility of spelling and filing errors in the new catalog format, lack of cross-references in the COM catalog, and lack of machine-readable authority files. The university plans to change from a classed arrangement of entries in the main bibliographic register with the next edition. The possibility of providing the supplements to the COM catalog in an on-line mode will be explored.

Maurice J. Freedman returned to the podium to summarize and conclude the conference. His rational and humane assessment of the challenges, the problems, and the possible rewards of catalog conversion called on the conferees to reaffirm the classic service goals of the card catalog.

Edited tapes of the conference sessions will be available. Contact Diane Lutz, Director, New Hampshire College Library, 25000 N. River Rd., Manchester, NH 03104.—*Joan Stockard, Readers Services Librarian, Wellesley College Library, and Editor*, ACRL New England Chapter NEWS. ■■

Freezing Card Catalogs

The Association of Research Libraries has published *Freezing Card Catalogs*, a discussion of the administrative problems research library directors might encounter as they plan to freeze their catalogs, persuade their institutions to go along with the idea, and actually bring alternative catalogs into being.

Copies of Freezing Card Catalogs are available for $3 (prepaid) from the Association of Research Libraries, 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

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RQ, Reference and Adult Services Division, ALA, v.15, no. 4, Summer, 1976. pp. 353-355. Reviewed by Michael O. Shannon, Herbert Lehman College, Bronx, New York.

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Choice, Association of College and Research Libraries, ALA, v. 13, no. 8 (October, 1976) unsigned.

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. . . and from these earlier reviews in the library literature.

- BOOKLIST, ALA. v. 72, No. 12 (February 15, 1976) "Reference and Subscription Books Reviews" (unsigned) pp. 875-6.
"For large academic and public libraries whose patrons do extensive research in subjects in which the government may have a controlling interest, the *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalog* and its Index will provide access to materials heretofore unavailable and even unknown, although their existence may have been assumed or suspected. In the expectation that future issues will appear and that coverage will expand, the *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalog* with its *Cumulative Subject Index* is recommended for these large libraries or any library whose patrons require access to this type of information."

- GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS, v. 3, No. 2 (forthcoming 1976)
The following was extracted from a review by Professor Robin Higham, Department of History, Kansas State University. Professor Higham is also author of *Official Histories* (1970) and an Editor of *Military Affairs* and *Aerospace Historian.*
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- SERIALS REVIEW, July/September, 1975, page 51.
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