

Cooperation and the Physical Book¹

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LIBRARIANS do not have to be reminded that we are living in an age characterized by a flood tide of books, periodicals, and other materials of research. They know already that our forests are being laid waste in order to provide the paper to feed our hungry printing presses, mimeograph machines, and all the other devices now used to bring the written word before the reader.

It might be emphasized, however, that, in coping with the flood, librarians are facing a double challenge: One involves the housekeeping aspect, the other is the matter of adequately meeting the needs of the scholar. To explain what I mean, let us take as an example a recent research item—the full reports of the Nuremberg war-crimes trials. I am told that the reports, testimony, and accompanying documents were issued in mimeograph form, and the full set fills many large packing cases—an entire freight car.

In considering the implications of acquiring this set, the librarian first faces the housekeeping aspect. Does he have room for it in his stacks; does he have staff enough to unpack, sort, arrange, list, classify, catalog, bind, and shelve the material; how must he allocate budget to provide staff, binding, and supplies involved in processing it; where is it to be shelved in order to be convenient to its users and still not be in

the way of others? This is the housekeeping aspect, and it is this aspect that has primarily concerned librarians when they worry with their presidents about more stacks, larger staffs, and bigger budgets. It is the problem we are thinking about when we read in Fremont Rider's book that university libraries double in size every 16 years.

The housekeeping aspect is, however, only one side of our larger problem. Perhaps, of the two sides, it is the less important. The other side concerns the compulsion to provide adequately research materials for the scholar. For short, let us call this the resources-enriching aspect. In the case of the Nuremberg trials example, this aspect involves such questions as: Considering all the research needs on the campus, is this something we *need* to acquire? Is the cost of this item something that I can justify, either in terms of an honest allocation of book funds or in terms of proper use of state money—or institution money? In many ways, the resources-enriching aspect is the more difficult side of the larger problem, since the librarian must draw that difficult line between what he will acquire and what he will not acquire—a line that can never be drawn to include what he would *like* to acquire or what his faculty feels that he *must* acquire.

During the last 30 years there have been attempts on the part of American librarians to meet this over-all problem cooperatively. Some cooperative plans have emphasized the housekeeping aspect, others the resources-enriching aspect—most of them have at least touched both sides. It is my purpose in this

¹ A paper presented at a joint meeting of the Association of College and Reference Libraries and the Reference Section of Illinois Library Association, at Grand Rapids, Mich., Nov. 10, 1949.

paper to mention some of them and to attempt to indicate to what degree each one has met one side or the other of the double-headed problem.

Early in this history we come upon the *Union List of Serials*, probably one of the most successful cooperative ventures American librarians have undertaken. Has it solved any of our problems on the house-keeping side? The answer is "yes," at least to the degree that librarians have avoided the purchase of little-used periodicals found to be available in neighboring institutions. One does not know how much this kind of use has been made of the *Union List*, but we are probably justified in thinking that over the years it has been considerable, especially among the medium and smaller-sized libraries. On the resources-enriching side, the *Union List* has been of enormous importance. Every time an interlibrary loan librarian uses it to locate and borrow a requested periodical the *Union List* has served to provide a reader with a "resource" not otherwise available locally. We can say that, in a generalized way, the *Union List* increases many times the available resources in the library that uses it.

Carrying the *Union List* idea into the world of separates, we have the notion of the union catalog. Being a larger and more complex problem, the union catalog has not had the universal success of the serials list. Except for three or four, most of the regional union catalogs have had uncertain histories; most of them came into existence through the happenstance of cheap W.P.A. labor. Those attached to bibliographical centers have prospered because of continuous support. And of all the union catalogs, the national catalog in the Library of Congress has, of course, been the most successful.

Let us attempt to evaluate the union catalog in terms of its ability to solve the double-barreled problem under discussion.

Theoretically, a regional catalog should help the university librarian to decide whether or not to purchase a given item requested by a faculty member. I do not believe, however, that this use is often made. For three years the Pacific Northwest Bibliographic Center advertised to its members a service providing the checking of proposed buying lists. This was offered as a plan for encouraging libraries not to buy expensive and less-used sets already available in the region when book funds might be spent more wisely for something else. During the three years, I do not recall that the Bibliographic Center checked more than two or three such lists, although I believe the library in which the center was located did occasionally check order cards against the regional union catalog. This is a case of a potential not adequately exploited, and may be explained by the nature of the institutions involved. As for using the national Union Catalog for this purpose, I should be surprised to learn that locating requests sent to Washington are very often used in deciding whether or not to buy, to discard, or to store material.

Locating for interlibrary loan, however, is another matter, and we justify the cost of maintaining union catalogs, I am sure, in terms of this service. According to our division of the problem, this is a successful cooperative device for enriching resources.

The three bibliographical centers are important cooperative ventures intended to meet the problem under discussion by means of a sensible sharing of resources. Due to lack of adequate funds, unfortunately, the bibliographical centers have not lived up to their promise. Much of their activities have centered around the union catalog and its locating and interlibrary lending services—not because it was planned that way, but because the small available budgets were largely spent in maintaining the disproportionately expensive union catalog.

Still another cooperative attempt to gain control over the physical book has been that of subject specialization agreements. The bibliographic centers have tried to promote them, local agreements have been discussed and in some instances informal understandings have been followed over many years. In 1941 a national specialization conference brought some 35 librarians together in New York City to come to grips with this compelling but complex possibility. The published proceedings of this conference are an excellent statement of the problem, but they indicate that little that was tangible resulted. In Chicago, the Newberry and the John Crerar libraries have always had an understanding as to their respective areas, and this has meant enriched resources for the scholar in their territory. But, aside from instances like this one, very little has been accomplished—certainly in the Middle West—that helps the university librarian cope with the great flow of research materials.

The New England Deposit Library is an outstanding example of a tangible device to meet the housekeeping aspect of our problem. An eligible New England library with stack-space trouble can get relief by renting space and storing its less-used material in the Boston warehouse, and it can store there for less money than it costs to keep it in its own stacks. The additional price it pays, of course, is that deposited material is available on 48-hour call instead of on five-minute call. During its first 10 years, the New England Deposit Library has not fulfilled its founders' hopes in terms of its resources-enriching possibilities, and not many New England libraries have used it to solve housekeeping problems.

As a cooperative device, the Farmington Plan must be mentioned. Its aim is primarily to enrich resources, since it looks toward bringing into one or more American libraries at least one copy of everything

published abroad. Since the complexities, the troubles, and the criticisms of the Farmington Plan are widely known, we need not go into them here, except to mention that many libraries feel that the present system of assigning Farmington acquisitions to libraries according to subject priorities is far from being perfect, and that it would be better if we had regional depositories in each of which would be placed one copy of every Farmington acquisition. And yet, taking everything into consideration, the Farmington Plan *is* probably the outstanding cooperative step American libraries have taken in terms of that resources-enriching aspect of the problem about which we are speaking today. There may also be certain housekeeping aspects some Farmington participants are realizing. These show up, however, only when a library resists the temptation to acquire an item known to be available in a neighboring institution.

To mention other cooperative ventures would be to make my remarks longer than they already are. I have saved for the last the latest cooperative plan, and probably one of the most promising. I refer to the promise of the Midwest Inter-Library Center, recently created by the Midwest Inter-Library Corporation with its one-million-dollar capital fund.

Librarians who have watched the developing plans of the Midwest Inter-Library Center have thought first and primarily of the housekeeping aspects. They see the possibility of relief for overcrowded library buildings in the chance to store little-used research sets in the Chicago center. They see the savings in additional building, and sometimes they see the savings in staff. Some of them, however, have not completely understood the tremendous potential for increasing regional resources, and since the plans for the Chicago center are still evolving, I should like to take the time to relate the center's initial program to

this resources-enriching aspect.

High on the list of initial programs is a state documents project. Under the plan, library members will select those state documents from their collections that they wish to define as "frequently used." The rest will be picked up by the Inter-Library Center in its truck. In the Chicago building the less-used documents from 11 member institutions will be assembled. A trained staff will organize, arrange, and shelve this miscellaneous collection, eliminating duplicates, and undertaking to acquire any and all items that are lacking. With a staff that is large enough, it is hoped that within one year's time, the center might announce that it has assembled a reasonably complete state documents collection of the 48 states. Such a collection would be an active one, kept current by adding publications as issued.

Librarians with whom the state documents program has been discussed feel that it should serve a number of purposes: (1) It will relieve crowded conditions in documents stacks, (2) it will reduce staff costs now devoted to acquiring, checking, and listing current acquisitions, (3) it will reduce significant cataloging and binding costs, and (4) above all, in most of the institutions, it will mean that the research scholar will have access to a more complete collection than he had before. This last point is the important one. It may seem to provide the solution to the dilemma put in these words by a Minnesota librarian. "It is hard for me to justify spending Minnesota money for a complete collection of out-of-state documents, and yet I feel that we should have them available for our faculty." So far, most of the important libraries in the area have attempted to assemble reasonably complete collections, but we would be wise to ask ourselves if 10 or 12 complete state documents collections are necessary in the

Middle West when a central collection in Chicago could do the job.

A similar approach is being made among other types of research materials. The textbook program calls for assembling in Chicago the large and small textbook collections now to be found in member libraries. The center will organize these into one unified and well-rounded collection, so that the scholar will find in one place a collection far more adequate than he had before.

The foreign dissertations program will undertake a similar job. Worth mentioning also, are the trade organs and house organs collections, and the college catalogs. These are under consideration as part of the initial program because complexities will not too much interfere with rapid accomplishment. They all have merit in terms of both the housekeeping and the resources-enriching aspects of cooperative effort.

On several campuses where I have talked with librarians, faculty, and administrators about the Midwest Inter-Library Center, I have found that the administrators become enthusiastic about the savings implied in the housekeeping aspects, but it is the faculty that sees the great promise in the resources-enriching. Three examples will suffice to illustrate the kind of things that appeal to the research man.

The dean of one of our larger law schools brought up the Nuremberg war-crimes trial proceedings. He waxed eloquent over its importance in legal research in the years to come. He became ecstatic at the thought of having the complete records on his own campus, but he became seriously realistic when he added that it was hardly something his library should invest in, but could not the law schools in the region acquire it jointly and keep it in the Chicago center?

At another university library a history professor entered the librarian's office while I was there. He had order cards for seven

German newspapers—microfilm files, he wanted, covering the period 1918 to 1935. He made a very eloquent plea that they be acquired—his research program demanded it, his students would use it again and again over the years. The librarian pointed out that it would cost about \$15,000. For a moment the professor became thoughtful, and then he said: "These newspapers should be important to research in several of our midwest universities. Could not the several libraries chip in and buy them and deposit them in this new Chicago library?"

There are probably three or four copies in midwest libraries of the *Stenographische Berichte* of the Austrian Parliament. None of these copies is what you would call heavily used. But in Minneapolis I talked to a political science professor who *had* used it from time to time. He volunteered this idea, and I use his own words: "I could get along almost as well with a copy in Chicago—on 24-hour call. Couldn't you arrange to have the two or three or four copies of this thing sent to Chicago, and then could you sell the duplicate sets and use the proceeds to acquire something important that *none* of us now have?"

These three instances should illustrate the point. To me they indicate that there may be a solution to the ever-more-complicated problem of control over the flood tide

of the printed word. In the distant future we may know of other methods for the documentation of human ideas. For some little time, however, we will be dealing with books and periodicals, newspapers, microfilms, and microcards.

Is the Midwest Center the final step? Of course not. The ingenuity of librarians will go on to other devices for meeting the challenge imposed by the great increase of materials. What this future is we cannot know. But we have hints that the midwest plan may be the pattern for developments elsewhere and possibly for a national plan. During the last two or three weeks, a member of the Harvard library staff has been visiting research libraries between Boston and Philadelphia for the purpose of discussing a northeastern regional library patterned in many ways after the Midwest Center. I hope I am not revealing any secrets if I report that a rural spot in Stamford, Conn., has been mentioned as a possible location for a northeastern regional library, and that libraries in the area are talking pretty seriously.

Regional libraries, serving as reservoirs of marginal materials for existing research libraries, and a national plan to develop them rationally, may be a twentieth-century solution, and perhaps a few of us may live to see them in operation.

Drexel Offers Scholarships

The Drexel Institute of Technology School of Library Science will grant three tuition scholarships for the academic year 1950-51. Applicants for these scholarships must be graduates of accredited colleges or universities. Application should be made to the Dean of the School of Library Science, Drexel Institute of Technology, 32nd and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia 4, Pa., before April 15, 1950.