

*The Evolving Virtual Library: Visions and Case Studies.* Ed. Laverna M. Saunders. Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 1996. 153p. \$39.50. ISBN 1-57387-013-7. LC 95-39544.

This book includes eight essays that together present an excellent overview of the development of the virtual library in the first half of the 1990s. Four conference presentations from a day-long session at the Eighth Annual Computers in Libraries Conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1993, form the core of the volume. The case studies ("how we did it" essays) address the practical issues faced in developing the virtual library in a range of settings: a regional K-12 network, a public library system, a statewide university library network, and a major academic research center. These conference papers are supplemented by three additional essays that broaden the scope to the international level and address content issues related to electronic texts and electronic publishing. An introductory essay by Laverna M. Saunders and Maurice Mitchell contextualizes the diverse essays by tracing the development of the virtual library in various settings.

The editor, Laverna M. Saunders, Dean of the Library and Instructional and Learning Support at Salem State College in Massachusetts, is an authority on virtual libraries. She has written extensively on the subject in various journals, including *Computers in Libraries* for which she is a contributing editor. She also edited a collection of papers from the Seventh Annual Computers in Libraries Conference, which was published in 1993. The credentials of the various contributors to this volume also reflect expertise and an intimate knowledge of the projects and issues they address. The collection includes a serviceable index. Most essays include bibliographic references, and many are profusely illustrated.

Most of the papers in the collection

are descriptive rather than analytic. Bernard A. Margolis's paper presents a description of the information resources, especially locally created databases with community information, provided by the Pikes Peak Library system in Colorado. Papers by Connie Stout and George S. Machovec are "how we did it" case studies. Stout describes how the State of Texas overcame numerous barriers (political, economic, institutional, technological) in developing a statewide network linking K-12 classrooms, educators, and community members. As an interesting contrast, Machovec describes how Arizona State University (ASU) took the lead in developing network connectivity on a regional basis for various constituencies. Machovec also describes ASU's Virtual Library Demonstration Project, where librarians, faculty, and computer experts work together on projects for developing and implementing new computer products and services.

Of particular interest to academic librarians, Project Mercury at Carnegie Mellon University is perhaps one of the most notable efforts in research and development of the virtual library at a major academic research center. Barbara G. Richards describes how the project has approached the goal of creating an infrastructure capable of delivering all types of networked information to desktop PCs in an environment where the location of users and resources is irrelevant. She discusses the technical details of architecture and interface design, and describes the range of resources and databases available through the campus network. Project Mercury illustrates the importance of collaboration among university computer centers and libraries, learned societies, commercial firms, and other universities.

Dennis Nicholson presents a brief history of BUBL (Bulletin Board for Librarians), an information service for li-

brarians in the United Kingdom. Despite minimal funding and reliance on the volunteer work of librarians and library school students, BUBL grew rapidly in the early 1990s from a bulletin board to an extensive information resource provider serving librarians throughout the world.

The final two essays in the collection address issues of information content in the virtual library, specifically, electronic texts and electronic journals. Susan Hockey, Director of the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH), established by Rutgers and Princeton in 1991, discusses the center's efforts to create methodologies for developing, maintaining, and making available electronic texts. Because of the uniqueness of the medium, CETH has worked toward developing standardized text-encoding, as well as methods for collecting and disseminating texts. And it has engaged in extensive educational and support services.

Michael Strangelove, publisher of the *Internet Business Journal*, describes his work in developing the *Directory of Electronic Journals and Newsletters* and discusses current trends and future prospects for electronic journals. In order to prevent "free market forces of profit and privatization" from solely "determin[ing] the shape of scholarly communication," Strangelove calls for the collaborative efforts of librarians, universities, and learned societies to "produce, archive, disseminate, and legitimate" electronic publishing.

Strangelove's call for collaboration is a chord struck throughout the book. *Collaboration* nearly equals *virtual library* as a prominent catchword/phrase of the library literature of the 1990s. Yet, ex-

cept for Strangelove's essay, the opposite and equally significant concept of conflict is rarely discussed in this collection of essays. The successful projects described in the case studies must surely have faced problems of conflicting interests or turf battles among various constituencies. Some discussion of this would have been enlightening.

Saunders, in her preface to the book, expresses the hope that the case studies would serve as models for others. In the context of the rapidly changing electronic environment, however, these essays are too dated to serve this function as well as they might have in 1993. Nicholson alludes to this in his paper on BUBL. Having written his original draft in June 1993, he found it necessary to add an addendum in August 1994. As he cogently observes, "If you are reading this at a much later date, don't stake your reputation on things being the same." Although many of the issues addressed in the articles are the same, the lengthy book-publishing cycle reveals the shortcomings of the monograph as a medium of current information. Perhaps this in itself illustrates the significance of the virtual library in providing access to information on rapidly changing subjects.

Despite the shortcomings noted, there is much of value in *The Evolving Virtual Library*. It is essential professional reading, particularly as an introduction to the multiplicity of issues and approaches to the development of the virtual library. It will likely endure as documentation of the virtual library in the last decade of the millennium.—James L. Terry, *New York University*