

## Aspects of Library Cooperation

**L**IBRARY COOPERATION is a favorite subject of conference speakers.<sup>1</sup> It is a topic which has consumed tons of paper in our library periodicals. In proportion to real accomplishment, probably more has been said and written about cooperation than about any other single aspect of librarianship. Yet there are aspects of library cooperation that have been relatively neglected in our many discussions and surveys of this subject.

There is an important distinction between two kinds of interlibrary cooperation—between that concerned with the apparatus for mobilizing and using existing library resources, and that concerned with adding to and enriching resources we already have.

The first kind has to do with the familiar devices of union catalogs, union lists, bibliographic centers, surveys of resources, and so forth. All of these tools perform important functions. They help us find a particular book or journal or film that is needed. They are important. Scholarship and research would be in a sorry state today without them. At the same time there is something missing here. Even if all the books in the great libraries of the country were to be listed in the National Union Catalog, this would still be no guarantee that the particular book that I might want is going to be found, for the simple reason that no mechanism exists for anticipating my need for this item and for making cer-

tain that some library somewhere has acquired it. Although the cooperative locating devices do mobilize the resources of a great many large and diversified libraries, they still lead only to books which exist in those libraries as a result of the independent and uncoordinated acquisitions policies of each of them. They lead us to books that are in libraries other than our own, but they contribute nothing toward bringing a needed book into a library somewhere.

The interlibrary loan picture is affected by relevant characteristics of a library's acquisitions policy. A typical college library in the Middle West builds its collection in response to faculty requests for books and periodicals and the librarian's interpretation of them in relation to institutional policy. With a modest book budget, this usually results in little more than a core collection. Neighboring institutions of similar size and wealth are doing much the same thing. The same kind of libraries buy most of the same books. They subscribe to most of the same journals. Though they reject thousands of items as being too special or too expensive in relation to potential use, by and large they all reject the same items. The interlibrary loan librarian in one of these college libraries knows, or soon learns, that when an item is not in his library's bookstacks it is not likely to be in the bookstacks of the similar libraries around him either. Naturally he turns to the larger university libraries in the region or to the library centers in Chicago, New York, Washington, or Cambridge.

Among universities the situation is similar. Their libraries acquire for local needs, well- or ill-defined. When a new

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journal is announced, the desirability of entering a subscription is weighed by the librarian and the faculty on each campus, and a decision is reached either to subscribe or to pass it up. By and large, the pros and cons are about the same on each campus, and, if the University of Wisconsin decides to enter a subscription, it is for most of the same reasons that subscriptions will be entered at the University of Minnesota, at the University of Illinois, at the University of Michigan, and at Princeton. If the subscription is rejected, the reasons are about the same as the reasons for rejecting it at the other places.

Although the percentage of unique items in a group of university libraries is apt to be higher than in the case of college libraries, there are relatively few factors that influence one institution to acquire materials different from those acquired in university libraries of comparable size and offering similar programs. This leads again to the situation in which the interlibrary loan librarian has his best results when he turns to larger institutions, such as Harvard or the Library of Congress. This system works pretty well. For most of us there is always a bigger institution from which we may borrow, but this has the effect of requiring the larger institutions to carry a disproportionate burden in supplying books on interlibrary loan to their smaller sister institutions.

Library cooperation concerned only with mobilizing and using existing resources does leave something to be desired. How about the other kind—the kind concerned with adding to and enriching those resources we already have?

In the first place, cooperative acquisition is a recent development in librarianship. Except for occasional instances of subject field specialization and instances where regional or national needs have been recognized in an individual library's buying policy, the most conspic-

uous example of cooperative acquisitions on the American scene is the Farmington Plan. The Farmington Plan adds to our total library resources many books that would not otherwise be acquired. It substantially increases the probability that a requested item will be found in at least one American library. The most important thing is that it does this in accordance with a plan. The cooperative acquisitions programs of the Midwest Inter-Library Center, the Hampshire Inter-Library Center, and the Southeastern Interlibrary Research Facility seek out and identify the books and journals that participating libraries will not otherwise acquire. These books and journals are the ones which are then added, by collective action, to the total library resources of the respective groups. Again, the enrichment of resources is carried on in accordance with a plan. As a form of library cooperation it is different in both nature and purpose from what has heretofore commonly been regarded as library cooperation—the erecting of apparatus for locating books and journals in other institutions, books and journals which were acquired for local reasons and for local clientele without reference to regional or national needs.

One kind of library cooperation is not necessarily better nor more important than the other. Each has its place, each its value. But our planning in the future can be more realistic if the distinction between the two is clearly recognized.

Successful inter-institutional library cooperation requires, as an essential ingredient, *the will to cooperate*. I am sure we are all prepared to say that we want to cooperate. But cooperation is easier said than done. He who would cooperate must be prepared to give a little and must often give this little before he receives anything in return.

If my neighbor has a lawnmower and I do not, it is fairly easy for me to cooperate in sharing the single lawnmower.

But even for me the situation is not perfect because there will be occasions when I want to cut my grass when my neighbor is using the lawnmower. This is an inconvenience that I can resolve in two ways: I can relax and postpone the mowing, or I can tense up, become irritated, and finally buy my own lawnmower. At that point cooperation ceases. However, if I am broke and cannot buy a lawnmower, I have as alternatives, the first one, again, of relaxing and cheerfully postponing my grass-cutting, or I can sit and fume and boil and curse my neighbor and the whole principle of cooperation.

The analogy can be translated to the library scene and to a particular case. About three years ago a microcard publisher announced as a new annual service microcard copies of the annual reports of the leading American corporations, those 1,100 listed on the New York Stock Exchange. For \$280 a library could subscribe and would receive each year on microcards all of these annual reports in a convenient, space-saving format. Iowa State University proposed that the Midwest Inter-Library Center subscribe to a single copy of these cards to be housed at the Center for the collective use of the then sixteen supporting members. Iowa pointed out that these annual reports were desirable to have, would be used infrequently, could be mailed easily in an ordinary envelope, and that a shared copy at the Center would certainly serve Iowa's purposes and would probably serve the purposes of the other members at a cost per member library of roughly one-sixteenth of \$280, instead of the full amount.

Following its usual procedure, the Center circularized Iowa's proposal. All member institutions but one reported agreement. This member reported that its business school was engaged in a research activity which required frequent access to corporation annual reports and for this

reason its business library had decided it must buy the microcards and have them immediately at hand. According to a fundamental rule at the Center, the purchase by one of the members made this item out of scope for the Center, and the Center announced to its member libraries that it would not subscribe to the microcard corporation reports for the reason that Institution X was going to buy it. Iowa and Wisconsin were two institutions which considered this result in respect to their own needs and came to the conclusion that a copy at Institution X was not equal to a copy at the Center (for reasons involving priority of demand, equality of use, mailing time, etc.), and these two institutions decided they needed to subscribe themselves. Thus three copies—at Library X, at Iowa, and at Wisconsin—were bought.

This story is not intended to be an indictment of Library X for refusing to play ball, because, as a matter of fact, the reasons for X doing what it did were valid and compelling. Cooperation among individualistic institutions such as libraries is never easy. It is one thing for the MILC members to assert as a principle that they wish to share some of their funds for the joint acquisition of little-used materials. It is quite another matter when we get down to cases and find that Library A wants to have a proposed item at home, Library B has no earthly use for it in the first place, and Library C doesn't think it should invest even one-eighteenth of the cost of an item which it might itself decide to buy next year. The fact remains that there are instances when the sharing technique does work, usually to the degree that the participants want it to work. The will to cooperate means more than lip-service to a principle. It means a real willingness to give a little today, because, in the long haul, reciprocity sets in, and cooperation pays off.

The will to cooperate means quite a

number of things: It means being patient and philosophical when my neighbor is using the lawnmower on the day my own grass needs cutting. It means one concedes occasionally, and that sometimes these concessions seem important and difficult at the time. It means one faces inconveniences, sometimes at embarrassing moments. It means for a librarian, a new outlook concerning the relative importance of pride in the size and greatness of his own collection and a true sense of service to his clientele. It sometimes means apparent decline in service to readers: The professor who wants all the books in his own office, or at least in a departmental library across the hall, has had to accept the realities of life and to have a great many of the books he needs two blocks away in the central library, unless his institution is going to go broke buying multiple copies. The scholar may need to make a further adjustment in his thinking and his habits. Unless his institution is going to go broke buying all the books for all the campus research programs, he is going to have to share the less-used ones with neighboring institutions, in the form of single copies located perhaps in another city but accessible on interlibrary loan or from a regional center. The will to cooperate means realizing that, although the alternatives sometimes appear to be having something at home, as against having it in another library two hundred miles away, an honest evaluation of the realities would show that the true alternatives are having it two hundred miles away, as against not having it at all. It means the realization that cooperation and sharing pay off in the long run rather than promptly on Monday morning.

One can weigh the disadvantages, inconveniences, and concessions involved in the sharing of books and in interlibrary cooperation, but all these inconveniences are out-weighed when the tremendous advantages are considered. The

most compelling point is that our society today requires access to such a multiplicity of books, journals, reports, and government documents that no single institution can hope to acquire everything needed for research on its own campus but must cooperate with its sister institutions to acquire them and service them collectively.

What is appropriate to share? You and I, if we share the same office, could conceivably share the same telephone book. If we live and work a mile apart we should each have his own telephone book. But living a mile apart, or even a thousand miles apart, will not seriously impair our ability to share a back file of the journal of the Cuban Library Association. The libraries of Knox College and of Beloit College could probably share a single file of the Hansard *Parliamentary Debates*, because on neither campus would these volumes be used often. On the other hand, the University of Illinois and the University of Wisconsin could share a copy of Hansard only with inconvenience. What would be more appropriate for these larger libraries to share would be a run of the Australian parliamentary proceedings or those of British Columbia. Although this point may seem obvious, it is one which is frequently overlooked. The president of an Ohio college proposed, about four years ago, that all the libraries in Ohio—public, college, university, the state library, libraries large and small—should together build a library storehouse which would be a center of state-wide cooperation, on all the libraries, presumably, sharing the same books. For Wooster College and Ohio State University to share the same books is a little like the First National Bank and me sharing our money. Of course Wooster can always borrow books from the large collection at the University (and I am sure it frequently does), but this is not the same as library cooperation. True library cooperation

implies at least a degree of reciprocity. Sharing of books works best when the books are little-used in the libraries that plan to do the sharing. This is the best general criterion. Let us be fairly cold-blooded about this. When we decide to explore possibilities for cooperation and reciprocal sharing, let us ask the first question first: What are we going to share?

Library cooperation costs money. When the presidents of midwestern universities decided to organize a Midwest Inter-Library Center I am afraid that some of them briefly hoped that library budgets in their own institutions might thereby be reduced substantially, or that they would never again have a request for a building addition. Such hopes are clearly unrealistic. We are living in an expanding economy in every sense of the phrase. We see this trend everywhere in research libraries. The recently issued list of journals abstracted in *Chemical Abstracts* includes 22 per cent more titles than the 1951 list. The expanding cultural and industrial consciousness in Africa and Asia means more government publications, more newspapers, more journals, more everything from countries whose output libraries in this part of the world collected only casually in the past. What a cooperative enterprise like the Midwest Inter-Library Center is able to do is to contribute toward making the upward curve a little less steep for the individual libraries in the area. Since the Center collects state documents, court reports, dissertations, house organs, newspapers, chemical journals from obscure places, government publications from India, Israel, and other diverse sources, its member libraries are able to expand at a rate somewhat less staggering than they would otherwise need to do. Book budgets in the eighteen member libraries of MILC continue to increase. The budget of the Center itself increases. The member libraries are now supporting at the

Center an operating budget close to \$90,000 a year. This is cooperation with a price tag. It causes some of the universities' business vice-presidents to question the purpose of the Midwest Center. We librarians must be astute enough to see what is really happening. We must recognize that the scholars in these member institutions have access to a lot of material to which they would not have access if it were not assembled at the Center by the eighteen supporting libraries, or, alternatively, that would be collected hit-or-miss by these libraries individually, and with a price tag much greater.

This can be stated another way: Cooperation, in the case of the MILC, means that, although the libraries that support the Center are spending more money for books now than they were ten years ago, they are spending less than they would if they were themselves collecting the materials to which they now have access through the cost-sharing principle on which the Center is based. This principle is one that applies generally to library cooperation, whether it is the *Union List of Serials* or the Bibliographic Center in Seattle. Library cooperation costs money, but what that money buys costs each participant less than it would cost without cooperation.

Three recent developments in the program of the Midwest Inter-Library Center are worth a brief special report.

Under the subject-field priority system of the Farmington Plan, a number of university libraries are receiving single copies of all the significant books published in a number of foreign countries. This involves a new concept, that of "complete coverage." The complete coverage idea is an answer to a point I raised earlier. We ought to take steps to guarantee that a book which might be needed some time in the future is going to be found in some library somewhere, instead of relying on chance. It is an im-

portant concept, but one about which we have not done much until recently.

The public libraries in the British Isles are developing complete coverage of books published in Great Britain, and a number of fascinating formulae have been developed for the division of subject responsibilities and for sharing costs. At the Midwest Inter-Library Center we have recently approached the concept of complete coverage for journals in fields related to chemistry.<sup>2</sup> The National Science Foundation has indicated its support for a similar project covering periodical subscriptions in the field of the biological sciences.

When the Harvard Microfilm Newspaper Project was started about fifteen years ago one objective was the increase of the number of foreign newspapers generally available in the United States. Harvard received a Rockefeller Foundation grant to initiate the project. In the course of time, the project was filming some thirty foreign newspapers, and the cost of supporting it was derived from the sale of positive prints to libraries at a price which included the cost of making a positive plus a portion of the cost of making the negative. In the case of some titles the sale of positives took care of the total cost of microfilming. In other cases it did not. About three years ago, Keyes Metcalf did some arithmetic and came to the conclusion that selling prints to support the project had the effect of decreasing the total number of newspaper titles filmed. Mr. Metcalf's arithmetic went something like this: The project was producing negatives of thirty newspapers at an average cost of \$100 per year each; total cost, \$3,000. Assuming twenty-five print-purchasing libraries, buying an average of five positives each at a cost of \$40 per positive; total cost, \$5,000. Thus, for a grand total of \$8,000 per year, twenty-five libraries were each

gaining access to five newspapers, and the collective activity was making thirty newspapers available in the country. Now, asked Metcalf, if we were to spend this same \$8,000 differently—namely, to create a national pool of lending positives—how much would we be able to buy? His answer was that \$8,000 would buy a negative and a lending positive of eighty different newspapers (instead of thirty) because duplication of titles among libraries would be eliminated. This gain in coverage would assume that participating libraries would be willing and able to share a single positive copy of each title, and, although Metcalf was far from naive on this point, he felt certain that the principle was worth trying. This is the principle upon which is based the ARL-sponsored Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project, inaugurated in January 1956.

The Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project now acquires 148 foreign newspapers, with representative titles from most of the countries of the world outside the United States. It includes Canada, Britain, France, and Germany, of course, but also French Equatorial Africa, Mozambique, and Thailand. For every one of these 148 newspapers a lending positive is placed on the shelves in the Midwest Inter-Library Center, the operating agent for the Project. It costs about \$20,000 a year to acquire the newspapers, to film them, to print the lending positives, and to pay the personnel who operate the Project. The income to support this effort derives from the fifty-three American libraries that subscribe to the Project at annual fees ranging from \$150 to \$500. Each subscribing library has liberal borrowing privileges and the right to buy a positive print at cost for those few titles which it feels it must have at hand. The benefit to the subscriber is made clear when it is realized that it would cost a

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ralph T. Esterquest, "The MILC Chemical Abstracts Project," *CRL*, XVIII (1957), 190-92+.

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library an average of \$125 per year to acquire and film a single foreign newspaper. A library which wants access to two foreign newspapers would thus pay about \$250; for four, \$500. The largest library can now buy into the Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project at an annual cost of \$500 and have access, not to four foreign newspapers, but to 148, all under arrangements for quick loan and liberal lending periods. The success of the Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project has encouraged the Midwest Center to prepare a proposal for domestic newspapers, modeled on the same plan.

A third development at the MILC has to do with the proliferation of long-term microcopy projects—the *Short Title Catalog* project of University Microfilms, the Evans *Early American Imprints* project, and so forth. During the winter, the University of Minnesota Library reported that it had already invested \$32,000, and was committed to spend another \$21,000, in subscription fees to such projects, obtaining film and cards which are actually seldom used. Minnesota wondered if most of the other MILC member libraries were not putting this amount of money into the same projects, if they too were not using the end product only occasionally, and if

there were not a golden opportunity here for considerable sharing of costs through joint subscriptions.

We have all been busy examining the situation, reporting duplicate subscriptions, and evaluating needs. Exploration seems to suggest that the multiple-sales method may not be the best means for supporting projects involving little-used material, but that coverage might be achieved at less total cost through the principle of a national pool of lending positives, like the Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project, or a national pool of negatives similar to the University Microfilms doctoral dissertation program.

These developments are part of the new look in library cooperation. The new look has to do with creating access to (in contrast to ownership of) and increased variety of resources for research purposes. Emphasis has shifted from union lists and union catalogs. Scholarship today requires access to the recorded knowledge of mankind. The bulk of recorded knowledge and information is expanding with no end in sight. No institution has, or will have, the resources in money, space, or staff to acquire and house the materials to which its scholars are likely to require access. Library cooperation is the hope of the future in our race against time.

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