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BOOK REVIEWS

Gore, Daniel, ed. *Farewell to Alexandria: Solutions to Space, Growth, and Performance Problems of Libraries*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr., 1976. 180p. \$12.50 (LC 75-35345) (ISBN 0-8371-8587-4)

"Limits to growth" have recently become fashionable in economics—big is not necessarily beautiful. Limited production seems likely to apply to books as well as to television sets and dishwashers. Unfortunately or fortunately, limited book output will not automatically result in limited libraries, since books do not easily die or rot (in spite of the efforts of some publishers); unlike TV sets, they are both media and matter.

Many libraries are now full, or approaching fullness, and have little prospect of additional accommodation. The eight years, 1967-1974, witnessed the biggest building boom in American library history: About 570 new or expanded library buildings were built, enough to accommodate 163 million volumes. But aggregate growth in stock was 3 million volumes more than this and would have been higher if 17 million volumes had not been discarded. And the situation is growing worse: In the last two years of the period, 1973 and 1974, capacity for 25 million volumes was created, while 41 million volumes (net) were added.

The crisis is well documented by Claudia Schorrig. Unfortunately, she does not provide estimates either for the future growth of world book production or for the future intake of libraries, which will be drastically limited by reduced funds—a factor which must in turn affect book production. Nevertheless, the crisis is clear enough. However few books are published or added, they still constitute net library growth unless weeding also takes place.

This volume contains most of the papers presented at a conference held in April 1975 on "Touching Bottom in the Bottomless Pit." The papers not included sound as interesting as those published, especially as they all seem to be concerned with possible practical solutions (e.g., Spaulding on "Microtechnology and the space problem," and Harrar on "Co-operative storage facil-

ities"). One would like to know why they were omitted.

The key paper (not apparently given at the conference) is Daniel Gore's; this combines statistical evidence, a systematic approach, logical argument, and polemic in a forceful presentation of the issues. His case is oversimplified, though the main points are valid. To argue for no growth at all is to advocate throwing out, for every year's intake, the equivalent of the intake of two or three previous years, when acquisitions will have been much less. Is this really possible, and for how long can it be continued? If the annual volume of publication increased again at a fast rate, and libraries were able to keep pace with it in their acquisitions, they might eventually end up with the intake of the last three years and nothing else.

Ellsworth Mason's approach is sensible and cautious, perhaps disappointingly so for the conference organizers. He hardly even manages to bring computers into the discussion. He does mention several aspects—mainly in passing—that are neglected by others; I refer to some of these later.

What criteria should be used for weeding, and how should weeding be done? Eugene Garfield suggests that citation analyses can be used for weeding journals, without offering evidence that citations are a sufficiently valid indicator of use as well as quality. It is highly unlikely that any one citation analysis, based on however many source journals (why only source journals, anyway?) will be a precise indicator of use in any one library; in particular, the correlation is likely to be lowest around the area of marginal journals, though this is exactly where decisions have to be made.^{1, 2} In any case, journal weeding should, to be optimal, be based on both titles and dates—the use of either alone will be suboptimal (and perhaps pessimal). Preprints of highly cited papers would undoubtedly be very useful, as Garfield (following De Solla Price) suggests.

Richard Trueswell reviews and updates his work in this field and continues to recommend last circulation date as a criterion. As suggested by John Urquhart,³ however, outside the items for obvious retention (which are easily identifiable in other

ways), distribution of use among the stock may well be random, so that the weeding of the noncore stock could equally (and much more cheaply) be done at random. The two approaches should be tried in comparable libraries and the results assessed. So far as I know, no library has actually used the Trueswell model, although his first published paper is now twelve years old.

Blair Stewart demonstrates that in a group of ten liberal arts college libraries, a modest proportion (900) even of their present limited holdings of journals (4,107) satisfies by far the majority (90 percent) of their interlibrary loan requests. The titles most requested are also the most commonly held by the libraries, including some held by all ten. Stewart expresses surprise at these results, which are similar to those found in an analysis of requests received by the British Library Lending Division.^{4, 5}

Buckland and Hindle outline a systematic analytical approach to collection control, drawing on their own work at Lancaster University Library and the work of others. The relevant factors are defined, and models for control are suggested. Like most library models at the present early state of the art, the data collection and analyses required appear to be out of proportion to the practical results likely to be obtained. Again, only actual use of models and a comparison of results with less sophisticated approaches (e.g., rule-of-thumb weeding) will demonstrate their utility and enable progress to be made.

One of the most interesting papers, because it describes practice rather than theory, is that by Marvin Scilken. I particularly liked his ideas of leaving cards for some weeded books in the catalog ("gone but not forgotten") and buying cards but not the books in doubtful cases ("pre-weeded"). The reader suffers from delay in supply when he wants such books, but his suffering is less than the benefits to readers in general resulting from duplication of heavily used books bought with the money saved.

Finally, Corya and Buckland present a useful paper on how the computer can help in collection control (Ellsworth Mason, please note).

Only one of the speakers (Ellsworth Mason) seems to have questioned the concept of the limited library, and few of the discussants offered serious challenge. Indeed, the panel discussion, which should have been the liveliest part of the conference, is largely irrelevant and certainly not notable for its quality. Could not one *advocatus dei* (since the devil had all the advocates he needed) have been included among the speakers?

Several important issues are unexplored by the book. The costs of discarding are hardly mentioned, nor the staff needed for a withdrawal program. The limited growth library will presumably have an even higher ratio of staff-to-acquisitions expenditure than libraries have at present, unless radical changes are made in other library operations to save staff. The question of processing current intake for easier future disposal too receives little attention, although Corya and Buckland point out that automated catalogs and circulation systems can make disposal easier and cheaper.

"Negative discarding," whereby each book acquired has to justify its retention after four or five years, so that the onus is on retention rather than withdrawal, deserves to be explored. So does the question of what should happen to books when they are withdrawn. What is little used in one library is likely to be little used in other libraries, and outright disposal, without a home for retired books, could result in total unavailability. Readers as well as books occupy space, as Mason points out, and stock rationalization should be accompanied by studies of seating requirements. To judge from a recent British study, common impressions about the intensity of occupancy and accepted standards of seating may prove to be wrong.⁶

Underlying the whole question of limited libraries is the fundamental concept of the library. It seems that many of those attending were librarians of colleges rather than major academic institutions, where the concept is open to most serious challenge. The functions and problems of public libraries, special libraries, college libraries serving mainly undergraduate needs, and large research libraries are quite different, and it is important to distinguish among them in

any rational discussion of the question. It is absolutely right to measure libraries by performance rather than by size, but performance criteria for libraries differ according to their function.

There is no doubt about the tremendous importance and urgency of library restriction. This book is a major contribution to librarianship in that it is one of the first to ask questions hitherto thought improper and to suggest unpalatable answers. If its overall quality leaves something to be desired, good though individual papers are, the significance of the book is unquestionable.

Its appearance slightly predates a report of the UK University Grants Committee,⁷ on the need to control library growth because of the shortage of capital for new buildings—a report of which the impact has yet to be felt. I hope it will be followed by more systematic analyses, related to different types of library, and above all by reports of carefully monitored practical experience in libraries following some of the principles advocated. Librarianship is after all a practical matter, and a gram of experience is worth a kilogram of theory.—*Maurice B. Line, Director General, British Library Lending Division, Boston Spa, England.*

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The Sourcebook of Library Technology: A Cumulative Edition of Library Technology Reports, 1965-1975. 1976 ed. Chicago: American Library Assn., 1976. Iv. (loose-leaf) with 30 fiche in pockets. \$50.00 (ISBN 0-8389-5469-3)

During this year of the U.S. Bicentennial, a reader may easily overlook the completion of a single decade of one library publication project, the *Library Technology Reports (LTR)*. Prepared by the ALA, which itself is celebrating a century of notable existence, the *LTR* is a significant accomplishment and has been fully appreciated by any librarian in need of advice in selecting library equipment.

Throughout its ten years of existence, the *LTR* has offered a number of objective and clearly presented reports and evaluations on many library products, systems, and services. As its editors point out, the financing of all the publication's operations has been exclusively from its subscriptions, making the *LTR* independent of any commercial influence. Simultaneously, close cooperation with competent, national laboratories has produced reports with very high technical standards, thus quickly turning the *LTR* into the librarian's version of the *Consumer Reports*.

As to format, the original loose-leaf reports soon evolved into a bulky, eleven-volume set, creating some problems for maintenance and use. Beginning with the 1976 volume, the overall format of the publication has changed. Now, the reports (*LTR*) are being published bimonthly in a noncumulative book format and are supplemented by an annually edited compilation, called *The Sourcebook of Library Technology (SLT)*, published in part on microfiche.

The first issue of the new *LTR* is a 132-page, softbound book, offering as its major feature a comprehensive evaluation of the OCLC system. The first *SLT*, issued at the same time, is an edited compilation of surveys and reports published in the *LTR* between 1965 and 1975. The printed *Sourcebook* is issued in a three-ring, loose-leaf binder and contains a title page, subscription information, an introduction, an instruction "how to use the Sourcebook," a table of contents, and an eleven-page in-