

A Plan for Centralized Cataloging

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Catalogs have a fundamental role in the administration of a library and constitute a necessary tool for making its literary resources available to readers. Accordingly much work goes into making the catalogs as complete and as exhaustive as possible.

On the other hand, cataloging must not be considered as the librarian's chief task and must not be cultivated with too many refinements at the expense of other library work, especially acquisition and reference work. F. E. Fitzgerald is quite right in pointing out in *Special Libraries* for February 1946 that clerical work takes too much time in libraries.

In recent years cataloging costs have been the object of some investigation in America, and the results of these studies have been surprising not only for librarians but even more for trustees and governing authorities. Fremont Rider has published data regarding one Wesleyan University Library in his remarkable book *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library* (1944). He contends that cataloging costs amount on the average to \$1.05 per book. The average price for the book was \$2.90 and the binding costs \$1.50.

The relative cataloging costs are still more striking if one compares the total costs divided by the number of books, since American university libraries generally acquire a great many volumes as gifts or in exchange, and many of these books are already bound when they enter the library.

The unit cost data given by Rider are: acquisition, \$0.95; binding, \$0.40; and cataloging, \$1.05.

Of these three expenses cataloging costs are the only ones which could be reduced by means of refinement of organization. Much has already been achieved in this field. Clerical staff members—at least in some libraries—are now assigned to copying titles of books.

Simplified cataloging has been tried in some libraries, but the saving in labor has no relation to the reduced value of the catalogs. One must always remember that catalogs are of value not only to the patrons but also the staff, and that the omission of certain data on the catalog cards may mean more work to the librarians engaged in searching or bibliographical work.

The only way of reducing the costs would be to organize centralized cataloging. It must seem irrational that as soon as a book has been published and acquired by the libraries, hundreds of catalogers sit down to an absolutely identical job of transferring certain data from the title page to the catalog card.

A fundamental condition for a central cataloging service is, of course, that the catalogs in the different libraries have the same format and style. With regard to the format, 3" x 5" (75 x 125mm) cards have been standardized for most libraries. With regard to the style of catalog codes, however, we are still far from any standard, at least internationally.

But the prospect for centralized cataloging is not so dismal as it would seem at

the first sight. Cataloging consists of three operations: copying of the title, collation and selection of the heading. The basic difference between the different cataloging codes revolves around the heading. At all events, the heading is the only part of the catalog card which is of fundamental importance for an individual cataloging system. It should therefore be possible to make a unit card, containing the transcription of the title and the collation, to which different libraries could add the heading appropriate to their cataloging system. One must only remember that the title must then be given in full, since the word used as heading or corporate heading is generally omitted in the transcription of the title.

Centralized cataloging can be effected in two ways, either by having the cards made by a central institution which duplicates the cards for distribution to other libraries, or by having the catalog cards made by the producers of the books so that the cards could be delivered to the libraries at the same time as the book. The first way is the only one as yet tried, but it has a very serious disadvantage, *viz.*, the inevitable delay which results from the fact that the cards must be ordered by the different libraries.

The other way would, of course, be ideal, but it is quite impossible to think

that all publishers should give this service to their customers. On the other hand, even if only some of them could provide cards which could be used by the majority of the libraries, this would mean a great help and a reduction of cataloging costs.

There is one class of publishers which could be said to have a special obligation in this matter. These are scientific societies and institutions. Their publications are distributed as exchanges or as gifts to libraries. As a rule, they have their own libraries and staffs competent to make the original cards. These institutions often spend a lot of money in order to publish the results of their investigations, and it is reasonable that they should spend a bit more in order to help the libraries bring their publications to the attention of readers. It must be remembered that the cataloging of serials published by societies and institutions generally takes more time than the cataloging of ordinary books.

The Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, has for some years been sending with each issue of its *Handlingar (Transactions)* a strip to be cut up into three cards, two of them to be used as entries for each number in the author and the subject catalogs respectively; the third to be used as a series card. A similar program by other institutions would be a great help to the libraries all over the world.

Correction

The statistics published in the issue for April 1951 contain a serious error on p.185. In the salary statistics for "Group II Libraries" Denison University is listed as paying \$1,200-\$1,900 to all other professional assistants (10 months basis). Actually, these salaries should have been entered under "All Nonprofessional Assistants."

Opposite "Low" at the foot of this page the column headed "All Other Professional Assistants" should read \$1,800 instead of \$1,200.

Apologies are due Denison for this calamity and appreciation for the good humor with which this error has been treated.—*Arthur T. Hamlin.*