Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Academic Libraries: Myths and Realities: Proceedings of the Third National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Ed. by Suzanne C. Dodson and Gary L. Menges. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Assn., 1984. 414p. $20, ACRL members; $28, nonmembers. ISBN 0-8389-6787-6.

As the title indicates, this paperbound volume contains the papers, addresses, and discussions presented at the third national conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries. With the publication of these proceedings we should pause and reflect on the accomplishments of the ACRL national conferences. After three conferences there should be some assessment of how well the academic library profession has achieved what it set out to do in 1978.

The first national conference seemed like an idea whose time had come. Other professions had national conferences, and certainly we also should have one—perhaps in part to confirm our membership among the professions. Without a doubt much of the academic library profession was caught up with the excitement of a national conference just for academic librarians where scholarly papers were to be read and discussed. What better way to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of ACRL?

By most accounts the first national conference was a success. More than twenty-six hundred librarians attended. The proceedings contained seven theme papers and sixty-six contributed papers. A few participants complained they did not have the opportunity to hear all the papers they wanted, and some commented that speakers read through their papers with little regard for audience interest. Nevertheless, with the passage of time the Boston conference has achieved Woodstock-like status among academic librarians.

After the enthusiasm generated by the first conference, inevitably the second national conference would be anticlimactic. Some eighteen hundred participants braved the brisk Minneapolis fall weather. Perhaps the decrease in the number of participants from the first conference reflected the austerity among libraries often discussed at this conference. The publishers of the conference proceedings, however, evidently did not believe that academic libraries shared the economic austerity of the rest of the country. They published the 5 theme papers and 56 contributed papers in two volumes with the combined price of *$125!*

Before the third national conference, a few academic librarians expressed serious doubts as to the "success" of the national conferences. Certainly there had been a few minor grumblings about the quality of the papers, the missed sessions, and lack of delivery style among the speakers. Now, however, two librarians publicly expressed their concerns about the success of the national conferences as a form of scholarly communication. Coughlin and Snelson, writing in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* (March 1983), titled their critique of the conferences "Searching for Research in ACRL Conference Papers." These authors concluded that more than two-thirds of the papers presented at the first two conferences were not research re-

ports. They called for a fifty-fifty split in research and scholarly papers for the third ACRL national conference and an exclusion of the "how-I-done-it-good" paper.

Was progress made at the third national conference? The answer is a qualified "yes." First, the conference organizers made a concerted effort, through their instructions to contributors and a workshop session at the previous ALA Midwinter Meeting to ensure the effective delivery of the contributed papers. They requested that accepted contributed papers be submitted "copy-ready" for duplication, to reduce printing costs. The reduced costs should ensure wider distribution of the proceedings. In fact, the conference participants received a free copy. No longer did participants have to rely on microfiche readers or pay exorbitant prices to read the papers they missed at the conference.

How well has the third national conference served as a forum for scholarship among academic librarians? By 1984 it had become "conventional wisdom" among academic librarians, as pointed out by Sharon Rogers in the wrap-up session, that conference papers presented at Boston and Minneapolis had not been cited. It is still too early to determine the citation pattern for the third conference. The lack of citations should not be surprising. First, one suspects that most librarians, like most members of other professions, reserve their best efforts for the journals. Second, the proceedings of the conferences are not as widely distributed as articles in the more prestigious journals are. The reduced costs of the Seattle proceedings should encourage wider distribution and, thus, increased citation. Finally, the proceedings of the conferences have not been indexed, as are contents of library journals. *Library Literature* should index the ACRL national conference proceedings as it does library journals.

Unfortunately, the conclusion that the contributed-papers aspect of the conference is not working is firmly implanted in the minds of many librarians. The number of contributed papers has been steadily reduced at each succeeding conference. Sharon Rogers and Robert Pesek, however, pointed out, in their carefully prepared analysis in the proceedings of the third conference, an increased sophistication in the papers presented. They described the primary format of the Boston and Minneapolis conferences as "author as biographer," through which the author describes systems in various stages of development. They described the single most common format of the Seattle conference as "author as analyst," through which the author performs primary research and discusses issues. Rogers and Pesek found encouraging movement from the earlier conferences to the third conference in the areas of "conceptual theory" and "analytic science."

This volume contains 47 contributed papers, 6 theme papers, and the papers from four alternate-format sessions. The theme papers are also published in the September 1984 issue of *College and Research Libraries*. These papers represent, as described in the preface, the best of the 166 papers submitted for review to the 118 reviewers. The acceptance rate of 28 percent is respectable and comparable to many journals. This does not mean that a few questionable papers did not slip through, but the reviews had to be done hastily to meet deadlines. With the large number of reviewers involved, some variation in judgment is inevitable.

The result is a collection of papers that ranges considerably in quality and subject and contains something for everyone. There are a few solid research pieces, which unfortunately do not necessarily lend themselves to oral presentations but make interesting reading in the proceedings. In addition, there are the ubiquitous "how-I-done-it-good" papers, which appear even weaker in print than when heard. To the chagrin of some of the more research-oriented librarians, many librarians voted their preferences with their feet, and the "how-I-done-it-good" papers often had larger audiences than the more methodological, rigorous papers. Nevertheless, before we engage in too much self-flagellation, such papers—in the form of well-developed case studies and similar scholarly activities—deserve some place at a conference largely attended by practitioners. The establishment of a "position

papers'' category for the fourth conference is a recognition of the interest in ''locally implemented experiences,'' as the organizers of that conference euphemistically have described ''how-I-done-it-good'' papers. Finally, although not reported in the proceedings, some of these papers were subjected to rather probing questions from the audience. Librarians interested in presenting such papers at future conferences should keep in mind that they will have to defend their work.

Are the conferences worthwhile? Are they more of an opportunity for librarians to speak than listen? Certainly there is a notable downward trend in attendance: fewer than fourteen hundred librarians attended the Seattle conference. For most of the hard questions about the conferences, it is too early to have definitive answers. If Rogers and Pesek are correct, the conferences may foster increased sophistication in scholarly activities among academic librarians. Given the widely publicized call for papers, many librarians who had never thought of submitting an article to a journal may have submitted a paper for presentation at a conference. In addition, several hundred librarians, many of whom would never have otherwise had the opportunity, had the experience of refereeing their colleagues' papers. Finally, literally thousands of librarians shared in the give-and-take of the scholarly process as papers were read, discussed, criticized, and defended. Is there room for improvement? The answer is ''yes, of course.'' Not everything lived up to the ideal, but practice is almost always essential for improvement.

This relatively inexpensive volume offers the reader a wide variety of information covering a full range of contemporary academic librarianship. Often the papers are only loosely related to the theme of the conference (does anyone *really* take the conference theme seriously when writing contributed papers?), but this should not be a concern. Not every paper will capture the attention of the reader, but there are enough to merit the purchase of this volume. Those seeking a complex mystery novel with an intricate plot and multidimensional characters will be disappointed. This is a collection of short stories and the reader can skim through picking favorites to read. Some are good and some are not. Some will encourage the reader to search for additional information in other sources and some can be quickly dismissed.

The reviewer will exercise the privilege of identifying a few of his favorite papers: Gresham Riley, president of Colorado College, enthusiastically articulated his support for bibliographic instruction in his theme paper. In a second theme paper, Bill Moffett, director of libraries at Oberlin College, described the frustrations of college librarianship as ''life in the minor leagues.'' Finally, in a contributed paper, Gary Lawrence provided an excellent analysis of the economic realities of ''Financial Management of Online Catalogs,'' which librarians should keep in mind as they seek to use the computer to solve their problems and provide better service. Purchase of the conference proceedings as well as attendance at and participation in future ACRL national conferences are highly recommended.—*Larry Hardesty, Eckerd College.*

Martin, Lowell A. *Organizational Structure of Libraries.* Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1984. 302p. $14.50 LC 84-4859 ISBN 0-8108-1696-2

This is an ambitious survey book describing organizational aspects of public, school, academic, and special libraries. Lowell Martin, a distinguished library administrator, has integrated his considerable practical experience with a careful review of contemporary library and management literature, producing a succinct, mostly cognizant comparison of the structures, relationships, and trends of these several enterprises.

The book begins with an examination of the evolution of management thought and practice generally. While many such summaries are available elsewhere, Martin's keen observations and pointed focus make his unique. He notes that whereas library management practice in general mirrors that of other types of organizations, it suffers from a significant time lag in the use of current concepts. Worse,