

The Southeastern Interlibrary Research Facility

COMBINED ACTION by six university libraries in Georgia and Florida has resulted in the formation of the Southeastern Interlibrary Research Facility. SIRF is a positive expression of awareness of the problems library growth present to universities and a vigorous attempt to find a solution to those problems in the libraries of the Southeast.

Its first year was primarily an exploratory operation supported by Emory University, Florida State University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the universities of Florida, Georgia, and Miami. Working as the Georgia-Florida Committee for Planning Research Library Cooperation, it concentrated on two pilot projects, the compilation and publication of *A Union List of Serial Holdings in Chemistry and Allied Fields* and of *Research Resources in the Georgia-Florida Libraries of SIRF*.¹ SIRF was established by a memorandum of agreement jointly prepared in the early summer of 1955. Operation under the memorandum began in October; at the end of the month a work conference was held in Atlanta to introduce SIRF and its work to a wider group of southeastern librarians.

As a result of the conference, the work

¹ *A Union List of Serial Holdings in Chemistry* is now out of print. Copies of *Research Resources* are available at \$2.50 from the Southern Regional Education Board, 881 Peachtree Street, N.E., Atlanta 9, Ga.

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of SIRF was continued on an investigative basis with three immediate objectives: a regional adaptation liberalizing the provisions of the ALA interlibrary loan code, exploration of the cost of a regional union list of serials and of the interest in publishing such a list as a regional cooperative project, and exploration of the desirability of organizing an association of southern research libraries. Work toward each of these objectives is presently under way although no new members were added to SIRF at the conference.

The establishment of the Southern Regional Education Board in 1948 created in the South a new and vital instrument for improving the educational resources of the region and for effective, positive channeling of the efforts to expand those resources. In succeeding years functioning programs in veterinary medicine, psychology, nursing, statistics, mental health, city planning, and other subject areas have repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of the board's approach to regional problems.

At an early meeting of the board, library representatives were invited to meet with university administrators to discuss regional cooperation. But the South is a complex of smaller regions. Its states spread across an enormous area. Though the several states face many educational problems common to most or to all of them, no common denominator could be found to which the problem of increasing regional library resources could be related. In the rapid

library development in the South since 1930, a few southern libraries have achieved distinguished status, but, by and large, library resources have not developed abreast of general educational expansion. Burgeoning enrollments and increased demands for trained subject specialists have created new graduate programs—even new schools—faster than adequate library resources could be collected for them. New programs have put added strains on university budgets so that impressively increased library budgets are still not large enough to support these new areas of research as fully as desirable.

Aware of the desirability of regional cooperation, aware of some measure of success in small area efforts within the region (at Atlanta, Durham, and Nashville), aware of marked success in other regions (the Midwest, the Rocky Mountain area, and the Pacific Northwest), representative librarians continued conversations with the SREB in an effort toward a more concentrated offensive toward their goal. A 1952 proposal for a regional library came to nought, but it contained the essence of the idea which was later activated as the Georgia-Florida committee. This proposal suggested "that a group of southern universities be constituted as branches of a regional library. Each of these branches would be assigned responsibility for designated subject-matter fields. Each branch would then purchase extensively in its assigned field. . . . The basic holdings of a first-class university library would be available at each branch. However, the expensive specialized publications and the seldom-used works needed for advanced graduate research would not be needlessly duplicated." It called for a central office which would be in effect a regional catalog and communications center. Envisioning the participation of twenty libraries, it asked that each contribute \$1,500 a year to operating cost and that

each commit \$10,000 a year to purchases in assigned specialties. Its proponents summarized the advantages by claiming that the program would "at a cost of \$11,500 per year make available to each cooperating institution library facilities which could not be duplicated for \$200,000 per year."

Such a proposal, some thought, invaded the autonomy of individual institutions. It committed a large portion of already strained budgets without, necessarily, local determination. But it was a positive step toward cooperative thinking.

Twenty libraries proved too many to bring together for concerted planning. In a profession whose tools are unitary in procedural demands the administrative officers have proved almost equally individualistic. Reducing the number to six research libraries in Georgia and Florida which already had practiced some informal cooperation, the planners tried again. Library and administrative representatives from Emory, Florida State, Georgia Tech, and the universities of Florida, Georgia, and Miami met with representatives of the Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta in March, 1954.

Optimism, enthusiasm, and a new sense of the practicality of cooperation pervaded the meeting. It was decided to make this group a formal committee to explore fully the possibilities of cooperation. A memorandum of agreement was devised. By the end of the summer it had been signed and, at a preliminary committee meeting in July, Dean (now vice president) Harley Chandler of the University of Florida had been elected chairman, and Richard Harwell, then assistant librarian at Emory and executive secretary of SELA, had been chosen as executive secretary for the committee.

Three major decisions were made at the very beginning of the work which, it was hoped, would enable the commit-

tee to avoid the stumbling blocks of previous efforts. First, the committee itself was constituted equally of library and administrative representatives from the institutions involved. It was recognized that in building collections libraries must be governed closely by local teaching needs. In order for the librarians to base plans on future teaching needs there would have to be inter-university as well as interlibrary planning. It would be only on the highest administrative levels that such planning could be effected. Second, the idea of a new regional catalog was rejected. Such a catalog would be enormously expensive. However, as three of the libraries were already fully represented in the Union Catalog of the Atlanta-Athens Area, it was determined to consider building that catalog as a regional control center. Third, the idea of a central storage facility was rejected for the foreseeable future. The libraries of this area do not yet approach in size the libraries which formed the MILC and, relatively young in terms of the period of rapid growth, have not accumulated large blocks of material of the kind which made the storage library in Chicago desirable.

Work in the committee's own office began in October, 1954. The structure and aims of comparable projects were carefully studied. The positive advantages of cooperative acquisition programs and of interlibrary use of materials were stressed. It was equally emphasized that the project would have no veto over local purchases but would provide an individual librarian with an argument to persuade faculty that requests for material already in the region be foreborne in favor of material new to the region. In successive meetings the committee retraced much of its thinking and decided in June to convert its organization into a permanent establishment as the Southeastern Interlibrary Research Facility. As a corollary, it ap-

proved in principle the merger of the Union Catalog of the Atlanta-Athens Area with SIRF. A revised memorandum of agreement was signed.² "In addition to strengthening the regional resources," it declared, "such a program will relieve each individual library of the overwhelming responsibility of unlimited extension of its library resources by cooperatively providing resources."

"The purposes of SIRF," stated the memorandum, "shall be to implement inter-university and interlibrary planning by coordination of information about research resources and acquisitions, and by making research materials in the region available as widely as possible for the use of all the libraries." The functions of the Facility are outlined as:

1. To serve as a communications center to expedite regional use of materials at its member libraries.
 - a. To compile and keep up to date, either on cards or as a distributed, printed list, a complete and accurate record of the serial holdings of member libraries.
 - b. To compile and keep up to date, either on cards or as a distributed, printed list, a complete and accurate record of the newspaper holdings of member libraries.
 - c. To maintain a record of regional resources by a union catalog.
 - d. To locate through bibliographies or correspondence with other centers materials outside the region when regional resources have been exhausted.
2. To provide an index to individual library and regional resources as an aid in planning both library and university development.
3. To develop programs of deposit or other methods of non-duplication in areas similar to those worked out by the MILC for midwestern libraries.
4. To formulate a program for the coordination of acquisitions.

² Emory committed itself to support of SIRF through January, 1956, and to separate support of the union catalog through June, 1956.

5. To act as an agent of the several libraries, upon request, in negotiating gifts of materials and in making possible joint ownership of materials.
6. To act as an agent of the several libraries, upon request, when they are jointly seeking foundation support.

To consider the extension of its project to a larger number of southeastern libraries, SIRF conducted its work conference in October. Present in addition to SIRF's own personnel were representatives from Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Clemson College, Duke University, the Joint University Libraries of Nashville, Louisiana State University, the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies, the Union Catalog of the Atlanta-Athens area, and the universities of Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Dr. Robert B. Downs of the University of Illinois, Dr. Herman Fussler of the University of Chicago, Dr. John E. Ivey, Jr., of the Southern Regional Education Board, and Mr. George A. Schwegmann of the National Union Catalog of the Library of Congress were present as consultants.

The work of the committee and the aims of SIRF were reviewed in considerable detail. The *Union List of Serials in Chemistry* and the *Research Resources* were presented as evidence of the year's accomplishment. The memorandum of agreement was presented as evidence of a way of future accomplishment. The *Union List* and *Research Resources* repeatedly pointed out both lacunae in regional holdings and unwarranted duplication of holdings. Imperfect documents resulting from a pilot project with only a single field worker, they will nevertheless prove useful.

The chemistry list records holdings in the six Georgia and Florida libraries for 626 titles. Of these, 272 titles are held by only one library, 136 by two, 73 by three, 65 by four, 38 by five, and 42 by all six. The survey volume omits chemistry but

covers (with varying emphasis according to the strength of the collections and the extent of graduate programs within the institutions) the rest of the library collections. It lists full holdings for 911 serial titles and mentions more than 1,400 periodicals (with at least one location) in its narrative sections. In book materials 753 specific titles (largely multiple-volume sets and monumental works) are located and general areas of strength in the several libraries are indicated.

In an editorial on October 31, *The Atlanta Journal* praised the project and said in part:

Six institutions in Georgia and Florida have figured out a way to solve the problem. It is needless for each institution to own all books, even valuable books, so they agreed that each would buy and house some. In this way, together they would own them all and would make them available to students in any of the cooperating institutions. . .

The plan obviously is wise. It is hoped that other universities and colleges in the Southeast will see its wisdom and join in the program.

That the editorial makes SIRF appear as a working proposition prematurely does not alter the approval of the plan. The consultants at the work conference were equally approving and genuine interest was exhibited in the whole project. But Emory's conditional commitment and the doubts about library cooperation which were revealed at the conference caused potential members to hold back pending the investigations into which the work of SIRF was redirected at the conference.

The work of SIRF has moved slowly, more slowly than its advocates had hoped. But there is room for much optimism. Many libraries of the Southeast have passed the point of being mere service institutions and are now full-fledged research libraries. Wise planning

can multiply their usefulness by making the collections at each library available to the whole region. If SIRF has not come up with a definitive solution to

the problem of interlibrary cooperation, it has at least created a climate of thinking in which cooperation is regarded as essential.

Recent Developments in SIRF

Since Mr. Harwell's article was written several events have taken place which have affected the development of SIRF. Emory University and the University of Georgia have withdrawn their memberships, and SIRF has regrouped as an organization of four institutions. Its new director, Graham Roberts, is now also a member of the staff of the Southern Regional Education Board and serves as library consultant to the other regional programs of the Board.

The Atlanta-Athens Union Catalogue has been reorganized and is placing its emphasis on "community service" to the State of Georgia. For the present SIRF will not have the opportunity to develop this catalog as a regional research instrument.

On a more positive side SIRF has assisted

in the organization of an Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, which held its first meeting at Miami Beach on June 21, 1956, and has undertaken the compilation of a regional supplement to the *Union List of Serials*. Work on the supplement is actively under way and several of the libraries participating have reported their holdings.

The purposes and functions of SIRF remain unchanged. It is as a focal point of regional interlibrary cooperation that SIRF has proved and will continue to prove its effectiveness. Cooperative programs seldom have an obstacle-free path to follow, and if an over-all view of the situation is taken, the future for regional interlibrary cooperation in the Southeast is a brighter one because of SIRF.—*Graham Roberts*.

Appreciation of Service to Arthur T. Hamlin

The following resolution was presented and adopted by acclamation at the ACRL membership meeting, University of Miami Cafeteria, during the Miami Beach Conference:

"Every organization hopes to find staff members who will do more than the contract calls for. In recent years, the Association of College and Reference Libraries has been especially fortunate in having as its Executive Secretary, Arthur Hamlin. He brought to this job imagination, energy, and perseverance. Those who watched his accomplishments knew that it would merely be a mat-

ter of time before some other organization with greater opportunities would ask for his services. All of us know we were lucky to have him with us as long as we did. In return for giving us this outstanding service, Arthur Hamlin has long since received our thanks and our admiration. All we can add is our wishes for success in his new job and our pledge of cooperation with him in any projects which could use our resources and talent to help him in his new position. We know that he will work for the advancement of all libraries while he sets new standards of performance at Cincinnati."