

Cataloging Problems in Review

In furtherance of its policy as a journal of discussion, *College and Research Libraries* presents the following two summaries and analyses based on the cataloging problems presented in the March 1942 issue.

THE EDITORS

By HARRIET D. MACPHERSON

Report on the Cataloging Forum Presented by *College and Research Libraries*

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JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON once wrote some lines that seem applicable to the concern of librarians with the cataloging situation of today. He said: "It is so difficult a task to form any correct estimate of one's own surroundings, largely on account of our very familiarity with them, that historical students have generally evaded this responsibility. They have often declared that it was impossible to do so satisfactorily. And yet no one will ever know more than we do about what is going on now."¹ Ten years ago, when plans were being laid to revise the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*, catalogers evidently thought they knew what was going on in their branch of the profession and executives must have felt that they had no particular reason to worry over cataloging procedures. Now, coincident with the publishing of the new rules, executives

and catalogers alike are taking stock of the present, as well as the past and future, of the cataloging situation. The March number of *College and Research Libraries* shows that librarians are not evading their responsibility in analyzing what is going on now in regard to cataloging.

It has become evident to many of us during the past year that the pioneer age of cataloging in America is over. The word *pioneer* is employed in place of *golden*, because it seems to the present writer that we have not yet arrived at the golden age of cataloging nor, indeed, of library service as a whole. There have been many outstanding names among catalogers during the past fifty or sixty years. To mention only a few of those who have made distinct contributions, the following might be cited: Cutter, Dewey, Hanson, Martel, Currier, Mann, and Hastings. They helped to outline standards by formulating rules and writing explanatory texts, by developing catalogs to provide access to huge collections, and by starting a system of cooperation among catalogers through the founding of the centralized card system at the Library of Congress.

¹ Robinson, James Harvey. *The Mind in the Making; the Relation of Intelligence to Social Reform*. N.Y., Harper [1921] p. [171].

They built almost from nothing. Frequently they had no precedent to guide them—only the sharp necessity of the moment. Much of their work still remains and is found practical; certain principles have already been scrapped; and, in the light of the probable future needs of libraries, many more of the results from the efforts of these pioneers may have to be abandoned.

Rugged Individuals

If we follow American history through the development of the West, it is evident that early settlers were rugged individuals who often succeeded in one undertaking and failed in another. They blazed trails but were not always able to keep their homes from being destroyed; they founded towns but often saw them evacuated in favor of other sites; nor did they always manage to save all the gold that they discovered. Nevertheless, the way was opened for future generations to profit from these early efforts. Perhaps we can find a specific parallel between the state of the nation in 1829, as described by Woodrow Wilson, and the state of cataloging today. In the first chapter of *Division and Reunion, 1829-1909*, Wilson remarks that he believes that the year 1829 was a turning point in the history of the United States.² Of the intellectual conditions of that period he says: "Its [the nation's] strength was rough and ready. . . . It had been making history and constructing systems of politics. . . . The country was as yet, moreover, neither homogeneous nor united. Its elements were being stirred hotly together. A keen and perilous ferment was necessary ere the

pure, fine wine of ultimate national principle should be produced."³

So far as the library profession is concerned, we also are "neither homogeneous nor united." "The keen and perilous ferment" seems already upon us, however, and it is to be hoped that a "national principle" of library service, at least so far as cataloging is concerned, is about to be produced. If one may judge from the contributions of writers to the March number of *College and Research Libraries*, all this is so. For here we find an amassing of the ideas of brilliant, convincing, and practical thinkers. An attempt at a complete analysis and synthesis of the remarks of the ten people who survey the cataloging situation in the above-mentioned issue might result in a volume of greater bulk than the new edition of the catalog rules. The present writer will only try to evaluate the papers from the following angles: (1) The attention paid by the contributors to the representation in the revised code of the principles of traditional cataloging and of Library of Congress practice in the past; (2) The recognition of the distinct difference between Parts I and II of the revised rules; (3) The extent to which specific rules from the code have been criticized; (4) The degree to which writers have viewed the issues in terms of their own libraries; (5) The extent to which cataloging problems as a whole rather than the text of the code have been discussed. In conclusion, a brief elucidation, both of the trends shown in these papers and of the revised edition of the code, will be undertaken. These remarks will be limited to the usability of these printed materials for courses in library schools.

² Wilson, Woodrow. *Division and Reunion, 1829-1909*. [New ed.] N.Y., Longmans, 1912, p. 2.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

Traditional Cataloging and L.C. Practice

Nearly all the contributors make some mention of the fact that the new code represents traditional cataloging and, specifically, the procedures that have developed at the Library of Congress during the past forty years. Miss Smith goes so far as to say that she would like to "see the Library of Congress adopt the code, or at least keep on with the parts of it which it is now using. . . ."⁴ Among the writers who deplore the fact that the new code represents traditional cataloging, none is more decided in his remarks than Mr. Nyholm. The gist of his criticism may be sensed from one quotation: "The superiority of the new code may consist in many instances merely in its being a desirable clarification of an undesirable practice."⁵ Miss Ludington believes that one of the chief values of the new edition is that it puts Library of Congress procedures into a form that anyone may consult. News about steps which may be taken by the Library of Congress that will make a break with tradition and thereby change some of the present L.C. card standards, is given by Miss Morsch and Mr. Mumford. Wisely, Miss Morsch reminds us that: "Simplifications must be based on the minimum essentials of the needs of the Library of Congress."⁶ After all, outside institutions are a second consideration and will probably have to remain so, in spite of Mr. Ellsworth's earnest plea that the "Library of Congress Card Division might well study the possibility of issuing various

⁴ Smith, Margaret I. "The Code and the University Reference Librarian." *College and Research Libraries* 3:133, Mar. 1942.

⁵ Nyholm, Jens. "The Code in the Light of the Critics." *College and Research Libraries* 3:146, Mar. 1942.

⁶ Morsch, Lucile M. "The New Edition of the A.L.A. Catalog Rules." *College and Research Libraries* 3:120, Mar. 1942.

kinds of cards for various kinds of libraries, if it is to continue issuing cards."⁷

Difference between Parts I and II of the Revised Code

Miss Morsch, Miss Ludington, Miss Root, and Mr. Tauber⁸ all show an appreciation of the division of the code into two parts. Part I, with some changes, is endorsed by Miss Ludington but she feels that much of Part II is too detailed for the ordinary run of books in libraries like Mount Holyoke. Miss Root believes that since uniformity of entry is so essential for libraries because of cooperative cataloging, most of the information in Part I will be needed. She thinks, however, that Part II might well be replaced by a manual of Library of Congress practice. Part I, according to Miss Morsch, is not full enough, for she shows cases where types of entries have been omitted entirely. As for Part II, she thinks it should not be published at all, since attempts to standardize beyond the entry on a card do not seem worth while. "Instead the Library of Congress should publish a style manual describing its practice and be responsible for keeping it reasonably up to date."⁹ Such a suggestion seems sensible. In addition, one may hope for separate, supplementary manuals devoted to rare-book and simplified cataloging and perhaps for a text that will provide explanations of reasons for rules set forth in Part I of the new code.

Criticism of Specific Rules

Several of the contributors made no attempt whatsoever to criticize specific rules.

⁷ Ellsworth, Ralph E. "The Administrative Implications for University Libraries of the New Cataloging Code." *College and Research Libraries* 3:137, Mar. 1942.

⁸ Tauber, Maurice F. "Is the Golden Age Really Over?" *College and Research Libraries* 3:185, Mar. 1942.

⁹ Morsch, *loc. cit.*, p. 119-20.

Those who have done so are: Miss Morsch, Miss Ludington, Miss Smith, and Mr. Nyholm. Miss Morsch confines her remarks to the types of entries for which little or no information has yet been provided in the code. The different points discussed by Miss Smith are taken up under broad headings. Her point of view is, quite naturally, that of the reference librarian. Largely for this reason, her appreciation of some of the bibliographic features in Part II may be discounted. Many of her ideas are pertinent, however, because of the very fact that she is concerned mainly with the use of the catalog. Catalogers may well sit up and take notice when she says: "To me added entries are more important than the subject cards. A book is quoted by the name of its editor, joint author, illustrator, translator, by its title, the body sponsoring its publication—anything the reader or writer can remember offhand, and often the subject cannot be definitely determined from the fragmentary reference."¹⁰ Mr. Nyholm presents his specific criticism in the shape of suggestions for simplification. Among the existing rules that he discusses are those relating to periodicals, corporate entries, capitalization, and collation. Of these topics, his treatment of collation is perhaps the most successful; certainly his handling of corporate entries appears both incomplete and impractical. It is somewhat surprising to find that the most detailed attention to separate rules has been given by a library executive—Miss Ludington. She discusses and criticizes the sections of Part I dealing with corporate entries, government publications, series, analytics, added entries, and serials. In her handling of Part II she again cites individual rules,

¹⁰ Smith, *loc. cit.*, p. 130.

though this is done in a general way, so as to illustrate possibilities for simplification. With the exception of her criticism of entries for state documents, most of Miss Ludington's points seem clear and logical. She voices valuable, constructive opinion in suggesting that all material on serials be kept together. This same idea, by the way, was expressed by more than one speaker at the 1941 fall meeting of the New York Regional Catalog Group.¹¹

Stress on Libraries with Which Individual Writers Are Connected

The extent to which contributors have viewed cataloging problems from the angle of their own particular libraries differs. Mr. Tauber, Mr. Nyholm, Mr. Clapp, and Miss Root make no reference at all to the institutions with which they are connected. Miss Morsch and Mr. Haykin present almost entirely the point of view of the Library of Congress, while Mr. Mumford mentions policies at the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress, the two institutions between which he was dividing his time. Since conditions at the Library of Congress may be said to affect the whole country, opinions expressed by members of that staff are not typical of reactions from most individual libraries. More heed, therefore, should be paid to Miss Ludington, Miss Smith, and Mr. Ellsworth, who make frequent reference to their present backgrounds in expressing their impressions of the new rules and of cataloging tendencies in general. While much may be gained by readers from the presentation of facts or beliefs in an impersonal manner, there is always a more sharp realization of values

¹¹ This entire meeting was devoted to the handling of serials and government publications in the revised code.

when writers quote from their own experience. If every contributor to the cataloging forum had confined himself to the way in which the revised rules and present cataloging trends are likely to affect his own library, a different set of papers might have resulted. Something would have been lost because of the lack of stress on general application of principles but much might have been gained. What practical services may Miss Ludington, Miss Smith, and Mr. Ellsworth be said to have rendered other libraries because of their more or less personal viewpoints?

*Discussion with Catalogers by
Administrators*

Quite evidently, Miss Ludington and the catalogers at Mount Holyoke are better informed about the role of cataloging in that library because of the discussions which preceded the writing of her paper. She acknowledges her debt to her catalogers, and it is certain that they must have gained in breadth of view through learning more about the executive side of the situation. It is to be hoped that many executives will follow Miss Ludington's example and take the time for mutual exchange of ideas with their catalogers. Also, the statement about statistics of Library of Congress cards used at Mount Holyoke may perhaps start a quest for information of the same sort in other libraries. Miss Smith brings up specific examples of how the catalog at the University of Michigan has failed or succeeded as to accuracy and fullness. Such facts should prove of help to staff members in other libraries. Her example of the problem of establishing the date of birth for Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne may bring forth criticism from librarians who do not think that the catalog should feature as a

bibliographical tool but at least Miss Smith has raised an important issue in a practical fashion. Mr. Ellsworth more than once shows firsthand acquaintance with the reaction of his student body to the catalog. Also, he acknowledges that he has discussed problems with faculty members, both at the University of Colorado and elsewhere. Would that other library executives might follow in his footsteps!

*Attention to Cataloging Problems as a
Whole Rather than to the
Text of the Code*

Four of the contributors were, of course, asked definitely to prepare papers about the code. Miss Morsch, Miss Ludington, and Miss Smith may be said to have fulfilled that purpose. Mr. Ellsworth, however, devotes most of his time to making general remarks about the cataloging situation in his own and other libraries. The remaining six writers were not expected to concern themselves entirely with the new edition of the rules. Yet Miss Root mentions it frequently, Mr. Tauber includes it in his review article and Mr. Nyholm handles in admirable fashion the task of covering both the general cataloging situation and the trends shown in the code. Mr. Clapp, Mr. Haykin, Mr. Mumford, and Mr. Tauber all deal with the wider aspects of cataloging from the standpoint of librarianship as a whole. Such an apportionment of topics shows foresight on the part of the editors. The advent of the new rules is important but it should not overshadow everything else that is happening in cataloging circles. The forum is well balanced for the very reason that subject headings, classifications, and cooperative cataloging, not to speak of the general movement towards simplification, have not been overlooked.

Conclusions

As a teacher of cataloging, I view the March issue of this journal as one of the most fruitful sources for required readings that I have ever come across. It is true that the first-year student in library school would be thrown literally into a maelstrom if he were confronted at the beginning of his course with the variety of opinions expressed in the ten papers relating to cataloging. After he has had some introductory instruction on the use of the catalog, the principles of its compilation, and the means of establishing different forms of entry, a beginning student should, however, be ready to grasp the fact that the library world is constantly changing and that catalogers must adapt themselves to new conditions. He should not be kept in the dark as to the lack of uniformity of opinion among executives and other members of the library profession as to how necessary changes are to be effected, and I know of no better way to introduce him to this situation than to put into his hands the papers presented in the March number. As for the advanced student of cataloging, he might well spend the entire term in analyzing and discussing points brought out by the ten different contributors. If each channel of thought were investigated thoroughly, the instructor would have little time to add anything else to the curriculum. For the student would be occupied in studying the new code for himself so that he might understand the papers; with investigating the differences between simplified, normal, and full cataloging; with reviewing his knowledge of standard subject heading lists and classification schemes and making critical inquiries as to the ways in which these tools have fitted in or have failed to fit in with

the needs of different types of institutions; with determining the relationship of the catalog department to general library administration. He would, moreover, be reading the reflective ideas of experts in his profession, and it is to be hoped that he would find their varying opinions challenging.

Status in Library Schools

The status of the new catalog rules in the library school curriculum is not so clear. Many instructors have taken literally the notice accompanying copies of the preliminary American second edition of the code, which stated that this edition was not for use in library schools. Other teachers have felt that the beginning students should have some acquaintance with the new rules after a firm grasp of the principles of the 1908 code has been assured. In advanced courses there has been, of course, little danger in promoting discussion about features in the new rules at any time during the term. So much for this year but how about the immediate future? There is little profit in requiring students to assimilate the content of Part II if this whole section is to be deleted and other printed substitutes provided for the description of the book. Until the Library of Congress, the two A.L.A. committees devoted to the revision of the code, and librarians at large have come to definite decisions about changes and supplementary publications, the library school instructor will have to live from day to day—teaching the old rules, mentioning some features of Part I of the revised code that are likely to attain permanence, and pointing out constantly that an authorized delineation of cataloging procedures is still in the making. However difficult such a task may

prove, it has its bright side. Those students who are to be the catalogers of the future should, because of these uncertainties and disagreements, prove more adapt-

able in making changes and adjustments when they undertake the building of actual catalogs in libraries and the solution of future cataloging problems.

By FRANCIS G. WILSON

The Library Catalog and the Scholar

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THE USERS of the college and research library hardly know that there is a "crisis" in the art and science of cataloging. In degree each professor and student is aware of the virtues and the vices of the catalog but few have any coherent opinions on what might be called policies of the cataloging department of a library. Yet any scholar should welcome the wide discussion among librarians of the question, for it is only the inert and static professional group which has no questions as to its own folkways. The users of libraries will see a hope for continued improvements in the management of the book resources of the nation in the re-examination of cataloging, even though they may not know just what the improvements are to be.

The nonprofessional approach to the catalog would, perhaps, distinguish first of all between the kinds of users of the library. Undergraduates have a certain type of demand, the graduate students another, and the faculty still others. But distinctions must be made between different kinds of faculty men, since some teachers seldom use the library while others regard it as their garden of research which

must be carefully cultivated. If the least sympathy need be expended on the teacher who does no research, we must also recognize that the needs of the students generally follow the pattern of demand originating in the teaching process. The values of the teacher are reflected in the demands the students make upon the library. A library catalog is a single instrument which must serve the needs of the whole academic community.

Wider Meaning of Service

Professional librarians may become immersed in the details of policy and administration and they may therefore forget the wider meaning of the service they are rendering the university. The library is, for the liberal and humane aspect of education, the organic and functioning center of the campus. If the laboratory courses may neglect the treasures of the mind locked up in books, the humanities cannot. Our universities have grown up in measure around the permanence of the library. We assume that the library will continue always to be where it is and that it will be always available to the seeker for knowledge. Americans who have used libraries in Europe will in many cases have realized the achievements of the American librarian, and this realization comes from