THE SERIALS PERPLEX:
ACQUIRING SERIALS IN LARGE LIBRARIES

Are serials a drug on the market? We do not really know how many of them there are. William Katz suggests that the current rate of publishing "is increasing roughly three times as fast as the growth of the world’s population," and he indicates the criticalness of the situation by stating that "while the world's population dies, the books linger on."¹ We are being told endlessly these days about how big a curse overpopulation is. As for the print explosion, one thing is certain—if Katz's figure is correct—we need never fear as we go shouldering one another off the earth's surface that we will be at a loss for something to read.

If we do not know how many serials are extant—people say that between 60 and 80 percent of the world's total publications are in the form of serials—we do have some idea as to how many periodicals there are. William Huff says that these number anywhere from 50,000 now, to a figure of 100,000 in 1979.² We know quite positively that magazines are being produced at a prodigious rate, and in my opinion we do not have to wait until 1979 to reach the 100,000 mark. We are already there.

Concerning the quality of what is being produced, it is good and bad at the same time. Some things are worth reading, and some are not. Recently Ashley Montagu said that he thought American magazines were flourishing in unprecedented fashion:

What a looking-glass to the history and development of this country is the American magazine! Is there any country that has a more interesting and bedazzling variety of magazines than this? I strongly doubt it. For vigor and variety, I think it would be difficult to equal the performance of the American magazine.
America's intellectual vigor happily grows greater rather than less, and we may expect this to be paralleled by an increase, rather than a decrease, in the number and quality of its magazines.

The question might be asked: How many serials does one need in order to have an adequate collection? My own feeling is that the number should be bigger than past history and finances are likely to permit. A library's collection should not be merely representative, but full in the sense that it provides for all of the reasonable needs of its library's customers.

BLANKET ORDERS

So much emphasis is being placed these days on blanket-order schemes that it is scarcely a surprise to find librarians experimenting with methods of obtaining serial publications in other than the one-item-per-order way. Certainly the blanket idea appeals. Why not get everything automatically as it appears, if this can be done without the fuss and bother that the separate ordering of each item entails?

The University of Washington Libraries have blanket orders with a local bookdealer for serial publications of the non-periodical type put out by various American university presses, and while on the whole the experience with these orders has been satisfactory, it has not been entirely trouble-free. Of course, it would be too much to expect that all of the hitches and flaws of the order-by-order arrangement are avoided by substituting for it the blanket arrangement. Even the machine is not going to bring about this lovely state of affairs. A non-linguist friend of mine suggests wryly that serials persons should adopt as their slogan the expression Schlamperei toujours. He may be right, if by this he means that our bumbling is indivisible and nonstop.

The blanket arrangement involves one inevitably in a number of difficulties. For one thing, there is a certain amount of confusion at the time the arrangement is first entered. Single orders already underway for items included in the blanket order have to be cancelled, overlapping shipments sorted out and conflicting billings squared away. At the same time, required duplicate orders for items appearing in the blanket order have to be taken care of in one way or another.

If the existence of old orders is awkward, so also is the uncertainty as to what will be included in the new ones. The supplier says that he will of course send everything in the publisher's catalog. Unfortunately, however, no catalog is ever complete or completely accurate. Consequently, what an over-all order brings—or omits—is generally a matter of uncertainty. For instance, the University of Washington Libraries included monographic publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in its over-all Harvard order. As it turned out, the reason for their inclusion was not that they are issued by Harvard, but merely that they are distributed by it. On the other hand, it was found that expected items are sometimes omitted. It is a sad fact that often new items are not sent until they are specifically requested.

Still, such difficulties can be expected to tidy themselves up with a certain length of time. If this does not happen, then one must conclude that
the blanket arrangement brings with it no appreciable advantage, and even buying in the piecemeal, item-by-item way is as satisfactory. It is difficult to say whether the fuss and cost are greater in one instance that in the other. Since the University of Washington Libraries’ experience with blanket orders has not been too pleasing, we do not find the blanket idea wholly irresistible. On the other hand, we are not certain that we have done enough experimenting with it to know how valuable it really is.

Bookdealers, however, greet the blanket-order idea with unanimous enthusiasm. Although many of them are not willing to accept blanket orders for serial publications, some do. As an inducement to would-be subscribers, Richard Abel, Inc. assumes responsibility for cancelling existing orders for items contained in the blanket order, and it also takes charge of returning duplicate shipments that arrive during the change-over period. Some firms have their own blanket-order programs. Stechert-Hafner, for instance, has at least four. These are identified by the initial acronyms: LACAP, BOPFA, FORFS and BOBNS. The acronyms expanded become: Latin-American Cooperative Acquisitions Program, Blanket Order Program for French Acquisitions, Foreign Fiction Service, and Blanket Order for “Book-News” Selections. The number of such programs available to libraries is becoming greater as time goes on. In most instances, however, serial items are considered to be outside the scope of the program.

A variation of the blanket arrangement can be seen in the operation of the Library of Congress’s Public Law 480 Program. According to Public Law 480, some part of the money earned through the sale of surplus agricultural products abroad is set aside for the purchase and processing by the Library of Congress of books and periodicals put out in the countries concerned, and the later distribution of these publications to libraries at home. The areas from which publications are being obtained at present are the Indian subcontinent and certain parts of Central Europe and of the Middle East.

This program is unquestionably of use to libraries participating in it. Its usefulness extends in fact much beyond the enriching of local collections, as one of the conditions required by the program is that participants make the materials they receive available through interlibrary loan to anyone in this country who wants them. According to Mortimer Graves, the widest possible use of these materials is essential if the program is to prove fully effective.4 Graves goes further; he asserts that librarians have a positive obligation to see that the materials are used properly:

The richest and most powerful society in history, called to responsibility, if not leadership, in the spherical, scientific, social(ized), secular, dynamic, crowded, and contentious world promised us by the twenty-first century, must develop the facilities for knowing that world as completely as possible. Of these our libraries form not the least important element. Only with understanding can we escape disaster; without it fifty or more Koreas and Vietnams lie just around the corner.5

Librarians may find this assessment of the place of libraries in the coming century somewhat overzealous, but they are not likely to consider it entirely beside the point. A matter of more immediate concern, however, is how long
the Public Law 480 Program can be expected to continue. There are suggestions that parts of it may have to be cut out, as Congress paves the way for national austerity; and if some parts go, others are sure to follow.

REPRINTS

The mass availability of reprints now offers help to persons who are attempting to fill in back runs of serials, or for that matter to buy old items that, for whatever reason, they do not hold at all. Within the last ten years or so, a good many reprint firms have come into existence. Some of the biggest of these are the Johnson Reprint Corporation, the AMS Reprint Service of New York, and the Gale Research Company of Detroit. There are, of course, many other such firms, some of which are themselves of fair size and importance.

Complaints of various sorts are made against the reprinter, but the fact that they reprint publications not available in other ways is a point not lightly dismissed. Among the complaints launched against them are that their prices are high and that they sometimes announce publication of an item too far in advance.

It is true that reprint prices sometimes seem extraordinarily high, but it is also true that these prices are not much out of line with prices paid for materials in print. An o.p. dealer complained not long ago to the AB Bookman’s Weekly that he was having trouble in selling original editions of recently reprinted books, even though the prices he was asking were below those charged by the reprinters. He went on to say that he suspected acquisitions librarians were ordering items from reprint catalogs without first checking to see whether or not the items they were after could be had at less cost through the o.p. trade. The editor’s reply to this letter was to the effect that some reprints were indeed priced higher than they should be. And then, unable to resist a parting jab, he added “as to librarians . . . there’s no point in getting wrought up about them as a class. They come in all sizes and styles, just as do dealers and collectors. Some are knowledgeable, others couldn’t care less about someone’s else [sic] money.” No doubt every acquisitions person has given offense in the way described—not only of course to the dealer whose wares he has spurned, but to himself also by inadvertently foregoing the bargain that a little hunting might have brought him.

As for the too early advertising of reprints, the AB Bookman’s editor has this to say:

In the “early” days of “modern” antiquarian reprints—i.e., just after WWII—scarcity of O.P. books and periodicals, growth of old and new libraries, etc., all combined to produce some “quick-buck” reprinters. They would announce long lists of books “to be reprinted,” “on press,” “available soon,” and the like. Reasons were many: to pre-empt titles and series, warn off other reprinters, obtain advance orders—and cash sometimes, with special pre-pub offers. Trouble was that such novice reprinters would fail to publish book(s) if there were insufficient advance orders, interest and cash, thus injuring genuine reprinter and purchaser who may have laid out money or allotted sum in budget. Fortunately, such practices are now at a
minimum. Even the few who had begun this way, and have still survived, have had to learn the hard way that confidence and trust are the twin beacons in the book fraternity. Thankfully, ours is not yet a huge field or a million-mass market, and it does not take too long to learn of the few firms that cannot be trusted.7

Behavior of the sort, it goes practically without saying, is anathema to librarians, who in ordering items long held-up in the publishing process find themselves saddled with at least two troublesome problems. First of all, they must reconcile their records (and maybe an irate customer or two) in the matter of the delayed receipt of the item. Also librarians do not like to allocate funds in one fiscal period for items that have no likelihood of arriving in that period, and they have good reason to slight such items. Their concern is not merely to keep the library bookkeeper happy, but, more importantly, to insure that allocated funds are not swept away in the general tidying-up that comes at the end of the fiscal period.

While abuses continue to exist in the reprint trade, their existence is much less obvious than it once was. Most firms specializing in reprints know that they have to behave in ways acceptable to their customers, and most are willing to comply insofar as they can with this requirement.

The number and variety of reprints available at the moment is sufficient to raise anyone’s eyebrows. The fact is that most reprint publishers are on the qui vive for new titles to add to their list, and they welcome suggestions from anyone concerning such titles. In many cases, the publisher is willing to reprint an item even without a guarantee that sales will go beyond the break-even point. Where this point occurs is, of course, not always easy to predict. One may suppose, however, that an item with a possible sale of fifty or sixty copies is grist to the publisher’s mill. The publisher’s readiness to engage in what might seem a rather risky undertaking arises out of three conditions: the existence of a ready market for reprints; the cheapness and efficiency of photo-offset printing; and the conviction, which is invariably borne out in practice, that even sleepers held long enough turn a profit.

TAPE PUBLICATIONS

Tape publications were undoubtedly inevitable. There are magazines like Wildlife Disease that appear only on microfilm, and others like Aspen that are made up of bits and pieces put together in a special box or plastic bag. Certainly inventiveness in the field of magazine publishing is not lacking. And now comes Computer Telejournal, a magazine issued in what are called “electronic video-recording cartridges.” These cartridges are read in videotape players designed to hook up to an ordinary television set.8 A number of large, multi-magazine indexes have of course been available for some time on tape, as well as in hard copy—Pandex, for instance, and the Science Citation Index—but never until now has a magazine appeared in tape format, and in this format alone.

The precedent is one that could have a considerable impact upon the collecting activities of libraries. Despite McLuhan’s second thoughts at a recent
New York Antiquarian Bookseller's Fair that the book is a communication medium that will endure, libraries are bound to find themselves before long in the business of collecting taped messages of one sort or another. The fact that few libraries are yet able to support a computer does present a problem, but one can take comfort in the thought that problems of this sort generally have a way of solving themselves in the end.  

The serials person's first encounter with the machine usually comes when he has decided to issue a computerized list of serials. We have all undergone this experience, and if we have emerged from it feeling a little bent (not to say stapled, spindled or mutilated), we are, nevertheless, convinced that the machine has a place in our future. As William Huff puts the matter: "Automation' is no longer a trend, it has become a state of mind."  

The fact is that now we not only tolerate the machine's presence—we actually welcome it. We may have qualms about giving the machine its way in all parts of our work. On the other hand, we are willing to turn a substantial part of our routine recordkeeping over to it without fuss.  

Ray Bradbury and others predict that the time is close at hand when people will stop turning on the computer, and instead submit to being turned on by it. A systems analyst at the University of Wisconsin says that "people have consistently underestimated the speed of advancement in the computer field, and have consistently underestimated the extent of future developments."  

It may be that we should be preparing now for technology's finest hour, an hour which may or may not coincide with that of our own decline.  

As for tape publications, what is there to be said about them? The first thing one notices is that computers are being used now in the production of nearly all of the big, important indexes, and that some of the indexes themselves are available on magnetic tape. An effort is being made by the Chemical Abstracts service, for instance, to produce all of its publications in machine-readable form as well as in conventional printed form. Similarly, the Institute for Scientific Information has plans for making the Science Citation Index and its other publications available in both ways, and the publishers of the Engineering Index expect before long to follow suit with their index.  

The next thing one is likely to notice is that tape indexes are highly expensive. Chemical Abstracts in its printed form costs universities at this time about $1,000 a year (the price of this publication has been advancing by $200 to $300 a year for the past several years), and costs others even more. (The university price in 1970, incidentally, will be in the vicinity of $2,000.) Whether or not Chemical Abstracts will ever be offered in its entirety on tape is uncertain. At the moment various offshoots of it can be had in this form. Basic Journal Abstracts and CA Condensates are two of these. In each case, the price is $4,000 a year. In examining the cost of tape indexes, no matter where these originate, one is forced to conclude that he is going to have to find some means of supplementing his regular budget significantly if he is to participate to any extent in the advantages that the arrival of the tapes makes possible. Money problems are every librarian's bane, and these are clearly not going to become smaller as time goes on.
As has been suggested, the cost of tapes is not by any means the only cost that computer-age librarians will find themselves faced with. The cost of equipment, including that of machine ownership (or even rental), is still far beyond the means of most of us. An outlandish indication of the sort of budgetary difficulty facing us was presented in June of 1969 at the ALA Conference by a librarian from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This librarian cited the fact:

that the amortized annual cost for space and equipment for his public card catalog was $3,000. To store the same number of cards and provide on-line access through a computer would cost $600,000 per year. Similarly, MIT can store a book for $.20 a year, which is the amortized cost of the land, building, and shelving. To “store” the text of that same book in “off-line” computer memory would cost $7.46 per year, excluding the cost of converting the text to machine-readable form.\(^1\)

There is little doubt that the availability of publications on magnetic tape portends great changes in the life of most libraries, nor are its immediate effects lightly discounted. The availability alone of tape indexes permits in-depth searching of the literature of a subject that is far beyond the scope of most manual searches. It is possible, of course, to have any number of subject headings (or descriptors, as the new usage is) placed in the machine’s memory rather than the few allowed in the manual search. The approach to one’s subject is thus much broadened, and the effectiveness of the search is improved in corresponding fashion. Early experiments in machine-searching, in fact, sometimes produced results that were altogether too effective. It must have been disconcerting to a Medlars searcher, say, to find himself loaded down with twenty pages of references to a particular subject when one or two references alone would have filled the bill. Yet the search, properly conducted, provides both fullness and exclusivity, and it is these properties, along with the speed of the machine itself, that give tape indexes their unique importance.

**CENTER FOR RESEARCH LIBRARIES PROPOSAL**

If one needs a serial but does not want permanent possession of it, there is always the possibility of borrowing it. And the possibility becomes a necessity in cases in which the item is a dead one and not available for purchase anywhere. In such cases, the interlibrary loan mechanism is called into play, and with luck, the needed item is presented to the requestor, either in the original or in photocopy.

The interlibrary arrangement is important—no question of this—but it has its limitations. One big one is that the needed item cannot always be located, or, if located, it is not allowed away from its home library. The delay involved in the interlibrary process is also a matter of concern. Some delay is inevitable and expected; the amount occurring ordinarily is greater than most borrowers find easily acceptable. If quick interlibrary-loan service consists of completing a transaction within a week or ten days’ time, it is clear that only inveterate users of the service will have the patience to accept gracefully the
longer time lapse that generally occurs. Facsimile transmission offers hope that things will improve in the future, but, as David Heron and J. Richard Blanchard indicate, the prospects for large-scale use of facsimile transmission, while these exist, are not glowingly imminent. The fact that Heron and Blanchard made their remarks some time ago does not matter very much as the strictures these remarks contain are still valid.\textsuperscript{13}

And now a riddle. When does one give pounds and pence and shillings away, and at the same time keep them (along with his heart presumably)? The answer is provided by the Center for Research Libraries. The Center has produced a plan whereby interlibrary borrowing can, all going well, be substituted for serial subscriptions. The plan, as outlined by Gordon Williams, is to turn the the Center into what he calls a “centralized national lending library for serials,” a library which has serials as its stock-in-trade and other libraries as its customers.\textsuperscript{14} The success of the plan, Williams says, is predicated upon the view that, depending upon frequency of use, there is a point at which it becomes cheaper for a library to borrow a serial than to acquire and maintain a subscription to it. To show how the plan works, Williams produced a series of mathematical models which made it possible to determine not only when a serial costs more than its use justifies, but also how much money can be saved by giving up possession of little-used serials in favor of access to the Center’s copy of these serials.

In essence the alternative the Center offers to conventional methods of dealing with serials is itself conventional. Its application, however, is not. The Center proposes to relieve member libraries of the necessity of keeping serials on their shelves beyond the point at which this can be done with ease and economy, and it proposes further to make available to members through interlibrary loan any serials that they may need from time to time. One can scarcely say that there is anything new in the interlibrary-loan notion. What is new is the fact that the Center is about to engage in an interlibrary-loan operation on a scale that can only be described as vast. Another unusual feature of the plan—and one worth noting—is that while the Center is a non-profit corporation, the service it offers is not free. Actually, the Center now requires that libraries wishing to borrow from it obtain a Center membership, the fee for which is substantial, and that they must pay various incidental fees as they do their borrowing.

Even so, libraries can assume that what is offered is a fair bargain. Libraries may, in fact, voice the question: Is all of this too good to be true? Certainly misgivings about the Center’s plan do crop up. A number are cited by the University of Wisconsin Library. This library suggests that the Center’s mathematical models may not have been based upon a wide enough examination of library costs.\textsuperscript{15} It points out also that the models fail to adequately compare the cost of access at a distance with that of local access, that they do not give enough weight to the value of browsing, and that they project savings which are more potential than realizable, as no guarantee exists that the Center will have any particular serial its members request.\textsuperscript{16}

An objection of another sort has been registered by the director of the press at the University of Wisconsin. This objection concerns the fact that the
borrowing or photocopying by libraries of the serials they need could work a hardship on publishers, particularly those which put out items of the more specialized sort.\textsuperscript{17} Williams, in reply to the charge, says that there may be some danger in the plan to present publishing practices, but he thinks the danger is easily exaggerated.\textsuperscript{18} He also suggests that it is necessary to find some means of overcoming today's information gap:

I wasn't around at the time, but I can well imagine that the scribes set up a loud hullabaloo when the printing press began to undercut the market for handwritten books. Individual scribes undoubtedly suffered from this invention, yet I think it can hardly be doubted that the public benefitted from it. By decreasing the cost of copies it greatly improved the dissemination of information. As publication rates have steadily accelerated, and the number of people capable of using information, and needing to know, has enlarged to include most of the population, it is clear that individuals must rely on libraries since they cannot afford to buy for themselves all of the publications whose information they need to have access to. And, at the same time, the amount being published, and preserved from the past, is far more than every library can afford to acquire. In brief, we are in a situation still in which it is desirable to reduce the cost for the dissemination of information to the lowest practicable figure, in order that as much information as possible can be disseminated as widely as possible.\textsuperscript{19}

If the Center's plan has objectionable features, the foregoing remarks make clear what some of these are. Still others can be added to the list. For example:

That although ready access to materials is the Center's principal objective, no convincing proof is offered that improvement of access will be brought about by acceptance of the Center plan.

That customer-reaction to the notion of service-at-a-distance has not been fully assessed.

That the scheme implemented according to Center specifications would lock member libraries into an arrangement from which retreat, supposing this were desired, would be difficult, if not impossible.\textsuperscript{19}

Setting aside all misgivings and objections, however, one cannot escape the thought that in accepting the Center's scheme, he may indeed be finding a way out of one of the most pressing dilemmas of the day: how to stretch resources sufficiently to give customers the kind of service they both need and have a right to expect.

It may be said, finally, that in accepting the Center's proposal, one proclaims his faith in the efficacy (and perhaps the perfectibility) of large-scale librarianship, since the proposal brought to fruition would establish a serials network of a scope and usefulness not before projected even by such bodies as ALA's Serials Committee and the Joint Committee on the Union List of Serials. Who knows? This may in fact be what libraries have been waiting for. In any event, librarians with a serials problem are advised to give the Center's proposal serious consideration.
If acquiring serials is full of problems and pitfalls, getting rid of serials, once they are no longer wanted, can be difficult too. Librarians as a rule are not given to throwing things out. What usually happens is that once an item is acquired, it is acquired for all time.

From time to time, attempts are made by librarians who suspect the quality of their holdings to sift out items that no longer deserve a place in the collection, but such attempts nearly always bog down early due to a lack of time and money. About the most that can be done to keep one's collection in trim, it seems, is to take a good look at each new item as it arrives in order to determine whether or not it brings with it something that the collection needs.

A full-scale inventory of holdings is an undertaking not lightly entered into, and a full-scale review of the contents of one's collection is a project certain to give pause to anyone contemplating it. My own library examines each new item for relevancy and usefulness when it first arrives, and again at the end of the first subscription period. But the result produced by this effort is so equivocal—I doubt that one out of 1,000 items examined fails the test—that we will likely abandon ourselves before long to the hazards of rampant and unreviewed growth.

At first glance surveying one's collection as a means of getting rid of unwanted duplicate subscriptions is a prospect that appears to hold merit. It turns out, however, that in a large and decentralized system, such as that of the University of Washington, there is absolutely no way of getting rid of duplicate subscriptions short of removing from the system the units in which they are kept. Pleadings do no good, nor do threats, cajolings and headshakings. Twice in the ten years before the machine came to bless our efforts at the University of Washington, we drew up by hand a list of the duplicate subscriptions in our collection. In each instance, we spent long weeks in doing the job, and in each instance the result produced was negligible. The lists, of course, were splendid to look at, but somehow they failed to persuade anyone to cancel any of his own duplicate subscriptions, and even, for that matter, to stop ordering more of them.

A similar result was produced in a survey conducted some years ago at Berkeley. Helen Worden, in reply to a question concerning this survey, states that the survey was abandoned as a total loss:

Berkeley's continuing survey of current serials was discontinued rather than completed some fifteen years ago and no study was done of the cost of the survey. The purpose of the survey was to reduce the incidence and control the speed of duplication of serials. It accomplished neither end.

The Berkeley survey—"experiment" might be a more appropriate term, as the survey dealt with only selected parts of the collection—lasted for the better part of ten years, and it failed, according to George Piternick, because of "ineffectiveness, slowness and costliness." These three factors Piternick examines as follows:
Ineffectiveness. Of 2,196 titles submitted for consideration, only 32 (actually 31) or 1.5% were actually cancelled as a result of the review. Not only is this a very small percentage, but the average subscription price of the titles cancelled was only $5.44 per annum, far below the $8.17 mean value for Current Serials Fund titles in 1957/58. Thus the cheaper titles are those cancelled. This result is perhaps not too surprising—the relationship between low cost and insubstantiality is traditional—but the effectiveness of the review for bringing down the size of the Current Serials Fund is made even less apparent thereby.

Slowness. [When perpetuation of the continuous review was recommended, it was recommended also] that the frequency of the review cycle be made 7-10 years. Since the inception of the continuous review in May 1950, 2,196 titles have been considered, or about 244 titles per year. In that same period, more or less, the number of subscriptions carried [centrally] has increased from 6,688 to 11,064, a yearly increase of 625 titles. The cycle of review, therefore, instead of being 7-10 years, has become an infinite number of years. At present rates we'll never get through it even once.

Expensiveness. Preparation of the lists and their review are procedures consuming a great deal of time of library staff and of the academic personnel engaged in the review. In the preparation of lists new cards must be made, data obtained from the serials file, a subject codification of serial titles performed by professional staff, involving examination of back files, actual preparation of multilithed lists; submission to subject specialists and academic personnel involves record keeping, reminder notices, rechecking, etc. It would be almost impossible and not particularly relevant to find an actual cost in staff and academic time per title cancelled—my rough estimate would be over $200 per title cancelled. The argument may be made, of course, that this cost is in salaries already budgeted and hence not an added expense, but, at some stages at least, the Continuous Review is not entirely a “fill-in” operation, but interferes with other, more useful work.21

These were the principal factors then that led to the failure of the Berkeley survey. Piternick notes, however, that at least two others contributed to its failure—the difficulty of determining whether or not a serial was good enough to deserve a place in the collection, and the fact that the decisions made were sometimes so questionable that reversal was inevitable. Piternick recommended that the survey be discontinued, and this recommendation, as noted, was carried out.22

It becomes apparent as time goes on and library costs soar that the old notion of storing duplicate and unwanted materials against an unstated future need is not quite so prudent and useful a notion as it was once thought to be. The fact is that too much saving can actually be wasteful. One makes no gain in banking his money at 4 percent when the cost of living is increasing by 5 percent. The moral is that while thrift and foresight are admirable qualities, these can be used to one’s disadvantage all too easily and too soon.

I am not suggesting that one should dispose of everything he has no immediate use for. It is a fact that items which one has no room for in his collection can have significance. Certainly one would not be inclined to throw out a duplicate run of so valuable a publication as Jane’s All the World’s
Aircraft. Garden-variety items are retained at peril, not of life and limb perhaps, but certainly of peace of mind and quiet efficiency of operation.

The case of the University of Washington Libraries—which may or may not be typical—throws cautionary light on the problem of storing unwanted and marginal materials. For years we saved everything, thinking that an eventual use would be found for each item put aside—even the most trifling and shabby. It was clear that we were not hoarding for the sake of hoarding, but on the other hand, it was not really clear that the only thing we had in mind as we moved materials into storage was the future good of our active collection. I have an unpleasant suspicion that we at Washington were actually using the storage device as a means of clearing our desks when no other means of doing this presented itself. In any case, our storage collection grew at such a pace that before long we found ourselves in possession of what some wag described as an acre and a half of duplicates.

And how much use did we get out of this collection of duplicates? Hardly any. One would suppose that a collection of such dimensions would yield treasure upon treasure. This, however, did not happen. The trouble was that vast files involve their keepers in vast labor, and this labor was invariably in an amount disproportionate to the good the files provide. We had our acre and a half of duplicates, and we worked hard to keep this collection in fit and usable order. Our work, however, turned out to be pointless. The number of items we were able to glean from the storage place for use in our regular collection was small to the point of disappearance. There were a few such items, but so few that even consulting the file—far from keeping it in order—was a waste of time.

What I am saying should not be construed as a polemic for the outright abandonment of the storage idea. There is some point certainly in being able to store things. Nearly everyone is tempted at one time or another to relegate to storage troublesome and bulky items that he both wants and does not want. And if he gives way in this case, he can take solace in the thought that in another he may stand firm.

Librarians of course have reason to worry about the uncontrolled growth of their collections, and an index to the size of the worry they feel appears in the fact that treatises on weeding keep coming out. Terms like “selective book-retirement,” “seldom-used item,” “obsolescence,” “storage” and “discarding” dot our profession’s literature. In considering such terms, incidentally, John H. Ottemiller makes the point that administrators would just as soon avoid their use, since they all have a negative connotation. He goes on to say, however, that they continue to be used simply because no satisfactory substitutes have been found for them.23 Certainly the concepts these terms embody are concepts that librarians are frequently called upon to juggle. And as the amassing of materials continues (the rate at which this proceeds never fails to astonish), the terms are not likely to fall out of use.

The practice of storing useful but little-used parts of one’s regular collection is not likely to be discontinued because stored materials cost less to care for than do materials kept in the main body of one’s collection. The argument is clinched, moreover, by the thought that although immediate
accessibility is denied in the case of stored materials, it is not needed very often anyway.

There is no doubt but that the idea is a useful one. Yet there are sizable objections to it. These are summarized neatly by Lee Ash in his book on the experiment carried out at Yale in the selective retirement of books. Ash states that at the beginning of the experiment it seemed reasonable to suppose that old completed serials and beginning runs of currently received ones could be relegated to storage without much trouble. He makes it clear, however, that this supposition soon went overboard:

Faculty members were reluctant to transfer long serial sets to storage, particularly if there were no cumulative index to them. They said that faculty and students like to search through such material, and often from this come ideas for papers or dissertations or new angles on topics of great interest to their research. Those working on various editorial projects in the Library did not want anything to go to storage and especially not serials. The Reference Department staff objected to the transfer of any of the learned society serial publications to storage because of the heavy use they receive; further transfer of these was, therefore, suspended.24

Other objections were equally as telling. One of these concerns the fact that making additions to incomplete serials in storage is difficult to do. The matter as it affected the Yale experiment is described as follows:

Since the Yale storage collection allows no space for additions, we could not put incomplete serials into it. Yet to weeders these were prime candidates for storage. We reviewed this problem from every angle but found no satisfactory answer. We agreed that, if not more than ten per cent of the volumes of a set were lacking, we would transfer the set to storage and put boxes on the shelves in place of the missing volumes so that there would be space for them if received. If more than fifty per cent of the set were lacking, we considered whether it should be discarded, whether it should be transferred to another library to fill its gaps, or whether we should try to fill in the gaps or replace the entire set by microfilm. But seldom were volumes to fill the lacks or a microfilm available. If a complete set for filming was located in some other library, usually the cost of a single copy was too high for its potential use in the University. Occasionally we decided to put an incomplete file in storage if nothing had been added to the set in years and it seemed unlikely to have additions in the future. In so doing, we took the risk of having to relocate the set or add a second call number if volumes were received later. The problem of incomplete serials in relation to compact storage has not been solved.25

Weeding problems are also of consequence. A library may decide that it will weed its collection, but in putting the decision into effect it will find, as the people at Yale did, that weeding can be as complex and time-consuming a procedure as any with which librarians must deal. According to Ash, the biggest weeding problem has to do with finding a sufficient number of qualified people to carry out the task effectively. A second is that as weeding progresses, it becomes an increasingly more difficult matter to unearth weedable items. And a third is that weeding can never proceed at a fast enough pace to make way for present growth in the collection. What Ash
refers to as the “ever-normal-granary theory,” the theory that the growth of an active collection can be controlled by putting in storage each year as many items as are added, is then overturned from the start.26

In spite of all of these difficulties, however, Yale adheres to the storage principle. It turns out, not unreasonably, that in cases in which a library’s rate of accession surpasses the rate of growth of its physical plant, the library has little alternative but to accede to some form of storing.

PRICES

A truism to end all truisms is that the times are not what they were. What is certain, at any rate, is that we do not need a Keynes or a Kiesinger to tell us that deprivation and affluence have aspects in common. If the case were otherwise, librarians would surely not find, as they do at the moment, that all their affluence is insufficient to bring them the publications they need.

The good old days are definitely and irretrievably gone—and with them the possibility of finding a bargain that is a bargain. Far from this, prices are going up a a rate that is quantum, exponential and unspeakably horrible. It becomes more and more apparent that there is absolutely no way out of the price bind for anyone, let alone for the serials librarians.

What is happening is that the average library budget, which at best is seldom more than a threshold budget (i.e., one large enough to provide adequate, if mediocre, services) is being thumped and pounded and squeezed and mangled until every inch of it is confused and bleeding.

Bigness is constantly confused with virtue these days. And bigness, whether or not it is a virtue, has come upon the library scene with a vengeance. Rider was not far wrong in supposing that academic libraries double in size every sixteen years; the doubling process in fact now stuffs itself into a ten-year period. And an invincible corollary may now be offered to the Rider theorem. Stated bluntly this corollary holds that regardless of the rate of growth of the collection, the cost of building it up and maintaining it in an average way will more than double in ten years’ time.

Proof is afforded by a glance at the latest array of price indexes for library materials.27 William Huff and Norman Brown speak calmly of increases in the serials field that are considerably larger than one wishes to credit. If librarians neither whimper nor complain as things turn from bad to worse, their restraint is great, and serves as an example to those of us who are more inclined to find offense in the matter than they are.

I am not suggesting that Huff and Brown like what is happening. I know that they do not. They are as disturbed about it as any of us are, more than most in all likelihood. Yet one can hardly say that librarians in general are greatly agitated over rising prices. There has been a strange silence in our literature concerning the fact that prices are outrunning themselves. The indexes appear regularly with some accompanying comment on percentage gains (and losses?), but apart from this, one has much searching to do before he turns up anything else.
ACQUIRING SERIALS IN LARGE LIBRARIES

Is the price of serials all that bad then? The answer is “yes.” In the past ten years’ time, the indexes show that, true to the Rider corollary, the average price of American periodicals has about doubled, and that the average price of American serial services has made a similar bound into the blue.

If an increase of 100 percent spread over a period of ten years seems livable, its livableness becomes less obvious when one considers that the rate of increase is itself advancing at a considerable clip. Helen Welch Tuttle makes this point somewhat offhandedly in the Library Journal.28 In talking about price increases, as these affect periodicals, she implies here and there that the rates are not static, but are in fact following a considerable inflationary bent themselves.

An English librarian, B. H. Baumfield suggested a short while back in a letter to the Bookseller that the air was full of what he termed “swingeing” increases in the price of books.29 I am not sure that I can define properly the term “swingeing,” but I am convinced that Baumfield knows what he means, and further that he is right.

Baumfield’s letter, incidentally, served to bring to public view—in England, anyway—the immense rush among publishers and booksellers to bring their prices into proper perspective with the times. Since the appearance of the letter, a full-dress review of the price situation has been presented in the same publication. Notes and articles galore on the subject of rising prices have been printed, and (to use a familiar term) continuation of the series can be expected.

One item that came out some months ago is of particular importance. This is a statement drawn up by the British Publishers Association on prices and pricing methods. The statement begins: “No one denies that the prices of new books have tended to rise each year (it would be strange if they had not in a period of inflation and rising costs), but we suggest that the increase is smaller than is at first apparent.” 30 It then proceeds to a discussion, using elaborate arithmetical examples, to show why this is so. The Association’s argument is the same as one made elsewhere by Huff and Brown.31 This argument states, in effect, that the intrusion of a few exceptionally expensive items into an otherwise unnotable group of items can inflate disproportionately the average price of the whole group. The Association concludes its statement with a list of conditions that tend to exacerbate the price bind: rising manufacturing costs, rising overheads, increasing competition and so on.

A few weeks after the appearance of this statement, the Bookseller issued a warning that libraries, which are more financially distressed now than ever before, would in all likelihood be putting forth efforts to eke out their budgets by raiding booksellers’ profits.32 This startling charge came about as a result of a librarian’s suggestion that booksellers increase the discounts they allow libraries. The suggestion got nowhere, and in fact subjected its maker to considerable abuse at the hands of the booksellers present at that time.

Prices are getting out of hand, and librarians have reason to be unhappy over this. No one willingly accepts a price increase, but librarians have acquiesced silently in the imposition of one increase after another. Certainly
we make little complaint about paying whenever we are asked to. Such apparent indifference to a matter that literally cries out for attention (it is after all a matter of the purse) is deplorable, and now it has brought us to the point at which our residual serials charge (that is, the amount we must pay in order to maintain our serials file in its present state, leaving aside the need for improving the file with new subscriptions) is climbing at the rate of about 15 percent a year.

Not to take too arcane a view of things, one might say that prices today bear little relation to value received, and further that the shrinking of the dollar will scarcely alleviate a situation that can only have damaging consequences for libraries.

**LIBRARY-AGENT INTERFACE**

In general an abundance of goodwill characterized the relationship that exists between libraries on the one hand and publishers and agents on the other. The somewhat acrimonious exchange, mentioned earlier, on the subject of library discounts can be pointed to as an instance in which the involvement of the moment generated heat, if little else. As a matter of fact, members of the booktrade are often helpful to libraries in ways that are both large and meaningful. A single example is enough to substantiate the observation. The blanket-order idea, which librarians are accepting with increasing enthusiasm, is not by any means our own invention, but an idea promulgated largely by publishers and booksellers.

An expression of the need for further exploring the library-agent relationship was made a short time ago by the ALA committee that put out the second edition of *International Subscription Agents*. This committee indicates that such problems as there are will be solved only after agents and librarians have subjected them to careful study. It makes clear also that the quality of service a library receives depends to some degree upon how helpful the library is to the agent, and gives a few hints as to how libraries can be helpful:

Purchase orders should include complete bibliographic detail and clearly state the requirements of the library. Subscription orders must be placed well in advance of the date they are to begin, and the agent must be told whether or not he is receiving a new order or a renewal being transferred to him from another agent. He must also know whether automatic renewal is expected.

Cancellations, especially if substantial amounts of money are concerned, must be placed very early. Agents often pay publishers for renewal before they receive actual payment from libraries. Since this early renewal is part of the valuable service they offer and since it ensures receipt of material, a responsible library should understand the procedures involved. It is sometimes difficult, even impossible, for agents and libraries to get refunds for subscriptions already paid to the publishers. If the amount is small, it does not pay to try. Orders placed for second or third copies, etc., should clearly specify, by copy number, that such is the case in order to avoid time-consuming inquiries about the intent of the library.
It is of interest to note in passing that agents do in fact pay for library subscriptions before they themselves receive payment from their library customers. This procedure, while necessary to the uninterrupted delivery of a subscription, can be awkward for the agent, particularly when payment of the agent's invoice is held up in the library. A conclusion not likely to attract opposition is that libraries owe it to themselves, and to their suppliers, to prevent undue delay in the matter of payment.

Another view is taken in this same matter by a Canadian librarian, who, in an open letter to the booktrade, says:

We appreciate that many of our suppliers have been considerably inconvenienced by our failure to settle outstanding accounts within the 30 day term which is customarily specified.

We have recently conducted a formal enquiry into the reasons for this, and we have discovered that one of the principle causes is the time required for shipments to reach us from dealers. For your information we list below the average number of days required for shipments to arrive in Edmonton.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Shipping Time (from date of invoice to date of receipt in Edmonton)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>9 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>13 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>26 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>36 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>43 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>35 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>46 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>26 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>33 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>64 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>97 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roumanian</td>
<td>62 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>84 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we are unable, at present, to discover any way of circumventing the delays which result from shipment by surface mail, we should appreciate it if dealers would take this factor into account when submitting claim for payment against outstanding invoices.

Please accept our assurance that we are doing our utmost to ensure that all accounts are settled as speedily as possible, once the material is in our hands. For instance, the enquiry above-mentioned revealed that, on an average, invoices are processed and approved for payment by the Book Order Department within 8 days of receipt.35

The point is that the coin has two sides, that for every quid there has to be a quo.

Huff has invented a name for serials people. He calls them “serialists.” It cannot be amiss then to call the work these people do “serialism.” And as for serialism, how does it stand these days?
One answer is provided by Clara D. Brown, of Louisiana State College. Serials people know that the world is a hard place, that they will always be overworked and that nobody knows the trouble they have seen. Brown emphasizes this notion and feels that no change is likely to take place in the situation soon.36 It is of interest that at the time Brown made her statement she was getting ready to retire. She had by then been a serials librarian for thirty years, and her sigh of relief at the thought of relinquishing all of the nonsense was positively earshattering.

Trouble is trouble, of course, and no one will deny that. Of more importance than a recital of the drawbacks of serials work, however, is awareness of the fact that its importance is growing steadily. The serials department of a library may indeed be, as Brown suggests, the tail that wags the dog.37 Someone else has put the matter in another way. This person says that the activities of a serials department resemble those of the human stomach or brain in that they determine invisibly whether or not the functioning of the body they are part of can be bearable.38

One is free to say, at any rate, that serials librarianship has come into a robust middle life. It may be a little grizzled, a little stooped (after all, as Orwell maintains, we deserve to look the way we do by the time we are fifty or so), but it is struggling hard to put on a good show. And it may be succeeding.

References

5. Ibid., p. 7.


16. Ibid., pp. 22-23.


19. Ibid., pp. 15-16.


22. Ibid., pp. 3-5.


24. Ibid., p. 10.

25. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

26. Ibid., pp. 11-16.


34. Ibid., pp. 2-3.


37. Ibid., p. 84.