

# The Library Technology Project

By FRAZER G. POOLE

I WOULD LIKE to tell you something of the purposes of the Library Technology Project and give you a brief cross-section of its activities.

The original concept was that the project should be a testing-standardizing-research program. Sometimes, we tell people that LTP is a "Consumer's Union" for libraries. This conveys part of the idea, but not all of it. Specifically, the project is engaged in four major areas—each involving library supplies, equipment, and systems.

1. The project tries to provide librarians with objective information.
2. It is working on the development of national standards.
3. It conducts testing programs.
4. It fosters research and development programs.

Although we sometimes think of Library Technology as a sort of combined National Bureau of Standards, Consumers Union, Battelle Memorial Institute, and Information Please for libraries let me hasten to add that we have a long way to go before LTP can really describe its program in these terms. Obviously, the project does not have final answers to all of the questions we receive, and there are instances in which the answer has to be, "we don't know." Obviously, too, there are many testing programs, standardizing programs, and research programs yet to be undertaken. In truth, the project has barely scratched the surface.

Some have asked, why all this emphasis on testing, standardization, and research? We believe the answer is that libraries have reached the point at which it is no longer feasible for them to operate except at the highest level of efficiency.

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*Mr. Poole is Director, ALA Library Technology Project. This paper was presented at the forty-sixth annual Conference of Eastern College Librarians at Columbia University, November 26, 1960.*

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Not, that is, if they are to play the important part in the cultural life of the coming decade that they should play.

Let me cite an example. I know of a university library where the librarian and the cataloging staff have been experimenting for six months in an effort to determine what method they should use for reproducing catalog cards. They have tried machine after machine, spent hours talking to salesmen, run time studies and cost studies, and still have not reached a decision. The actual time spent on this one problem, I have no way of knowing.

But I do know that this example can be multiplied hundreds of times in other libraries—on problems of copying equipment, circulation systems, and microform reading equipment—to name only a few. In the future, such drawn-out decisions could undoubtedly be repeated with facsimile equipment and electronic data processing equipment.

The point is that librarians should be too busy now—and most assuredly will be in the future—to spend unnecessary time on such decisions. Every machine, every item of supply, every potentially useful system, should be so thoroughly tested and evaluated that the librarian can sit down with the basic facts of his own operation at hand and from published data be able to determine quickly and easily what he requires for his particular situation.

Library Technology's basic purpose and ultimate goal is to be able to supply librarians with exactly this kind of objective information. The project is not an end in itself but only a means of enabling librarians to expend their full time and energies where their real purpose and interests lie—with people and with books.

This is the aim of Library Technology. But how does it operate? What sort of projects does it undertake? What has it accomplished?

The project, as you know, is sponsored by ALA. It has offices in Chicago near ALA headquarters. It was originally scheduled to expire on April 30, 1961, but there is so much yet to be accomplished it is hoped some means for its continuation and expansion can be found.

The original grant from the Council on Library Resources provided routine operating expenses. Individual projects undertaken by LTP are funded separately by the Council, upon presentation of carefully developed proposals.

Of the Library Technology programs now underway, these may be of particular interest:

1. The most important systems study is that on circulation control, scheduled for completion this winter, with a report due for publication in the spring. This program is being conducted by George Fry & Associates, one of the country's outstanding management consultant firms, under the guidance of an advisory committee of librarians. The assistant director of LTP, Forrest Carhart, is chairman of the advisory committee. There is every indication that this study is going to provide answers to many of the questions on circulation systems that have long been in doubt. As part of the report it is expected that a "do-it-yourself" systems kit will be made available to librarians so that they can evaluate and select circulation systems tailored to their specific requirements.

2. Somewhat less than half completed is a study on catalog card stock being conducted by William Barrow of the Virginia State Library. This program is not only comparing existing rag card stocks but is also evaluating new card stock made of chemical wood fibers, in accordance with the specifications for permanent/durable paper developed by the Virginia State Library. Preliminary tests indicate that this new stock is far more permanent and almost—although not quite—as durable as rag stocks, at about half the cost. The new stock does not yet have the same excellent erasing properties as does rag stock, but there is reason to believe that these qualities can be improved substantially in future runs.

3. Last June, Sectional Committee Z85 of the American Standards Association was established to develop standards for library supplies and equipment. This committee is sponsored by ALA and administered by the Library Technology Project. The director of LTP is chairman of Z85 and also of the subcommittee on steel bookstack standardization. The assistant director of LTP is chairman of the subcommittee on library supplies. As chairman of the subcommittee on library furniture, we have E. Sigurd Johnson, professor of furniture manufacturing and management of North Carolina State College, who serves as special consultant to the Library Technology Project.

The development of standards under ASA procedures is a somewhat slow process, but there is every reason to believe that this committee will develop many useful and practical standards where none exist today.

4. We are now completing a report on the results of a thorough laboratory test covering what we call quick laminating equipment. This process is not suitable for rare documents, but librarians are already using the equipment for the protection of many other kinds of library materials. Our tests were designed to find out how efficient the process is,

what mechanical problems the equipment might be subject to, and for what uses the process might be most suitable. The report on this program will be published in the *ALA Bulletin*, probably in the March issue.

5. One of LTP's major testing programs got underway in July when William Hawken, formerly head of photographic services, University of California, began a year's study of book copying equipment. The results will be published as a handbook which should be a useful tool for librarians who must decide what photocopy equipment to buy. This is the first really comprehensive test program ever undertaken on photocopy procedures and equipment.

6. One of the minor problems in libraries is the lack of a good, sturdy, inexpensive pamphlet box that requires little space to store and can be knocked down if needed. Two weeks ago the project received the first lot of samples of a new pamphlet box that is sturdier than almost any similar container on the market, can be shipped flat, set up and knocked down as often as desired, and costs only sixteen cents to manufacture in standard sizes. With a normal markup, this is still only half as expensive as comparable boxes. This first run of two thousand will go to libraries all over the country for field testing before we ask the suppliers to make them available. Some of you will be receiving letters in the near future, asking for your assistance in testing and evaluating these boxes.

7. A year ago we initiated a major research program at Battelle Memorial Institute to develop a machine to mark books—or, I should say, to prepare labels for marking books. This program has run into difficulties which are only now being solved. There are still problems to overcome, but it seems definite that we shall eventually have a device that will prepare an unusually legible label, with an adhesive that will adhere to any book-covering material, and do so

far quicker than is possible with present methods of hand marking.

8. As the studies of Mr. Barrow and others have shown, acid is perhaps the single most destructive element in the deterioration of paper and it has been demonstrated that paper can be damaged by acid migration from one sheet to another. Other familiar hazards to valuable documents are insects, moisture, and fire. At the request of one of the state archives commissions, Library Technology is about to begin a preliminary program, which may later lead to a full scale research project, on the development of new containers for manuscripts and other archival materials.

9. Of the hundreds of letters received by LTP, the second most common question asks for assistance in choosing equipment with which to duplicate catalog cards. No thorough systems study of catalog card reproduction has previously been made. Sometime ago the Library Technology Project requested a full-scale proposal covering such a study. This proposal is expected to be ready next week and if it looks as good as we think it will, we will submit a request for funds for this study in the near future.

10. Another program of interest was initiated in September to develop performance standards for library binding. This project, jointly sponsored by the ALA and the Special Libraries Association is being conducted in two phases. Phase I will attempt to identify the various binding needs of libraries and will make recommendations for Phase II during which performance type standards and acceptance tests for such standards will be developed.

As we all know, the Class A binding standards developed jointly by ALA and LBI have served librarians well for some 25 years. But Class A specifications are written around specific materials and methods. With the development in re-

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weekly, classified bibliographies, *Wochentliches Verzeichnis*, which four years later were cumulated into semi-annual bibliographies, *Halbjahresverzeichnis*, arranged alphabetically by authors. A third step in this series are national bibliographies which are similar in arrangement to the semi-annual bibliographies and which include publications for periods of five years, *Mehrjahresverzeichnis*. The first in this series comprised publications for the years 1951-1955. The latter aims to include not merely publications in the actual possession of the Library, but also German trade publications of foreign countries. A separate periodicals bibliography for the years 1945-1952, *Zeitschriften* was completed in 1958. It will be the first in a new series of periodicals bibliographies. Another special bibliography for official publications

was prepared for publication in 1960. Finally, mention should be made of the bi-monthly *Das Deutsche Buch*, a selective bibliographical bulletin which is distributed primarily among scientific institutes, libraries, booksellers, publishers, and German diplomatic missions.

In conclusion due credit should be given to the staff of the Deutsche Bibliothek. There were only four employees in 1946 when the library was first organized. At the end of 1959 there were 137, including ten laborers and fourteen trainees. Compared to the size of staffs of other large national libraries and bibliographical centers the number of librarians and clerical workers is small indeed. Their contribution to librarianship under difficult post-war conditions has secured them a prominent place in the library world.

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cent years of new materials and methods for binding, it has become desirable to develop performance type standards. Similarly, it has become apparent that the various end-uses of many library materials may require more than one type of binding.

Some of you have already been visited by members of the survey team for this project.

None of the programs I have just described has been completed. In fact, one of the first lessons we had to learn was how long it requires to obtain final results in such cases. The program on quick laminating equipment for example, was begun in September 1959, but

it will be March 1961 before the report is published. Since this first venture, we have learned several things that will help speed such programs, but there is still an irreducible minimum for many testing projects.

We expect to publish reports on certain adhesives, on pressure sensitive tapes, on laminating equipment, and on the circulation control study during the spring. Reports of other programs will follow as rapidly as possible.

If the project is continued it will be able to conduct many more of these basic studies that will free librarians from some of their time-consuming administrative problems.