

Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Automation in Libraries. By Richard T. Kimber. (International Series of Monographs in Library and Information Science, volume 10) Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968. 148p. \$6.00 (68-57416).

This slim volume concentrates on the application of computer technology to library housekeeping operations. When the administrator of a library decides to automate routine operations, he usually needs three distinct types of information. First, he needs a check-list of questions about policy, systems objectives, cost limitations, staff needs, and ways of estimating the time required to automate the various phases of implementation. Second, he needs to know about systems operating in comparable institutions, particularly how unforeseen problems were solved. Third, he must know the availability and limitations of appropriate hardware and software of several manufacturers; modifications, delivery times, costs, manufacturer's support of system design implementation, and how up-graded equipment can be integrated into his operating system.

The first type of information noted above is partly met by this book; the second type is also discussed but in the context of general housekeeping systems. In his introduction about the why of library automation, the author states that the book is primarily for people who have "no knowledge of computing." He yields his second chapter to Anne H. Boyd, Lecturer in Computation from the Queen's University of Belfast. In a description of what computers do, how programs are written, and how a computing center may relate to a library, Boyd seems to create more confusion than is necessary. Boyd's description, for instance, of the binary number system is not clear to someone who knows "nothing about computing." In another instance, the reader's knowledge of scientific numerical notation is assumed. Other notations, which form the everyday vocabulary of the com-

puter scientist ($\log n$, $\frac{n+1}{2}$ and "bucket")

are incomprehensible to most librarians. It is a difficult task indeed to translate the specifics of computer operations to a lay audience meaningfully in seventeen pages. A good part of this chapter might be valuable to library programmers who have no experience in the computer processing of text.

After two chapters of general orientation, the automation of normal housekeeping functions of most libraries are discussed, and general processing steps are block diagrammed. These functions include ordering and acquisitions, circulation control, periodicals listing, and accessioning. The concluding two chapters deal with automating book catalogs, including the printing of accessions lists. The final chapter is a concise amalgam of current automation projects in libraries in the United Kingdom and the United States, with a brief note about possible future developments. All but two of the ninety-nine references in this book occur in the last chapter.

There are a few instances of outdated information, but in a field as dynamic as library automation this condition is to be expected in a relatively slow publication cycle. The author brings to his American readers tantalizing descriptions of some outstanding automation activities in the United Kingdom and on the Continent in addition to those in the United States.

A topical sample of Kimber's comments runs as follows. *Economics*: "As with all computer applications, there is a certain minimum scale of operations below which computer utilization is not economic." (p. 52) He does not attack the economic problem or explain how an optimum scale of operations is determined. *Searching*: he cautions the reader that subject searching by computer, using available data bases, may not be effective. *Computing centers*: he warns that when local computers are used which are not part of the library, that the overall policy of the computing

center with which the library must deal affects the stability of the computerized library system subservient to that policy. *Users*: in his conclusion the author writes, "To design on-line computer systems which perform limited file-searching functions may be to miss the real needs of most library users." (p. 132) In some cases more rather than less user inconvenience results from an automated system. Often the elegance of the system design seems more important than the people problems associated with accommodating the needs of the library staff and library users. If these needs are not met, redundant and secret personal systems evolve, causing a peculiar kind of subversion of the new system. *Efficiency*: in an automated system, a library should become more efficient as work load increases. As users of computing power, small and medium size libraries may become dependent upon large ones in cooperative arrangements. *Documentation*: in writing about poor library automation, "The lack of such a literature about failures is keenly felt, especially in the present context." (p. 118) Many travel dollars and expensive staff time have been wasted in system circuit-riding based upon the reports of over-enthusiastic authors.

Although the book is inadequate in its coverage of microform systems in library automation, it is a refreshing overview which may have more value to librarians and computer people who have been close to the complexity of their pet systems so long that the long view has become lost in the press of day-to-day decisions.—Ron Miller, *Five Associated University Libraries*.

Librarianship in Canada, 1946 to 1967; Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Homer Morton (Le Bibliothécaire au Canada de 1946 à 1967). Ed. by Bruce Peel. Victoria: Canadian Library Association—Association Canadienne de Bibliothèques, 1968. 205 p. (68-143854).

Elizabeth Morton is truly a "notable" among Canadian librarians, and the proof thereof is the appearance of the present volume. *Librarianship in Canada, 1946 to 1967* is subtitled "Essays in Honour of Eliz-

abeth Homer Morton" and is in fact a *Festschrift* issued on the occasion of her recent retirement from the position of executive director of the Canadian Library Association—Association Canadienne des Bibliothèques.

The honor was richly deserved. Miss Morton was not only the first executive director of the C.L.A./A.C.B. but also for twenty-one years its soul, its cement, and its visible presence. (Figures of speech come easily to mind when referring to her.) Small wonder, then, that a considerable portion of this book is taken up with tributes to Miss Morton herself. If the *homages* (the French word in this case really puts it best) are sometimes a little flowery, well, that's quite understandable and forgivable.

The rest of the book consists of essays on a variety of subjects but having in common the aim of attempting to review Canadian library development in the generation after World War II. There are twenty of these essays in all: four deal with the C.L.A./A.C.B. itself, four with municipal and regional libraries, two with university libraries, two with special libraries, two with services for children and young people, three with bibliography and publishing, two with personnel and library education. The last essay—"A Cautionary Tale" by Robert Blackburn—is quite *sui generis*.

The contributors are all leading figures in Canadian librarianship and, as might be expected, they write well. They also, as might not be expected from a *Festschrift*, write to the point. One of the great drawbacks of most *Festschriften* is that the contributors, pressed for something to offer up, seem usually to have pulled their papers out of some desk drawer where they have lain since being rejected for publication elsewhere. *Festschrift* essays tend to be stale and dull, and the only connection which most have with each other is that their authors have at some time been associated with the person being honored. *Librarianship in Canada, 1946 to 1967* escapes such occupational hazards of *Festschrift* publication. The papers are up to date, specifically written for this volume, and together add up to a most useful