

Special Report:

Library Catalog Conversion



The key to library automation is the conversion of the card catalog to machine-readable form. This conversion process can involve the commitment of many thousands of dollars of the library's budget—not only in the current year, but in years to come, since decisions which are made initially can have far-reaching consequences.

The March/April 1978 issue of *Library Technology Reports* contains a full-length report on the costs, problems, strategies, and techniques of conversion by Brett Butler, Brian Aveney, and William Scholz.

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tion of the oral history program and the deletion of the section on rare books. Examination reveals that few of the reviewers' criticisms (in *American Archivist* [July 1974] and *College & Research Libraries* [Sept. 1974]) have been addressed by this revision.—Terry Abraham, *Washington State University, Pullman.*

Cameron, William J. *Bibliographical Control of Early Books*. Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science Series 10. Sarada Ranganathan Lectures, 10, 1976. Bangalore: Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science, 1978. 78p. \$6.50.

In this series of five lectures, William Cameron, director of the Hand Printed Books Project and dean of the School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, develops his theory of bibliography and illustrates his argument with descriptions of several bibliographic searches.

The argument is the more significant aspect of the lecture series, but the descriptions of bibliographic searches compose the more striking and memorable and enjoyable aspect of the series. The descriptions include, for example, a quest for works printed by H. Hills, Jr., and a second quest for data about eighteenth-century coffeehouse libraries. They will confirm many beginning librarians in their decision to become rare-book librarians.

The argument, in brief, is that the usable substitutes for a single universal bibliography compose a complex pattern of separate listings (resembling the picture side of a jigsaw puzzle). The author asserts (p.13) that these listings fulfill two conceptually distinct functions, namely: (1) lists of "neutrally descriptive items within objectively definable limitations"; and (2) control devices that "optimize the exercise of the appraisal powers of potential users or their agents."

But Cameron demonstrates in the subsequent discussion that, at least when machine-readable files are considered, it is convenient to redefine the first function as two functions.

A secondary but significant strain in the author's argument is the fact that humanistic scholars need access to publications in terms of selective criteria that are not well described in terms of ordinary subject bibliography. They often, for example, need to see lists of publica-

tions arranged chronologically or according to place of publication.

Accordingly, the basis for a system of bibliographic control consists of a series of descriptive entries that provide full information about the objective characteristics of each bibliographically distinct volume. The *National Union Catalog* represents one such set of descriptive records. In addition, this reference tool locates many copies of each work.

However, such descriptive entries are too long for the many secondary listings where scholars need to compare several entries in order to make judgments. Short-title entries rather than complete, neutrally descriptive entries provide sufficient description for these secondary listings. Moreover, such entries can be more easily rearranged in the various sequences that are useful for scholarly comparisons.

In the case of the Hand Printed Books Project, the machine-readable data file is in two parts. The first is a series of short-title entries for works printed before 1801, and the second is a series of so-called collocation files. These collocation files list selected titles from the basic file by address and can be used to record such information as scholarly judgment concerning the works printed by H. Hills, Jr., or a series of sermons arranged according to the date of delivery.

This is an interesting approach to bibliography and suggests (at least for machine-readable files) an easy way in which to separate the clerical aspects of bibliographic description from those problems of grouping that require judgment and scholarship. However, the assumption that short-title entries are more appropriate for machine-readable files than full description requires further discussion.

It should also prove possible to include far more detailed descriptions in a machine-readable file together with some form of marker that would identify the necessary data for short-title entries that could be used for display. In this way, the actual record could include such details as a complete list of all sermons included in a single bibliographically distinct volume or a complete table of contents for a monograph or even complete indexes. The entire question of what is needed in a full description of a bibliographically distinct vol-

ume requires further discussion.—D. Kathryn Weintraub, *University of Chicago*.

Bahr, Alice Harrison. *Microforms: The Librarians' View, 1978-79*. White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1978. 118p. \$24.50. LC 78-10645. ISBN 0-914236-25-3.

As stated in the introduction, this book covers criteria for selection, a brief review of traditional and innovative uses of microforms, and a discussion of the following questions: How can microform quality be detected? What format(s) should be bought and when do they save money? How should they be cataloged, shelved, and preserved? Who are the reputable dealers? How costly is equipment and how is it evaluated?

All these points are covered, mostly through quotations from and references to articles in various journals and to some other publications, with few original ideas and comments added. Sources cited are up-to-date as late as May 1978, but more than half of the 158 items in the bibliography refer to the *Journal of Micrographics* and the *Microform Review*.

This compilation of microform facts is too unorganized for perusal by the novice and offers little new to those who have kept up with developments in the field. Thorough editing might have produced a usefully organized and better written book, avoiding sentences like "One of the most important microform standards was the result of the federal government" (p. 28).

The chapter "Microform Selection and Acquisition" covers film types, polarity, formats, and standards. It lists a few selection tools and reasons for centralizing microform purchasing and management activities. There is no discussion of materials available in microform, of their contents, organization, etc.

After this emphasis on technical aspects, there is a warning that acquisitions librarians must avoid becoming lost in technical questions, thus losing sight of evaluating the library's need for the material. The assertion that lack of standardization need not be a deterrent to microform use because a library must "simply anticipate new directions in the field" and purchase accordingly is followed by the statement that "proliferation of size and format often requires enormous outlays for equipment" (p. 28-29).