Costs of Cataloging

FELIX REICHHMANN

At the approximate rate of one article every second year for almost a century American librarians have discussed cataloging costs. The entire profession, committees of the American Library Association, library administrators, catalogers, and reference librarians have participated eagerly in discussions which have not lacked actuality and “dynamite.” Few contributions are of a straightforward descriptive nature. Many have defended the status quo, sometimes passionately, or announced with gusto a lowering of production costs. Compilations of actual data from groups of libraries have been singularly ineffective, however, and have aroused strong reactions from some of the libraries which have helped in making them.

It may be coincidence that eighty years of preoccupation with cataloging costs coincide roughly with a period of American library philosophy which has imposed a new and heavy burden on cataloging departments, viz., the obligation of providing a complete and dual subject approach in the form of multiple subject headings and close classification. These parallel efforts should not be stressed too much because at the same time there occurred a rapid increase in library holdings, a development which in itself made a continuous scrutiny of cataloging procedures imperative. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the European libraries which do not accept the obligation of giving dual subject approach are far less concerned with the problem of cataloging costs.

The membership of the American Library Association was confronted with this issue ab initio. In the first volume of the Library Journal appeared Charles A. Cutter’s vigorous defense of the American cataloging system, and of its usefulness and intellectual standing.1 Cutter was irked because people suggested that the investment in the catalog was a dead loss and were unwilling to be liberal with it. The figures at this time for the entire cost of technical operations for the Boston Public Library ² were $1.00 per volume (35% cents per volume

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cataloged), and for the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore “about a third of the annual expenses of the library.”

Despite the interest in the subject, later efforts of a committee of the American Library Association to arrive at reliable cost standards were unsuccessful. W. W. Bishop summarized the achievements of the period ending about 1900. While the financial data are obsolete, his theoretical conclusions are still valid. Based on frequent discussions and contributions which had appeared in the Library Journal and Public Libraries, he estimated that cataloging entailed on the average a charge of 20 cents a volume and required 4.5 cards per title in large libraries and three cards in smaller ones. He held that production standards could not be set, but studies which were to be taken seriously should consider the title, and not the volume, as the unit for reckoning cost.

The Grand Rapids Public Library was one of the first institutions to measure cataloging in terms of time spent. In 1914 it reported the lowest average time for cataloging as four minutes for fiction and twenty-one minutes for nonfiction, not including that given to classification and card reproduction. In the same year a second attempt to deal with the problem was made by the American Library Association through a special committee. Titles were designated as production units, cataloging was broken into thirteen operations, and costs were calculated in time spent as well as in dollars and cents. The committee submitted a detailed progress report in 1914 at the Washington conference of the American Library Association. Eighteen libraries, each cataloging 100 titles, were included in the test “to establish what might be regarded as a fair cost and a standard method of cataloging.” The results were unreliable and disappointing. The committee complained that the libraries were too few, the sample of titles was too small and not representative, varying conditions in the libraries were not taken into account, the thirteen operations did not equal the total effort devoted to cataloging, and administrative and overhead charges were not calculated. A. G. S. Josephson reported on the costs of production in terms of items cataloged and time spent in four groups of libraries, viz., three large libraries of distinctive types, four university libraries, seven large public libraries with branch systems, and four smaller libraries. Three of the university libraries took issue with the outcome as announced by the committee and published their own figures, which were significantly higher.

Not satisfied with the results obtained so far, the Catalog Section

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of the American Library Association accepted the challenge that “the problem of cataloging costs must be attacked by catalogers themselves.” A committee under the chairmanship of Ellen A. Hedrick based its recommendations on four preceding investigations: two questionnaires mailed by A.L.A. committees in 1924, one for the Library Survey and one in connection with the study of the Classification of Library Personnel; the work of an informal committee of the Section, with Paul N. Rice as chairman; and Adah Patton’s report on the cost of cataloging at the University of Illinois. The questionnaire for the Library Survey was disappointing from the cataloger’s standpoint. It did not provide definitions for the terminology used and did not differentiate between clerical and professional work. That for the Personnel Classification study too had only limited validity for the cost problem. One week’s activity was reported and the time spent on the different operations was estimated, but the total amount of work done was not recorded.

In submitting his report at the Saratoga Springs conference of the American Library Association in 1924, Rice had made the following suggestions:

1. That a uniform system of cataloging statistics be established.
2. That relative costs of different steps in the process of cataloging 100 average books be ascertained according to the Josephson plan or a similar stop watch method.
3. That records be kept in the testing libraries of items cataloged and the proportion of time devoted to new work.
4. That the proportion of salary pay roll for this work be estimated.
5. That the result of the cost of the entire output be divided by the number of pieces to get a true average cost. That this result divided in turn by the average cost of 100 books be used as a factor to multiply the average stop watch figure for each step in the process.
6. That results from libraries of about the same size and with similar collections and use be compared: (a) Reference libraries 300,000-500,000; (b) Public libraries 100,000-300,000.12

Miss Patton13 calculated the unit cost of volumes cataloged at the University of Illinois Library for a three-year period, 1922–25. She defined “volume cataloged” to include every separate piece added to the catalog and shelf records. By dividing the salaries and wages of the department by the number of volumes cataloged, she arrived at 77.6 cents per volume. Five other large university libraries reported
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for a two-year period, 1922–24, a unit cost per volume ranging from 50 cents to $1.08.

At the Seattle conference of 1925 Jennie T. Jennings, in the name of the committee, presented a “Plan for an Investigation into and Report on the Cost of Cataloging.” It identified in detail the six main factors which are involved in the cost of cataloging: administration, physical condition (equipment and conditions of work), hours of work, procedure, statistics, and cooperation between libraries (cooperative cataloging). According to it the most important single item for an analysis of cataloging cost is the breakdown of operations involved, and the following list compiled by a group of experienced catalogers is still valid:

I. Monographs
   1. Accessioning
   2. Searching for and ordering L.C. cards if obtainable
   3. Searching for correct form of heading
   4. Classification
   5. Cataloging, i.e., making one complete entry and indicating added entries and references, or correcting L.C. card to fit work in hand
   6. Shelf listing
   7. Revising
   8. Carrying out corrections
   9. Multigraphing cards
      a. under subjects and added authors
      b. in subsidiary catalogs
      c. in shelf list
   10. Writing up, if L.C. cards are obtained
      a. under subjects and added authors
      b. in subsidiary catalogs
      c. in shelf list
   11. Revising work, involves proof-reading cards
   12. Carrying out corrections
   13. Filing cards in preliminary files
   14. Filing cards into catalogs
   15. Tagging book, pasting in labels and pockets, plating books—may be complicated by the use of different kinds of plates according to the fund book is purchased from and also if book is a gift
   16. Marking call number on
      a. tag or label
      b. bookplate
c elsewhere in book
d shellacing tags
17. Extra labels such as Reserved, Not to be taken from library, etc.
18. Writing charge cards
20. Collating books
21. Revising above processes
May also involve
22. Discarding duplicates, and correcting records
23. Discarding imperfect copies, and correcting records
24. Checking order list to avoid getting duplicates
25. Indicating corrections and changes in catalog for uniformity or simplification
26. Carrying out corrections

II Serial work—i.e., work appearing at intervals more or less regular, not monographic
A New series—process the same as in I
B Continuing work, cards for which are in catalog
   1. Accessioning
   2. Withdrawing cards from catalogs and shelf list or from serial record if continuations are added to latter only
   3. Adding to cards, including shelf list
   4-11. Same as 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 for monographs

III Serial work—monographic
A New series
   1. Process same as I, and in addition
   2. Establishing series in catalog, same as I, 2-3
B Series in catalog
   1. Process same as I
   2. Process same as II B, 2-11

IV Periodicals
A Assembling current numbers to form a volume
   1. Record in periodical file only
   2. Current numbers are displayed or
   3. Arranged in stack to await completion of volumes
B Volume complete—process as in II
C Recording wanting numbers, checking bills, etc. see IX

V Analytical cataloging
1. Indicated by cataloger
2. Carried out by typist
3. Revised by cataloger
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VI  Government publications, if accorded different treatment
VII  Pamphlets accorded shortened treatment, e.g., inaugural dissertations
VIII Maps
IX  Bill checking, stamping date of receipt, writing for wanting numbers, indexes and title pages, replacing imperfect copies, is properly the work of order division but may be handled by catalogers—or catalogers may have to furnish data to order department.14

The committee moved that a board be appointed to make an all-inclusive study of ways to reduce costs with the least harm to service. Necessary additional data for a nine-point study were to be obtained personally by an investigator and not through a questionnaire. The several avenues of research were identified as follows:

1. Intensive, comparative study of a selected number of catalog departments of two to three types and sizes of libraries.
3. Analysis of processes according to mechanical, clerical, and technical functions to be compared in terms of the method suggested by Rice (Item 5 of Rice's proposal).
4. Analysis of administrative problems as affecting costs.
5. Analysis of interlibrary cooperative cataloging.
6. Establishment of a reasonable cataloging cost per volume in six to eight representative libraries, both according to type and size of library and in terms of mechanical, clerical, and technical work.
7. Definition of the terms "mechanical, clerical, technical"; study of their application and rate of times spent for each.
8. Study of cooperative methods in order to save the useless repetition of tedious and time-consuming processes.

The report was forwarded to the Council of the A.L.A. as "the final action and opinion of the Catalog Section."14 No action was taken by the Council.

Miss Hedrick's committee submitted one of the most elaborate fact-finding proposals in the history of American cataloging. Seen in retrospect after almost thirty years, some features of the plan can be criticized, notably, the choice of volume instead of title as the unit of measurement; insufficient breakdown in describing the work of the professional cataloger (in contrast to the detailed listing of procedures

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in the theoretical introduction of the report, the research proposal lumps almost all activities together as “cataloging, i.e., bibliographical research, writing of one entry and indicating added entries and references”); and the location of searching for L.C. cards, ordering L.C. cards and shelf listing on the same technical level with cataloging and classification. The necessity of continuing all the services is dogmatically accepted, and no room is left for the question whether all are necessary and worth while. Nevertheless, the report is an impressive testimony of the earnest intention of American catalogers to reduce cataloging costs.

The survey of libraries conducted by the American Library Association in the mid-1920’s had only negative importance for the present discussion. Few libraries reported cost accounting, and none did so for cataloging; most libraries were still scorning the idea. During the next ten years libraries rarely published processing costs; the statements which exist often are brief, and limited to the figures of the reporting library. However, Elinor Hand provided data for the University of California Library. Cataloging expense per title (she called it volume) was 65.5 cents, that for complete processing 72.6 cents, and for recataloging 53.1 cents. Operating costs for the bindery were calculated at 21 cents per title; Ruth Wallace in a discriminating paper gave various suggestions on streamlining the organization of a catalog department. She noted, however, that “it seems useless to compile actual costs.” The Rochester University Library reported its reclassification expenditure as 54.5 cents per title or 26.2 cents per volume. Bertha Buelow of the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Public Library calculated cataloging cost for a small sample of books. Her figures were for nonfiction 40 cents per volume and for new fiction 16 cents, about four-fifths of the money being used for salary. The cataloging of her first sample of fifteen nonfiction titles, mostly with L.C. cards, required eight hours and thirty-seven minutes. The professional cataloger spent seven hours and seven minutes, and part-time helpers one hour and thirty minutes. The average time to catalog one title was therefore $34\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, i.e., $28\frac{1}{2}$ minutes professional time and six minutes non-professional.

Not satisfied with these descriptive or narrative approaches, the Catalog Section repeated its request for a basic investigation. At the annual A.L.A. conference of 1934 Susan G. Akers read a paper, “A Plea for a Study of Actual Costs of Simple Cataloging.” A motion
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was carried to appoint a committee for such a project, but no further action was reported.

In an article which has become a classic in cost accounting, Fremont Rider\textsuperscript{22} reported for Wesleyan University Library a unit cost per volume, broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labor</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>$0.20</td>
<td>$0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessioning (and preparation)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataloging</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All technical operations</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that he computed the same costs for cataloging and recataloging. Calculated in terms of present day prices, all the figures would have to be doubled. Whereas Rider gave an accurate but not sufficiently detailed account of the costs to catalog one book in one library during one year, A. D. Osborn provided a keen theoretical analysis of the whole question.\textsuperscript{23} Two of his main points were that a compilation of unit costs has local value but does not bear directly on the problem of cost reduction, and that an investigation of the nature and purpose of the dictionary catalog is necessary to lead the way. He also deplored the ever-widening gulf between chief librarians and catalog departments. Harriet MacPherson\textsuperscript{24} too suggested a closer cooperation between administrators and catalogers, perhaps through a joint committee which would conduct or direct some of the studies proposed by Miss Hedrick’s group. With full justification, she defined solution of the costs of cataloging as an administrative and not purely a cataloging problem, in saying: “Catalogers... have started investigations of the cost of cataloging, but they can hope only to show the output through the figures which they provide; by themselves they cannot change the characteristics of the institution in which they work.” \textsuperscript{25}

In 1936 the committee of the American Library Association investigating cost accounting suggested the establishment of a statistical division at the Association’s headquarters to help libraries in their attempts to provide useful data, which theretofore had not been too successful. The committee took a rather dim view of the value of unit costs as published up to that time, stating: “While true cost accounting, with costs reduced to unit basis, is of value..., the conditions and procedures in libraries vary to such a great extent that at the present time results obtained by unit costs for various items, useful though
they may be for comparison from year to year within the same library, can prove of small value to any other library.” 26

In the same year R. A. Miller 27 finished a doctoral dissertation which proved the feasibility of a minute analysis of cataloging cost in the spirit of the catalogers’ proposal of 1925. His data were compiled from elaborate weekly time-sheets, filled in by the entire staff of the technical departments of Iowa University during an eight-week period. No stop watch was used, but every precaution was taken to assure that the time was correctly accounted for to the nearest five minutes. Three of Miller’s tables—those showing direct labor time and cost for cataloging new books, direct labor time and cost for recataloging books, and cumulated labor costs with unit costs for distinct types of cataloging—summarize the important factors, but do not do justice to the exactness of his method. This can be ascertained readily by inspecting the time-sheet with its fifty-three questions.

The reaction to Miller’s publication was a mixed one. Deep respect and sincere appreciation of the work performed was mingled with great reluctance to apply his methods to the operations of other libraries. Many were taken aback by the complicated machinery and the effort involved to keep the records, although Miller had reported that the average weekly time a full-time staff member had spent was 31½ minutes, which he equated with 38 cents. Another question was what should be done with the information after the calculations had been made; for it cost Iowa University almost $1,000 to collect the rough data, and today it would amount to two or three times as much. Again, what administrative decisions would justify such an expense? If it was difficult to evaluate one’s own figures, it was even more frustrating to compare them with the data of another library.

Rider had calculated that recataloging was as expensive as new cataloging, whereas Miller stated that recataloging came to only 50 per cent of the price of new cataloging. Without knowing exactly the problems involved and the methods applied, the mere calculation of the figures remained for the administrator a non sequitur. Miller’s answer to this was his convincing and well-coined slogan, “control through information.” He also reformulated and carefully limited the purpose of cost measurement.

Unit times or unit costs are not, of course, the answer to our many questions of management, policy, and practice. In any one institution they are but evidences of a situation which must be further studied to reveal economies and best procedures. Unless there is a disposition on
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the part of the institution conducting a cost survey to examine carefully the conditions which have resulted in the costs found, with a view toward improving these conditions, there is no virtue in cost analysis. Unit costs do not answer questions. They raise them.28

Then, having been appointed director of the University of Nebraska Library, he applied his methods to measuring the output of the cataloging department there.

Blanche P. McCrum29 presented some standards which were based on the experiences of middle-sized liberal arts colleges. Among her cost figures per volume cataloged are 67.5 cents for Grinnell College, 67.7 cents for Iowa State College (in 1929), and 72 cents for Mills College.

The Montclair Study, which is well documented by two publications, was an investigation of thirty-seven public libraries of medium size and was sponsored by the Montclair, New Jersey, Public Library, an institution whose name has become synonymous with daring application of modern machine methods, especially IBM machines. The survey of cataloging costs was published first.30 Emma V. Baldwin had hoped that the similarity of size and functions among the thirty-seven libraries would have caused a similarity of methods and terminology, "but the degree of rugged individualism which still obtains in libraries had not been fully appreciated." Nevertheless, she believed herself justified in presenting not only averages but a standard of reasonable accomplishment. The full process-time per title (accessioning, cataloging, and preparation) ranges from 124 down to 26½ minutes, with an average of 68 minutes; the money expenditure fluctuates from $1.25 to 28 cents, the average being 70 cents. A processing time of 45.1 minutes for new titles and an average processing time for all titles of 37.4 minutes, including that for duplicates and replacements, was recommended as a standard for medium-sized libraries.

The complete report31 describes the magnitude of expenditure in time and money for the processing of books. The old statement that cataloging is the most expensive operation of the library is invalidated for the medium-sized public library. Only 15 per cent of the entire time of the staffs is spent for the technical processes of acquisition and cataloging, while almost three times as much is used for readers' services, i.e., those of circulation and reference work. Of the total expenditure for salaries, only 6.2 per cent was spent for cataloging, but 8.3 per cent for reference and 26.9 per cent for circulation. The complete distribution of staff time proved to be as below:
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43.7 per cent to direct service to the public in information and reference service, assistance to readers, public relations, and circulation of books.

14.6 per cent to acquiring and organizing material for use.

17.8 per cent to keeping the collection in order.

12.5 per cent to administrative and office work.

5.8 per cent to miscellaneous duties.

5.6 per cent to time allowed for vacations, leave, etc.

Processing costs for high school libraries are obviously cheaper. Mary E. Crookston 32 tabulated cataloging output from eleven high school libraries, the sample being distributed over the country and including schools of a great variety of sizes and types. She calculated a unit cost per title cataloged ranging from 12 to 72 cents, with an average of 34 cents, corresponding to unit time from 11.3 to 40 minutes and an average of 27.3 minutes. For college libraries C. B. Clapp 33 computed an annual production per cataloger ranging from 800 to 3,000 volumes and a unit cost of 65 cents to $2.00 per volume. Maurice Tauber’s reclassification study 34 confirmed Miller’s low figures for reclassification. He reported a unit price per volume recataloged running from 23.4 to 53.1 cents. 35 Elsa De Bondeli 36 observed that it was due to the accurate measurement of all operations that processing costs for the first shipment of books to the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in Mexico City were kept as low as $1.48 per title, including ordering and binding. Perrie Jones’s success in decreasing cataloging costs from 96 to 64 cents per volume was entirely due to technical shortcuts, short-cataloging, and economy in subject headings. 37

Patricia B. Knapp 38 calculated the cataloging costs at Chicago’s Teachers College through dividing one year’s total labor cost by the number of pieces cataloged, and arrived at a figure of $1.13 for a new title and 72 cents per new volume. By applying Miller’s technique in an abbreviated form for a sample of thirteen days she arrived at significantly lower results. Her figures as given below, however, represent only costs for cataloging and classification, whereas the yearly average dealt with the entire processing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cataloging and Classification</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Volume</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with L.C. cards</td>
<td>$0.303</td>
<td>$0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without L.C. cards</td>
<td>$0.788</td>
<td>$0.388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interesting statistical calculations based on production data have
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been published by Hazel Dean. The initial sample consisted of forty-six libraries, of which only nineteen reported output in titles, ranging in size from 170,000 volumes to 1,800,000 and "showing enough uniformity in organization to allow statistical comparison." In spite of the similarity the annual production per cataloger ranged from 608 to 2,471 volumes, or from 419 to 1,555 titles. Moreover, no relation could be found between output and size of library; for instance, the group of the largest libraries contained both the lowest and the highest number of volumes per cataloger. It was baffling, and quite contrary to a common assumption, that no statistical correlation could be found between output and the number of L.C. cards used. It was outside the scope of Miss Dean's paper to explain all these facts; however, her final rhetorical question implies her answer: "... is it not more likely that ... [the difference] is due to more efficient methods and organization of the work within the catalog department or to differences in the quality of the catalog?"

The Washington University Library at St. Louis, Missouri, reported an appreciable decrease in cataloging costs within a three-year period, mainly through the application of three principles: a clear distinction between professional and clerical work, full acceptance of L.C. cards, and the formulation of clear instructions. The Pasadena, California, Public Library achieved a similar result by an improved coordination between the acquisition and cataloging departments. About 12,000 volumes were cataloged annually by a staff of three professional and 2½ clerical workers. The excellent spirit of the catalog department of Williams College made it possible to catalog yearly about 4,900 titles with one professional and one clerical worker. The large research libraries, however, continue to be preoccupied by rising costs of cataloging. Columbia University Library calculated for 1950-51 an expense of $3.66 per title, and the University of California Library for 1949 one of $3.34 per volume.

The Public Library Inquiry devoted a special publication to work measurement. In it the average time to catalog one title was calculated as follows: fiction, 16 minutes (range 13-21 minutes); nonfiction, 34 minutes (range 16-62 minutes); periodicals, 24 minutes (range 3-38 minutes). A large public library using no L.C. cards reported a total processing time of 73.7 minutes. Watson O'D. Pierce, the author of the report, also tabulated the time units for different operations performed in the catalog department of one library. His work, like others, confirms as follows the view that the financial impact of cataloging on

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the total library budget is a small one: "It should be noted that the percentage of total time spent on cataloging is not high. It is very probable that too much time has been devoted to the discussion of cataloging and too little to other parts of the library operation." 46

A recent study 47 correlating the size of public libraries with the output of the individual cataloger came to the same negative result as Miss Dean's, which had been based on academic libraries. 39 According to it there is an easily understandable relation between the size of a library and the number of catalogers employed. However, the volume of work performed by the individual cataloger is in no way related to the size of the catalog department, and "Differences between the libraries are more apparent here [volume of work] than at any other place in the study." The yearly output as calculated per cataloger ranges from 800 to 9,405 volumes, with the largest single group between 2,000 and 2,499 volumes yearly. Most small libraries have low production figures, but also the highest quota is reported by two small institutions. The larger libraries, with one exception, do not fall below the 2,500 mark, and the two largest ones have averages running between 5,000 and 5,999. The yearly production by title count ranges from 497 to 4,483 titles per cataloger. The largest single group—18 per cent—is in the bracket 800 to 999; 71 per cent of the institutions report between 600 and 1,799 titles per cataloger. On the whole the small libraries make a better showing. All the widely scattered high outputs are reported by small institutions; none of the larger libraries reaches the 2,200 title mark; and the two largest libraries are in the group next to the lowest, that of 600 to 799.

These results are interesting and worth remembering, but no conclusions can be drawn because the sample is too small. The comments on the ratio between the numbers of catalogers and the total professional staff of a given library are valid. The average cataloging department employs 6 to 7 per cent of the total professional staff and 8 to 9 per cent of the total clerical staff. In about three-fourths of the institutions the force of the public service departments is three times as large as the cataloging personnel. We have no up-to-date corresponding studies for academic libraries, but the ratio probably is 40 per cent for technical services and 60 per cent for public services.

Four groups of publications are summarized in the ensuing pages, because they bear only partially on the topic of this paper. From the large number of general treatises on library finance, but four are men-
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tioned—two American\textsuperscript{48, 49} and two English\textsuperscript{50, 51} Whereas American librarians pay much attention to unit costs, their English colleagues question the usefulness of such data. Typical is the remark by V. G. Pintress, “There is little profit to be derived from it [consideration of unit costs] directly, although it does sometimes show how the costs can be cut.”\textsuperscript{52}

The major American textbooks on university and college library administration\textsuperscript{53-55} stress the value of cost measurement as providing information important in administrative control. W. M. Randall noted: “Unless the results of a process can be compared with its cost, it is difficult to see how a valid opinion concerning its actual value can be reached. . . . It may then be discovered that they [many services] are, in reality, expensive luxuries.”\textsuperscript{56} L. R. Wilson and Maurice Tauber give a short chronological summary of studies on cataloging costs and conclude, “the administrator who is interested in an efficient organization will, through knowledge of costs, be in a position to be critical of established library practices, to review routines in relation to objectives, and to consider new ways of doing things.”\textsuperscript{57}

Library surveys form an essential part of the professional literature of American librarianship. Their importance is discussed by Wilson and Tauber, in whose work a list of the most prominent ones is given. Within the last few years the findings of several more carried out at educational institutions have been published, namely, of those for the universities at South Carolina, Cornell, Stanford, New Hampshire, Montana State, and Notre Dame, and at Texas A. and M. College, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Similar compilations have been issued for public libraries, such as that of Los Angeles. Survey reports seldom deal with the unit costs of cataloging,\textsuperscript{68} but their judicious description and critical analysis of the technical services of a library may contain a wealth of important information. No basic study of cataloging practices, and of their functions and uses, can afford to bypass the substantial data they supply. The “rugged individualism” of libraries, largely influenced by the character, growth, and tradition of a given institution, is by no means mitigated by any desire of the librarians to conform to standards. Every survey confirms the belief that libraries, like books, are distinctive, and that resemblances are coincidental only. This situation has to be kept in mind in using the reports of different libraries for statistical calculations.
### TABLE 1

Production of a Group of American College and University Libraries for 1950-51 and 1951-52

<table>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of titles cataloged.</td>
<td>Amount spent through department</td>
<td>Professionals in catalog department</td>
<td>Professionals in acquisitions department</td>
<td>Clerical in catalog department</td>
<td>Professionals in acquisitions department</td>
<td>Clerical in acquisitions department</td>
<td>Professionals engaged above 1/2 full-time processes</td>
<td>Clerical engaged above 1/2 full-time processes</td>
<td>Units output for catalog department only</td>
<td>Production units for all technical processes</td>
<td>Unit output for all technical processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1950-1951</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>7,569</td>
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<tr>
<td>7,916</td>
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<td>8,218</td>
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Costs of Cataloging

**TABLE 1—Continued**

Production of a Group of American College and University Libraries for 1950–51 and 1951–52

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<th>Number of titles cataloged</th>
<th>Amount spent through department</th>
<th>Professionals in catalog department</th>
<th>Professionals in cataloging department</th>
<th>Professionals in acquisition department</th>
<th>Professionals outside above departments engaged in cataloging, 1951–52</th>
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<th>Production units for all dept. processes</th>
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*Production units are calculated by giving every professional staff member the value: 1, and every clerical staff member the value: 0.6.

†Unit output is calculated by dividing the number of titles by the number of production units.
The fourth group of material, which provides the best over-all view of production and cost in catalog departments, consists of the annual reports of individual libraries. Instead of quotation from such reports, however, a tabulation of the cataloging output of a selected group of college and university libraries is presented here in Table 1, the figures having been collected through direct correspondence with members of the Association of Research Libraries. The idea was that by concentrating on a group of large academic libraries which have much in common a fairly uniform picture would develop. This turned out not to be the case. Differences in definition and administrative organization have proved so conspicuous that the tabulation of output cannot be regarded as an instrument of comparison, but only as a means of easy surveying. Naturally it is the privilege of an individual library to evaluate its own efficiency by comparing its output with that of a selected sister institution, after a careful analysis has showed the likeness of the libraries as regards definitions, structures, and material processed.

In the project referred to, the title has been selected as the unit of work. Measurement is in titles cataloged and not in funds spent. The money value has been disregarded because of the frequent salary changes; besides, it would have penalized the libraries which pay the better salaries. However, the actual cost can be calculated easily by dividing the average professional salary through the unit output. Clerical positions have been assigned the arithmetical value of 0.6 because the ratio between the average professional salary and the average clerical income is frequently 1 : 0.6. The calculation of column 12 is based on the entire staff employed in technical services, on the supposition that the ultimate usefulness of all technical operations to a given library lies in the number of titles (acquired, cataloged, or recataloged) which are readied for circulation. Librarians who do not accept this viewpoint can disregard column 12.

These considerations have excluded the feasibility of statistical calculations, but some general observations are permissible. The range in output between the forty odd libraries is too great to be explained by differences in terminology. The reason for the wide variation must lie elsewhere.

The libraries represented in the sample are research libraries of national standing. We therefore can assume that the catalog departments have equal professional competence, and that the work they
perform follows a uniform pattern. The libraries differ in magnitude, however, and tabulation proves again that cataloging output is not a function of the size of the institution. Furthermore, while the library buildings show great variation in terms of obsolescence, no significant relation based on this factor could be inferred. We can, therefore, conclude that the discrepancy in output is mainly caused by variations in cataloging policy.

Only a few contributions to the problem published outside the United States are to be found. As already stated, English librarians are sceptical. For instance, J. H. Pafford, in a positive and sympathetic review of Miller’s “Cost Accounting” for the Year’s Work in Librarianship, concludes: “The costs of details of library service have not been carefully worked out and, indeed, may be of relatively small importance.” Incidentally, no other mention of cataloging cost appears in the entire run of this important yearbook. J. S. Parsonage, too, doubts the value of “weighted work units and cost accounting.”

The chapter on cataloging in the great German Handbuch does not treat cost, and alludes to economy only in the closing paragraph: “Time and money saving methods lie mainly in cooperation, unification and standardization.” Frels’s erudite history of cataloging in Germany discusses in some noteworthy passages cataloging theory, but not cost. The University Library at Hamburg calculates for 1949-51 a unit cataloging cost of about 50 cents per volume, but because of salary differentials, this figure has to be tripled to become comparable with those of American libraries. A Polish study on a library in Danzig reports a time unit of ten minutes for cataloging plus an additional five minutes for classification.

Unit cost is a mathematical generalization and therefore does not do full justice to individual cases. Moreover, it is a quantitative measurement, and the qualitative imponderabilia which do not lend themselves to arithmetical calculation are unsatisfactorily considered. This is one of the reasons that most American libraries have been lukewarm about setting standards of production. Some report work experiences, but many are dead set against “any production quotas in any department of the library because it would interfere with the flexibility of work assignment and would be resented by the library staff.”

For her ideal library, which she thought of as using L.C. cards for 95 per cent of its cataloging, Margaret Mann estimated as output per hour:
Columbia University Library reports as its production:

Cataloging per hour, with L.C. cards 5.3 titles
Cataloging per hour, without L.C. cards 2.7 titles

Cornell’s experience of work performed in one hour is:

Searching (one operation for acquisition and cataloging):

Cataloging:
- L.C. cards, with classification 6 titles
- L.C. cards, without classification 4 titles
- Without L.C. cards 3 titles
- Recataloging, with L.C. cards 4 titles
- Recataloging, without L.C. cards 3 titles

Card production:
- Stencil typing 25 cards
- Card typing 40 cards
- Headings 100 cards
- Headings, with card corrections 60 cards
- Filing 100 cards

Other clerical work:
- Ordering typing 60 orders
- Volumes checked in from bindery 100 volumes

The minimum standards of performance per hour of the library of the Department of Agriculture are:

Searching for cataloging:
- Cataloging (includes descriptive and subject cataloging, classification, and assigning book number: separates and serials): 2 titles
- Catalog—revision (includes descriptive and subject cataloging, classification, and original stencil or typed card): 4.2 titles
- Catalog—typing: Preparation of stencil or typed card from information on Process Form and publication (includes all corrections, catalogers and typist): 7 titles
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Other typing:
- Cutting stencils for copies 17 stencils
- Typing cards 25 cards
- Completing cards (stencilled cards or L.C. cards) 42 cards
- Typing book plates and labels 50 cards

Miscellaneous:
- Running stencils 25 stencils
- Ordering or receipting L.C. cards 30 titles
- Card pulling (includes preparation of Card Out slips) 25 cards
- Pasting and accessioning publications (includes accessioning shelf-list cards) 26 volumes
- Unpacking, checking, and pasting materials returned from bindery 30 volumes

Preparation revision:
- Stencils for copies 50 stencils
- All volumes (includes revision of cards and publications) 25 volumes

Filing:
- Catalog card arranging for filing 208 cards
- Catalog card filing (unrevised) 100 cards

Based on the experience of five large libraries, the following minimum standards can be suggested:

Cataloging, with L.C. cards 5 titles
Cataloging, without L.C. cards 2 titles

Card reproduction:
- Typing stencils 20 cards
- Typing headings 75 cards
- Filing cards 100 cards

These standards, like everything else, have to be applied with common sense. As is true of any statistical measurement, they are tools—not idols to be worshipped. It would be unrealistic to multiply the norms by the number of hours in a work week and to assume a corresponding output. Rest periods, staff meetings, and inevitable interruptions are bound to make an appreciable dent in the hours of work. The most important consideration is that human beings are not machines which can be set at a given speed and be expected to produce a uniform product. The best results will be achieved by an understand-
ing supervisor who has the confidence and the respect, and therefore the loyalty of the staff. This by no means implies that every member of the catalog department should have freedom to decide how much time can be spent on the cataloging of one title, or that the concern is with quality alone and not with the quantity of output. A reasonable equilibrium between quality and quantity has to be found, since the acquisitions program of research libraries makes it imperative that close attention be given to the sum total of titles cataloged.

Cataloging is an intellectual activity which demands knowledge, judgment, and initiative, and every plan to increase the output must take these factors into consideration. Three approaches can be taken: to encourage a progressive spirit in the catalog department, to streamline the administration of the department, to change basic policy.

For most modern catalog departments, it will be hardly necessary to stress the first point. Catalogers as a group are not complacent about their work, but have a professional, critical attitude and are eager to adopt new methods. No other group in librarianship has devoted so much energy to a critical self-evaluation. Nevertheless, it remains one of the foremost duties of a department head to sustain and further professional responsibility in every staff member, both with regard to total output and to accuracy of the individual entry. Specific reasons warranting nonfulfillment of minimum standards should be established.

Head catalogers have paid much attention to the second point in the last years. Undoubtedly we all are far from perfection and it will need constant alertness to maintain a high level of efficiency. The recent survey of the preparation division of the New York Public Library is a case in point, showing how much can be achieved by applying methods of management engineering. The main efforts have been directed toward modernization of the physical plant to make possible smoother flow of material, acceptance of work simplification methods, elimination of overlapping operations (such as verification of entry), careful work assignment, and shortcuts in descriptive cataloging.

A significant decrease in cataloging costs, however, can only be achieved by a change in policy, especially with regard to subject approach. It is beyond the authority of the technical services to effect such a change because it would necessitate adjustments on the part of public service departments. Not even such a moderate alteration of rules as suggested by B. H. Branscomb for college libraries could
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be authorized by a catalog department without incurring heavy protest from other members of the library staff.

The department most affected by any change in cataloging rules is that concerned with reference work. The development of reference service in American libraries is closely related to the growth of subject approach to the library holdings, as represented in dictionary catalogs and close classification. By tradition and practice, accordingly, the work of the cataloger is slanted toward the needs of reference work, as implied in the statement that her main thought "is what she can do to better serve the reference librarian." Presumably nothing would be gained and much might be lost if a curtailment of cataloging operations should mean only a transfer of labor and expense to the reference department, although no cost figures are available to decide the point.

J. C. M. Hanson is the most outspoken representative of catalogers who do not believe that substantial shortcuts in cataloging would be economically sound. He has said:

... an honest and experienced librarian is not satisfied to meet a demand for reduction in cataloguing costs by saying that he has succeeded in cutting the costs twenty-five cents per title, without at the same time informing his trustees that the reduction had been achieved by omissions and curtailment which must necessarily reduce the efficiency of the catalogue and place additional burdens on other divisions of the library, notably the reference department—not to mention the public. Obviously, the information omitted from the catalogue must be supplied from other sources if called for. It should not be difficult to see that in the long run it will be cheaper to have the facts ascertained and supplied by the catalogue department, equipped and trained for the purpose, than to have the reference librarians, frequently high-salaried assistants, go through the bibliographical investigations omitted in regular routine not only once, but repeatedly, and usually under pressure of time and other limitations likely to affect the results.

Reference librarians are almost unanimously opposed to any drastic cut in cataloging operations. Nobody, of course, is against economy per se, but the group is convinced that any essential modification of cataloging rules would decrease the service potentialities of libraries as a whole and increase the burden on reference departments. For instance Isadore Mudge, although in principal very sympathetic to cataloging economy, summarizes her attitude: "In an experience
of more than thirty years in different types of college and university libraries, I have yet to find any item of information called for in the rules for adequate description of the average book, which some reader, of his own accord, will not make good use of." Helen Purdum goes even further, in the words: "Was there ever a catalog with too many analytics?" "... there should be a title card for every book, as well as cards for all subtitles, alternate titles, and cover titles; plus a generous use of series cards." A library administrator therefore concludes: "I... come to believe that insistence on costly standards for public catalogs stems not from catalogers primarily but from staffs in reference departments."

Although some of these views are based on long experience in successful reference departments, they must be characterized as opinions. W. H. Brett has tried to work out the facts. His investigation, confined to one reference department, led him to the conclusion that "Had the [reference] librarians been denied the use of the [subject] catalog, they would have been able to perform their work of aiding students in their search for material and information very nearly as efficiently as they did."

Brett's findings are probably valid for other libraries, yet whether it would mean increased costs for reference departments has not been settled. It is therefore necessary to look for additional data concerning the use of the catalog by the general public. Susan G. Akers has shown that most college students do not understand bibliographical abbreviations, and Miller's study has confirmed that many added entries (such as those for editor, illustrator, and series) are seldom utilized. Merritt investigated the use made of the subject catalog at the University of California and deduced: "... if subject cataloging were to be dropped for all foreign books and for all English books more than twenty years old, subject-cataloging load would be reduced immediately by 65 per cent. The efficiency of the subject catalog in terms of books circulated with its help would progressively decline to a level not lower than 80 per cent of its present effectiveness."

The previous literature on the subject, summarized by Merritt, confirmed his findings that the subject catalog is only of relative importance. The conclusion is warranted that the observance of all rules for descriptive and subject cataloging is not the condition sine qua non for the usefulness of a library. Modifications could be made without impairing service potentialities. It presumably is true that every descriptive detail and every subject relation brought out by the catalog
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card will be used on some occasion. However, it is doubtful whether we should therefore apply elaborate rules to most books at all times.

No evaluation of operational costs is realistic and meaningful unless the final product is taken into account. The question whether cataloging costs are too high depends lastly on an evaluation of the dictionary catalog and of close classification. Catalogers have been eager to adopt new methods of production; they are no less willing to translate new policies into cataloging operations. It is up to the library profession as a whole to formulate these policies.

References


25. Ibid., p. 92.


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43. Direct communication from Columbia University Library.


46. Ibid., p. 33.


[315]


65. Opinions voiced in oral and written communications by librarians who had been asked to inform the writer on the production quotas of their libraries.


68. Information supplied by R. R. Shaw, Librarian of the Department of Agriculture Library.


Costs of Cataloging


ADDITIONAL REFERENCES