Introduction

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This issue of Library Trends is an attempt to bring together for the first time in one place information on the application of machines to the performance of library operations and techniques.

Strictly speaking, mechanization in libraries relates to the replacing of personnel engaged in library operations with machinery wherever possible. Although the articles in this issue give considerable attention to this particular aspect of the subject, they are broadly concerned with the application of machinery, appliances, equipment, and tools to various library operations for the purpose of making these operations possible, better or easier.

Melvin Voigt’s introductory article lays the foundation for the rest of the issue insofar as it discusses the nature and principles of mechanization in libraries and the application of these principles to library operations in general. His paper, among other things, examines such questions as the following: (1) What are the underlying reasons for introducing machines into libraries? (2) To what kind of repetitive operations do they lend themselves? (3) What factors have either promoted or hindered their use in libraries? (4) What effects have they had on library operations and services? (5) What are the attitudes toward them of library administrators and staff? (6) Does automation offer any possibilities in the foreseeable future with respect to any major library operations?

Each of the succeeding articles relates to a particular type or kind of machine, appliance, equipment or tool utilized, or potentially useful, in library operations. Some of these devices were designed for use in business and industry in general and were adopted by libraries without change; others were adapted, in some instances to a considerable degree, to meet special library requirements; still others were especially designed to perform operations peculiar to libraries. With Mr. Trotier is Associate Director for Technical Departments, University of Illinois Library.

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respect to the devices assigned to them, the contributors, in general, review the development of the use of these devices in libraries, assess their current use and value in the mechanization of library procedures, and, on the basis of apparent current trends, attempt to predict what future developments may be anticipated in this area.

Some librarians have expressed the opinion to the writer that, compared with business and industry, libraries have been quite conservative with respect to the use of machines, that they have often been laggard about adapting mechanical aids to library operations, and that they have contributed little towards the developing of machines designed especially for library applications. The facts produced in the papers published in this number tend to show that, at most, these judgments are only partly true. There is a great deal of evidence that libraries have taken advantage of the technological progress witnessed by this generation. Many of our fellow librarians have applied and adapted mechanical aids to library procedures with notable success. Some have stimulated and prompted manufacturers to develop and build equipment to serve the special requirements of libraries. And a few have combined rare imagination and exceptional inventive and mechanical ability with an intimate knowledge of library techniques and management to conceive new machines for the performance of operations peculiar to libraries.

If librarians have made significant progress in recent years in the direction of mechanization of library operations, it has been not only because more machines and appliances suited to library applications have been available, but because increasing costs of library services have focused attention on ways and means whereby these services could be carried on at costs they could afford to pay, and also because the growing problem of maintaining the staff required for accomplishing the essential functions of the library necessitated the substitution of machines for personnel wherever possible.

Mechanization of operations is part and parcel of scientific management. And scientific management is relatively as important in libraries as it is in business and industry generally. The need for it has always existed, but has become increasingly important in recent decades as a concomitant of the rapid growth of libraries and the greatly expanded demands for library services. It is to be hoped that the articles presented here will not only supply useful information on the subject, but that they will stimulate ideas and experiments which will provide further impetus to the trend towards mechanization of library operations and the improvement of library service in general.