The Bibliographical Control of Microforms

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On June 11, 1853, John Stewart wrote to his brother-in-law, the astronomer, Sir John Herschel: "Should your old idea of preserving public records in a concentrated form on microscopic negatives ever be adopted, the immediate positive reproduction on an enlarged readable scale . . . will be of service," and Herschel, in a letter of July 6, 1853 commented: "I will only add that the publication of concentrated microscopic editions of works of reference . . . and innumerable other similar applications is brought within the reach of everyone." 1 Years passed, and Herschel's "microscopic" editions became a fact.

Unfortunately, Herschel did not suggest a system of bibliographic control for the type of microform he advocated, nor at this late date have librarians and bibliographers become fully cognizant of the need for an adequate system of bibliographic control over the sea of microforms in which they are being engulfed. Seemingly, as one writer has put it, "Microforms have come to be one giant headache for library administrators, bibliographers and researchers." 2

Although the subject heading "Microfilms" found its way into the indexes of Library Literature only about 1940, libraries had been accumulating microfilms in ever-growing quantities for more than a decade before that date. The origin of the use of microforms in connection with rare or difficult-to-handle materials, as well as the need of reading machines for the use of microforms generally, have made the microform holdings of libraries annexes to their rare book rooms where the servicing of both the materials and the reading machines takes place. As a consequence, from the very beginning, microfilms and later also microcards, microprint, and other forms of microreproduction, have acquired the character of remoteness and the aura of the extraordinary which, to a degree, has limited both the use of microforms and a library-wide appreciation of the need for their bibli-

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graphic control. As so often is the case with rare books or with special collections, entries for microforms are often excluded from a library's card catalog, and the key to the contents of such collections is in the memory of the curator, or in arbitrary schemes of shelf arrangement or of special limited cataloging. Within their limitations such substitutes for conventional catalog entries in the public catalog have served as a stop-gap arrangement, but because of the present rapid expansion of library collections in microform, this type of control has become both unsatisfactory and unworkable.

The present state of bibliographical control of microforms is such that even in a center of bibliographic controls and of information on such controls, as for example the Union Catalog Division of the Library of Congress, information on the existence of major microform projects throughout the world, and on the specific holdings of the libraries, is only fragmentary. No systematic practice exists in regard to the reporting of microform projects by their producers, or by libraries of catalog entries for microforms of individual titles. Better controls of materials in microform are needed by the users of libraries, by librarians, and by the producers of microforms.

Readers ask for library materials primarily to obtain the information they need and frequently they are shocked to learn, when the original publications are locked in rare book collections and not subject to interlibrary loans, that copies of the desired material are widely available in microform, or that the difficult-to-locate original of an issue of a newspaper, serial, or other document could readily be consulted in microform.

The group most aware of the needs for bibliographic controls are the librarians, especially the reference, interlibrary loan, and acquisition librarians. If all publications in microform would be subjected to full regional or national centralized control like other printed materials, the problems of the reference and interlibrary loan librarians would be lessened and labor and money would be saved. Also, the existence of such controls, especially if published, would enable the acquisitions librarian to know quickly about the existence of microform publications of monographic works or of runs of serials where the acquisition and assembling of the ink print originals are difficult or costly. Such a bibliographical tool also would assist libraries within a region to make decisions on microtext purchasing, either institutional or on a cooperative basis. One of the few existing tools designed for this specific purpose is A. H. Horn's Southern
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*California Union List of Microtext Editions*, issued by the libraries of Occidental College and the University of California in Los Angeles in 1959. Although it is not a regional list, mention might be made in this connection to Eva M. Tilton’s union list of microcards,\(^4\) originally published as a master’s thesis and scheduled for publication in a revised form by the Scarecrow Press in the fall of 1959.

The interest of producers and commercial manufacturers of microforms in bibliographic controls is motivated by considerations of economy. Working with a limited market of consumers, they want to avoid costly duplication of microform projects. Realizing the need for better bibliographic control several of the commercial microform publishers already have begun to practice cataloging in source by copying available Library of Congress cards or other catalog entries as the first exposure in their microforms. For example, University Microfilms, Inc. endeavors to obtain and photograph Library of Congress printed cards in the microfilms it prepares for its O-P Book Program, and the Microcard Foundation, beginning in 1959, photographs available Library of Congress printed cards on the first cards of microcard sets, in addition to supplying author, title, and imprint information in legible type on first cards.

It is now fully realized by those who are close to the problem that the present situation is chaotic and that there should be developed a system of bibliographic controls for microforms capable of informing the custodians, the users, and the producers of microforms of the existence of at least the negatives of all microforms that have already been produced, regardless of type, both as cataloged items in libraries and other depositories, and as potential items of acquisition from worldwide sources. The acquisition librarian in a relatively small university library with limited book purchase funds, who is contemplating the purchase of a set of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* for $8,000 should know that this complete series is available in a micro edition at $850. Many such examples can be cited.

That the existing system is inadequate is attested by the concern over the problem that has been recently expressed by the American Library Association, Resources and Technical Services Division Copying Methods Section, the A.L.A. R.T.S.D. Committee on Resources of American Libraries, Subcommittee on Micropublishing Projects, and the American Historical Association Committee on Documentary Reproduction.

At a meeting in Washington on April 4, 1959, the agenda of the
A.H.A. Committee on Documentary Reproduction included several topics on the subject of bibliographic control of microforms. This group recommended that there be created an agency to centralize all information concerning the existence of microforms and to publish one or more catalogs of such material. It brought out the fact that there were two distinct needs—one for a record of microforms that are owned by American libraries—the other, a central record of all types of microforms that are available from producers of microforms, particularly those in foreign countries.

The group also recommended that a study be made of the type of central organization needed to carry out the desired objectives of obtaining data and publishing suitable catalogs and suggested that such a study should be sponsored by the library profession, but in such a way as to maintain contact with the A.H.A., the Modern Language Association, other scholarly organizations, and with commercial producers, and that the study should be conducted by an individual who could cross lines among librarians, catalogers, archivists, scholars, and technicians. The group also hoped that after such a study, financial support could be secured for setting up a central organization which would operate as a clearinghouse for all data relating to microforms. On the basis of these recommendations, the secretary of the A.H.A. invited the A.R.L. to seek the necessary funds and to sponsor such a study.

At its 1959 Midwinter meeting the A.L.A. R.T.S.D. Copying Methods Section Executive Committee approved the following resolution:

WHEREAS: A serious situation exists concerning the lack of centralized cataloging or indexing for multi-title microform projects; and, as a result, libraries are expending an unnecessary amount of duplicate effort in cataloging this form of material.

RESOLVED: That action be taken by an appropriate section or committee of the American Library Association to provide the most desirable type of bibliographic access to these publications; and that these bibliographic controls be produced as an integral part of these projects.

This resolution was forwarded by the American Library Association to its Subcommittee on Micropublishing Projects which, on May 20, 1959, prepared "A Preliminary Report on a Proposal That There be
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Established a Cooperative National Microfilm Deposit" which includes the following statement on the bibliographic control of microforms:

A second step is the creation of adequate means of reporting bibliographically the existence and availability of microforms. This is a very complex problem, the gravity of which is evinced by the fact that many presently existing microforms cannot readily be discovered. A consistent, continuing, and comprehensive system of reporting is fundamental both to the coordination of micro-production and to the wide availability of the materials so produced.

It appears unlikely, for the present at least, that the National Union Catalog could absorb the task of currently publishing the locations of microfilms produced and owned by libraries. The problem extends also to the control of microfilms that are commercially available and to other types of microforms, such as microprint, microcard, and microfiche. It has been suggested that control might be achieved by means of an enlarged Union List of Microfilms. A general Microforms in Print has also been suggested. The problem extends further to the "cataloging in source" of microforms.

The Committee on Documentary Reproduction of the American Historical Association is deeply interested in the bibliographic control of microforms and it is proposing that A.R.L. sponsor a study to determine exactly what needs to be done, how it should be done, and how much it would cost. The Subcommittee endorses this proposal. A thorough exploration of this complex problem through all its ramifications seems necessary if a satisfactory solution is to be found.

Meanwhile, each library is urged to report currently its own locally produced microfilms, title by title, to the National Union Catalog, where at least a tentative central file can be maintained.

In keeping with the recommendations of the A.H.A. Committee on Documentary Reproduction and the A.L.A. R.T.S.D. Committee on Resources of American Libraries, the secretary of the A.R.L. has appointed a committee to draft a request for funds and to select a competent librarian to make a comprehensive study of the entire problem of bibliographic control of microforms.

What are the elements of the "very complex problem" noted by the Subcommittee on Micropublishing Projects? As this writer observes the weaknesses of the present system from the vantage point of the National Union Catalog and the Microfilming Clearing House, the major problems fall within three basic categories, namely, problems relating to the production of catalog entries for individual titles in-
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cluded in microforms, problems relating to the bibliographic control and publication of such entries in the form of appropriate lists and catalogs, and the need for centralizing and publishing information about microform projects that are contemplated.

Elements of the problem relating to basic bibliographic controls include: the question of adequacy of the rules for cataloging microforms in the light of the present situation; the need for uniformity of catalog entries for microforms; the need for the presence of targets in microforms which will provide catalogers with the necessary bibliographical information; the systematic incorporation of Library of Congress cards or other catalog entries as first exposures in microforms, and the desirability of acceptance by all producers of the theory of cataloging in source.

Elements of the second phase of the problem are: the need to determine the extent to which centralized catalog controls should be established over all forms of microforms owned by American libraries and institutions, and the need to determine whether there should be centralized catalog controls over microforms of library materials of foreign or domestic origin of which no copies are owned by American libraries.

The third phase of the problem is concerned with the centralizing and publishing of information on contemplated microform projects.

The rules for main catalog entry of microforms are identical with the rules for the entry of the original material and in general, when cataloging microforms, the cataloging staffs of all libraries follow the A.L.A. Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries. Such is not the case with the rules for descriptive cataloging, which are presented in Sections 10:4 and 10:5 of the Rules of Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress. These rules distinguish between the treatment of microfilms and microprints. For microfilms distinction is made in regard to the imprint, depending upon whether a microfilm represents a reproduction of a previously published work of a microfilm edition. According to these rules, entries for microcards shall show the imprint of the micro-edition in all cases. In terms of Library of Congress practice this means that cards for microfilms will be printed only in relatively few cases, and the majority of entries for microfilms will be "dashed-on" in printed or typewritten form on existing Library of Congress catalog cards for the original publications.

The rules for description do not seem to be followed to any ap-
preciable extent outside of the Library of Congress. The typical cata-
log card received by the National Union Catalog for any type of
microform represents a cataloging of the original work with an added
note “microfilm,” “microcard,” “microprint,” “microfilm edition.” Fre-
quently the cards do not indicate the name of the producer of the
microform, the date of the reproduction, or the source of the original
copy. Adoption of the Library of Congress rules by libraries is neces-
sary if a more effective centralized bibliographical control of micro-
forms is to be achieved. The influential position of Library of Congress
cataloging practice in American libraries and among publishers and
bibliographers makes the Library of Congress printed cards a unify-
ing force in bibliographical control and the lack of printed Library
of Congress cards for microform reproductions appears therefore as
a matter of great practical consequence.

That there is a lack of uniformity among libraries in the matter of
cataloging microforms is evidenced by the answers to a questionnaire
sent in 1957 by C. H. Cantrell, director of libraries, Alabama Poly-
technic Institute, to twenty-one libraries, mainly in the southeastern
part of the United States, in a quest to discover the best way to
process catalog cards for the microprint edition of Early American
Imprints, 1639–1800, i.e., the titles listed in Charles Evans’ American
Bibliography. Of the fourteen libraries that subscribed to the micro-
print series, four had decided not to catalog, five had not reached a
decision in regard to cataloging and five had given the microcards
some cataloging treatment. In no instance were cards made on a
full dictionary catalog basis. However, two libraries provided refer-
ce cards from the series entry “Early American Imprints” to the
listing of titles in Evans’ American Bibliography, and four libraries
added notes on the catalog cards for Evans’ American Bibliography
indicating that all titles listed therein are available in the library in
a microprint edition. In the replies to the questionnaire several li-
braries stressed the need for cooperative cataloging of microforms.

The need for all producers of microforms to provide bibliographical
information cannot be stressed enough, since the omission of such
information might invalidate the whole project. J. A. Riggs, in a paper
read to the A.L.A. Copying Methods Section on June 23, 1959, in-
dicted the producers of microtexts for their lack of editorial work.
(Riggs discusses this fully in the preceding article on p. 376.)

The amount of cataloging information that producers might reason-
ably be expected to provide in microforms necessarily must vary in

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relation to the sponsorship and size of the micro-edition, the type of material being copied, the existence of catalog cards for the originals, etc. The ideal would be for producers to embrace the cataloging in source theory in full and supply catalog entries which would uniformly follow the general rules for entry and the rules for description of microforms. If the ideal procedure is not possible, existing L.C. printed cards or catalog entries from other libraries representing the originals should be photographed as first exposures on the microforms along with targets which should indicate the name of the producer, the date of production of the microform, the location of the original and, if in a series, the title of the series. As an absolute minimum, producers should include the target information enumerated above.

The cost of integrating such bibliographical information into a microform should be considered as one of the costs of producing microforms. The probable small resulting increase in the subscription price of a microform series would be inconsequential as compared with the advantages that would accrue to the libraries, the users of the microforms, and even to the manufacturers themselves, who as a result, would find it easier to compile their sales lists and who would be safeguarded against unintentional duplication of reproduction of identical works by other producers.

There is no uniformity of opinion among librarians concerning the extent to which centralized bibliographical controls of microforms should be provided. Most librarians seem to agree that there should be centralized controls of microforms of newspapers, serials, American dissertations, and of manuscript collections, and that such lists should be published separately.

The *Union List of Microfilms* and its two supplements include nearly 60,000 entries for microfilms of mainly books and serials in several hundred libraries which reported such holdings to the Philadelphia Bibliographical Center during the period 1941-55. Although many librarians argue that entries for books in microform need only be filed in library card catalogs with the entries for the original books, and that there is no need for a separate union catalog of books in microform, the fact that libraries have purchased approximately one thousand copies of the *Union List of Microfilms* appears to be substantial evidence of its usefulness. Because publication of this union list will cease with the issuance of the cumulative supplement which is now being edited, librarians should be greatly concerned about the question of whether a successor publication should be undertaken.
Pending determination of this question Eleanor Campion, director of the Philadelphia Bibliographical Center, urges libraries that now cooperate with the Union List of Microfilms to continue to report their holdings of microfilms to the Center. Some questions that must be answered in this connection are: should the scope of the successor union list be enlarged to include all types of microforms? Should it record only items that are owned and cataloged by libraries, or should it record also at least the long runs of serials and sets of books that are available in microform from domestic and foreign sources? Should it record only the existence of master negatives, or should it also attempt to indicate the locations of positive copies? Who should do the job and who should pay the cost? Would the publication of such a list be commercially feasible?

The majority of the special catalogs and sales lists of microforms that will be found in American libraries represent microforms that were produced by libraries, commercial firms and other agencies in this country. From this fact it might be argued that American librarians are adequately informed of the existence of microform projects and the availability of microforms that are produced in the United States, but passage of time and the rapidly growing number of catalogs and sales lists that are appearing on the American scene (not to mention the fact that in many instances the editions are exhausted), suggest that the time has arrived when the record of both microform projects and of individual titles in microform should be consolidated and published in a list of annual frequency such as Books in Print, or of a cumulative pattern such as the Cumulative Book List.

Any case that might be made for the need for publication of annual or cumulative lists of all microforms produced in the United States would be even more valid for a similar control of microforms produced in foreign countries. Whereas the major domestic producers of microforms usually publish catalogs, or distribute sales lists to American libraries, no such general practice exists for microforms produced abroad. Because European producers have undertaken to reproduce extensive runs of rare and sometimes unique materials, American librarians, archivists, and scholars cannot afford to be uninformed of the availability of such microforms. The International Documentation Centre, Stockholm, is an excellent example of a foreign producer who, as is illustrated in its monthly Micro Library, can supply monumental out-of-print publications in microform.
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An attempt to centralize information concerning contemplated microform projects was initiated in 1949 when, upon request of the A.R.L., the Microfilming Clearing House was established in the Union Catalog Division of the Library of Congress for the purpose of centralizing information on extensive microfilming projects involving newspapers, serials, and manuscript collections either contemplated, under way, or completed. The Microfilming Clearing House maintains files on such projects, offers a reference service based on the data in its possession, and from time to time publishes information in the Microfilming Clearing House Bulletin which appears as an appendix to the Library of Congress Information Bulletin. To date seventy issues of the Bulletin have been published. It also published the Newspapers on Microfilm, a union list presently in its third edition (1957), with a supplement in the press. This clearinghouse could very well form the nucleus of an expanded information service covering all projects regardless of subject matter or type of microform employed. Centralization and publication of all such information would not only prevent duplication of microform projects, but it would also enable librarians and scholars to evaluate the contemplated projects, to advise in regard to bibliographical standards, and in effect to exercise a veto power over projects of uncertain need or where the proposed type of microform reproduction is not best suited to the need. In any case the clearinghouse would have to depend on the cooperation and good will of all domestic and foreign producers of microforms to provide reports on their contemplated projects.

An attempt has been made to outline in this paper the problems connected with the bibliographical control of microforms. It is hoped that a survey and evaluation of the situation, presently sponsored by the A.R.L., and the findings and recommendations of the expert to undertake this survey will result in actions satisfying the needs of all concerned with the acquisition, production, and use of microforms.

References

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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES


