



Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

MICHAEL M. REYNOLDS

ROCKED BY THE MOUNTING shock waves of the explosion of the material and service expectations of the library user, the practitioners of interlibrary loan in the traditional manner are digging in behind their policies. As a consequence, one of the most important, implied obligations of the library—providing the most effective access to information—is slighted, as the borrower will not and cannot borrow and the lenders will not lend.

Interlibrary loan is a technique by which one library lends material indirectly to an individual through another library. In essence, therefore, it is merely a means through which a library may broaden its lending service to include those materials which are made available by other libraries. The technique of interlibrary loan, of necessity, entails a lending operation, but regardless of where the actual work is performed—circulation, acquisitions, etc.—the principle involved is one of reference: that is, to provide the library user as completely as is possible with the material he needs.

As a library activity, interlibrary loan should not be viewed as constant and unchanging but rather as a manifestation of a principle existing along the continuum of library development. To write a documented history of interlibrary loan would be extremely difficult; while it might add a certain historical prestige to trace its development back to a traffic in clay tablets or incunabula, and to indicate variations in the purposes and techniques of the transactions, the principle was the same then as it is today. The purposes for which one library will make available its material to another library, the scope of what materials are made available, and the techniques by which materials are made available are reflections of the society itself, when viewed against the totality of the social environment.

In the rapid development of libraries in Europe during the nine-

Michael M. Reynolds is Associate Director of Libraries, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.

teenth century, quite naturally the European concepts of interlibrary loan reflected the exclusive characteristics of European society and the medieval idea of the community of scholars. In this community each member felt a certain duty, and not a little pride, in making his own or another's work available to a serious fellow scholar. The public and academic librarians of the late nineteenth century in America saw that, "it would add greatly to the usefulness of our reference library if an agreement should be made to lend books to each other for short periods of time,"¹ and they translated the European practice of restricted loan into the American idiom. The purpose of interlibrary loan as expressed by the 1917 A.L.A. Code for Interlibrary Loans was: "(a) to aid research calculated to advance the boundaries of knowledge by the loan of unusual books not readily accessible elsewhere, (b) to augment the supply of the average book for the average reader, . . ."² This attitude was certainly in keeping with the prevalent concepts of libraries as being active participants in the American educational process and the librarians' responsibilities as extending beyond a puerile guardianship of the physical books entrusted to them.

Yet interlibrary loan was never expected to result in an unrestricted flow of materials between libraries. Certain types of library materials like manuscripts and rare books, by their nature, were excluded from interlibrary loan. Others, like current issues of serials, low cost in-print books, and newspapers, were declared off-limits unless special arrangements were made. Besides these restrictions on types of materials, and the additional legal and budgetary limitations in which libraries operated, the three basic tenets of interlibrary loan have defined it as ". . . a courtesy and a privilege, not a right, . . ." to be used ". . . for research and serious study, . . ." with the understanding that the lending library owed its first obligation to its ". . . primary clientele."³ The "courtesy and privilege, not a right" relationship placed the responsibility of the inconvenience squarely on the borrower; the "research and serious study" clause was expected to deter the ordinary request for material not immediately available; and the position each library took to preserve the rights of its "primary clientele" acted further to restrict the traffic and added an uncertainty to the request for loans. Restrictions notwithstanding, an experienced interlibrary loan librarian with an explanatory note on his request form and a wide acquaintance with his counterparts, could, when working within the clear and grey areas, eventually fill over ninety per cent of the requests.

Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

The Library of Congress, emerging as a truly national library, epitomized the operating attitude of American libraries when, at its formal inception of the system in 1901, its information circular advised: "Under the system of inter-library loans the Library of Congress will lend certain books to other libraries for the use of investigators engaged in serious research. The loan will rest on the theory of a special service to scholarship which it is not within the power or the duty of the local library to render. Its purpose is to aid research calculated to advance the boundaries of knowledge, by the loan of unusual books not readily accessible elsewhere." This was, however, tempered by the consideration that "To a library the need expressed is the best claim and credential." ⁴

As only a few institutions could boast of libraries adequate to meet the demands of the new investigative techniques in the historical and social sciences, the volume of interlibrary loan increased slowly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Well into the twentieth century researchers continued to cluster in the book centers, buy their own books, or make annual hegiras to major collections. By 1917, however, the demands of interlibrary loan had reached a point where it was felt advisable that an ALA committee draw up a code of practice for interlibrary loan and define its purpose, scope, and limitations.⁵ The 1917 Code, with the later Interlibrary Loan Code of 1940 ⁶ and the Interlibrary Loan Code of 1952,⁷ were intended to act as general guides. Within communities, regions, or special subject areas, interlibrary loan practices were expected to be of a more informal nature.

If the world at the turn of the twentieth century had changed only in degree and not in kind, lending books "at a distance" would have continued as an occasional disruption in the operation of a library. However, concurrent with the new technology that was able to request and deliver within days was a multiplicity of other factors which had immediate ramifications for interlibrary loan. Among these were the growing number of researchers, as seen in the increase in masters' and doctoral degrees awarded, the development of tools with information about the collections of other libraries, the broad expansion of research in the social sciences and humanities, and the explosion of research in the pure and applied sciences.

In 1876, when Green's letter to the editor of the *Library Journal* on interlibrary loan was printed, 835 masters' degrees and 31 doctors' degrees were granted in American colleges and universities. By 1924,

the number of doctors' degrees was 1,098 while in the same year 8,216 masters' degrees were earned. In 1940, the year of the revision of the 1917 ALA Code, 26,731 masters' degrees and 3,290 doctors' degrees were conferred. By the year of the next revision of the interlibrary loan code, 1952, the figure had risen to 63,587 masters' and 7,683 doctors' degrees. Projections for 1963 indicate that there will be approximately 83,700 new masters' and 12,300 doctoral degrees, and that by 1970 these will be 139,000 and 18,100 respectively.⁸

The printed library catalogs of the nineteenth century like the *Catalogue of the Library of the Boston Athenaeum* and the *Catalogue and Second Catalogue of the Library of the Peabody Institute of the City of Baltimore* had exposed the holdings of a few significant libraries. But it was not until the Library of Congress Card Division under Charles H. Hastings began its work of distributing copies of printed cards in 1901 that a national system of bibliographic control over library resources began to be realized. To facilitate service, the Card Division made available proof sheets of the catalog cards and established depository catalogs of its printed cards strategically throughout the country. At the same time the Library of Congress began to exchange cards with the New York Public Library and with other large libraries which were also printing catalog cards⁹ and to print catalog cards from copy supplied from other governmental libraries. Even before the printed Library of Congress *Catalog*, the then Superintendent of the Library of Congress reading room, F. W. Ashley, wrote, "Our acquisitions are known in Seattle long before our own local readers get word of them through any advertisement in our public catalog."¹⁰

The first major nationwide union list of serials to include holdings was Henry C. Bolton's *Catalogue of Scientific and Technical Periodicals*, representing 127 American libraries. Nine years earlier in 1876 Johns Hopkins University had issued a *Checklist of Periodicals, Taken at the Following Institutions in the City of Baltimore: Library of the Johns Hopkins University; Library of the Peabody Institute; Mercantile Library; Germania; Medico-Chirurgical Society; Library of the Maryland Institute; Library Company of the Baltimore Bar*; this was the first to indicate resources regionally. By 1931, in the apogee of locational tools for serials, *The Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada*, Haskell was able to cite some eighty published American union lists of serials and newspapers.¹¹ Since then the publication of regional union lists of serials has been especially

Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

notable, ranging from the broad subject and geographic areas covered by a Southern Regional Educational Board's *Southeastern Supplement to the Union List of Serials* to a more restricted U.S. Bureau of Ships Technical Library's *Union List of Serials in Naval Libraries of the Washington Area*.

The regional union catalog as a bibliographic device found its greatest growth in the period between 1930 and 1940. Whereas the National Union Catalog provided the location of library resources nationally, these regional catalogs were confined to a more restricted geographic area such as a city, county, state, or a region. As Downs says in his discussion of union catalogs, the availability of free labor from federal relief agencies during this era gave the union catalogs a great impetus.¹² The variations between the theoretical extremes of bibliographic centers and union catalogs naturally result from differences in the functions they are organized to perform. Bibliographic centers such as the Philadelphia Bibliographical Center for Research have their own staffs and book collections. Their work might include servicing a union catalog and a collection of bibliographies in order to provide location within and outside the distinctive region, relaying interlibrary loan requests directly, verifying cataloging and acquisition data, preparing author or subject bibliographies with notice of availability within the region, and reference research work.¹³ A union catalog, such as the Ohio Union Catalog, has as its primary function that of providing a record of the location of materials. Services beyond this take it into the scope of the bibliographic center.

However effective national or regional union catalogs and union lists might be as enterprises for obviating the purchase of low-frequency use books, facilitating acquisition or cataloging activities, and reducing the degree of duplication in types of materials and areas of collecting, their principal purpose is to provide the means to locate and supply the book within the system with the least possible delay.

With the Library of Congress *Catalog of Printed Cards*, *The National Union Catalog*, *The Union List of Serials*, regional union lists of serials, union catalogs, bibliographies controlling other groups of material such as microfilm, dissertations and state publications, and bibliographies and abstracts providing intensive coverage within subject areas, the basis for a high degree of success in filling requests for interlibrary loan has been achieved. For those who can afford the tools, it is now possible to sharpshoot instead of "buckshoot."

To such bibliographic controls, add the finite character of library collections and the mounting number of library users, most of whom are familiar with the possibilities of interlibrary loan and who see in it an ordinary extension of library service; the result is a theoretically infinite increase in the provision by one library of materials from other libraries.

Interlibrary loan by its nature, as an activity called into being by budgeted organizations to overcome the factors of need and distance, engendered problems. Much of the literature on interlibrary loan dealing with these problems is synthesized within the three interlibrary loan codes. They can be divided into two categories. The first is concerned with the pros, cons, and definitions of lending for serious work by serious scholars and the fact that the burden of interlibrary loans is carried by the larger libraries. The second category of problems deals mainly with the mechanics of the transaction—costs, insurance, shipping, and use of borrowed materials. In this latter group, those difficulties that are an innate part of the physical activity have tended to be standardized through custom and the use of common forms and special mailing supplies. These may not have provided completely satisfactory solutions, but they have reduced physical labor.

The trend of the solutions to the first category of problems is most encouraging for interlibrary loan. As the requests for interlibrary loan have increased, librarians have tended to relax the "research and general study" restriction, especially on the regional level. In the continuous compilation of regional union lists of serials and the movement toward increasing the effectiveness of union catalogs, one sees tangible evidence that there is an active interest in developing tools capable of providing effective access to the library resources of particular areas. In addition, much that has been unavailable for interlibrary lending, like serials and newspapers, is now obtainable by copying.

However, the pattern of interlibrary loan requests has produced some reactions. Librarians tend to borrow upward, sometimes horizontally, but rarely downward. Regional union catalogs and union lists of serials may act to reduce the flow of requests to libraries outside a region, but even here the main flow is upward. Within the structured system of a main library with suburban branches, all having essentially the same books, requests for the uncommon title flow naturally to the main library. It is expected to act as a supporting

Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

collection. In much the same way, libraries operating outside a formal system find it to their advantage to request material from a major library, where the item would most likely be located. The larger the research library, the better the incidence of success. This pattern is dramatically illustrated in Kurth's *Survey of the Interlibrary Loan Operation of the National Library of Medicine*, by glancing at the serial titles most demanded. The title most frequently requested is *Lancet* and among the first thirteen are the *American Medical Association Journal*, *American Dental Association Journal*, *Science*, *Nature*, and several others which in many instances certainly could have been obtained as easily from a library smaller and closer.¹⁴ Since the large libraries, in turn, borrow from their peers the lack of equity between the large and small libraries, while understandable, has had some negative results for interlibrary loan. More and more libraries are refusing to service requests for undergraduates and even graduate students, to verify inadequate citations, or to lend serials on interlibrary loan. In the last instance they are instead substituting copies, sometimes at prices beyond the ability of the researcher to pay.

If we accept the idea that the work of a library is a reflection of the immediate and total environment in which it operates, it would be well to examine the library's reference function as expressed in interlibrary loan to determine how consistent it is with its current environment—and to what degree it may be anticipating change. The following statements are generally accepted as true:

1. Access to library materials is essential to study (whether professional or lay), research, and teaching.
2. A library can hope to be better able to serve, but it cannot hope to attain self-sufficiency.
3. Larger libraries cannot hope for reciprocity in inter-library lending from smaller libraries.
4. Academic institutions are faced with rising enrollments, a move away from the textbook to individual study and research, and incursions into new degrees and areas of concentration. For the smaller institution, the situation is very acute. In 1897, slightly over 70 per cent of the approximately 4,500 graduate students enrolled in fields which led to the doctoral degree were working in the humanities and social sciences. More than 100,000 graduate students were enrolled during 1956-57 in programs which led to the Ph.D. de-

gree, and they were almost equally divided between the humanities and social sciences and the biological and physical sciences.¹⁵ With the smaller academic libraries historically oriented to the social sciences and the humanities, they can never expect to support the students and faculty in the areas of the biological and physical sciences without outside help.

5. New generations of users, many of whom enjoy a mixed blessing of leisure, are calling on the public library to supply individual books and materials which are outside the mainstream of the collection. The public library is also faced with requests from highly motivated individuals in businesses, local industries, and the professions, many of whom have been directly exposed to the interlibrary loan services offered by academic libraries.

6. In a society in which technology produces new industries overnight, the library has become an integral part of the research and development team. No matter how well provided those libraries are to meet explicit research needs, they cannot anticipate the need for the non-current but still important article or for library resources in exploratory investigation.

Some of the responses of libraries to the above facts and the many others which clearly point to a need for freer access to books and information are stop-gap measures; some, which do not interpret interlibrary loan too narrowly, are attempting to permit it to approximate its contemporary purposes.

In many libraries nothing is being done or can be done. With inadequate staff, harassed by crowded quarters, and faced with the need for constant attention to bread and butter obligations, the potential borrowing librarian is very reluctant to further the patron's desire to continue a search beyond the immediate collection. To request an interlibrary loan takes time and energy away from other things; and besides, the book might not be sent or, if it is sent, the whole procedure takes too long. In all too many cases, the small library is not aware of the potentialities of interlibrary loan, it hasn't the bibliographic tools to verify the citation, or it doesn't know where to ask. Others view any attempt at interlibrary loan as a criticism of the collection and a violation by the library user of a contract according to which he is to have no interest or desire beyond "this" library.

While for the small library the problem lies in an inability or lack or desire to borrow, many lender libraries view any further commit-

Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

ments to interlibrary loan as extending a service which is already beyond their interest or their ability to support. Notwithstanding their allegiance to the ideals of study and research, they nevertheless take easy recourse to at-home obligations.

More than any other group, librarians of colleges and smaller libraries have been disturbed by the continuation of previous interlibrary loan practices.¹⁶ For them the dynamics of social and educational change are not theoretical. They are now faced with more of a different kind of student who requires more material and much of this material is impossibly expensive. Many have never been satisfied with the limitations on borrowing that have been implied in the interlibrary loan code. Their goal can be described as cooperative interlibrary loan in which location is not an end in itself, but only one part of a process entailing need, source, and delivery.

In most instances the hopes of those seeking solutions on a broad front lie within a regional arrangement. Although this makes for a variety of approaches, it does permit the flexibility to build on the customs and strengths of each distinct area. The recommendations in Wyman W. Parker's survey of academic libraries in Ohio¹⁷ represent a continuation of the pattern of cooperation of the Joint University Libraries and the academic libraries in North Carolina. As the libraries concerned have good to excellent college collections, he feels the need is for an equitable sharing of research materials, as the usual "interlibrary loan is not the answer to this need of large resources by students who are now required to do individual work on the college campus."¹⁸ The research materials would be housed in a jointly supported bibliographic center which would also be responsible for locating and borrowing books and for compiling lists of the serials of the cooperating libraries.

Far more comprehensive is the *Report of the Commissioner's Committee on Reference and Research Library Resources*¹⁹ for New York State. This might act as a handbook for studies aimed at serving the library needs of all the citizens of a state. Built on existing resources whenever possible, the program calls for a mutually supporting chain of regional libraries. Each request would filter upward through progressively larger resources to where it could be serviced. Recognizing the need for speed, the system would be provided with electronic hardware and rapid communication and delivery.

While only two studies have been discussed, others are available, including those on Maine,²⁰ New Hampshire,²¹ and Colorado.²² In

each, one finds uniformities in purposes and techniques which together may present an insight into current and future directions.

One finds in these studies:

1. There is a growing concern with providing all library users with equal access to materials. This is especially true where the system is organized within a political unit and the larger library is publicly supported.

2. Interlibrary loan is no longer concerned merely with the unusual title.

3. While in theory all libraries participate equally, one or more larger libraries is expected to act as lender library. Where the back-stop library is tax supported, this may be considered as an extension of public service. If the library is associated with a state university, the university is aware that benefits will accrue to it in raising educational levels, in training students who are often its future graduate students, and in projecting an image of service to the state. In many cases the larger library may already be supplying the books. Now through the use of quick copying machines, serials can also be made available without inconveniencing its own in-house users.

4. Speed of communication and delivery are vital to making the network workable. There is a correlation between quick access and the willingness of the library user to have the material he needs located elsewhere.

5. The borrowing academic libraries need to buy more bibliographies, arrange for faculty and students to visit other libraries in order to avail themselves of their resources directly, and provide copies of articles supplied by other libraries. Generally, they are encouraging and not penalizing those who want to extend their range beyond the immediately available.

6. The need continues to exist for tools to control serials on the local level.

7. The library of libraries in each system has to provide more than materials. Consideration is being given to complementing the reference-research functions of the smaller libraries.

8. Each regional system has to have outlets to other resources, whether this is within the chain organization of the New York scheme

Interlibrary Loan: A Reference Service

or directly into the great national libraries in Washington. No system can hope for self-sufficiency.

Without suggesting that the answer to accessibility lies inexorably in the direction of a central library or that this is in itself good or bad, this appears to be the general direction of future interlibrary loan. This does not, however, reduce the responsibility of each library to develop and maintain a collection fully adequate to meet its basic program. But when the human and material resources of any one library cannot meet the needs of a user, a mental and physical environment must exist in which they can be met. The key to this is interlibrary loan.

References

1. Green, Samuel S. "The Lending of Books to One Another by Libraries," *Library Journal*, 1:15, Sept. 1876.
2. A.L.A. Committee on Co-Ordination. "Code of Practice for Interlibrary Loans," *ALA Bulletin*, 11:272, July 1917.
3. Association of College and Reference Libraries, Committee on Interlibrary Loans. "General Interlibrary Loan Code 1952," *College and Research Libraries*, 13:350, Oct. 1952.
4. U.S. Library of Congress. *Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1907*. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907, p. 73.
5. A.L.A. Committee on Co-Ordination, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-274.
6. "Revised Code," *Library Journal*, 65:802-803, Oct. 1, 1940.
7. Association of College and Reference Libraries, Committee on Interlibrary Loans, *op. cit.* pp. 350-358.
8. Conger, Louis H., Jr., and Fullam, Marie. *Projection of Earned Degrees to 1969-70*. Washington, Office of Education, 1959, p. 5.
9. "Report of the Card Section of the Catalogue Division," *In U.S. Library of Congress, Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1902*. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902, p. 91.
10. Ashley, F. W. "Interlibrary Loan from the Viewpoint of the Lending Library," *In James A. McMuller, Selected Articles on Interlibrary Loan*, New York, H. W. Wilson Company, 1928, p. 58.
11. Haskell, Daniel C., comp. "A Bibliography of Union Lists of Serials," *In Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada*. New York, H. W. Wilson Company, 1927, pp. 1581-1588.
12. Downs, Robert B., ed. *Union Catalogs in the United States*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1942, p. XVII.
13. Stone, John P. "Regional Union Catalogs: A Study of Services Actual and Potential," *In Robert B. Downs, Union Catalogs in the United States*, Chicago, American Library Association, 1940, pp. 129-130.

MICHAEL M. REYNOLDS

14. Kurth, William K. *Survey of the Interlibrary Loan Operation of the National Library of Medicine*. Washington, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service, 1962, p. 32.
15. Eells, Walter C. "Graduate Students in American Universities," *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*, 44:459-464, Oct. 1958.
16. Hirsch, Felix E. "Interlibrary Loans from the College Viewpoint," *College and Research Libraries*, 10:434-439, Oct. 1949.
17. Parker, Wyman W. *The Possibility of Extensive Academic Library Cooperation in Ohio: A Survey*. Ohio College Association, 1963.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
19. New York (State) University, Commissioner's Committee on Reference and Research Library Resources. *Report to James E. Allen, Jr., Commissioner of Education*. Albany, University of the State of New York, State Education Dept., New York State Library, 1961.
20. Metcalf, Keyes D. *Cooperation Among Maine Libraries; A Report Prepared for the Larger Libraries of Maine*. Cambridge, 1961.
21. Ford, Joseph P. and Holden, John T. *A Study of Library Service in New Hampshire*. Concord, N.H., State Library, 1961.
22. Oehlerts, Donald E. *A Study to Determine the Feasibility of Establishing a Cooperative Technical Processing Program and Direct Transmission of Interlibrary Loans*. Denver, Association of State Institutions of Higher Education in Colorado, 1962.