A Tribute to F. Wilfrid Lancaster

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of the career of F. W. Lancaster. It starts with a review of the recognitions he has received for his teaching accomplishments, both in the United States and in many foreign countries. It then turns to his books, for which he has received awards from the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Society for Information Science and Technology, and his other writings, among them the 1969 report on the evaluation of MEDLARS, which received an American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS) award as the best paper of the year. Next, Lancaster's contributions in research are discussed, starting with his work on the evaluation of information systems. Then, Lancaster's work as consultant to governments, commercial companies, nonprofit agencies, and libraries throughout the world is briefly reviewed. Finally, this article highlights Lancaster's contributions to the profession, with emphasis on his leadership as editor of *Library Trends*. The article then concludes by viewing Lancaster's contributions in the context of historic cooperation between the United States and the United Kingdom.

Introduction

F. Wilfrid Lancaster has had a spectacular, illustrious career as teacher, researcher, author, consultant in library and information science, contributor to the profession as an organizer of conferences, and the editor of *Library Trends*. His contributions have been well recognized and he is lauded by all who know him.

Teaching

As simply one of the awards Lancaster has received, he was the very first recipient of the ASIS Outstanding Information Science Teacher Award. In the January 5, 1981, issue of *Current Contents,* Eugene Garfield quoted the award certificate presented to Lancaster, "He has written a series of outstanding texts which serve as the basis for courses in information retrieval, vocabulary control, measurement and evaluation of information services. . . . He has inspired many students to share his commitment to research and evaluation. His impact as an information science teacher reaches far beyond the University of Illinois" (Garfield, 1981).

Garfield went on to say, "Lancaster has extensive international teaching experience. He has given courses, often under the auspices of UNESCO, in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Norway, and Poland. He has delivered guest lectures in a number of other countries also. In all cases, Lancaster has made a lasting impression upon his students and earned for himself a reputation as an excellent instructor."

Indeed, in the years since that award, Wilf Lancaster has continued to be a superb teacher, an outstanding researcher, and a rich contributor to the literature of library and information science. His international teaching assignments included appointments as visiting professor at universities or as responsible lecturer for workshops in Argentina, Brazil, China, Denmark, Germany, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, and the West Indies. While UNESCO has continued to be a major sponsor for those workshops, the governments for the countries involved have also been so.

Clearly, Wilf Lancaster is a superb teacher and that in itself would be sufficient to place him in the pantheon of library and information science. But there is more!

Writings

In his commentary in 1981, Garfield also said, "Over the years, Lancaster has authored more than 75 articles, book chapters, special reports, and monographs on various aspects of information science. . . . Perhaps most notable among Lancaster's works are five books he has written. Three of these books have won the ASIS Best Information Science Book Award, and a fourth won the Ralph R. Shaw Award of the American Library Association" (Garfield, 1981).

In the years since that commentary, the number of publications has grown to over two hundred! And the flow continues even today, fifteen years after his retirement as professor emeritus at the University of Illinois. And the number of ASIS awards for Best Information Science Book of the Year has now grown to four (see Appendix A), and of ALA awards to two! (See Appendix B).

One of the award-winning books was published by John Wiley & Sons, as part of its Information Sciences Series, for which Joe Becker and I were responsible. Wilf Lancaster said, "My 'biggest moment' in the field of information science occurred in 1968 when I discovered that my first book had been accepted for publication by John Wiley" (Williams, 1998). He went on to say, "It is never easy for a relatively unknown author to find a publisher, and my experience was no exception. I first submitted the manuscript to Columbia University Press and later to McGraw-Hill. Both sat on the submission for several months before they eventually declined. At that point I was ready to give up on the whole thing and was beginning to feel that the book was perhaps not worth publishing after all. Quite by chance, I mentioned the situation to a professional colleague, Jesse Ostroff. He said that he was quite friendly with Joe Becker who, at that time, was very influential in Wiley's publishing in information science. Jesse gave a copy of my text to Joe, who liked it. John Wiley made a rapid decision to publish. Since this made a significant contribution to furthering my career, I will be eternally grateful to Wiley, Becker and, especially, Jesse. . . . There have been many notable events in my career (which, incidentally, I do not regard as completely over), including many important awards from ASIS, but getting my first book published was definitely the highlight."

A second of Wilf's books, also an ASIS Best Book Award winner, was published, in 1973, again by John Wiley & Sons but through its subsidiary at the time, Becker & Hayes, Inc., as part of its Melville series. I must say that, whatever feelings of gratitude Wilf may have, I am personally even more grateful to him for publishing those two books with Joe Becker and me.

Of course, while the most evident publications may be the several books, the array of nearly two hundred journal articles and reports is in many respects even more impressive. Indeed, the 1969 report on the evaluation of MEDLARS won an ASIS award as the best paper of the year (Lancaster, 1969).

Alright, so Wilf Lancaster is a superb teacher and an excellent writer, but so what? What else has he done?

RESEARCH

His work on evaluation—of libraries, of information retrieval systems and information systems more generally, of indexing and abstracting structures, of indexes and journals, of online searching, of users and their needs, of training programs, of library collections and information services, of evaluation as a management tool—is truly monumental. There are some sixty of his publications focused on this area.

As Wilf said in his comments as part of the Pioneers of Information Science Scrapbook, "Following work on the Aslib Cranfield Project, and various evaluation studies for Herner & Co., I had recently completed a large-scale evaluation of MEDLARS (published in 1968). The book was

based primarily on my experience in these various evaluation studies" (Williams, 1998). And indeed, his work on evaluation is almost certainly the centerpiece for his research.

But there is more in his research than just evaluation, of course. I will not here in this introduction try to cover the full range of his research work since there are other articles in this Festschrift that will do so far more effectively.

Consultation

Instead, I now turn to the role of Wilf Lancaster as a consultant. Of course, it is largely based on his research and the resulting reputation and demonstrated qualifications to be an advisor to governments, corporations, and other organizations.

Here again, the array of institutions that Wilf has served as a consultant is almost overwhelming! Much of it, as with his educational work, was under sponsorship of UNESCO. But much of it was directly to various national governments. Those for agencies of the U.S. government—the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the Department of Defense, the National Institutes of Health—are among them, but there are perhaps a dozen other countries that he has also served.

Of course, the relationship with NLM may well have been the most significant. In that respect, it is worth noting that when Wilf joined the faculty of the University of Illinois, it was as director of their program in biomedical librarianship, from 1970 to 1973.

The consultations involve commercial organizations, nonprofit institutions, universities, and libraries as well as governments. Indeed, his knowledge and expertise clearly have value in every kind of organization. And the nature of that knowledge is that it does not fade with time but rather grows.

Professional Services

Wilf Lancaster's contributions to the profession have been equally monumental. Among them is the series of annual conferences, the Clinics on Library Applications of Data Processing, for which he edited the proceedings for 1972 to 1975, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1986, and 1990 (*Proceedings of the Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing*). I am sure that he was responsible for the planning and organization of each of those conferences himself.

And now we come to the capstone, the twenty years of editorial responsibility for *Library Trends*, from 1986 until 2006! The role and the level of quality of *Library Trends* was, of course, established well before he became editor, but his twenty years of continuing leadership have maintained its reputation. Now, it must be admitted that each issue of *Library Trends* has its own editor(s) and they are responsible for bringing together the con-

tributors and assuring that the quality is maintained. But clearly, as the person with overall and continuing responsibility for the journal, Wilf Lancaster is the person who is ultimately responsible.

It is worth quoting the comments that have been made about the importance of *Library Trends* (though it must be said that these are taken from the *Library Trends* website!):

> *Library Trends* not only identifies topics that are substantively important for the profession to consider, it also has consistently secured the most authoritative authors to help guide our thinking. *Library Trends* always provides intellectual food for thought.
> —Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services, Library of Congress

> In spite of the "L" word in the title, *Library Trends* has for over a half century offered synthesis and analysis of a wide range of important developments across the entire spectrum of library and information science.
> —Trudi Bellardo Hahn, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland; former Executive Director of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) and Past President of the American Society of [sic] Information Science and Technology

> Over the decades *Library Trends* has provided high-level commentary on the latest developments in the world of libraries and librarianship. The fact that each issue is devoted to a specific topic gives authors the confidence to explore their subjects thoroughly and in depth, knowing that others will be doing the same. As a result, the level of scholarship in *Library Trends* is consistently high, yet the journal remains accessible, whether its readers are practitioners, students or library and information science educators.
> —Alistair Black, Professor of Library and Information History, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

> *Library Trends* remains the only journal in our field that has a theme-based focus. It is a critical tool for scholars and professionals who need to know the latest thinking on research and practice in specific subject areas. Additionally, its interdisciplinary and international reach make it available and germane to a worldwide audience in a wide array of fields. The journal thus is a link among all cultures and in many disciplines that must deal with identical or overlapping issues in their scholarship.
> —Michèle Cloonan, Dean and Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College

> *Library Trends* is a valuable professional tool regardless of the theme of the individual issue. It always makes me take the time to think and reflect, something that's so hard for all of us to do given the fast, full pace at which we work.
> —Donna Dziedzic, Executive Director, Naperville Public Library

Well, as I have said, these are from the *Library Trends* website, so they may have been carefully selected and may not be as objective as they should be. But I must say that, in my view, *Library Trends* is everything they say! (The Graduate School of Library and Information Science, n.d.).

THE PARTNERSHIP

Turning again to Wilf's comments as part of the Pioneers of Information Science Scrapbook, he also said, "There are other people, of course, who profoundly influenced my career, and I owe all of them a debt of gratitude: Cyril Cleverdon, who led me to the field of information retrieval; Saul Herner, who brought me back from England; and Herbert Goldhor, who offered me a full time faculty position at Illinois and rewarded me by rapid promotion."

It is his reference to Cyril Cleverdon to which I now want to turn because I want to use the celebration of Wilf Lancaster's contributions to our field as an opportunity to explore the long-term and continuing partnership between the United States and the United Kingdom in the development of library and information science. There are many aspects that can be identified in that partnership. Some relate to the development of librarianship, as a focus of both service and practice, on the one hand, and of teaching and research, on the other. Some relate to the development of computers, again as a focus of service and practice and of teaching and research. Some relate to meeting the needs of information in support of science (i.e., "science information"). And some relate to the development of information science as a context for teaching and research.

The last of those contexts—information science—is where the contributions of Wilf Lancaster are most relevant. But I do want to devote some attention to other contexts and especially to science information since in a real sense they provide both the intellectual and the historical context for information science.

Turning first, though, to librarianship, it is clear that the practice and theory of librarianship has been a real partnership between the two Anglo-Saxon countries. There was a common perception of libraries that, in a very real sense, was shared between the United States and the United Kingdom and that common perception was really quite different, even distinct, from that elsewhere in the world. The shared perception was that a library was essentially an open institution, a center for service both to research and to the public.

In the development of computers and more generally of data processing, there was a sharing of perceptions of the roles of these technologies. It must be said that the United Kingdom was certainly the leader during the nineteenth century not only in the technological developments but in the theoretical underpinnings. In contrast, the approach in the United States was far more pragmatic, oriented toward the needs in busi-

ness. Thus, there may not have been a partnership, as such, between the United States and the United Kingdom with respect to computer developments during this period, but there certainly was a sharing of knowledge from the standpoint of both service and practice, if only through the mechanisms of commerce. It must be said, though, that in the years since the end of World War II the United States has dominated in this arena.

Turning to the field of science information, the partnership has been very evident since the end of World War II. In my view, the seminal event was the publication, in 1945, of the report, *Science: The Endless Frontier,* from Vannevar Bush, as the President's Science Advisor (Bush, 1945). To all intents and purposes, it has set the agenda for science information in the United States for the past sixty years and more. Indeed, directly from it came the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health!

From the standpoint of the partnership, though, it is relevant to point out that the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference held in London from June 21 to July 2, 1948, was the direct result of a recommendation made by the Royal Society Empire Scientific Conference of 1946, essentially immediately after the Vannevar Bush Report to the president. And the report on the conference in 1948 explicitly says, "It is worthy of note that the Royal Society believed that the problems relating to the adequate dissemination of scientific information were of such magnitude to convene such a conference as this with representatives not only from the United Kingdom, but also from the dominions and from the United States" (The Royal Society, 1948). So the partnership was seen as alive and well, at least as far as the United Kingdom was concerned.

And indeed it was so also from the perspective of the United States. The International Conference on Scientific Information held in 1958 under sponsorship of the National Science Foundation, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Documentation Institute, and the National Research Council started with an Opening Session Address by Sir Lindor Brown, making a direct tie between the 1946 Royal Society conference and this one (*Proceedings of the International Conference on Scientific Information*, 1959).

Of more immediate significance for my comment here, though, was the level of participation by colleagues from the United Kingdom. They included forty persons, many of whom have, in the years since then, played significant roles in the development of information science. Among them were three members of the Cambridge Language Research Unit (Margaret Masterman, Roger Needham, and Karen Spärck-Jones). There was Robert Fairthorne, Stella Keenan, Douglas Urquhart, Brian Vickery, Andrew Booth. And, of course, Cyril Cleverdon.

Cleverdon was of special significance because he received one of the first grants from the Office of Science Information of the U.S. National

Science Foundation. The Cranfield Project set the standard for the evaluation of information retrieval systems, and of course it is to that project that Wilf Lancaster refers (Cleverdon, 1960).

Of course, the partnership between the United States and the United Kingdom in information science has continued since then, and the United States in particular has gained greatly, as represented not only by Wilf Lancaster but by Michael Buckland and Blaise Cronin. In the United Kingdom, I think especially of Wilfrid Saunders, at Sheffield, and Jack Meadows, at Loughborough.

The point I am making here is that Wilf Lancaster represents this partnership in an especially effective way.

Conclusion

The opportunity to write this commentary on the career of Wilf Lancaster has been a great gift to me. I have known and admired him for decades but, frankly, until this review I had never fully realized the magnitude of his contributions to our field. Now, having had this opportunity, I am awestruck!

APPENDIX A
American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS) Best Information Science Book Awards

1. In 1970: Lancaster, F. W. (1968). *Information retrieval systems: Characteristics, testing and evaluation.* Information Sciences series. New York: Wiley.
2. In 1974: Fayen, E. G., &. Lancaster, F. W. (1973). *Information retrieval on-line.* Los Angeles: Melville Pub.
3. In 1978: Lancaster, F. W. (1978). *Toward paperless information systems.* New York: Academic Press.
4. In 1992: Lancaster, F. W. (1991). *Indexing and abstracting in theory and practice.* Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

APPENDIX B
ALA Best Book Awards

1. In 1978: Ralph R. Shaw Award: Baker, S., & Lancaster, F. W. (1977). *The measurement and evaluation of library services.* Arlington, VA: Information Resources Press.
2. In 1989: G. K. Hall Award. Lancaster, F. W. (1988). *If you want to evaluate your library.* Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

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In 1991, after twenty-seven years of service on the faculty of Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Robert M. Hayes retired, becoming professor emeritus. From 1974 until 1989, he served as dean of that school. From 1964 to 1969, as a professor in the school he served as director of the Institute of Library Research. Dr. Hayes received his doctorate in mathematics from UCLA in 1952. From 1949 until he joined the faculty of UCLA in 1964, Dr. Hayes worked as a systems analyst for various organizations in government and industry. In 1959, Dr. Hayes founded and served as president of Advanced Information Systems, a company that pioneered in computer-based information retrieval, developing some of the first generalized computer programs for file management. In 1969, Joseph Becker and Dr. Hayes formed Becker & Hayes, Inc. of which Dr. Hayes was vice-president until leaving to become dean of GSLIS/UCLA in 1974. Dr. Hayes has had visiting faculty appointments at universities in the United States, Australia, China, Japan, England, Azerbaijan, Croatia, South Korea, and Austria. Dr. Hayes served as chairman of the Public Sector/Private Sector Task Force of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) (1979–82), with primary responsibility for its final report.