Workshop Words Worth Recall

To give just a sense of what is ahead (for libraries), I will concentrate on only three matters: (a) the bibliographic structure, (b) library collections, and (c) computers and communications technology.

Bibliographic Structure

Now, our bibliographic structure is becomiong library-independent. The change started in specific scientific areas and is moving to other disciplines. While local resources do retain the merit of being close at hand, they—and the catalog that is the guide to them—are increasingly inadequate as a foundation for research. No single library can keep up with all the new avenues of scholarship and new ways of combining traditional disciplines; nor can most libraries acquire even a modest percentage of the new items published each year.

As a result, extensive computerized bibliographic data bases are being developed, many of which are devoted to specific disciplines. In addition, libraries have joined together as members of bibliographic networks such as OCLC, Inc., and the Research Libraries Group's RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network). OCLC serves 2000 libraries of all kinds with a data base of 6 million records; RLIN's research library members have access to well over 1 million records. In the aggregate, if linked within a nation-wide U.S. bibliographic system and extended internationally, these data bases will ultimately provide users with a guide to all recorded information. The on-line, user accessible, computerized catalog gives every library a demanding new responsibility—new at least in practice if not in principle—of providing its users with their personal windows into the expanded bibliographic world.

Given the change in the underlying bibliographic structure, the nature of the local catalog itself now needs review. With the advent of on-line bibliographic data bases, scholars and researchers have discovered many new ways of searching for information—ways that far exceed the routes imagined by those still tied to the format of catalog cards. The expense of cataloging, costs of catalog maintenance, and even the size of the catalog card prevented catalogers in the past from attaching more than two or three subject headings to a single book. The storage capacities of computers can accommodate much more information and allow greater precision in descriptions of individual items. Interdisciplinary studies remind us of the limitations of arbitrary rules and fixed plans for the categorization of knowledge. Indeed, can any single item be "definitively" recorded so that a searcher would inevitably uncover it regardless of the search strategy and terminology used? The computer, with its capacity for sifting through thousands of records in seconds, has opened new doors for library users and library managers alike.

Library Collections

Ways must be found to control what libraries acquire and keep. Even if budgets were not the growing constraint they are, there is something irresponsible about collecting more and more material, each item of which, by definition, will be used less and less. Somehow, the sales goals of publishers have to be brought into better harmony with the fiscal realities of library budgets and more focused goals of collecting policies. Some librarians (and scholars) will have to build distinctive and comprehensive subject collections on behalf of all, and, in turn, will have to look elsewhere for material in other fields. Further, national collections of certain categories of materials, such as periodicals, make sense for many reasons, and a way

will have to be found to bring them into being. One editor of a small journal speculated that he might support a periodicals center if he could convince its management to accept a $7,000 annual subscription rate for his publication to make up for an anticipated loss of subscribers. Perhaps a more productive approach would be for librarians and editors to consider ways in which an NPC might bring more closely together the distribution function of scholarly journal publishers and the distribution function of libraries. There is an opportunity here to improve performance in both economic and service terms, but such change will require that we put our function ahead of our form.

Technology

The February, 1981, issue of *College and Research Library News* (42:2, pp 29-30) reprinted the following two paragraphs from *The Book of Predictions:*

> *1985-1990.* Half of American homes will be connected to a video-data communications network that allows two-way dialogue with the instructors of televised classes in higher education. Pocket-sized electronic books will be produced which consist of mini-cassettes that are either inserted into calculator-sized terminals for text display or hooked up to domestic computer systems for print-outs of typeset quality or read-outs by voice synthesizer. Twenty-thousand pages of text can be transmitted by computer in one second and stored on two square inches of film, glass, or other surface and read by a computer looking for specific concepts at one thousand pages per second.

> *1991-2030.* The price performance ratio of computers will be reduced to one-sixteenth its current value, and hardware costs will become nominal. Online link-ups to large research libraries in home, school, and office will cause a decline in published reference books, newspapers, and magazines. A Universal Information System will be in operation, giving access 'at any given moment to the contents of any book that has ever been published or any magazine or any fact' (Andrei Sakharov). Printing-on-demand modules in both urban and rural locations will permit hard copy reproduction of any material required—granting, of course, that the copyright laws have changed by then.

How librarians and publishers address these and many other matters during the years immediately ahead is important. How well they succeed in fulfilling their constant functions in a time of changing methods is even more important. A way must be found to make certain the results fully justify the effort.