

## COOPERATION IN PROCESSING

By ORCENA MAHONEY\*

At this time a popular topic of discussion among librarians is cooperation, probably because there are so many implications and possibilities in all fields of library work. In fact, cooperation is the theme of a current and important project of the American Library Association, the revision of existing standards for public library service. The new guide to evaluation of libraries as it relates to library structure and government will emphasize the necessity of libraries to work together, sharing their services and materials, in order to meet the full needs of their users. In other words, the cooperative approach will be the most important single recommendation of the document.

And it appears to me that cooperation in the processing of library materials has more possibilities than many of the other important library activities. As a matter of fact, cataloging has become so dependent upon cooperation that we sometimes forget how much of our job is being done for us in some other library. Many libraries are not taking full advantage of the cooperation that is already available and are not considering ways of increasing cooperative efforts.

There are many kinds of cooperation with technical terms applied to mean different things. "Cooperative cataloging" is a program in which several libraries do cataloging for the benefit of each participant. The other extreme is "centralized cataloging" where the complete cataloging is done by a single library or central agency for the use of a number of libraries. Thus the cataloging done by The H. W. Wilson Company and the Library of Congress is centralized cataloging, and the library that buys the printed cards is taking advantage of centralized cataloging. However, the more changes and adaptations on the cards made by the individual libraries, the more the end result becomes a type of cooperation rather than centralized cataloging. Many large libraries take advantage of the cataloging of the Library of Congress by using information obtained from the printed *Library of Congress Catalog* or proof sheets and thus achieve the benefits of cooperation in their cataloging. For reasons of economy and increased uniformity, it is generally agreed that centralized cataloging is the preferred type of cooperation, particularly for small libraries. Also centralization is often more applicable to the other processing procedures than casual cooperation.

It is interesting to note that other nations are also engaged in a discussion of centralized and cooperative cataloging. In England in order to make the best use of centralized and cooperative cataloging, which is felt to be an imperative need, libraries will have to adopt one cataloging code instead of the several now in use throughout the country. With the publication of the British National Bibliography, they have achieved a form of centralized cataloging which is used by several of the regional library systems. In Norway, centralized cataloging is combined with centralized buying on the part of state-aided school and rural public libraries. Sweden has gone a long way toward centralization with the adoption of a single classification system for the whole of Swedish national bibliography. There libraries may subscribe for a card service which also supplies book cards and pockets.

\*Mrs. Mahoney is Executive Secretary of the Division of Cataloging and Classification, American Library Association.

In postwar Germany there are some dozen university, research, state and big public libraries that are now forming one ideal library by cooperation in book buying, union-cataloging and inter-library lending. Two Italian cities undertook in 1952 a scheme of centralized cataloging which should be completed within a five-year period. A by-product of the effort, perhaps the first of its kind in Italy, will be a union catalog for the region. One of the most recent and most comprehensive services in the field of centralized cataloging was that inaugurated in 1949 by the National Diet of Japan. In our own hemisphere, Brazil has a centralized cataloging agency in its *Servico de Inter-cambio de Catalogacao*, and Canada has *Fides Publishers of Montreal*, which began in 1951 to issue printed catalog cards for new French-Canadian publications and selected titles appearing in France and Belgium.

In the United States, besides the centralized card service offered by The Library of Congress and The H. W. Wilson Company, we find a centralized card system in the state of Georgia. The State Cataloging Service is operated for public and school libraries by the State Department of Education as a part of the state aid program. This service provides addressographed unit cards supplied upon request for each book that is purchased through this state agency. In this way libraries may avail themselves of centralized purchasing as well as cataloging.

A smaller unit offering centralized services is the Regional Library Service Center in Watertown, New York. This Regional Center is a detached office of the New York State Library established in 1949 to offer advisory and supplementary assistance to the established public libraries in three counties in upstate New York. At present there are sixty-three libraries participating in the Regional Center's program. Processing at the Regional Center includes books only. Of the sixty-three libraries in the regional program fifty-seven are using the processing service. Processing for these libraries includes cataloging and classifying, pasting of pockets and date slips, and marking books. The local libraries do not have centralized ordering—each library orders its books and instructs the jobber to send the books directly to the Regional Center. When returned to the local libraries on the weekly truck delivery, the books have been marked, pasted and have complete catalog and shelflist cards.

Other examples of centralized processing exist in localities where a city library has contracted with a neighboring county library to have the processing done by one of the libraries for both institutions. Several instances of such contractual arrangement are to be found in California, between the Monterrey and Salinas libraries to mention one.

It is evident from these examples of successful ventures in centralized cataloging that libraries find value in not having to duplicate so much of the work in the field of processing. Just what are some of these advantages that can be obtained from centralized processing. Suggestions for your consideration are:

1. Reducing the cost of cataloging
2. Avoiding duplication of effort
3. Increasing uniformity of cataloging and catalogs
4. Making possible larger discounts in purchasing books
5. Providing large enough units to allow adequate mechanical equipment
6. Freeing the librarian of a small library from processing duties in order to give more time for work with the public.

It is generally agreed that centralized cataloging can be used to reduce costs, although it is a widely accepted fact that costs increase with the size of the collection. This should be borne in mind in setting up a central processing unit. For the most economical plan it might be best to confine the participating libraries to a homogeneous regional group, such as the Watertown Regional Center.

In nearly all discussions of cooperative or centralized processing there is wide agreement that its primary aim is to avoid duplication of effort. Catalogers who use printed card services can offer the best testimonials on this point. Finding ways and means of economical adaptation of centralization is now being studied by a committee of the ALA Division of Cataloging and Classification.

Not all librarians would agree that uniformity in cataloging is an important consideration. It is, however, a necessity if the full benefits of cooperation are to be utilized. And from the long-range point of view, it would tend to make the use of catalogs easier by students, research workers and the general public, if not librarians.

Most administrators have found that purchasing in quantity allows for the enjoyment of increased discount benefits. It is true that if larger volume causes an increase in red tape, the cost of operation increases. Modern machine methods and forms can overcome this obstacle, provided a homogenous unit is observed. If the central processing unit is large enough, it is possible to finance not only business machines, but duplicating machines and other equipment that will improve the output and reduce labor costs.

In many small libraries there are only one or two professionally trained librarians. It is generally recognized that cataloging is one of the library activities that requires professional training. True, many of the routines involved are clerical, but not descriptive and subject cataloging, and they take time. If the lone librarian could have this work done for her, she would be free for the many other demands upon her time, particularly improved library service to the public.

Improved library service is certainly our main objective and it would appear that cooperation is one of the ways of obtaining this goal. It is my hope that librarians will realize that cooperation and especially centralization can be utilized to good advantage in the processing of library materials.

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### "Operation Library"

The United States Junior Chamber of Commerce has adopted the Arkansas Jaycee's "Operation Library." This civic project was begun by the Arkansas group in cooperation with the Arkansas Library Commission and the Arkansas Library Association to improve library facilities in communities throughout the state.

On July 28, 1956, the board of the national organization adopted "Operation Library" as a Class I (major) project for the coming year. North Carolina Jaycees will be ready to work with librarians, trustees and friends groups in this state. We can use the help of this alert and energetic organization.