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by Charles Tremper

The familiar card catalog may have been one of the little-known side effects of the French Revolution. The National Library of France grew rapidly at the end of the eighteenth century, when it added the royal and ecclesiastical libraries to its collections. The catalog in book form used at the time lacked the flexibility to cope with the National Library's unprecedented growth. What may have been the first card catalog—written on playing cards—was created.[1]

The early card catalogs were only supplements to the permanent catalogs in book form; the next logical step was to use cards instead of adding entries to an inflexible book format. The library catalog, written on interfilable cards and allowing room for infinite expansion, was a technological revolution.

In the course of the nineteenth century, card catalogs became common in most larger libraries. A decision in 1901 by the Library of Congress to sell its printed cards to other libraries in the United States was an impetus both for the development of card catalogs and for cataloging according to a national standard. Buying pre-printed cards enabled libraries to save the time and cost involved in doing their own cataloging and preparing their own cards.

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[1]Dunkin, Paul S., *Cataloging U.S.A.*, Chicago: American Library Association, 1969, p. 2.

Pioneers in the cataloging of books set forth two goals that are still valid today: standardization of practice and the convenience of the user. It was assumed, perhaps naively, that the two would usually coincide. When they did not, the convenience of the user, not the cataloger, was to prevail. Standardization has proven easier to attain than "convenience of the user," which is vague at best. Clearly not all users in all kinds of libraries would find the same thing convenient. However, because Library of Congress cataloging has come to be accepted by most libraries, their cataloging practices have become the standard.

The problems and limitations of cards have become more apparent as library collections and card catalogs grow. Bulk alone complicates a card catalog. The Syracuse University Libraries maintain 28 card catalogs comprising approximately 6,000 card trays and 4 1/2 to 5 million catalog cards. It is a difficult and time-consuming task to keep the cards in their proper sequence in a catalog as large as the one at Bird Library. Clerical staff and student workers file the cards; their work is checked for errors by librarians and other staff members. In the course of revision, various kinds of errors may be found: large blocks of cards out of sequence, incorrect or incomplete forms of personal names or names of corporate bodies, and problems with call numbers and subject classification. All of these pose potential problems for the user.

The ALA (American Library Association) Rules for Filing Catalog Cards is 258 pages long, an indication that the order of filing is not always readily apparent. Anyone who has browsed among the headings beginning with New York in either part of Syracuse University's catalog will understand this. In addition, the Syracuse University Libraries' card catalog, like those of other libraries, has certain inherited problems. They are the result of a century of growth and change. The merging of collections in Bird Library also created a merged catalog. As a result, many obsolete and confusing branch library designations still appear on older cards. Many of the older cards are in various states of deterioration. The effect of incomplete, mutilated, missing, or misfiled cards is clear: a patron is effectively prevented from finding a book, so it may as well be lost.

Although it is a relatively simple matter to add new cards or to remove obsolete ones, it is not easy to change the information on existing cards. The card catalog serves as an index to all the titles of a library's collection, creating access to each in a number of ways: by authors, both personal and corporate (corporations, universities, governments, etc.); by titles (in one or more forms); and by subject headings, a specialized vocabulary describing the contents of a work. Author and title information comes from the book itself and is printed on the card in a format

standardized by the Library of Congress. The subject headings are assigned by catalogers at the Library of Congress or at the local library from the *Library of Congress Subject Headings,* which lists all headings authorized by the Library of Congress.

This subject vocabulary has developed for nearly a century and like the merged catalog, it also has problems. Because it is difficult to change an established heading on great numbers of cards, sometimes outdated and archaic terminology is still in use. For example, one looks in vain to find "movies" or "films" or "motion pictures" in the subject catalog. Ultimately one is led to "Moving-pictures" for books on the subject. Syracuse University's subject catalog has three drawers or trays of cards with the heading "Moving-pictures"; to change those approximately 1800 cards would be an expensive task. "Airplanes," until a few years ago, was found under "Aeroplanes"; World War II files were under "World War, 1939-1945"; while World War I files were under "European War, 1914-1918."

In addition to making a steady stream of small changes, the Library of Congress has twice in the last two decades undertaken a thorough overhauling of its cataloging system. The first of these was the result of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* adopted by librarians in 1967. The Library of Congress did not fully follow the code's provisions concerning author and subject entries to avoid having to change many of their established names. In a card catalog, this would have meant either creating a system of cross-references between past and current forms or manually changing the names on millions of cards. The practice of noncompliance was grandly termed "superimposition." Newly-established names, however, followed the Anglo-American code.

On January 1, 1981, the Library of Congress fully adopted the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules,* which has produced a sharp break with the past concerning many established forms of personal and corporate names. Since January 1981, "superimposition" has yielded to the equally grandiloquent "desuperimposition." Simply put, this means that the Library of Congress and other libraries are now following all of the rules all of the time.

A guiding principle of the new code has been to make the form of name used in cataloging correspond more closely to what people have seen in other sources, rather than trying to establish the fullest form possible of someone's "real" name.

Therefore, in the new catalog, you will find "Twain, Mark" rather than "Clemens, Samuel Langhorne." A hint of things to come was establishing former President Carter as "Carter, Jimmy" instead of "Carter, James Earl." Classical writers, popes, and saints will be entered

under a common English form if possible. "Aristotle" will replace "Aristoteles" and "Francis, of Assisi," "Francesco d' Assisi." Russian names will be more fully Anglicized with "Dostoyevsky, Fyodor" replacing "Dostoevskii, Fedor Mikhailovich."

The long, inverted, and often artificial hierarchies now appearing in library headings for corporate names will be replaced by forms in general use. As a result, "Rochester, N.Y. University" (a moderately benign hierarchy but a form appearing nowhere outside of library catalogs) will become "University of Rochester."

To implement more easily and more econonically the changes required by the new Anglo-American catalog rules, the Library of Congress has closed its own card catalogs and adopted a computer-based catalog. The computer can both modify headings and create links between the old and the new forms. A machine change need only be made once to appear on all records affected. In addition, the computer offers ways of searching that can overcome some of the problems of large card catalogs and of a controlled vocabulary. Multiple locations become possible by adding computer terminals. However, the computer has its own problems. It is absolutely literal; a simple reversal of letters that the eye would overlook in a card file may prevent an item from being found. And of course, computers sometimes become inoperable and some kind of back-up system may be necessary.

Here at Syracuse, the Libraries' Task Force on the Future of the Card Catalog made the recommendation to "close" (add no new cards) Syracuse University's card catalog both in response to these developments on the national scene and to better meet local needs by using computer technology. The original Task Force was headed by Metod Milac, associate director for Collections. Other members were Gregory Bullard, associate director for Technical and Automated Services; Anne Edwards, head of Humanities; Shirley Ellsworth, head of Cataloging; Cynthia Gozzi, head of Acquisitions; Pauline Miller, head of the Science Libraries; Marion Mullen, head of Reference; Donald Seibert, head of Fine Arts; Nancy Urtz, Catalog Maintenance Librarian; and John Wyman, manager of Systems Development. (Mrs. Gozzi and Mrs. Urtz are no longer at Syracuse University.)

The Syracuse University Libraries were well ahead of most research libraries in having a well-developed in-house computer system—SULIRS (Syracuse University Libraries Information Retrieval System). The system is the result of a decade of cooperative effort between the Libraries and the Syracuse University Computing Center. Originally

designed to order, pay for, and circulate books, SULIRS now functions as the libraries' catalog as well. The data base contains more than 450,000 records for all books acquired since 1971. Thus the computer catalog generally contains the most recently acquired books and those older ones which are most heavily used.

Most materials in the Syracuse University Libraries are cataloged on a computer terminal linked to the Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC) in Columbus, Ohio. The OCLC data base contains machine-readable cataloging from both the Library of Congress and other member libraries. From OCLC the Syracuse University Libraries receive cards for those card catalogs that are being continued as well as a computer tape. The tape is compared with the information in SULIRS to insure that the data in the SULIRS records match the data in OCLC in regard to forms of name, titles, series titles, subject headings, and other pertinent information.

Some twenty-two SULIRS terminals are now available for public use: a cluster of eight in the reference area of Bird Library, terminals on the other floors of Bird, and in the Engineering and Life Sciences Library (ELS). Terminals are planned for the other branch libraries: Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, and Physics.

Not only will SULIRS continue the work of the familiar 3 x 5 cards, but it will also overcome their limitations by providing information not found in the card catalog. A patron can now learn whether a given book has been ordered by the Libraries; received, but not yet cataloged; has been checked out to another user; or is in the reserve collection. In addition to the call number, SULIRS also locates a book directly, providing not only the call number, but also the floor, branch, or reference collection where the book may be found.

It is now possible to search for books by authors and titles on SULIRS, using a system of search keys that is outlined at each public terminal. It is planned that subject searching, using the Library of Congress subject headings (those found in the subject card catalog) will be available later this year. At the same time, the search strategy will be refined to use whole words, rather than the truncated forms now used.

Efforts are now underway to add selected titles acquired before 1971 to SULIRS. The criterion for selection is use, as shown by circulation. The Cataloging Department is creating SULIRS records for older books that have circulated at least twice in the past year. This project is termed "retrospective conversion" and the goal is to add to the on-line catalog those titles most in demand.

The records in SULIRS are continually being revised to insure greater accuracy and to include more information. Call numbers and location information are being added and corrected where necessary; authors and titles are being made consistent with current cataloging practice.

It is anticipated that SULIRS will soon be available to users of any Syracuse University computer terminal, including those in laboratories or administrative offices. This would provide access from anywhere on campus to the library holdings.

The Syracuse University Libraries Information Retrieval System is especially useful in fields where current material is a prime consideration. Library users have responded enthusiastically to the increased availability of the on-line catalog. In Bird Library, there are often more people using the computer terminals than the author and title section of the card catalog.

The new on-line catalog does not replace the existing card catalogs which have been compacted and shifted as part of the general reorganization of the first floor of Bird Library. Although no cards have been filed in the author and title section of Bird's card catalog since December 1980, cards are still being filed in the subject catalog, which is at present a comprehensive subject index to all library holdings. In addition, cards for serials and periodicals continue to be filed in both catalogs. Certain special and branch library card catalogs continue to have all the cards filed for books in that library (Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, Physics, the score and record catalogs in the Music Library, and the catalog for the George Arents Research Library). Finally, for researchers in those fields where currency of information is less important, important material will often be found only in the card catalog.

Libraries today are in much the same situation as those in the late eighteenth century when the first card catalogs appeared. Today the computer terminal has supplemented the card catalog. Just as interfilable cards were a technological advance over the catalog in book form, the computer offers a similar leap forward as we near the twenty-first century.

With the closing of Bird Library's author-title catalog in January, we have begun a period of transition. The card catalog no longer is a comprehensive index to the Syracuse University Libraries' holdings; nor is SULIRS. Both will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future, as were card and book catalogs nearly two hundred years ago.

As for the two cataloging goals of standardization and convenience for the user, we believe the well-programmed computer can handle the standardization, leaving the librarian free to consider users and their needs.