

Problems of Horticultural and Botanical Libraries

The first conference on botanical and horticultural libraries was held in Horticultural Hall, Boston, on Thursday, November 13, 1969. Sponsored by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and organized by the Society's Library Committee, the Conference was conceived as an opportunity to discuss problems of interest to libraries in the field. Forty persons attended, representing more than twenty institutions.

The first speaker was Mr. John F. Reed, Curator of the Library of the New York Botanical Garden, who addressed himself to the "Problems of Horticultural and Botanical Libraries." Dr. George H. M. Lawrence, Director of the Hunt Botanical Library of the Carnegie-Mellon University, followed with a discussion entitled "Care and Preservation of Library Materials." The afternoon session began with an analysis of a library's "Bibliographic Responsibilities to the Plant Sciences" by Gordon P. DeWolf, Jr. In "Where Do We Go From Here?" Mr. Gordon W. Dillon, Executive Secretary of the American Orchid Society, suggested several ways to continue the discussions with a series of conferences. Following a question and answer period the group, in an informal business session, accepted the invitation of the Hunt Botanical Library to hold a second conference, in Pittsburgh, on April 24-25, 1970.

*It is planned to reproduce the edited texts of the major presentations at the conference in this issue and in succeeding numbers of *Arnoldia*. — Ed.*

To preface my remarks, I would like first to define my concept of the primary roles of the major botanico-horticultural libraries. To me, they represent research-resource libraries of inestimable value which are deeply involved in collecting, preserving, and providing access to the bulk of the world's literature dealing with the various aspects of plant science — pure and applied.

Specifically, their responsibilities fall into three main categories: (1) to preserve, conserve, and protect their collections; (2) to develop, complete, and expand their collections to meet the needs of both present and future users; (3) to provide service and accessibility to this literature and knowledge about this literature to their users.

The collections held in these libraries are, in truth, national resources. It is important that we who are concerned with these libraries recognize that our responsibilities exceed the bounds of our individual institutions.

In my discussion I am forced to adopt a shotgun approach that will touch briefly upon scattered problems in these areas of responsibility before going on to what I consider to be the major problems facing our libraries today. I think I should also say at this point that these problems are not unique to botanico-horticultural libraries. Although they may be more urgent for us than for libraries in other scientific disciplines, they are very similar to the problems faced by most academic research libraries.

When one speaks of a librarian's custodial duties many people immediately conjure up an image of a stuffy, intransigent guardian who jealously watches over the library stacks, suspicious of anyone who wants to read or, worse yet, borrow a book, and who is really happy only when every book is in its proper place on the library shelves. When I speak of custodial duties I am referring to the positive and constructive activities which are part of the maintenance of collections having intrinsic archival and historical value.

One of these major responsibilities is the ever-present task of physical maintenance, preservation, and conservation of the publications and other library materials in the library collection. The ravages of time — use and the chemical deterioration of paper and binding materials — are matters of constant and increasing concern, especially in libraries that attach archival importance to their collections.

A closely related problem needing much greater recognition, attention, and action in library circles today concerns the production of modern publications at high standards of quality of materials and workmanship. Failure of librarians to concern themselves with present publication practices and to put forth the problems that poor production standards create for research libraries will compound the difficulties of preservation in the future.

Technology has developed long-life — pH neutral — papers that can be manufactured and sold at costs approximating those of lesser quality, more rapidly deteriorating papers. We must urge publishers to adopt the use of these papers in their production of periodicals and monographs. It is disturbing to see how rapidly issues of some of the outstanding scientific journals published in this country, as well as abroad, begin to discolor and become brittle. It is hard to believe that those responsible for

these publications consider their work to be of such ephemeral importance.

Physical format and design of periodicals and other publications is still another area of great concern to librarians today, particularly the tendency to reduce the width of inner margins. Inner margins of one inch or 3/4 inch usually allow adequate space for libraries to bind these items either by machine oversewing or preferably, in archival collections, by smythe or bench sewing. When, usually in the name of economy, inner margins are reduced to one-half inch or less, as in the case of such substantial journals as *Planta*, *Excerpta Botanica* and the *Gardener's Chronicle* to name only a few, the binding of the volume by libraries becomes much more difficult. If such volumes are machine oversewn, there is often no inner margin left at all; even with smythe sewing the text often runs into the groove of the binding making the volume difficult to read or photocopy.

Librarians must be aware of the quality of both materials and workmanship that go into the publications they acquire for their libraries, for they make a great investment in purchasing and maintaining these materials. When publishing and production standards fall below those that will allow libraries to maintain usable archival collections, then those concerned with libraries must make their voices heard.

Collection development presents many challenges to practicing libraries today. Because of the increasing numbers of publications produced each year and the even more rapidly increasing costs of books and periodicals, library purchasing budgets must be substantially increased each year just to allow libraries to hold ground in their particular areas of specialization. At the same time, librarians and others involved with the selection of books, journals, and other materials for their collections, must exercise increased selectivity in allocating their available resources.

A similar problem is faced by libraries trying to fill gaps in their holdings or involved in large-scale development of collections of older literature. In these areas, increasing costs are compounded by increasing competition for this literature, especially from the developing small college and university libraries.

The most economical answer to large-scale development of collections of older literature, at least on an individual institution basis, is the purchase of this material in microforms — microfiche, microfilm or microcard. That such microforms are relatively inexpensive and require little storage space is very

attractive. Unfortunately, there is one major drawback to the use of these materials: readers confronted with the prospect of having to use microforms will go out of their way, often to considerable personal expense, to avoid their use. The development of relatively inexpensive reading-printing equipment which produces usable, inexpensive hard copy for consultation and reference should be of great assistance in helping libraries overcome much of the resistance to the use of microforms.

Aside from the archival value of microforms, the greatest value I see in them in research-resource libraries such as ours, is in the interlibrary loan and photocopying programs that we provide. By maintaining microform duplicates of rare, valuable, and fragile materials, explicitly for the production of photocopies for interlibrary loan and in-house photocopy demands, libraries can save tremendously on the wear and tear on original materials while still providing access to them.

The greatest problem facing any group of libraries today, be they related geographically or by their subject specialization, is their willingness to investigate, identify, and implement programs that lead to standardization, cooperation, and shared utilization of their resources and activities.

One of the most obvious areas for this coordination is current acquisition and collection development. I am sure that this group willingly concedes the impossibility and impracticality of any library even to attempt to collect all of the world's literature dealing with the plant sciences. Instead, individually, our approach has been, and continues to be, one of maintaining more or less comprehensive collections in our particular areas of specialization and smaller representative collections in those areas of our secondary interests. Although there must be a high degree of overlap throughout our collections, we must look beyond the bounds of our own institutions and begin to think in terms of the total information needs of the plant scientist, and we must try to assure, on a collective basis, the comprehensive collection of the plant science literature.

Coordination of general acquisition responsibilities must be accompanied by a general and freely functioning cooperation among libraries in sharing and distributing their unique holdings. Such a "network" approach to library resource development has been recognized and developed on a regional basis — particularly in state library systems. I believe a similar approach can be taken on a subject basis, although difficulties arising from lack of geographical proximity are sure to be present.

As I have already mentioned, in the libraries represented at

this meeting there is a considerable overlap in our current acquisitions programs, probably collectively greater than 50%. Among selected libraries in this group, the overlap in purchases may exceed 90%. With such a high percentage of duplication in current acquisitions, we have an ideal opportunity to share in some way the production of cataloging data and thereby to reduce our individual cataloging costs.

It has been my experience at The New York Botanical Garden that the cost of descriptive and subject cataloging to American Library Association and Library of Congress standards is often higher than the cost of acquiring the publication itself, particularly when printed Library of Congress cards are unavailable within a reasonable period of time. We have learned through experience that approximately 40% of our Library of Congress card orders for newly published monographs and serials are unfilled after six months. Most of this material consists of publications in foreign languages and analytics of serials sets, the material for which original cataloging is most costly to prepare.

Much costly duplicate original cataloging could be eliminated if we could agree to certain standards for descriptive and subject cataloging and devise a way in which to distribute cataloging copy to cooperating institutions for their individual production of catalog cards. Better yet, with further standardization of card format, we could possibly develop a centralized card reproduction center that could supply cards to our individual libraries.

Closely related to the cataloging of new published works is the production of cataloging data for our older literature collections. Several libraries are contemplating or have begun the awesome task of recataloging their collections to modern standards. The New York Botanical Garden is one of those institutions that has undertaken this massive task — one that we estimate will require 15 man-years of professional cataloging time. This indeed is a costly undertaking.

To date, our experience indicates that we can obtain LC printed cards for slightly less than one-half of the items which we must process in this project. The load of original cataloging that our recataloging staff must perform is terrific. To me it is foolish and wasteful for other institutions to duplicate this work. I would like to see some method developed to pool and share such data with other libraries embarking on similar endeavors so that needless duplication and expense could be avoided. By pooling or exchanging such information we could, at the same time, develop a very useful bibliographic tool — a union catalog of our collective holdings. This would be particularly valuable

as many of our libraries are poorly represented in The National Union Catalog.

Another area where I would like to see a coordinated approach is the preservation of archival sets of ephemeral and secondary publications. I am thinking specifically of seed catalogs and popular gardening and horticultural magazines, many of which are printed on such low grade paper that they rapidly deteriorate even with little or no use. Two good examples of such publications are the journals *Popular Gardening* and *Amateur Gardening*, issues of which less than a decade old have so deteriorated that they can no longer be bound. Assuming that archival sets of such publications should be maintained, would it not be practical for one or two institutions to assume the responsibility of conservation and preservation while the remaining libraries, interested in having ready access to these publications, could depend upon microfilm copies? If such coordination is desirable, we could pool our collective sets of such publications to make up complete sets with the best preserved copies of each issue. This sort of coordination of effort must come about if original documents are to be adequately preserved. Many publications of this nature have already reached an advanced state of decay, and their complete loss is imminent.

A valuable bibliographic tool which could be developed through botanico-horticultural library cooperation is a union list of botanico-horticultural periodicals based on the exhaustive compilation *B-P-H Botanico-Periodicum-Huntianum* prepared at the Hunt Botanical Library last year. Such a list would have two major values: the first, to provide readily accessible and up-to-date knowledge of the periodical holdings of cooperating libraries — information that is very incompletely available in the *Union List of Serials*; the second, to supply us with a knowledge of the important gaps in our collective holdings — information that would be very valuable in a coordinated collection development program.

There are two other areas of potential cooperative endeavor which I would like to mention briefly. One is the possible pooling of the various publication exchange activities presently carried out independently by a number of our libraries. At its simplest it could involve only the interchange of exchange lists and information; but at a more highly organized level it could take the form of a centralized exchange office providing service to a group of libraries — sort of a Botanico-Horticultural Farmington Plan. The other proposal for coordination involves inter-library loan responsibilities which we all have to greater or

lesser degrees, not just among ourselves, but with the larger library community. Coordination of such activities might take the form of designating one or two of our institutions with the primary responsibility for meeting the bulk of interlibrary loan service, while the remaining institutions serve to supplement the resources of these primary lenders.

One of the first questions that arises after such a spell of idealizing is very realistic — who will pay for such cooperative programs? The answer must be correspondingly realistic — we will! Not as additional expenses over and above those we already find difficult to bear but, hopefully, from the resources saved by not having to perform each of these tasks individually. With consolidation and specialization of effort in such functions as collection development, cataloging, and interlibrary loan, there should be corresponding economies.

A less definite, but possible, outcome of activities of coordination and cooperation is that by working together we might better qualify for the grant dollar. A recent issue of *College and Research Libraries News* (no. 9, Oct. 1969) reported that the National Science Foundation's Office of Science Information Service has stated that its resources are "being concentrated on developing information systems in basic disciplines which take advantage of the available technology."

Coordinated and cooperative endeavors such as those I have outlined today are certainly a humble beginning, but they could eventually develop into much more sophisticated programs.

JOHN F. REED
*Curator of the Library,
New York Botanical Garden*