

Precataloging— A Must for the Modern Library

Mr. Dewey, formerly head cataloger, John Crerar Library, is a student at the Graduate Library School, University of Chicago.

“WHY IS THE cataloging so slow?” This is a question that has been repeated for many years. In the public library, the few books that stay in the catalog department only a few days are still too slow in reaching a demanding public. In the college library (as elsewhere) many books may remain on the shelves for months awaiting Library of Congress cards. In the research library, where many titles are in foreign languages and where costs are extremely high, speed—except for “rush” or “haste” titles—is generally nonexistent. Even the rush books take 24 hours. There are no L.C. cards for too many titles. The filing gets behind. Staff shortages play havoc with schedules. Large and unexpected gifts slow up the process still more.

Temporary cataloging has been advocated as a solution for this problem, and is undertaken in the case of some of the more important titles in many libraries. Generally, however, even temporary cataloging shows up in the card catalog only after days or weeks. This is due principally to the fact that permanent classification and shelflisting of the volumes are usually parts of the “temporary” process, making it necessary for the cataloger to examine the books themselves. This slows up the process. When temporary cataloging is undertaken as rush work it is a nonroutinized activity and therefore unduly expen-

sive. Any rush work is expensive; what is needed instead is a simple system that is fast and cheap. If temporary cataloging is to solve our problems it must be cheap enough to be applied to all titles.

Within the next few years most of our large libraries will be obliged to install modern temporary or precataloging systems. The time has long been with us when fast temporary cataloging was needed by our readers, and the time has now come when they have the right to demand and expect it. There is no reason why a reader desiring to know what new books on television are in the library should find the catalog to be a month behind in listing these books.

Why should a reader studying the effects of the Taft-Hartley Act on our economic system not have the new book received yesterday instead of the one published two months ago? If the library acquired the second edition of Frear's *Chemistry of Insecticides and Fungicides* yesterday, why should a reader be forced to use the first edition? If we acquired Uhlenbruck's *Die Herzkrankheiten* two months ago, why should the Reference Department have to borrow it on interlibrary loan from Yale? Or why should a professor have to submit an order card for a certain new book because it isn't in the catalog, only to receive a note several days later saying that it was there all the time? Why should an order librarian search the card catalog for 12 titles only to discover in the outstanding orders file that four of them are already on order, and in the “received but not cata-

logged" file that four more are already in the library? Why should not the public catalog give all this information? That it does already in several large libraries, among them John Crerar and the libraries of Rochester and Virginia universities, is a sign that other libraries can be equally responsive to the needs of their patrons. It is the purpose of this article to pass along the experience of the John Crerar Library in providing temporary cataloging for all of its books.

In December 1946 the Crerar catalog department decided to work through the medium of fast temporary cataloging toward a system of fast permanent cataloging. It was decided that temporary cataloging should appear in the catalog in a matter of hours instead of days after books arrive; that when the temporary cataloging could be left as permanent cataloging, that would be fast cataloging; and that when inadequate temporary cataloging had to be replaced it should be done with speed and efficiency.

The last two goals are still a long way off, but the progress toward them that results from the achievement of the first is encouraging. Like so many libraries having official catalogs, Crerar has always provided temporary cataloging of a sort in its catalog. Through 1946 this consisted of a temporary card, copied from the original order card, which showed that the title was on order (it being necessary to check the file of outstanding orders, which consisted of the order cards themselves, to determine whether or not the book had actually arrived). As soon as the book was cataloged and assigned a call number, the call number was written on this card in the official catalog so that the book could be located in the stacks if desired. About four weeks later the printed card replaced the temporary card.

Since this temporary card was a carbon

copy of the Library of Congress card order it seemed entirely within the realm of possibility to type an extra carbon for filing into the public catalog. But whether or not this was a desirable procedure was another question. What problems would phone and telautograph calls by delivery departments for uncataloged books bring to a harassed cataloging department whose backlog was growing by leaps and bounds? Yet the very fact of a growing backlog made it all the more imperative to make these books available to readers by some sort of temporary cataloging. And since a temporary card was provided in the official catalog for the staff it seemed logical to provide one for the public.

Consequently in January 1947 the catalog department began to file temporary cards into its public catalogs and began to assign to all new titles, at the time of ordering, a serial number called a temporary call number, by which the books would be shelved in the department until they were cataloged and shelflisted, and which would be used by readers asking at the delivery desks for these books. In order to assign this number in advance of ordering, the catalog department added, to the group of "three by five" slips it was typing, a temporary slip for the public catalog, and a slip for a control file to be arranged by the temporary call number. The control file showed whether or not the book had arrived and, if so, whether it was still waiting in the catalog department, or had been given to a particular cataloger, or had gone to the stacks under a permanent call number. A clerk was hired to circulate the books from the catalog department in response to telephone and telautograph requests and to fill a need for more assistance at the shelflist with what time remained.

The system worked well from the beginning. It was possible to file the pre-typed temporary slips in the public catalogs

within a matter of a few hours or less after the arrival of books in the order department, since they needed to have nothing done to them. Circulation has been at a brisk rate and averages around 100 titles weekly. A special form is inserted in each book circulated, giving the name of the cataloger or location to which the book should be returned. Any cards in the book are retained in the catalog department as a charge. Each book is plated or stamped with ownership marks before being circulated. An experiment involving the filing of slips into the medical department catalog at the time of ordering the book has proved successful, with advantages for readers and reference staff alike, who seem to prefer to know that a book is on order than to find no mention of it in the catalog at all.¹ This slip is not marked when the book has arrived.

In the summer of 1947 steps were taken to transfer the system to continuous Kant-slip Standard Register multiple carbon forms. These forms, now in use, provide a number of advantages over the old "three by five" slips of paper and carbons. They come in continuous strips of 1000 copies, perforated to tear to "three by five" size, and eliminate the time formerly wasted in manually assembling the sets of slips and carbons. Used in the electric typewriter, they provide six clear carbon copies. A set of forms² consists of the dealer's purchase order; Library of Congress card order; control copy (perforated every fourth slip to serve also as an order book showing date of receipt, bill payment record, cost, and permanent call number;³ temporary author

cards for official and public catalogs; a temporary slip for a special public subject catalog arranged by the first two figures of the Dewey Decimal Classification (assigned at time of ordering), thus providing an immediate subject approach to all new titles; and a card, of stiff paper, that stands visible in the book while it is shelved in the catalog department. This is used to charge the book to the delivery department for loans, and later stands in the shelflist to hold the call number until the printed card is filed. The cost of these forms is about two cents per title.

For requesting free material that is to be permanently cataloged, a special set of forms was obtained. These employ in place of the dealer's purchase order a special "Request for Free Material" slip which has thus far successfully secured a high proportion of the materials solicited. One of the carbon forms in this set is used to acknowledge receipt of materials.

A third set of forms, lacking the purchase order form, is used as temporary cataloging for unsolicited gifts.

From the point of view of readers and reference staff the great advantages of the system lie in knowing whether any given book is in the library or on order, what new books in various subject groups are in the library, and in being able to secure such books with normal speed through the normal delivery channels. Let us see what advantages there are for the processing staff.

Because these forms provide author and subject cataloging from the moment of arrival of books in the library (or before) without any effort on the part of the catalogers, they eliminate the need for rush and haste cataloging of all materials except reference books. The "waiting" shelves in the catalog department have thus become a stack area adjacent to the department,

directly after a similar copy in the order forms used by Columbia University Libraries.

¹ Readers are encouraged to leave their names and addresses so that they can be notified when the books they called for have arrived.

² Multiple-copy correlated forms have been in use for years in many libraries, where they have reached a high state of development in providing control over acquisition procedures. Such forms were described in an article by N. W. McCombs, "Correlated Order Forms," *Library Journal* 58:285-289, April 1, 1933. The present article shows how correlated forms may be used to provide control over cataloging procedures.

³ The perforation feature of this copy is patterned

thus making the department itself a work room instead of a storage room.⁴

The arrangement of books in a single numerical sequence makes it possible to locate quickly any uncataloged materials not yet in the hands of the cataloger. This need has been described by Dorothy E. Chamberlain as "one of the problems of a large cataloging department" in the opening sentence of her article "In-process Records,"⁵ and forms the basis for her subsequent discussion. Miss Chamberlain advocates the "in-process catalog" as the solution to this problem, vetoing "the ideal method [of putting] a temporary card in the public catalog for every title" on the grounds of its involving "considerable time and money [and possibly not being] worthwhile." It is the assignment of the serial number to the temporary cards and the arrangement of the books by this serial number that make the temporary card system superior to the separate in-process catalog. Its cost as an extra carbon is negligible, and the filing cost is certainly low enough to be worth while. The adoption of the system by large catalog departments will make possible the elimination of the expensive "in-process catalog." The alphabetical function of the latter will be assumed by the public catalog,⁶ and its locating function by the numerical control record. This latter record makes it possible

⁴ It would be possible to transfer the books now in these temporary stacks to the main stack area. This would mean that all new titles would be sent directly to the stacks following arrival in the order department, to be called up and charged to the individual cataloger when desired.

⁵ *College and Research Libraries* 7:335-8, October 1946.

⁶ In libraries having official catalogs, the alphabetical function of the "in-process catalog" will be assumed by both the official and public catalogs, for no library can any longer deprive its clientele of books just because they have not been permanently cataloged and classified, or justify the withholding of temporary cards from the public while at the same time providing them for the use of the staff. Some observers of the system in use at the John Crerar Library have argued that Crerar can very well afford to publicize "uncataloged" books because it, as a research library, does not lend books to its readers for use outside the building. A more mature opinion would hold that any library whose policy is to circulate its books should be happy to circulate them as soon as possible. If prompt "permanent cataloging," whose ultimate purpose is to circulate books, is not immediately neces-

sary, so much the better. If a book remains in constant circulation for six months on temporary cataloging slips, what more could "permanent" cataloging accomplish? There is some justification for the rather widespread belief among administrators that uncataloged materials should not leave the catalog department, but this justification exists only because and only as long as circulation of such materials is a disruptive and expensive process.

For fiscal reasons this record must be kept in the order department. However, even in libraries where order and catalog departments are not in close proximity to one another and possibly not even on the same floor, the numerical control record would not have to be duplicated or even supplemented in the catalog department. Assuming that delivery personnel have access to the temporary stack, the control record need be consulted only for material not in place there. At such times it would show either nonreceipt, name of cataloger or permanent call number. To enable the control record to show this information it is necessary only that all catalogers' requests for materials be routed via the control record. The recording of the cataloger's name constitutes a charge canceled automatically by the recording of a permanent call number in the control record.

The catalog department benefits tremendously by limiting the amount of material sent to each cataloger to what he can catalog promptly. The cataloger is no longer faced with the task of sorting, organizing and selecting from masses of material, and the time formerly spent in doing this is available for cataloging. As the books are received in the catalog department their order cards are filed in a "Library of Congress orders out file" (in the case of unsolicited gifts, the forms are typed first) until the order is returned by the Library of Congress. The order cards with the L.C. order slips are marked by the head cataloger with the initials of the cataloger to whom the title is to be

assigned. A clerk then takes these cards to the control file in the order department and records the date and the cataloger's initials. The clerk then delivers the books to the cataloger.

At the Crerar, assignments of titles to catalogers are made on the basis of difficulty, form or language, as subject work is done by the classification department. In a library whose descriptive and subject work is done by the same cataloger the assignment of titles would of course be carried out principally on a subject basis. The head cataloger selects daily order cards for only as many titles as he feels can be cataloged promptly by each cataloger. When more orders are returned from L.C. than can be promptly cataloged, the less important ones are filed into a deferred file from which assignments are made later when more time is available. Occasionally this deferred file is checked against the *L.C. Cumulative Catalog* to secure L.C. card numbers for those titles whose *Np* status has changed at the Library of Congress.

When an L.C. card has been obtained, all necessary added entries⁷ are verified in advance of distributing the order cards to the catalogers. Consequently when the cataloger receives the book all he needs to do is check it with the L.C. card for accuracy and pass it on to the classification department. Where no L.C. card has been obtained, no advance verification of added entries is undertaken for the cataloger, so that while the cataloger himself does as much advance work as possible before sending for the book, it does remain at his desk longer than if an L.C. card had accompanied the order card. However, the interval is still so brief that it has seemed unnecessary to show in the control record the name of the cataloger, and this is no longer done.

⁷ The order department systematically indicates the results of its searching of main entries on all order cards.

A similar system is in operation at the Yale University Library where deferred classes of material, especially gifts, go to a numerically arranged stack in an experiment recently reported by Dorothy F. Livingston.⁸ Miss Livingston states that the procedure has enabled the department to clear up nearly all the back work in every class. She attributed this to systematic organization whereby the cataloger's desk is not choked with materials, and to the resultant increase in efficiency and morale. At Yale the numerical system is applied only to deferred titles after arrival in the catalog department. Our experience at Crerar demonstrates that to achieve maximum benefits it should be applied to all titles and as early in the processing routine as possible. Even for the new books that are promptly cataloged there is bound to be a period of one or more weeks during which they are not represented in the catalog if temporary or precataloging is not applied. However, we say "amen" to Miss Livingston's findings. We have almost forgotten what it is like to be personally surrounded by a mass of printed matter, but what memory remains is decidedly unpleasant. We feel no nostalgia for the days when there was a wild scramble for the uncataloged book for which some reader had had the temerity to ask.

At the expense of holding slips out of the temporary subject file of new books for a day or two, it has been found advantageous at Crerar to circulate these slips to the reference staff before filing, so that they may see the titles of all new books received in the library. However, temporary author cards go into the catalog without delay.

One of the many minor advantages of the system is the ease with which delayed Library of Congress order slips can be

⁸ "Controlled Cataloging: an Experiment at Yale." *College and Research Libraries* 8:11-16, January 1947.

disposed of. These of course bear the printed temporary call number, and when no order card is found for them in the L.C. orders out file, they are immediately checked against the control record which usually shows that the title has already been cataloged, disposed of as a duplicate, incorporated into a series, etc. Before the numerical control was established it was necessary to leave a special dummy in the L.C. orders out file indicating what had happened to the order card.

The system as adopted at Crerar offers many possibilities for expansion in new directions. It has been extended to current periodicals shelved in the periodical reading room, so that a catalog entry is available for all new periodicals. A special symbol is typed preceding the temporary call number on the set of forms, and a reader presenting a number so prefixed is directed to the periodical reading room. The typing of temporary periodical entries was formerly a separate operation. When a periodical volume is finally sent to the catalog department for cataloging it may be located by its temporary call number.

The catalog department is now considering extending the system to vertical file material for which those in charge of the vertical files feel that there is some possibility that full cataloging may eventually be desirable. Until the final decision is made, the temporary entries, with "VF" prefixed to the number, will enable readers to locate desired pamphlets, and will prevent the ordering of duplicates. When a final decision is made to catalog fully, the material will go through the normal routines without further ado.

In pursuit of the second goal, we note

that some of the temporary cataloging entries are so satisfactory that we wish they could stand permanently, especially for materials for which subject shelving is of no special importance. This is true for practically all materials at Crerar where the stacks are closed to everyone. It is probably true for at least a part of the collections of every library. Why should not some of the more specialized materials, some of those in foreign languages destined to be used infrequently, stand on the shelves in serial order?

The most valid objection to letting the temporary cataloging stand for some titles is the thinness of the paper stock of the temporary slips. So far no method of reproducing stiff cards in adequate quantity at a single typing has been turned up. It is always necessary to both type and reproduce; only with the multiple carbon forms are the typing and reproduction accomplished simultaneously. There is no question but that the slips are too flimsy for permanent use or that their number is inadequate for added and subject entries. Hectograph, Mimeograph, Duplimat, and similar processes offer the most hope for stiff permanent cards, but the catalog administrator must be certain that a high enough percentage of titles would be left permanently on this "temporary cataloging" and shelved by serial number to compensate for the extra time spent in multiple reproduction as against the time saved by the multiple carbon method. The writer feels that when administrators are willing to shelve parts of their collections serially on permanent "precataloged" cards the day of fast cataloging will be here. The day of fast (and cheap) temporary cataloging is here now.