Book Reviews

Bourne, Charles P., and Trudi Bellardo Hahn. *A History of Online Information Services, 1963–1976.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Pr., 2003. 493p. alk. paper, $45 (ISBN 0262025388). LC 2002-40789.

My first thought when asked to review this book was: why should any of us care? In this age of monthly system updates, annual software migrations, and library users who were born using computers from birth, is there any reason why we would have any use for a history of on-line retrieval systems? Would this book underscore my lament about our profession—that we tend to be down in the dross of the digital cutting room instead of blazing trails and bleeding some edges? Curiosity getting the better of me, I delved into the book.

It is written like many technical reports with two columns to a page. The font is Times Roman with long paragraphs and large blocks of text. This is not the kind of book to skim through lightly. Delving does not really work. The book will not capture your interest if you randomly scan the pages. So I started at the beginning, which is inspired, and I was hooked. The prologue begins with a black-and-white still from the movie *Desk Set* in which Katharine Hepburn is the head librarian of the Federal Broadcasting Corporation's Research and Reference Department. Miss Watson's wits are pitted against an engineer's invention call EMERAC—the Electro-Magnetic Memory and Research Arithmetic Calculator. Oh boy, I thought, we have not come very far. Didn't I just read an article this summer in *D-LIB Magazine* where Cornell University Library's digital reference staff were competing with Google's new expert service, Google Answers, to see who did a better job? But I had taken the bait and switched to fast forward. Although the machines change, in fact, the issues remain the same.

History is important; we all know that. Those early systems engineers pioneered the fledgling online retrieval systems without which we surely would not have the Internet today. At what point, I wonder, does the staid past become interesting, instructional, and inspirational—witness the history of flight and the Wright Brothers? Whatever the verdict for the history of online information systems, the Charles Bourne and Trudi Bellardo Hahn book will retain its landmark status. This is a compelling and thoroughly documented piece of retrospective research. The authors should be commended for having the tenacity and patience—and a sense of the importance of the long-headed view—to have spent the past few years interviewing the early pioneers, studying their work, and sorting out myth from fact.

The book is intentionally a basic chronology of online systems and information retrieval. The authors' qualifications for writing this book are impeccable. Both have biographies that bear this out, albeit from different vantage points. Charles Bourne was an early systems pioneer and former vice president of DIALOG Information Services. Trudi Bellardo Hahn is manager of Library User Education Services and Adjunct Professor at the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies. Both have written copiously on this topic.

The authors have chosen to focus not just on "a description of tapes, disks, terminals and telephones, and search

algorithms." They have included the human element as well. You can understand what motivated these "online pioneers," what made them keep going in the face of extraordinary technological, sociological, and economic obstacles. The starting date was selected because the authors' research indicated that the first online bibliographic retrieval system appeared in 1963, developed by Stanford Research Institute at Menlo Park. The year 1976 marked a watershed as online retrieval systems were poised for a major leap forward with the development of ILO/ISIS, the first online system to allow search terms entered in one language to retrieve records indexed in another language.

The enormous wealth of information within these covers is made accessible to the reader by the authors' exceptional discipline and organizational skills. Online milestones are documented in boxes throughout the text as well as together in an appendix. The book is generally organized chronologically with a final summary chapter. A comprehensive bibliography is provided as well as homage paid in the introduction to the major sources used and people interviewed. The authors have thoughtfully placed the glossary at the beginning of the book where it is much handier. There is also a useful index.

Obviously, the target audience for this book will be library school students and documenters of the history of early online retrieval. However, almost everybody will find something of interest, something they did not already know. For instance, although I spent sixteen years at SUNY Albany, during the 1980s and 1990s, I was unaware of the crucial role played by SUNY and its Biomedical Communication Network, or that it eventually evolved into the commercial BRS Search Service. One can always point to a few omissions in a work of this breadth. The development of the MARC record seems underplayed to someone coming from a cataloging background. Although RLIN was not developed until 1978, I was surprised to see no mention of the formation of RLG in 1974. However, in reading here about the role of OCLC, I was reminded why. OCLC is described as "a major contributor to" rather than "a pioneer in the technology of online search systems." OCLC and RLG—with many others—were the organizations that took these early inventions to the next level for cooperative library use.

This book is about four themes: "systems, services, funding, and pioneers." In weaving these strands together, the authors have successfully answered my question of who should care and why. They also fulfill their promise in the book's introduction to bring forward "fundamental truths … about user-oriented systems and services, dependence on sources of funding, and people who are innovators and risk takers." I look forward to volume two!—*Gillian M. Mc-Combs, Southern Methodist University.*

Drahos, Peter, with John Braithwaite. *Information Feudalism: Who Owns the Knowledge Economy?* New York: The New Press, 2003. 253p. alk. paper $25.95 (ISBN 1565848047). LC 2002-41069.

The corpus of readings, of relevance to librarians, addressing the debate over information and intellectual property rights grows daily. Newspaper and magazine articles, Web logs, and monographs abound as their authors consider the legal, social, cultural, and moral entanglements of governmental, corporate, and individual interests in accessing and using information and defining what constitutes public knowledge. In *Information Feudalism*, Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite—authors of *Global Business*