

Union Catalogs and Interlibrary Loan

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FOR THE five years 1935-39 the University of Pennsylvania Library handled 1805 requests for the borrowing of items on interlibrary loan. During that time the use of two union catalogs had significant effects on this routine, and it was in an attempt to find out something definite about these effects that this study was undertaken. Questionnaires concerning interlibrary loan from the national Union Catalog and the Bibliographical Planning Committee of Philadelphia gave impetus to the study and suggested the procedure to be used.

This procedure consisted simply in tabulating the sources of location for items borrowed. On the back of the request card which each borrower fills out, the librarian indicates where the title is verified; any location obtained and the source of the location; from what library, or libraries, the item is requested; insurance value, charges, and date returned. The cards were grouped according to the source of location and counted. Only elementary statistics were employed, and while some of the information on earlier cards was difficult to interpret or too meager for inclusion, it is felt that the total number tabulated is sufficient to give a satisfactory representation.¹

¹ 119 cards contained insufficient information for inclusion in the statistics.

The sources of location were classified as follows: (1) Depository Catalog at the University of Pennsylvania, which contains cards for the Library of Congress, Harvard College Library, University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, Princeton University, Newberry Library, John Crerar Library, Wesleyan University, and the Vatican Library; (2) *Union List of Serials*; (3) Union Catalog; (4) Union Library Catalogue of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area; (5) Other; (6) No Search and Not Located. Class 5, "Other," includes items located through printed library book catalogs or other bibliographies, such as the *Bibliography of Research Studies in Education*. Class 6 is a rather inadequate catch-all for those items which the library did not or could not locate. For example, when a professor or a graduate student asked the library to borrow a book he had already seen or used at some other library, there was no necessity of locating the item. On the other hand, the library found it impossible to locate some items; quite a few of the earlier cards contained notes like this: "Try Bryn Mawr;" "Try Princeton;" "Try Columbia;" "Give up." Class 6, then, takes care of the items for which locations were either predetermined or indeterminable.

Comparative Use of Location Sources

With this explanation of the location classes employed the chart on page 338 becomes easily intelligible. Each long bar

represents the total number of requests, 100 per cent, for a single calendar year. The segments represent the percentage of the requests according to location. The reader can probably draw correct interpretations of his own, but may bear with the writer for pointing out a few.

In the questionnaire filled out for the Bibliographical Planning Committee it was discovered that in 1938 only 15 per cent of the requests were for periodicals. This fact, together with the fact that the library has a large periodical reference collection, accounts for the small part played by the *Union List of Serials*. The large part played by the Depository Catalog in 1935 simply indicates that it was the one chief source of location available at that time. It is also worth noting that the "No Search-Not Located" segment for 1935 includes over thirty items located in local libraries by an assistant working for a professor. This work would now be done by letter or by telephone calls to the Union Library Catalogue. The length of the No Search-Not Located segments for 1938 and 1939 clearly demonstrates what the union catalogs have meant in this respect. The length of the "Other" segment for 1939 may be due to the large number of theses borrowed, most of which were located when they were verified in the theses bibliographies.

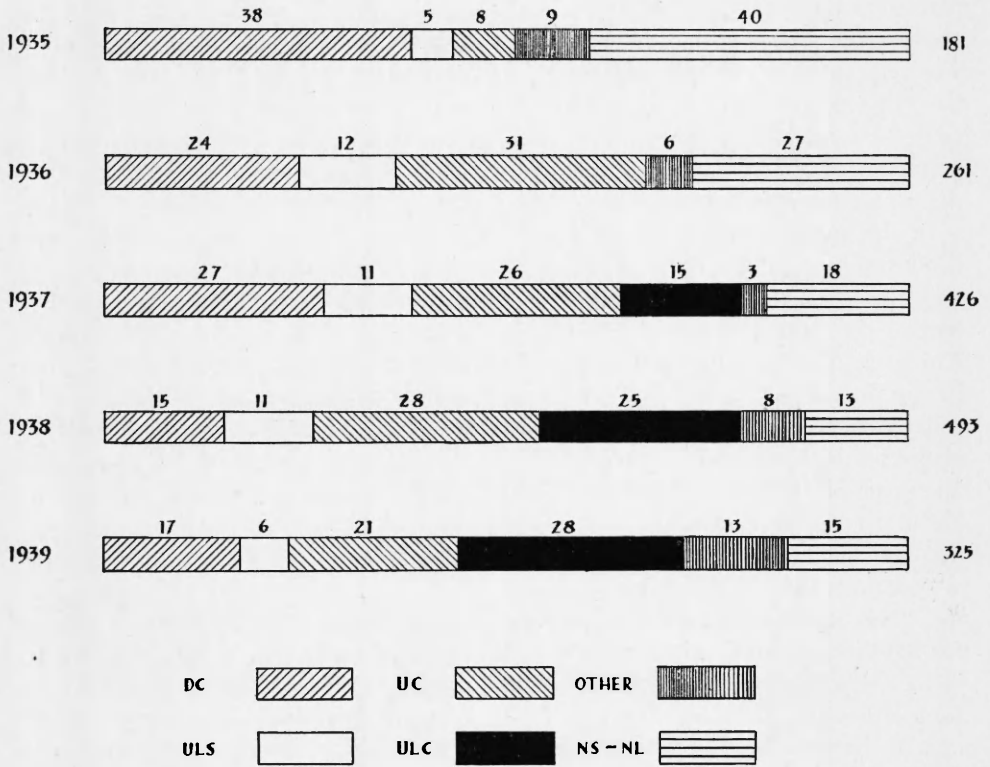
Effect of Regional Catalogs

Probably the segments for the Union Library Catalogue and the national Union Catalog provide the most notable demonstrations of the chart. These show how much is available in the area if there is a means of locating it, and how much a metropolitan or regional catalog affects the use of the national catalog. In 1939 over a quarter of the items were located

in the Philadelphia area by the Union Library Catalogue, whereas the number of requests sent to Washington for location is 10 per cent less than in 1936, before the Union Library Catalogue was able to give assistance. Now that this catalog is operating efficiently, with only the more difficult jobs of editing to be done, it is reasonable to assume that the percentages for 1939 can serve as a forecast for the future. Even if they do not, however, the percentages for 1936-39 are sufficiently significant to indicate one effect of a regional catalog on the national catalog and to encourage further study of the whole problem of regional catalogs in a national plan.

Over-dependence on Union Catalogs

This larger problem of local or regional catalogs cannot be dealt with in this paper, but two of the minor ones, which concern interlibrary loan, can at least be stated. First, there is the problem of how much to depend upon the union catalogs. The obvious routine at the University of Pennsylvania is to try the Union Library Catalogue, the Depository Catalog, and then the Union Catalog at Washington. The question is, provided the first two sources fail to locate an item, whether to write to Washington immediately for location, or whether to attempt location independently through library catalogs, other bibliographies, and such suggestions as one finds in Winchell's *Locating Books for Interlibrary Loan*. The latter process is likely to be time consuming and costly to the individual library, and frequently unavailing, although occasionally it may result in quicker service to the borrower. The former is simple, inexpensive, and usually certain as to the Library of Congress and the Association of



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Research Libraries. However, this routine throws the burden entirely upon the Union Catalog—perhaps quite reasonably—and develops a tendency to neglect other sources if it fails. Often its report is considered final, without examination of such works as Miss Winchell's or Gilder's *Theatre Collections*. Perhaps any more exhaustive search is not feasible in most libraries, but the fact that the union catalogs are not the only sources for location needs attention.

Scope of Interlibrary Loan Service

A second minor problem in connection with a local or regional union catalog is that of extension of loan privileges.

Knowledge that books are available in nearby libraries promotes a demand for general borrowing quite beyond the province of interlibrary loan. Undergraduate students want books they cannot find in their own libraries; industrial concerns request recent foreign periodicals they cannot afford to buy; and generally there is a demand for books of recent date, still available at moderate prices, which the borrowing library does not want to purchase for any of a number of reasons. Although these demands may not be legitimate, they should be recognized and treated with tact, for the time may come when such extension of the loan privileges will be forced upon the catalog.

Financing a Union Catalog

This statement refers, of course, to the difficulties in financing the union catalogs. If our generous foundations cannot permanently supply the funds, who will, and on what basis will claims for support be made? In this connection it is well to consider the alarming state of the regional library catalogs in England. The *Year's Work in Librarianship*, 1938, reports as follows (page 115):

Almost all the regional systems have had to inform the Carnegie Trustees at various times that the funds originally granted them would not be sufficient for the completion of the union catalogues, and the Trustees, therefore, convened a conference of representatives of all regional systems at the National Central Library on October 19th, 1938. It was clear, from the statements of the delegates, that the original grants were insufficient in all cases, as even the representatives of those systems which had not yet completed the periods covered by these grants were able to report definitely that more would be needed.

If this is the situation at present, what of the future? Will the proposed plan of subventions from the cooperating libraries, together with voluntary service at the catalog, become practicable? A union catalog does not run itself; to give effective service, it needs a well-trained staff which will not only serve the users and service the catalog, but which will also promote the continuous assistance of the

cooperating libraries. An abandoned union catalog would be a great loss, not only of time and money required to produce and establish it, but also in the cessation of its services. Just as a location service, which is its basic function, the Union Library Catalogue of Philadelphia is fast becoming indispensable to the scholars and industrial researchers of the area. They do not quite realize yet how much saving in time and money the catalog is, but in two years more, the writer thinks they would grasp at any device rather than permit the catalog to cease functioning. One device they would probably consider is extension of the service in order to provide a basis for broader claims for support.

So even this simple study of inter-library loan brings to the fore the most important questions concerning union catalogs. What will be their relation to the national catalog? How are they to be financed? Whom are they to serve and how? And finally, will regional subject catalogs, as suggested by Dr. Bishop, solve all of these problems at once? Here is plenty of opportunity for further study, and as a hint to start anyone who wants to take the opportunity, this bit of information: there is already a demand for a subject approach to the Union Library Catalogue of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area.