

# To Our Readers . . .

This is our last issue as editors of the *News*. To all of you that have taken the time to send us personal letters, news releases, notices of new publications, and everything else (yes, even the occasional correction), we say thank you. We couldn't have done it without you.

We would particularly like to compliment Eileen Mahoney and her staff at the ALA Central Production Unit in Chicago for the excellent job they have done for us. Not enough people know of and appreciate this staff; they produce almost all of ALA's publications, and are some of the world's kindest and most patient

people. They do a brilliant job in turning "amateur editor" requests into a professional product.

Most of our effort in the past two years has been to make the *News* easier to read—more boxes, headlines, boldfaces, and so on. We think it will work out well that Ms. Collins hopes to expand the content of the *News*. We wish her the best, and hope all of you will assist her as much as you did us.

Sincerely,

ALLAN J. DYSON

and SUSANA HINOJOSA

Editors, *C&RL News*

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## Inside Washington

*Christopher Wright*  
*Assistant Director*  
*ALA Washington Office*

There was genuine excitement in his voice when Joseph Howard, chief of the Library of Congress' Serials Cataloging Division, suggested to a room full of librarians in October that a new U.S.-Canadian cataloging project might someday mean "a serial can be cataloged once in the U.S.—once in the world—and never be cataloged again." The amount of work saved would be staggering.

Howard was talking about CONSER, the Cooperative Conversion of Serials project, which is designed to build a 300,000-title computer catalog describing the serials held by eight major North American libraries. The file will be stored on the Ohio College Library Center computer and will be made available to the public at the cost of reproducing the computer tapes. The project is scheduled to begin operation early next year. Initial funds have been provided by the Ford Foundation through the Council on Library Resources.

CONSER is an important development for the whole world. The way it has come about says something about the energy and resourcefulness of librarians and raises some questions about the way library cooperation is evolving in the United States.

The project began, at least formally, in the summer of 1973 when about two dozen people formed another of the library world's myriad ad hoc discussion groups at the ALA Conference in Las Vegas. Encouraged by staff from CLR and led by a small steering committee, the group produced a plan. After some discus-

sion with the library community, not all of it friendly, CLR and the principal participating libraries began negotiating with OCLC, and the project is hoped to be underway by the beginning of 1975.

There are three important elements to this story.

First is the fact that CONSER developed more or less spontaneously. Participants at the Las Vegas meeting have said there appeared to be a general feeling among a number of librarians that the time had come to try applying modern technology to the intractable and expensive problems of serials cataloging. The idea was the product of a committee and not the brainchild of one person or one institution.

Second, the project has remained throughout a nongovernment operation. Even though it will use a version of LC's MARC format and the resulting computer tapes will be distributed through the Library of Congress and the National Library of Canada, the ultimate control of the project remains in the hands of CLR and the participating libraries (four government and four private).

Third, the operation is, for the moment at least, critically dependent on a private foundation for support. Also, the Ford Foundation has announced that because of its own economic problems it will not be able to provide long-term operating funds for projects such as this, and once the seed money runs out the libraries must seek help elsewhere. Unofficially, the participants hope that the Library of Congress will find room in its appropriations for the modest cost of maintaining the CONSER network and data base. But for the moment CONSER remains privately funded.