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Citation

Kipp, Laurence J., and Annie T. Thomas. 1951. The creation of a cataloguing economy: The typing section of the Widener Library. *Harvard Library Bulletin* V (1), Winter 1951: 112-116.

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The Creation of a Cataloguing Economy: The Typing Section of the Widener Library

As part of its basic function, a library should make promptly available to its public the titles flowing into it by purchase, gift, and exchange. Yet at Harvard, as in most libraries, funds to pay for the necessary cataloguing are—and always have been—limited. The use of short forms of cataloguing rather than bibliographically complete varieties has helped the library to meet its obligations. In addition, as clean-cut a division as possible has been made between the work of professional cataloguers and non-professional assistants, and a large part of the work that precedes final approval of catalogue cards has been assigned to the latter group, much of it to the typing section of the catalogue department. The origin and development of this section seems to be worth recording as a study, literally speaking, in library economy.

The typewriter was not considered a useful tool in Harvard cataloguing until some years after it had been widely adopted in business offices. A machine had been introduced in the library as early as 1892, when 'two of the cataloguers gave half of each day to cataloguing titles prepared by themselves and by two others.' But the letters had a blurred appearance because of the glazed surface and stiffness of the catalogue cards and, as William Coolidge Lane, then Assistant Librarian and later Librarian, reported the experiment, 'the gain in time of writing' was 'just about offset

by the additional slip' that was 'written to begin with, and the additional time in revising.' Consequently the typewriter was abandoned in April, 1893.¹

It is now clear why the experiment failed. The typists were poorly trained, the card-stock was not adapted to this new use, the typing involved simply an additional step in the cataloguing, and, no doubt, the machines worked less well than do those of the present day.

It is significant that highly-trained cataloguers were then unknown, and that there was little differentiation of duties among the employees of the department. During the next twenty years, both specialization and the training of new cataloguers proceeded rapidly. The typewriter, in the meantime, proved its usefulness in other parts of the library, and in 1908 it was given another trial in the catalogue department. In his annual report for the succeeding year, T. Franklin Currier, Assistant Librarian in charge of that department, reported: 'Early last fall I completed an investigation as to a suitable typewriter for card work and the Library finally purchased a Smith Premier. . . . I took the Smith Premier because the card holder can by no possibility smooch the face of the card; the machine writes near the top and

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, quotations are from the annual reports of the catalogue department of the Harvard College Library (manuscript and typescript), in the files of the department.

sides of the card, though does not write on the very lowest line; it has some twelve more characters than most other makes — an important point in our polyglott work; the method of writing accents is good and the color shift convenient; it is not so rapid a machine (writing not visible) but extreme rapidity can probably never be attained in card work even by an expert writer. . . .

At present we are typewriting a good portion of titles and this work should be increased in order to save the time of cataloguers and to introduce greater legibility of cards. As to the artistic appearance of any typewritten card the less said the better.¹

One might raise an eyebrow at Mr Currier's verb 'to snooch,' point out his underestimation of the speed possible in typing cards, and disagree with his aesthetic reaction to typed cards, but his decision has undoubtedly saved the university great sums of money and his choice of a machine was so judicious that the same make was used almost exclusively for thirty years.

From 1909 the catalogue department was never without at least one typewriter, but the use of the machines in the regular cataloguing was limited, largely because the cataloguers resisted learning how to operate them, and because the work of the department was not so specialized that any one person was given all responsibility for typing. In a period of crisis, however, the machine proved its usefulness, as Mr Currier reported in describing preparations for moving into the Widener building in 1915. 'The period from 1911 to 1915 will be remembered as . . . hectic . . . In 1911 plans were initiated, looking

toward the reorganization of the card catalogues . . . Over three million cards were handled and for the public catalogues alone more than a million new cards were prepared, of which about a half were newly typed by a group of typists pounding away for dear life during these busy months.'²

By 1925 Mr Currier had evolved a system that made the typewriter an even more important tool of his department. 'Certain experiments,' he reported at the end of the year, were made 'toward economizing in the mechanical process of cataloguing. Books were looked up by the cataloguers and brief notes made as to the form of entry and certain other details of cataloguing. These notes were turned over to a typist (Miss Brown) who prepared an author card. The card was then placed in the book and edited by the cataloguer . . .

'The work is still experimental, and has been taken up by Miss Baker. There is always a question as to how much preparation should be done, and this may differ in different classes of material. Where the person who finally forwards the work is not of the supervisor grade, it is probably wise to have the preliminary looking up made as simple as possible, perhaps reducing it only to the determination of the heading. The typist should then prepare the card as well as she can, but should not jump up from her work to ask questions about any individual item. . . . Since the work is to be carefully edited, it is sheer waste of time for the typist to do

² Thomas F. Currier, 'Cataloguing and Classification at Harvard, 1878-1938,' *Harvard Library Notes*, III (No. 29, 1939), 238-239.

more than present an accurately copied title. . . . A very large percentage of these cards can be inserted in the official catalogue even though they may bear certain alterations of the cataloguer.⁷

Mr Currier continued to emphasize his cataloguing economy and in his 1928 report stated: 'We have made further extension of the process of so-called 'preliminary' cataloguing to relieve experienced cataloguers of some of the mechanical drudgery of their work. This has gone on under the supervision of Mrs. Nelson for the initial searching in the official catalogue, by which are revealed Library of Congress cards which we can utilize, headings which have previously been determined, and also other editions and duplicates. Miss Baker has then been called in to direct the preparation by the typists of the initial card.'

By 1930 the work of the typists was so well established that Mr Currier reported: 'The work of our staff is becoming every year more dependent on the labors of the typists' division in Miss Baker's charge under Miss Stearns' general supervision. It is, therefore, a prime necessity to keep it fully manned with capable typists. The normal work comprises the typing of all cards, preparing preliminary catalogue titles for the bulk of all books passing through the cataloguers' hands, adding headings to printed cards from the Library of Congress and our own printing job, and being ready for numerous typing jobs large and small.'

The importance of the typing section has certainly not diminished during the past twenty years. It remains one of the most efficient and most

economical devices initiated in the library for the handling of a heavy cataloguing load. The section has inevitably attracted many 'special' jobs, some of them of short and some of them of long duration, but its primary duties have remained as Mr Currier outlined them.

The staff has been relatively stable in size throughout this period. In 1930 six regular typists were employed, although three additional temporary typists were busily copying cards for the Library of Congress Union Catalog and another temporary assistant was typing Icelandic titles. At present the section employs eight typists. While each typist is something of a specialist on one or more of the various procedures, her duties vary greatly, as the flow of work varies. An observer in the section during a typical day would find all of these activities during the course of the day: one or more typists preparing preliminary catalogue cards for books purchased, or making order slips for Library of Congress cards, another person doing similar work for books acquired by gift, another typing Russian acquisitions, another adding headings to cards ordered and received from the Library of Congress, others typing up complete sets from the preliminary cards approved by a reviser or making stencils if many cards were required. During the day the staff would probably also sandwich in such non-regular duties as typing labels for books returned from the bindery, cutting stencils for information to be distributed, transferring shelf lists to cards, typing lists for various uses, or perhaps copying catalogue cards to be used in experimental projects. The section is not a

typing pool for the entire library, and non-catalogue jobs are not often assigned to it, but an exception has been made, in the past two years, by assigning to it the daily task of typing the form cards that are filed as a record of books on order.

It is difficult to measure the flow of work through the section, since many duties are irregular or non-recurring. However, the preparation of cards from title-pages, the typing of sets of cards, the addition of headings to Library of Congress cards, and the typing of order cards always form the bulk of the work. In 1948-49, when the library added 55,000 new titles to its collections, 200,000 cards to represent those titles were added to the catalogues. Each card was processed in the typing section. Beginning in 1948 the number of cards purchased from the Library of Congress was cut sharply, and the number typed by the section increased correspondingly.

The reasons for the success of this typing section are in part obvious. Typewriters have been greatly and continuously improved and typists have become highly skilled and productive while cataloguers have become more specialized as well as more expensive. But this section has had an even more successful record than would be warranted by these facts. Some of the additional reasons for its success are tangible, some of them intangible.

High staff morale has been apparent in this section almost continuously since its creation. This is evidenced — and in part caused by — a relatively low personnel turn-over, a strong group feeling, a pride in productivity, and a willingness to push

rush jobs through rapidly. Mrs Martha Baker Maxwell served as supervisor of the section from 1925 to 1938, and was succeeded by Mrs Annie Terjentan Thomas, who is at present in charge of the group. Other typists have given long service. Miss Edith Carlson has served fourteen years and Miss Arpenny Garoian seven years. The five other present members of the staff have averaged three and one-quarter years of service. Moreover, the section has been drawn upon to fill positions in other parts of the library. Miss Mary Garoian and Miss Alice Cauchon, now on the Houghton staff, and Mrs Ruth Hoppe, now secretary in the catalogue department, worked for some time in this section before being transferred to their present posts.

There are no scientific bases on which to select personnel for the section. Past experience indicates that the most productive workers, and those most likely to remain on the job, are high school graduates, with high school rather than business school training in typing. Applicants are given tests and emphasis is placed upon accuracy, appearance of the work, and responsiveness to directions, rather than upon speed. The section supervisor puts each new typist through an informal instruction course. During the first year a new member of the section is, for the most part, confined to the typing of complete sets of cards from the approved original. Following this, new procedures are added to her schedule until she has mastered all — or nearly all — of the details required in preliminary cataloguing.

Group unity has undoubtedly been stimulated by the location of the section in quarters of its own. The sec-

tion was originally located in the 'lower cataloguing room,' but during 1948 was moved to the first floor, adjacent to the union catalogue, where it occupies a comfortably large office in a convenient location. The lighting in the room was changed from incandescent to fluorescent, under an 'egg-crate' louver that diffuses the light and makes it, the typists report, admirably suited to close work.

Electric typewriters were tested in the section before the war, and in the past three years it has been possible to supply them for all permanent members of the section. These have proved chiefly valuable in reducing

fatigue, with a consequent improvement in speed. Experiments were made in operating the machines in a series, so that one typist could make multiple copies of a card in one operation, but this attempt was abandoned because no successful means of feeding the cards into the machines could be found. The mastery of this problem would mean greater savings to the library, but with or without further gadgets the typing section seems certain to continue as an economic necessity.

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The Autograph of Keats's 'In Drear Nighted December'

IN December, 1817, at Burford Bridge, Surrey, where he had fulfilled his plan of finishing *Endymion*, Keats wrote 'In drear nighted December.' His own connection with the lyric ended there. He neither mentioned the poem in any extant letters nor published it in his lifetime. It was left to his friends to argue over and has become a similar legacy to editors and critics of his poems.¹

Not published until 1829, eight years after Keats's death, in that year it appeared three times—in the *Literary Gazette*, 19 September, in *The Gem* for 1830, an annual presumably

¹The best discussion of the problems of the poem and of its many critics is, of course, to be found in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1939), pp. 1-111. Variant readings of manuscripts and early printed versions are collated on pp. 349 f.

published the preceding October,² and in the Galignani (Paris) edition of *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats*. Early transcripts are even more numerous—Richard Woodhouse made three (of which two are at Harvard),³ J. C. Stephens

²It is well known that annuals were issued in the autumn preceding the imprint date in order to catch the Christmas trade. The exact date is not always easy to determine. The *Literary Gazette* reviewed *The Gem* on 24 October, the *New Monthly Magazine* in November, so that an October publication date appears most plausible. There is, as Professor Garrod points out, no question of priority between the *Literary Gazette* and *The Gem*. The reviewer says that the poem appeared in the *Literary Gazette* 'a few weeks since,' adding that 'it is but justice to state that the proprietors had previously printed their version from another copy.'

³W³ and W⁶ (the symbols are Professor Garrod's) are in the Harvard Keats Collection, W² in the Morgan Library.

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