

## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

### Technology and Law Librarianship

There is an increasing concern in our profession with the impact of technological change on law librarianship. The challenging papers on law library automation, which are contained in this issue, and the Chicago conference at which they were delivered, testify to that fact. This is, however, only one aspect of an increasing concern with the improvement of librarianship generally, through the more effective use of scientific developments in the fields of automation, administration, and information control. These developments are further illustrated by the important projects sponsored by the Council on Library Resources, which include a recent undertaking by the Association of Research Libraries and the American Council on Education, establishing an office for library management research. The conference on library networks, held last fall in Virginia, was another important event in this regard, which is likely to have wide ramifications for the future. The MARC project at the Library of Congress and the ERIC clearinghouse for material in library research and information science are other symptoms of this new era in librarianship.

It is terribly important to law librarianship that law librarians concern themselves with these developments and begin serious exploration of possible improvements in their libraries. We have not always kept abreast of the best thinking and latest developments in general librarianship. Our Committee on Automation and Scientific Development cannot do the job alone; they can only stimulate and lead. Our obligation is to respond, and to act where and when appropriate in the light of our needs and the feasible opportunities for improvement.

With all this, however, we must beware of the danger of adopting change for the sake of change. As I have indicated elsewhere, technological advance is desirable only insofar as it serves the goals and purposes of libraries. Although automation and scientific development will undoubtedly shape and influence our librarianship, they should not be allowed to undermine in any way the qualitative standards by which we are guided.

We should be aware of what our professional purposes are and use whatever means are available to us to serve those purposes. We are obligated to give the new technology an honest appraisal and, wherever possible, begin exploring its utilization in law libraries. Furthermore, we must apply the same critical scrutiny to our present practices and procedures as we do to the offerings of the new technology. It would be an abdication of our responsibility either to ignore useful opportunities for improvement in our libraries or to make changes that do not serve their goals. I for one find it hard to justify such change as that instituted by the Library of Congress in its catalog card numbers—a change that discarded the useful mnemonic device by which the year of card issuance was represented in the first two digits of the card number, thereby permitting easy dating of many books. It is difficult to conceive that the administrative advantages secured by the new numbering system justify what we lost in that “improvement.” I am sure we can easily draft a list of other changes that diluted the effectiveness of an existing service or practice.

I do not know which danger is greater. Certainly, in the past, law librarians have been more prone to overlook opportunities for improvement than to adopt new methods impulsively and without serious consideration. One hopes that the more balanced views reflected in the papers of the Chicago conference published herein will govern our future actions. Let us not err in either respect.

William Godwin, the political philosopher, offered this useful advice in another context:

Benefit by every practicable means man wherever he exists, but be not deceived by the specious idea of affording services to a body of men for which no individual man is the better.

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