

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Computer Systems in the Library: A Handbook for Managers and Designers.* By Stanley J. Swihart and Beryl F. Hefley. A Wiley-Becker & Hayes Series Book. Los Angeles: Melville Publishing Company, 1973. 388p.

Once every year or two, either in England or the United States, a book appears attempting to explain computer systems to librarians. This book, *Computer Systems in the Library*, is the most recent of the introductory texts. It starts off with a chapter entitled "Why Automate?" which skims very lightly and uncritically over the often-repeated reasons for using computers. In this instance, money is included as a reason to automate, for we are told that "When properly planned, unit operating costs are normally reduced when a function is automated." Automation's impact on the library's research and development budget is not discussed.

The book then proceeds to the six chapters which occupy the bulk of the book. They cover the automation of six major library functions: catalog publication, circulation, acquisitions, cataloging, catalog reference services, and serials. Each chapter consists of a description of one or two apparently existing automated systems, with a complete discussion of how the system functions, what files are involved, the data in each file, coding and formats used in the files, and reproductions of various output products from each file. Unfortunately, we are not told where each of these systems exists, and the systems often appear to use techniques that are suitable only for very small libraries. For example, in the circulation system that is described, a packet of pre-punched book cards is to be carried in the book; each time the book is charged or discharged one of the cards is removed, with the last card serving as a signal to create a new deck of cards. Little mention is made of the data collection terminals that are so commonly used in automated circulation systems,

with the result that the description is very closely linked to a single system, with little opportunity for the reader to compare various methods or techniques of information handling.

The latter part of the book addresses itself to some general problems, including the interlibrary sharing of data and programs; the planning, implementation, and control of automation projects; and brief discussions of input and output problems, the protection of records, and some considerations in choosing hardware. Three appendixes offer a 2,500-word exclusion list for KWIC indexes, a set of model key-punching rules for a corporate library, and a thirty-three-item bibliography in which the majority of works listed were published between 1964 and 1968.

A major weakness of the book seems to be its lack of critical focus. Library automation problems are treated as being not particularly difficult; in fact, "the authors can see no serious or major disadvantages to automation in libraries. The situation," we are told, "can be compared with the disadvantages of using typewriters or telephones." This reviewer finds it difficult to know what sort of audience these words, and the entire book, are addressed to. Though subtitled "A Handbook for Managers and Designers," it would be an inexperienced manager indeed who needed to be told that "In its mode of operation, a keypunch is quite similar to a typewriter. A key must be struck for each character . . .," or that "The catalog master file may be stored on magnetic tape reels or on magnetic disks." The experienced librarian, on the other hand, will not be pleased to learn that "many libraries with computer systems have given up the Library of Congress [filing] system for *Mc/Mac* and have placed *Mac* in order between *Mab* and *Mad*, and *Mc* between *Mb* and *Md*." Nor will anyone associated with libraries be pleased to discover that "computer centers not only can, but frequently do, lose information. From time to time complete files are erased. There is almost no way to ensure that information will not be inadvertently erased."

The librarian who is already involved in automated systems will not need this

book; the librarian who wishes to learn about automation and the systems analyst who needs to understand library systems will do well to read other sources in addition to this one.

*Peter Simmons*  
*University of British Columbia*

*The Metropolitan Library.* Edited by Ralph W. Conant and Kathleen Molz. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1972. 333p. \$10.00.

The editors describe this book as a sequel to the important *Public Library and the City* (1965), also published by M.I.T. Press. The focus again is on the concerns of metropolitan public librarians, combining the viewpoints of specialists from library and social science disciplines.

Of the eighteen papers included, only three, by John Trebbel, John Bystrom, and Kathleen Molz, concentrate on the implications of present and future technology on public library service. Their papers offer a general, if hard-nosed, approach to the need for specific research into the economic, behavioral, professional, and technological barriers impeding the advent of the automated millenium. Micrographics, reprography, computers, facsimile transmission, telecommunications hardware, and technology are considered essential components of information trans-

fer with which libraries must become compatible—and comfortable.

The imperative need for and conduct of long-range research in telecommunications is outlined by Bystrom, including aspects of research necessary for both a national telecommunications network linking all types of libraries and the local use of community cablevision by individual library outlets.

The three authors devote considerable head-shaking to the chilling reality of financing technological adaptations and innovations in libraries—the “snake in Eden” according to Trebbel. Governments, specifically national governments, are cited as the logical sources of the enormous sums required for automated library and information services of whatever kind.

Molz warns repeatedly and forcefully that libraries, while not discarding the book, must change their priorities. Continued dependence on print as the prime information transfer medium is insupportable. The public library must adapt to a multimedia world.

None of the foregoing is new to information scientists or specialists in automation, but as concerned participants in the knowledge business they should find these papers of general interest.

*Lois M. Bewley*  
*University of British Columbia*