THE DOUGLAS LIBRARY IN 1970

by Hilary Richardson [originally published in 1999]

Have you ever picked up an old book in Stauffer Library and noticed an old-fashioned 3" x 7" punched computer card in the back pocket? Perhaps you’ve wondered whatever they were for. Well, the answer is that they were part of the first automated circulation system at the Douglas Library.

A project was begun in July 1970 to automate the circulation system at Douglas. Shelf list records were converted into machine-readable form, the whole process taking over a year. The sections included were primarily in the social sciences and humanities, as the actively circulating books in the rest of the classification were in the various branch libraries, which would not be receiving the computers for circulation.

The Computing Centre assigned Wilma Bernabei, a Systems Analyst, and Dave Nolting, a Programmer, to the Douglas Library Circulation Project. Following a discussion of the pros and cons of various alternative methods of conversion, the “Administrative Terminal System” (ATS) was chosen, with the “Optical Character Scanner” (OCS) as a backup.

Susan Miller was put in charge of the five library assistants in the Shelf List Conversion Unit, which had been set up in the former Order Librarian’s Office across from the Bibliography Room (it later became David Wang’s office). Here the staff busily typed in records, using IBM 2741 terminals. Each morning, a printout of the previous day’s work was picked up at the Computing Centre, matched with the relevant Shelf List cards and sent to the Cataloguing Division, for proofreading. The end product of the data entry system was a magnetic tape containing truncated shelf list records, from which machine-readable punched book cards were prepared and inserted into the relevant books, where to this day they can sometimes still be found.

The general ambivalence of library staff in 1970 to computerization can be seen in the humorous “Basic Laws of Library Automation”, assembled in an article by F.H. Ayres in the Queen’s University of Belfast School of Library Studies publication, Program: News of Computers in Libraries. Some of these are quoted below:

THE LAW OF RECIPROCAL INCOMPREHENSION

For every word of jargon in librarianship, there is an equivalent word in computer science with a completely different meaning (e.g. index, title, heading).

THE LAW OF BIBLIODYNAMICS

For any library mechanization project RaC= RpC÷2 , where Ra is the result achieved and Rp the result promised. C represents the librarian’s constant apprehension whatever happens.

THE LAW OF REASONED INERTIA

Delay can only be beneficial, as it will enable one to profit from other people’s experience, or, the longer the delay (preferably until after retirement), the greater the profit!

THE LAW OF BIBLIOINCOMPATIBILITY
This refutes the previous law, and lays down that a mechanized system used in one library will not work in another, meaning that the systems and programming work will need to be done all over again.
(Adapted from Program, April, 1970, pp. 68-69.)

The order process was a long way from being automated, but in 1970 a new multicoloured order slip was designed for the Order Department. It consisted of 7 parts, two of which were sent to the vendor (one to be returned with the book), one was kept as a tracer copy, one was for the number file, and one was for the fund file. The other two copies were to be filed in the card catalogue, the green one when the book was ordered, and the yellow one when the book was received but not catalogued. This meant that the “on order” file in the Acquisitions Division could finally be discarded, and was a welcome change, as it eliminated one step in the searching procedure for new books.

The Education Library was still located in the Douglas Library as of 1970, and returning summer students in Education (in those days, an Education degree could be acquired after two years of summer school) were surprised to discover that their books were now more accessible than the previous year, as they were shelved around the room, the Reserve books having been removed behind the desk where the Education books had been the previous year. Education students’ major problem was locating the M to Z books, which had been shelved in the attic above the Blue Spruce room, because of lack of space. Education Library staff got tired of explaining several times a day how to find these books, and by the end of the day were uttering some gibberish like “Go through the maze, and up at the very tip-top of the winding staircase in the south tower of the haunted old castle, you will find the hidden treasure”.

Archives, which was at this time also located in the Douglas Library, had gone through many changes in 1969-70. In 1969, Val Knapp resigned on February 28th, in order to move to Oswego, New York (but returned within a year to work in the Library Office). Harold Naugler resigned on August 29th, in order to devote full-time research to his doctoral dissertation, and was replaced on September 1st by Anne MacDermaid as Assistant Archivist. Archives staff changes in 1970 included the coming of Roger Olson, and the promotion of Rose Mary Gibson from General Librarian to Senior Librarian. Dr. John Archer, Chief Archivist, resigned on 1 January 1970, to become Principal of the University of Saskatchewan at Regina, and Mr. Ian Wilson was appointed Acting Archivist, effective April 1st, 1970. Ian, who started working in the Queen’s University Archives on graduating from Queen’s in 1966, served as Chief Archivist here from 1970 to 1976, and then became Archivist of Saskatchewan. He was Archivist of Ontario from 1986 until 1999, when he was named to head the National Archives in Ottawa.

It was a busy time of expansion for the Queen’s University Archives, which had been fortunate in obtaining the papers of a number of prominent Canadians. These included Victor Sifton, Chairman of Free Press Publications Ltd., Donald Gordon, President of the C.N.R., Conservative M.P. John T. Hackett, Merrill Dennison, author of many business histories, and Andrew Glen, President of the Toronto Independent Labour Party, 1921-22. In addition, Queen’s obtained the papers of the Fourth Duke of Richmond, Governor-in-Chief in Canada, 1818-19, those of Dorothy Livesay, a well-known Canadian poetess and dramatist, and those of Thomas Kirkpatrick, the first mayor of Kingston. Significant additions were made to the papers
of Senator C.G. Power, Adam Shortt, the Tett family, and Dr. A.R.M. Lower, an eminent Canadian historian.

Archives also started collecting local business records, starting with the Calvin Company papers, the records of the lumbering, ship-building and tugging company that once flourished on Garden Island.

The Health Sciences Library, located in Theological Hall since 1966, reported that in the 1969/70 year its circulation had been 26,459. Also during the last year 128 subscriptions and 3603 volumes had been added to the collection which now stood at 37,195 volumes and 821 subscriptions. It also announced that a new computer-based retrieval system, MEDLARS, acronym of the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System, developed at the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, was now available through the National Science Library in Ottawa. The service would be free until January 1971, after which there would be a charge.

As usual, there were many new people hired in 1970, especially as there had been 84 resignations during the 1969/70 year. The turnover rate for Cataloguing alone, during the 6-month period of April to October 1970, was 40%. New staff members included Jean Perrin in the Serials Department (January 26th), and Susan Quick (later to be Susan Brennan), a Junior Clerk in the Cataloguing Division (March 24th).

David Wang, who had been working in the Law Library, transferred back in February as Head of Circulation in the Douglas Library, following Mrs. Humphries’ retirement. He held this post until 1994. On May 1st, Elinore Brown transferred from Reference to Acquisitions, with an office on the third floor mezzanine, and the title of Librarian in Charge of Collection Development. This, it was thought, would enable Queen’s to begin a policy of systematic evaluation of the library collection, assessing its strengths and locating its gaps.

New staff arriving in May/June included Susannah Denyer as General Librarian, Cataloguing Division, Sandra Casey (now of Education), as a General Librarian in the Reference and Research Division, and Ann Peters (now Ann Geris of Cataloguing), as a Junior Clerk in Government Documents.

Summertime brought several new faces, including those of Bonnie Pero (now of Documents), as a Junior Clerk in the Cataloguing Division, Donna Dumbleton (now of Special Collections), as a Junior Clerk in the Education Library, Ellen Oosten (now Ellen Compeau of the Teacher Resource Centre) as a Junior Clerk in Acquisitions/Receiving, Janet Fisher (now Janet White of Documents) as a typist in Education, Linda Amey (now Linda Kirkpatrick) as a typist in the Cataloguing Division, Linda Dumbleton (now a national CUPE rep.) as a Library Assistant 3 in Documents, Jo-Ann McKeown (now Jo-Ann Reid) as a Junior Clerk in Administration, and Leonora Webber (now Lee Schuster) as an Intermediate Clerk in the Law Library. Gail Slack (now Gail Phillips of Documents) started as a typist in ILL, and Arlie Murphy (now Arlie Redmond of Stauffer Reference) as a typist in the Reference and Research Division. At the end of August, Mrs. Helen Brunton, who had worked in the Medical Library (as it was then called) and the Reserve Room, retired.
Susan Miller came back from library school and rejoined the Cataloguing Division, this time as a General Librarian and supervisor of the Shelf List Conversion Project. Doreen Rutherford started as a General Librarian in the Reference and Research Division.

In the fall, Marcia Stayer (Marcia Sweet) came back from library school as a General Librarian in Law, and Jennifer Allen (now Jennifer Millan) came as a Junior Clerk in Cataloguing. Vivian J. Keir arrived as a Senior Librarian in the Health Sciences Library, and Janie McCann (now Janie Haig of Education) started work as a Junior Clerk in the Serials Department.

Another milestone in 1970 was the closing of the east door onto the terrace facing Gordon Hall as an exit point for patrons. When the addition to the Douglas Library was planned in the early 1960s, and long before plans for the Stauffer Library, the terrace was seen as a central point for the entrance into the main wing and the new north wing, and also into the south wing that was projected to be built in the future, in the area between Douglas and Ontario Hall. It was thought that the University Street entrance would fall into disuse, and the back terrace was envisioned by the architects as a grand place of entry to the Douglas Library, which would eventually have three doors giving access to the north, south, and middle sections of the library (this was before exit control had been thought of). Remembering Queen’s Scottish origins, the architects therefore built the balcony on a rather grandiose plan, as the exact replica of the balustrade of Stirling Castle, Scotland.

The terrace was quite extensively used in its early days: for example, the Queen's Cultural Committee used to sponsor musical activities there, such as folksinging on the back terrace on three successive Wednesdays in October 1968. Tables and chairs were provided for the audience and free coffee was served. In October 1969 (and also October 1970), there was a book sale on the back terrace, consisting of 2,000 volumes of duplicates of every imaginable variety. By 5 o'clock, every volume had been sold.

The terrace was also a handy place to take breaks. The library staff would gather there at break-time in fine weather, although there was some debate about whether it was strictly legal, as a 1966 D.A.R. memo had forbidden leaving the Douglas building during coffee breaks.

Gradually, the terrace fell into disuse. After exit control was established in 1966, there was a commissionaire at the terrace exit as well as the University Avenue exit, but eventually this was considered to be a waste of money. In April of 1970, the exit via the terrace was no longer to be used, although patrons could still enter by this way for a few more years. In 1997-99, the terrace proved to be a useful entry point for the workmen doing the Douglas Library renovations, but it had long ceased to serve as a public access point.