ADVENTIST LIBRARIANSHIP ACCESSES THE ELECTRONIC FUTURE

Step into virtually any library today, and one of the first things you will notice is all the people huddled around computer monitors. For those who still picture the library as a dusty repository of old books and magazines, this might come as something of a shock, as it did to me when I entered library school a few years ago and discovered that one of the first courses I had to take was one in computing.

The ongoing changes in information technology and their impact on current and future libraries have, not surprisingly, generated considerable discussion in professional and lay literature by people like Nicholson Baker[1] and Clifford Stoll,[2] who decry technology's effects on libraries, as well as those who hold more positive views of libraries of the future with no paper at all—the so-called virtual library. As is often the case, the truth will probably lie somewhere between the two extremes.

Determining what will remain the same and what will change requires that libraries and those who love them re-examine the mission and fundamental definition of a library. For many, a library is simply a place where information-containing materials are stored, retrieved, and distributed to users. The underlying though often-unstated assumption is that this is paper-based, or at least paper plus other physical media such as microforms and audiovisual media, all of which are confined to one location. But computing and communications

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technology are now lifting these geographic limitations, and at the same time destroying some of the old assumptions and replacing them with exciting new possibilities.

The fundamental mission of the library remains unchanged—the delivery of information in the most appropriate format to a defined community of users—even as the methods of accomplishing it change. Indeed, libraries are one of the most successful expressions of socialism in human organizations—places where groups of people have pooled financial resources to purchase and provide information resources for the good of the entire community. This need not change as we move increasingly from paper to electronic methods of information distribution.

An Unsettling Evaluation

One might well inquire where Adventist libraries and librarianship fit into the larger changes taking place in information technology. Where are we now? What do we need to do to accomplish our mission in the future? How we will get there? A candid evaluation of current Adventist library resources, which are limited almost entirely to the church's educational institutions, is most unsettling.

Frankly, compared to similar institutions both secular and private, most Adventist libraries are underfunded, some dramatically so. This has made it difficult for them to provide adequate service even in the print-only environment and has made it extremely difficult for them to obtain and use electronic technology. The slowness of Adventist academic libraries to switch from

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card catalogues to electronic cataloguing and the quality of some of the systems chosen clearly illustrate this problem. Selecting a system because of its cost rather than its functionality should be a matter of concern to all. Having many small, underfunded institutions of higher learning has not been conducive to the development of adequate, much less outstanding libraries at our institutions.

Another reality facing Seventh-day Adventist education is that the majority of Adventist students live in the developing world, where resources are often scarcer than in the developed world and where some advanced academic programs have been developed without adequate information resources to support them.

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The home page for Andrews University's James White Library on the World Wide Web.

An Evolutionary and Revolutionary Impact

The impact of computers on libraries is both evolutionary—for example, replacing a card catalogue with an electronic search program, and revolutionary—for example, being able to share resources over vast geographical distances via the Internet. Libraries are quickly moving from the era of the stand-alone computer to networked units. While some, like Stoll, see the marriage of computing and telecommunications through the Internet as "silicon snake oil"[3] that threatens to destroy libraries, others hold a more positive view of the revolutionary opportunities thus created, which allow users to access useful information regardless of place or time. A visit to any library convention clearly shows that most librarians are not only in the second camp, but also are pro-

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A student does book title and subject research on computer in the Chan Shun Centennial Library at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas.

actively involved in creating that brave new world.

At least since the 1950s, Adventist librarians have shared a vision of their unique contributions both to the church and to the profession.[4] Their first joint project, the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index*, is now available in both print and electronic form.[5] This index includes citations to articles published since 1980 as well as an obituary index.

Early History of ASDAL

Sensing a need for regular meetings, Adventist librarians met at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, during 1981 and established the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians (ASDAL),[6] which has met annually since that time, including an international congress of Adventist librarians held in England at Newbold College in 1995.

ASDAL has been active in developing and promoting the idea of networking among Adventist librarians and increasingly is developing strategies for sharing information resources among Adventist libraries. The size and geographical spread of these libraries is both a challenge and an opportunity. What other organization has such an opportunity for sharing information on a worldwide scale between the developed and developing nations in the spirit of Christian love and concern?

Pooling Resources

At the 1995 ASDAL conference, the James White Library at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, proposed a program called Services to Adventist Institutional Libraries (SAIL),[7] which will provide needed services such as book or periodical acquisition and consulting services to libraries in developing countries.

At the 1996 ASDAL conference at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland, Adventist librarians voted to establish the Adventist Libraries Information Cooperative (ALICE), an umbrella organization for group purchase and shared access (in many cases over the Internet) to commercial databases such as ERIC, PsycLit, Religion Index, and Medline, as well as general periodical indexes with as many as 1,000 periodical titles available in full text. As this article was going to press, the program was being implemented by the inaugural libraries, with more locations to be added later.

The librarians' vision is for ALICE to provide teletronic information to Adventist schools and academic institutions on every continent. Negotiating with commercial vendors has revealed the power of group purchase, which should

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Article author Harvey Brenneise at his computer in the James White Library at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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Kitty Simmons, a librarian at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, enters computerized information about the library's books. The circulation system module, which is scheduled to open at the end of fall quarter 1996, will allow library employees to check out books using a bar code scanner.

enable Adventist libraries to at least partially overcome some of their geographical and financial limitations.

Providing Access to Adventist Materials

In addition to providing "secular" information available from commercial vendors, Adventist librarians dream of providing easy access to denominational materials.

Since the inauguration of the *SDA Periodical Index* in electronic form, use of these materials has increased significantly in church libraries. It is our dream to be able to provide electronic access to the full text of Adventist periodicals as easily as we can to secular ones. Arthur

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Don Cicchetti, director of media services at La Sierra University, works at the university library's video studio.

Winzenried at Lilydale Adventist Academy in Australia has already begun this important work.

Another pilot project initiated at the 1996 conference was a comprehensive bibliography of Adventist materials (Adventiana) in electronic form. Its first project will be for La Sierra and Andrews universities to do this with Adventist dissertations and theses.

Also at the 1996 conference, Adventist librarians began discussions with the Adventist Pioneer Library,[8] a lay group that has developed a CD-ROM called *Words of the Pioneers*. Soon this database of the full text of early Adventist writings will be more widely available, and the full text of early Adventist periodicals will be linked to the electronic *SDA Periodical Index*. The entire database may eventually appear on the World Wide Web.

Internet and Web Resources

Increasingly, Adventist resources are becoming available electronically on the Internet, and particularly on the World Wide Web. A list of Adventist libraries on the Web is found at http://www.andrews.edu/library/libraries.html, with Adventist resources being available through Adventist Connections (http://www.andrews.edu/inst.html) and other meta-indexes.

Not only are Adventist libraries developing better ways to share electronic data, but they are also finding ways to make available the vast treasure-houses of print data in many of our libraries. Scanning technology and other means will allow quick and efficient delivery of this type of information to wherever it is needed.

Adventist librarians are excited about the future of print and electronic communication—and especially the possibilities for Adventist libraries as we move into the electronic future. ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Nicholson Baker, "Discards," *New Yorker* 70:7 (April 4, 1994), p. 64.
2. Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* (New York, Doubleday, 1995).
3. Ibid.
4. Harvey R. Brenneise, "Meetings of SDA Professional Librarians Prior to the Formation of ASDAL," *ASDAL Action* 11:2 (Winter 1992), pp. 5-11; also published as "A History of Professional Meetings of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians Prior to the Formation of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians," ERIC document ED342 392.
5. Telnet to library.libr.andrews.edu or via the World Wide Web at http://143.207.5.3:82/screens/opacmenu.html.
6. World Wide Web site: http://www.andrews.edu/asdal/; see also Taylor D. Ruhl, "The Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians, 1981-1991: A History," *ASDAL Action* 11:2 (Winter 1992), pp.11-13.
7. World Wide Web site: http://www.andrews.edu/library/collections/departments/sail.html.
8. World Wide Web site: http://www.andrews.edu/other/APL/.