

A French-American Resources Project: Needs and Potentials in a World of Migration

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In order for a prompt sharing of information among scholars in the world through improved document delivery, bibliographic control, the digitization of resources, and cooperative collection building, the need for individual librarians to be in routine contact with library partners in other countries is crucial. Due to the migration of emigrants to countries throughout Europe and America, the changing nature of our library collections, and the services we render also increases the need for closer contact among librarians. The successes of various projects of the North American Global Resources Network in promoting closer initiatives between individual librarians in separate countries suggest that the time for a French-American Resources Project to enhance library relations between France, the United States, and Canada, is ripe.

Every major European national library had at least one prominent director in the twentieth century who made a distinctive mark on librarianship within his own country and beyond. Names such as Hanns Eppelsheimer, Director of the Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt from 1946-1959, and Julien Cain, Director of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris from 1930-1964 come quickly to mind. Both were visionaries in terms of their recognition of the importance for libraries to provide better access to collections and to adapt to societal changes. At a ceremony opening an exhibit at the Bibliothèque nationale, Cain delivered one of his famous quotes, “Une bibliothèque n’est vivante que dans la mesure où elle se transforme et s’enrichit.”¹ Both personally extended themselves to users of their libraries from abroad, and if they were with us today, they would surely embrace our developing technologies which facilitate almost magical access to our respective collections. They would also support innovative projects to forge closer institutional ties between our libraries as well as personal ties between our librarians. Perhaps L. Quincy Mumford, Librarian of Congress, paid the highest tribute to Cain’s engagement on the part of international librarianship, when on the occasion of Cain’s 1964 retirement he noted: “Of his leadership in international library affairs I can say with little fear of contradiction that no member of our profession has contributed more to the growth of international library and cultural cooperation than he.”² Two remarkable achievements of Cain at the Bibliothèque nationale, which reflect his devotion to bibliographic control of foreign materials were his 1952 *Catalogue Collectif des Ouvrages Étrangers* (1952) and his ongoing inventory of current foreign periodicals (*L’Inventaire Permanent des Périodiques Étrangers en Cours*) from 1953.

Today, as never before, library users in France and North America need rapid access to materials from across the Atlantic via a variety of routes: the purchase of materials; the borrowing of them as physical objects; electronic document delivery; and subscriptions to full text journals as well as to suites of specialized databases, including digitized collections of print and illustrated resources. These users frequently require referrals across the Atlantic to special collections not always readily identifiable. Occasionally they come with complex reference questions which could be more

expeditiously answered if our librarians had access to the names of subject specialists across the ocean. If this sounds quaint in our dashing information age, it should not. Now as before, in subjects from economics, to religion, to forestry, to writings by immigrant populations, discreet collections exist in our university libraries, municipal libraries, and archives with which only subject specialists in those libraries are truly conversant. Thus the establishment of “contact partners” or sets of librarians, one on each side of the Atlantic, with specific subject specialization identifiable via a web site could be of great value for reference queries, referrals to very special or esoteric repositories, and many other purposes. For instance, cooperative ventures to secure differential pricing for electronic resources could be pursued via such partnering. (American efforts with American publishers to offer lower prices to the French side, and vice versa). Joint projects to digitize materials of a similar nature, particularly between partner libraries whose collections complement each other, could also emerge. Possibilities exist, from collections of maps to World War I posters to 17th century French emblem books. In the arena of bibliographic control, work to standardize our cataloging norms has been underway for some time, but a closer involvement of French and North American cataloging teams by means of a bibliographic control working group could accelerate this effort. And last but not least, all modes of document delivery could be improved via new and fresh contacts on an individual basis between our interlibrary loan librarians. For all of these things to happen, a flexible structure consisting of a number of working groups under a common umbrella hosted by both of our countries would be ideal. Such a structure would provide logistical support, serve as a launching pad for joint trans-Atlantic grant applications, deal with intellectual property issues, and manage budgets obtained from grants.

The Global Resources Network, begun in the mid 1990s under the aegis of the American Association of Universities and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in Washington, D.C. could form the framework for such French-American cooperation. This network, which can be viewed at www.arl.org, has to date launched six major projects with the overarching goal of improving North American access to publications of several countries and areas of the world: Africa, Germany, Japan, Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The results of several published studies in the early 1990s by both WESS and ARL, which revealed huge lacunae in North American holdings of European publications, led to these projects. Most of the projects have proven worthwhile, in particular the German Resources Project (GRP), which since 1999 has increasingly promoted reciprocity in the attempt to benefit German as well as American libraries. The four components of this project: bibliographic control, collection development, digitization, and document delivery, as well as certain components from the other Global Resources Network projects, could fit well into the framework of a French and American project. I enthusiastically support the formation of such a project which we might call a French-American Resources Project. The anchor in France could be one or more of several organizations: the Association des bibliothécaires français, the Association professionnelle des bibliothèques universitaires, the Agence bibliographique de l'enseignement supérieur, the Conseil supérieur des bibliothèques, or INIST (Institut national de l'information scientifique et technique) of CNRS. No doubt our book vendors, such as Aux Amateurs de Livres and Librairie Jean-Touzot could also play a

role in such a project, as has played Otto Harrassowitz, the German book vendor, in the case of the German Resources Project. Our French vendors have already made presentations at meetings of the WESS Romance Discussion Group; for example, Gilles de la Rochefoucauld gave a talk in 1998 on Belgian authors and the placement of their works with French publishing houses.

And now to the basic components which such a project could comprise.

First, to Collection Development and Reference

In order to locate special collections of materials – rare or non-rare – guides, particularly conspectus or mapping guides, would be necessary in order to establish sets of contact partners by areas of subject specialization. The *Répertoire des Bibliothèques* contained in the *Catalogue Collectif de France*, maps out collection strengths across all disciplines, and, consequently could serve as the basis for the identification of French contact partners. Recent movement by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) to develop a national collection development scheme mapping holdings of academic and municipal libraries throughout France might also serve to help identify French partners. In addition, individual laboratories of the CNRS with subject foci could play a role. The German project has very successfully made use of Germany's national conspectus, *Webis*, as a framework for establishing partnerships of librarians, two per subject, within the project's Collection Development Working Group. In the area of Jewish Studies, for instance, the University of Frankfurt Library's Jewish studies specialist, Rachel Heuberger, was partnered with a counterpart at Harvard University, Elizabeth Vernon. These two librarians have forged close ties for ongoing cooperation that has had tangible results. Vernon has selected and donated to Frankfurt duplicate books in Judaica, and Heuberger has reciprocated by sending Harvard microfilms of antiquarian materials in Judaica from the Frankfurt collections. Vernon, incidentally, has noted that she would welcome the emergence of a French American Resources Project through which opportunities for her to partner with a French Judaica selector within a working group framework might arise. The fact that *Webis* features the Library of the University of Frankfurt as a collecting point for Judaica led the German Resources Project (GRP) to contact Heuberger and invite her to participate as a contact partner. A click on the subject heading "Jewish Studies" or "Judentum" in the GRP subject index to German and American subject partners brings up the names and contact information for these two subject specialists who have participated in various collection projects together. //Incidentally, just yesterday morning I paid a visit to the Alliance Israelite universelle in Paris, whose impressive library on 19th and 20th century Jews throughout the Middle East has contracted with the BNF for adoption of its bibliographic records into the *Catalogue collectif*. When I asked the Alliance's curator, Jean-Claude Kuperminc, if he would one day be interested in serving as a contact partner within the framework of a French-American Resources Project, he responded enthusiastically.

The wealth of scholarly resources in France's municipal libraries as well as resources dealing with collections by and about her immigrant populations could, of course, be included among the subject areas for partnerships, in particular those regarding

North Africa and the Middle East. North American subject groupings could feature similar resources dealing with our Latina/Latino and Asian immigrant populations, featuring special collections by and about them as well as relevant reference services.

Second, Bibliographic Control

French and North American libraries continue to acquire copies of each other's print publications. Nonetheless, without common cataloging standards for name authorities, subject headings, and rules for monographic sets, original cataloging for these materials still has to be duplicated in both countries. Naturally, if we could reach agreements on common standards, the duplication of much cataloging could cease. To this end, a Bibliographic Control Working Group for our American and French cataloging experts could contribute a lot. A recent achievement of the Bibliographic Control Working Group of the GRP has been the translation of *AACR2 (Anglo American Cataloging Rules 2)* into German. The Deutsche Bibliothek, in addition to other German libraries, has been seriously considering the adoption *AACR2* in place of *RAK (Regeln für die alphabetische Katalogisierung)*, in part as a step towards full standardization of Anglo-German cataloging norms. To date this proposal has met some opposition from much of the German library community, not a few of which see this as but one more example of Anglo-American hegemony. In any case, these developments underscore the direction which much current thinking is taking towards the standardization of cataloging norms. This does not mean, however, that the norms of one country or continent need to be imposed on or accepted by another area of the world. The translation of a code should serve primarily as a means to enable catalogers to better assess possibilities for compatibility. Actually, American and French attempts at standardization are in some respects ahead of American and German efforts, for some preparatory work has already been completed, as in the case of the French translation of *AACR2* which was published by Editions Asted in Montréal in 2000.³ And then there has been the adoption of *AACR2* in recent years by a few French university libraries which are members of OCLC and which contribute records to *WorldCat*, despite the BNF's adherence to the established French cataloging norms of AFNOR (Association française de normalization). In addition to the École normale supérieure, French university libraries that contribute to OCLC are: Avignon, Lille, Nice, Poitiers, Savoie, Strasbourg, and Montpellier. North American committees revising *AACR2* as well as the upper echelons of the Association française de normalization would have the final say in any product developed to harmonize our cataloging norms, but initiatives emanating from small groups, such as much work currently underway in the GRP can have a strong influence. This is particularly true of leading members of each country's cataloging associations. For instance, prominent German and American authorities in cataloging who are members of the GRP are currently authoring an article to be placed simultaneously in German and American library science journals comparing our respective cataloging standards. The ultimate goal is to produce a norm incorporating common features of *AACR2* and *RAK* plus a digital thesaurus of distinctively German and Anglo-American forms of headings and subjects to be used for the rapid updating of shared records.

Third, Digital Projects

As more collections of print materials become digitized and made available over the Web, possibilities arise for trans-Atlantic partnerships to pool resources and construct common portals for searching across collections – print as well as graphic. Some examples are: medieval French manuscripts, or French imprints of the Early Modern period of which a wealth exists in France, and, to a lesser extent in other countries of the world, such as the U.S. and Canada. Search structures to retrieve text and image can be re-invented all the time on both sides of the ocean, or libraries with similar collections can collaborate as test beds for the latest search technologies and create common search portals. Such collaboration is in progress between the University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign, my home institution, and the Herzog-August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, for the purpose of collaboratively digitizing our respective collections of 17th century German emblem books. Cooperative efforts at obtaining major grants in order for us to make site visits to each other's libraries have been successful. A digital library project web site supported by a French-American Resources Project could not only promote collaboration between French and North American libraries with similar collections across all subjects, but it could also serve as a clearinghouse to contain descriptions of, and links to ongoing library digital projects, individual as well as collaborative, in our two countries.

Four, Document Delivery

Unfortunately trans-Atlantic document delivery between our countries remains woefully inadequate. Photocopy requests serviced between our libraries are all too frequently filled by paper copies sent through the mail rather than by electronic transmission. At my institution, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, figures for lending and borrowing for calendar year 2003 are fascinating: twenty-one French institutions lent us 32 photocopies of journal articles and 31 loans of print items. By contrast, only eight French libraries borrowed books and articles from Illinois, but at a much higher volume: 364 articles and 246 loans of books. There are no doubt many reasons for these low transaction statistics on the part of both countries. Many North American and French libraries sometimes find it easier to request items from outside sources, such as the British Document Supply Center, than from each other. But with recent willingness on the part of the BNF to facilitate interlibrary borrowing from libraries throughout France, attitudes have changed, and more French libraries are willing to lend their materials and to fill document delivery requests.

A Document Delivery Working Group, consisting of French and American interlibrary loan specialists, could work together to improve the methods we employ in borrowing each other's resources. Since 1999 the Document Delivery Working Group of the German Resources Project has made impressive inroads in improving trans-Atlantic delivery of journal articles. For almost two years, a cooperative American partnership with the German consortium Gemeinsamer Bibliotheksverbund (GBV) hosted at the

University of Göttingen an ILL web site which facilitated efficient borrowing capabilities for journal articles between American and German libraries. This project was managed financially by ARL, but it unfortunately came to a halt during 2002 due to German copyright issues. Libraries participating in the GBV-North America project maintained deposit accounts at ARL, and payment for loan transactions were simply deducted from these accounts. Ariel transmission was the technical route chosen. Our German group is, nonetheless, now fervently pursuing new avenues with the Library of the University of Göttingen.

Additional Possibilities for Cooperative Work

Other components of the Global Resources Network, such as the Cooperative African Newspaper Project's Union List of African Newspapers, overseen by the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), or the distributed acquisitions program of the Latin American Resources Project could also serve as initiatives for adoption by a French-American model. But in order for the idea of such a project to materialize, a dialogue between Romance studies librarians in WESS and their counterparts in France needs to get off the ground in a constructive way. Organizational infrastructure on the American side is likely to be feasible, so long as ARL and CRL are convinced of the need for such a project. By the way, recently CRL took over the responsibility for the German and Latin American projects from ARL. Identifying such a support organization or organizations on the French side may prove more difficult, since one or more French governmental ministries might have to become involved and enticed into the formation of such a project. Perhaps discussion of such possibilities as I have outlined here could take place at an upcoming WESS Romance Discussion Group meeting at ALA to which our vendors and special guests from French libraries could be invited. In advance of this, it would be advantageous for representatives from just one or two French institutions to initially partner with one or two representatives from North American institutions in order to secure an initial solid framework for communication. Most important of all is the initiative and leadership that might be taken here today by individuals inspired by the concept of close partnerships between our two library communities, and by the past legacies of the directors of our national libraries, our university libraries, and municipal libraries.

Hanns Eppelsheimer and Julien Cain led their national libraries out of the horrendous ravages of World War II into a more enlightened age and time of closer library relations between their two countries as well as relations with North American libraries. It would be, however, another fifty or so years before the digital revolution would make possible first rapid bibliographic access to our mutual collections and, soon afterward, virtual access to texts themselves. As an American I delight in the closer cooperation we are forging with our German colleagues, much by virtue of this digital revolution. I would equally delight in knowing that such cooperation was on the horizon between us and our French colleagues. Hopefully a special component of that cooperation could involve the provision of better access to the publications of our

immigrant populations across all the major work areas I have noted: collection development, bibliographic control, digitization, and document delivery. .

Notes

1. *La Bibliothèque nationale de France. Collections, services, publics.* Sous la direction de Daniel Renoult et Jacqueline Melet-Sanson. (Paris: Éditions du Cercle de la Librairie, 2001), 79.

2. Quincy L. Mumford, "Tribute to Julien Cain," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Juillet-Aout, 68 (1966): 98.

3. *Règles de catalogage anglo-américaines.* Élaborées sous la direction du Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR. (Montréal: Éditions Asted, 2000).