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From Microcards to Digitization

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accompanied by the utterance “*Lekker koffie, hor!*” (translated approximately as Aaaaaaaah, good coffee!) is always required. And I must admit the coffee is really, really good. When I first got to Holland I would hear colleagues who traveled in North America speak with disgust about American coffee and how weak and undrinkable it was. I felt obliged to defend the honor of Maxwell House and Folgers, et al. However on my first business trip back to North America I remember my first cup of morning coffee in the Montreal Holiday Inn, and the first sip when I realized all their allegations were true!

Language was not an immediate problem since virtually all employees at Swets had to know some English to do their jobs. Everyone born post war in the Netherlands is pretty proficient in English and it is emphasized in the schools, but they really become proficient from imbibing imported American culture, primarily pop music and television.

A colleague called Ton, short for Anton, who taught me the ropes so to speak, proudly announced he had learned a lot of his English not only in the schools, but also through watching and listening to pirate broadcasts of shows such as Mr. Ed on television. He proceeded to sing me the familiar “A horse is a horse, of course, of course...”

As to the work itself, I was a quick study and was soon answering correspondence, dealing with claims, preparing invoices and dealing with claims, as well as learning what was at the time a pretty sophisticated computer database system. The Dutch office itself provided my first lessons in the language, *Nederlands*, or Dutch, and my early vocabulary was shaped by this experience as any child's is by his family. Two of the first words I learned were *schedeblade* and *pootaardappel*. *Schedeblade* is the name for an office supply item that is a thin cardboard divider used in the ring binders which are the backbone of the Dutch office filing system. There are no filing cabinets as we know them, but many large black ring binders shelved endlessly, with colorful labels applied to their spines indicating contents, such as correspondence, invoices, etc. and year. Each worker had a hole punch on his desk and used this and the ubiquitous *schedeblade* to maintain his files. *Pootaardappel*, by the way, means seed potato, a term learned because one of my customers was a large national agricultural library.

I went to evening classes to learn Dutch, and it was my aim to master it. I must say that Dutch is the most difficult language I ever tried to learn. And I majored in German, studied Russian, can read French and

Spanish, and have since studied Mandarin Chinese. Although I could do my job and live pretty well without knowing much Dutch, I strove to learn the language, mostly to understand the rich office gossip which was always divulged in the mother tongue! Living in a village, rather than a cosmopolitan city like Amsterdam, not hanging around Americans, but taking part in Dutch activities such as the local Jazz Club evenings, taking mini trips in Holland and the rest of Europe with Dutch people, as well as watching TV and reading one of the simpler daily newspapers and the royal gossip magazines, all contributed to what I regard as a reasonable mastery of the language.

Although most Dutch people know our language far better than the majority of Americans know any other language, there are some deficiencies. They have trouble for instance with Native American and Spanish language based American names, and spelling is often troubling. On learning before a business trip from the Dutch travel agent that rooms were not available at the Holiday Inn, but they had booked me in the Ramadan Inn, it took a few seconds for it to register as Ramada Inn. Once when some new invoice paper was printed and delivered to the office I discovered to my horror that in the payment instructions on the reverse side of each sheet was printed “Bank of Cananda.” It isn't good business practice to misspell the name of the country with which one is doing business, so needless to say I didn't use this invoice paper.

Now back to those *schedeblade* and Dutch ring binder files. Perhaps the most poignant and lasting personal impression and perspective I was granted involved the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. This is a site I have visited every time I have returned to Holland, and to which I took all my American visitors. As one leaves the entrance and exhibition area, containing multiple editions of the diary in numerous languages, as well as the original plaid child's diary, and Shelley Winter's Oscar won for her portrayal of Mrs. Van Damm in the movie version and donated by her to the house museum, one enters the old office part leading upstairs to the hidden attic. That stairway and entrance was hidden successfully for years by a swingaway wooden bookcase filled with what – those Dutch ring binders with the same type of colored labels and *schedeblade* used in my Swets office.

The reality of what happened, that elusive, mercurial thing called empathy filled me as I suddenly, spontaneously felt the truth embodied by that house. The bravery of those who hid the Franks and others for those years, the fact that they were ordinary people just like me, but who risked their lives to save their souls became knowledge to me rather than history. I could see the soldiers tearing away the boards, flinging those files and taking people to their deaths. That mundane thing, a ring binder divided by thin pieces of cardboard called *schedeblade*, is now a touchstone for me to the past. 🌿



From Microcards to Digitization

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As a librarian/library school educator for over half of the 20th century, there are lots of memories to recall. I won't fill up your issue with all of them but pick out a few that are special to me from the perspective of my career as a serials librarian in a large university library; a circulation/serials/head cataloger in a theological library; and for the past 35 years as a faculty member of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)** teaching courses in cataloging and classification, technical services, and preservation.

My most vivid memory of any paper I wrote in library school in the late 40s concerned an idea that a prominent librarian had for the card catalog. Microcards would provide both access and text for users. Us-

ers could take from the catalog the tiny microcards which would replace books. Of course, we all know that the century never produced a microform reader to satisfy users and neither did it bring this idea to fruition! Technology has played such an important part in innovations and I think of the old idea when we become so absorbed in electronic access and full text retrieval. Technology influenced how an old idea of providing access and text took a new turn.

When I was a student, I was asked to be one of the student founders of Beta Phi Mu and served as the honor society's first secretary. I have remained active in Alpha Chapter throughout its existence and still serve as faculty liaison to the Chapter.

Along the way, my husband, **William T. Henderson**, became a librarian, too. We
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have not only shared a profession but also team teaching responsibilities in preservation and technical services. His areas have been acquisitions/collection development and for 30 years he was the preservation librarian at UIUC.


One of the highlights of my career was to be a consultant from the **American Theological Library Association** to the AACRI catalog code revision sessions. There I met some of the greats of cataloging of that era: **Lucile Morsch, Sumner Spalding, Wyllis Wright, Seymour Lubetzky, and Mary Piggott**. Seymour Lubetzky and Mary Piggott would later come to GSLIS as visiting professors and share my office. Those were great summers and Mary and I have had a long distance friendship from London to Urbana over the years.

Another person who influenced my career was **Fred Kilgour**. He invited Bill and me along with **Ruth C. Carter** to visit OCLC during the first week that OCLC went online in Ohio. The system went down as we entered the door but soon recovered. I came home from there determined to show my students what this could mean for catalogers so I simulated the OCLC search on a computer assisted educational system called PLATO at the UIUC. I had to learn to combine programming with educational techniques. For many of our students in the early 70s this was their first hands on experience with a computer. It seems unbelievable now but 3 of them actually became physically ill when faced with working with a computer!

One of the uses of the computer in the technical services class has been to have each student communicate with 2 e-mail mentors, practicing technical services librarians who help give the students the feel of what is happening out there in "the field." The mentors have been enthusiastic and year after year many of them continue their role in helping to educate students. Eventually, students who were mentees have themselves become mentors. This has become something of a continuing education experience for the mentors.

One of the parts of our discipline that has been perhaps the biggest surprise apart from the role of computers has been preservation. In my early days as a serials cataloger, I knew the role of binding as an important part of serials work. Since then, we have learned so much more about preservation needs; now we are learning about archiving our electronic records. Driven home has been the relationship between preservation and collection development and the heavy burden of selection for preservation. This also shows how learning must be a lifelong experience as this is an area where I have had to study hard to learn from the literature, the Internet and most of all my husband's experience and understanding of preservation. It has become a mission and a passion for both of us, something I would never have dreamed of half a century ago. We have tried to instill in our students the idea that preservation is the concern of everyone who works in or uses a library, archive, or museum. This area, too, is one that draws us closer to institutions other than libraries as archives, museums, and historical associations share many of our preservation concerns.

I have won several honors and awards for my teaching but I treasure most the experience of working with some 7,000 students who have made their own marks on the profession in many areas of service. Just a few weeks ago, one of my students from the early 70s was sitting beside me at a professional meeting where we listened to a presentation on library and information science education. As the presentation ended, she turned to me and said: You taught me to THINK. To me this was the best of all honors! The past century, whether we have been part of it for 50 years or 5 months, has required a lot of thinking. The future will be no different.

This has been and still is a great career. Thanks for letting me reminisce. 

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