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Back Talk-Millennial Contribution

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BackTalk — Millennial Contribution

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Carter and Bonk

took care to explain the difficulty that librarians find themselves in with members of their community who object to a particular book. Certainly, the difficulty has magnified itself with the advent of the Web, but most academic libraries are still just as much able to skirt the issue now as well as then.

The world of publishing now is radically different than in the late 60's. This is no doubt the biggest change in our professional lives. Who would have guessed in the 60's that most publishers would become part of mega information companies owned by a few groups in Europe? That STM publishing would change the whole landscape and contribute to scientizing of library budgets, if not their collections? That the **Association for Research** libraries would invent the **SPARC** initiative to challenge these same publishers? That the survival of the scholarly monograph would be in peril? That authors would be taking back their copyrights? That publishers would shift their emphasis from print to electronic publishing? That a whole new third party industry would emerge to facilitate the use of electronic materials by libraries? That librarians and publishers would become entangled in a lead and follow, follow and lead relationship in which we are both rolling pell-mell toward a digital world of information?

The answer to all of these questions is, of course, no one knew then that all of this would happen. So, what chance is there that we can now guess what will happen to libraries in another fifty years, let alone a thousand. My guess, however, is that access to information will continue to be more and more democratized. Libraries performed this function in the last century. What will be their function in the next? Academic libraries, I expect will continue to serve as the keepers of the university information purse. We will continue to listen and observe needs and acquire the information for the use of the many. The mode of delivery will continue to be more and more electronic. As memory devices shrink, while their capacities grow, we'll give individuals more and more information. As wireless campuses become ubiquitous and then go beyond, we'll be there to decide which of all the content that can be bought, will be acquired. As the chaos produced by the richness of the Web multiplies, we'll be there to organize and provide customized access to these resources. I don't fear for the future of libraries or librarians; it will be a lot of fun. 🐮

On the eve of the new Millennium (yes, the same one we thought we were beginning last year), I thought I would consider the changes that have occurred during my own professional career, and make a few prognostications for the future of librarianship in this special issue of *ATG*. I began as a professional librarian in 1972, in the good old days when you received your MLS after a one-year MLS boot-camp experience, mine at the **University of Washington** in Seattle. My first assignment included both collection development and reference work at **Brigham Young University** as one of three social science librarians.

To help remind myself of what the field of collection development was like then, I recently looked at my copy of the 1969 edition of *Building Library Collections* by **Carter and Bonk** (1969). In that useful tome, the authors said university libraries were supposed to support the curricular needs of graduate and undergraduate students in the liberal arts and the professions, plus they were supposed to be "committed heavily" to the support of faculty research (p. 45). My initial feeling upon reading this was to say that only the means, but not the ends of collection development, had changed. Yet, I think much more than just the means have changed. The word "support" then meant selecting, ordering, receiving, cataloging, shelving, and preserving physical objects. Today "support" includes, at least at most academic libraries, the use of commercial document suppliers, state-wide user initiated document delivery services, the purchase or leasing of electronic information stored on remote servers, and storing ever larger portions of what we own in ugly buildings in cow pastures. More than just the means have changed. The "end" has transformed itself.

By the late 1960's, selectors at large and not so large libraries were already switching from carefully selecting each book on the basis of the author, publisher, the typography, the imprint date, and the treatment of the subject to using publisher standing orders, buying as comprehensively as possible, and in general employing a vacuum cleaner approach to build collections. Not all selectors agreed that the goal should be to find an approval plan dealer with the largest truck, but most acquiesced for one reason or the other. Today, the battle continues but I sense that the origin of the soldiers is different. With the advent of the Web, with its thousands of free resources, at many institutions the most vocal voices of conservatism come from technical services departments because they cannot copy-catalog Web resources as fast as electrified selectors can find them. At many universities, it is the catalogers who want to

differentiate between good and bad information on the basis of what is purchased or comes free. I think something has to change and those favoring the rejection of free Web-based information will not be the winners. The paradigm has shifted, cataloging will need to change since we are now in the business of getting larger fire hoses to spray information, not trying to figure out how to reduce the velocity of the hoses we now own. (Sorry for the switch of metaphors.)

While the space here does not allow a systematic review of how everything has changed, let me simply list the other chapter headings in the **Carter and Bonk** book and make a few comments, and ask that you ruminate on how things have changed since you began as a librarian: Selection of non-book materials; the selector and his tools; surveying and weeding collections; surveying the community; censorship and book selection; the publishing trade; national and trade bibliography; and acquisitions.

In those days, non-book materials included films, recordings (which then meant records and tapes), microforms, periodicals and pamphlets. Those were hallowed days when periodicals could be relegated to a single page treatment in a collection development guide book like **Carter and Bonk**. Since they now consume 50 to 90 percent of every academic library's budget, it is hard to think of them as non-book materials even though that is technically the case. In the 1960's all of these formats were at the margin of our collections. What is different now in the "if it isn't on the Web, it isn't" era, monographs and periodicals are taking a seat next to these non-book mediums at the margins.

In those days, the "selectors and HIS tools" referred to review sources like *Publisher's Weekly*, *Choice reviews*, etc. Now, while these titles are still a mainstay at smaller academic libraries, at large libraries we have long since outsourced selection to approval plans and we rely upon them to interface with major publishers to get 80 percent of what is coming out into their computers so it can be delivered to us on a weekly basis. While we are still involved in collection surveys (assessment), weeding (some real and some just to remote storage), and user surveys, these have been displaced as consumers of librarian time by meetings (remember that participative and consultative management overtook us during these years) and now by keeping up with what is free and for sale on the Web. And, of course, we no longer talk about the selector and HIS tools. This is another sign of changed times.

Censorship is still very much with us.