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Books Are Us

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who manages and oversees the operation of the department. Three library assistants responsible for serials/periodicals report directly to the Electronic Serials Librarian who manages the process to acquire, renew, and cancel serials in all formats.

Refinements in the department structure, integration of similar activities, reassignment of responsibilities, training of staff, and successful hiring of new staff have helped expedite the transition to a predominately electronic environment. With a librarian and two library assistants whose priorities are management of electronic resources, the department can now pay more attention to maintaining information related to electronic resources, tracking changes in content, and updating URLs. In addition, the staff is responsible for the **Serials Solutions A to Z** title list and will be maintaining a link resolver.

The consolidation of units and the merger of similar activities resulted in the following benefits:

- Improved efficiency in the materials ordering and receiving process - By combining functions, streamlining workflow, eliminating duplicate efforts, and reducing print processing, **MOR** staff is able to handle the workflow despite the loss of two library assistants.
- Increased staff productivity in some areas - Training and cross-training developed expanded expertise within the staff who can now fill in for each other and keep backlogs from forming.

- Allowed greater focus on the management of electronic resources - With more staff and professional support available, planning is possible. Management of electronic resources changed from being reactive to proactive.
- Maximized staffing resources overall - The redefinition of positions and reassignment of responsibilities made the best use of human resources.
- Reduced volume of work in print materials processing - The conversion to electronic subscriptions, implementation of shelf-ready books, cancellation of print subscriptions, transfer of bindery activities, and revision of the claiming policy all contributed to changing the workflow to accommodate the expansion of electronic resources.
- Enhanced communications with vendors and among library staff at all levels - One point of contact for vendors was established by creating a departmental e-mail account and designating one phone for electronic resource matters. **MOR** staff participate in meetings of other library departments and work with other departments to establish policies related to using electronic resources.

Consolidation of the department has provided several advantages, and what we have learned will serve us well as change continues. The following briefly describes some of those lessons:

- Preparing/planning are very important, especially when many changes of personnel and workflow take place in a relatively short period of time. Trying

to anticipate problems and prepare for them gives staff a better idea of what to expect and reduces frustration. Since this area will continue to change for the foreseeable future, these key elements cannot be left out.

- Planning for change and communicating decisions need to take place with the people affected, and their input should be solicited.
- Constant evaluation and reevaluation must take place to ensure that productivity is enhanced as changes take place. Feedback on how changes are working is an important component of the evaluation cycle.
- Having a long-term strategic plan gives a framework for decision-making library wide as well as at the departmental level.

In conclusion, the merger of acquisitions and serials/periodicals has made the management of electronic resources possible and expedited the transition to a predominately electronic environment.

Related Readings

1. Bordeianu, Sever, Linda K. Lewis, Frances C. Wilkinson. "Merging the acquisitions and the serials department at the University of New Mexico: a case study." *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, vol. 22, no.3 (1998), p. 259-270.
2. Zhang, Xiaoyin. "Combining traditional journal check-in and claiming activities with electronic journal initiation and maintenance activities." *Library Resources & Technical Services*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2003), p. 208-214.

Books Are Us

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Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. — **AR**

Thanks to **Diane Rourke**, Director, Health Sciences Library, **Baptist Health Systems of South Florida** (Miami), for writing: "There is an absolutely ghastly description of the new national library in Paris and also the librarians there in the book, *Paris to the Moon*, by **Adam Gopnik**, an otherwise lovely memoir of his five years in Paris, raising his young son and commenting on French cultural life for his columns for the *New Yorker*. . . in fact many of the chapters were published in the *New Yorker*." While this is not a fictitious account, it aroused my interest.

So I read *Paris to the Moon* (Random

House, 2000; ISBN 0-375-75823-2, trade paper) and was transported to the City of Light, enchanted by **Gopnik's** observations on life and customs and raising a child in Paris. I was intrigued by his several page description of the national library, as well as of his experiences there, and wonder if others familiar with the library share his impressions.

Gopnik wrote the "unbelievably vertiginously enormous" new *Bibliothèque Nationale* must "have been designed by a committee made up of **Michel Foucault**, **Jacques Tati**, and the production designer of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* The whole thing is set up, way up, on a wooden platform the size of six or seven football fields, high up off the street. There is an unbelievably steep stairs, leading up to this plateau, which is like nothing so much as one of those stepped pyramids where the Aztecs plucked the hearts out of their sacrificial victims." There are four glass skyscrapers, each set at one corner of the platform, all very hand-

some, "in a kind of early-sixties, post-lever House, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill way."

Gopnik described applying for and getting a library card as a time consuming experience bordering on exhaustion. He began with a visit to the desk of "one severely disciplinary young lady," who took information and entered it into the "single-overseeing computer system that was intended as the glory of the place." Next he visited the desk of another young woman, who reentered and corrected all the information the first girl en-

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tered, then had him pose for his photo, all a more time consuming process than it should have been. After more than an hour, he got the card, and began his descent "into the vast underground caverns" of the reading rooms.

The books are all located up in the towers, and the reading rooms are located deep into the earth. There was no signage to assist him. The floors are described as "spiked metal" and he went through several turnstiles and several doors before getting on an escalator for a ten-story descent into the basement. Two more turnstiles, two more windowless metal doors. He requested a seat in the reading room from a computer, inserting the card into a turnstile to access the room. He described the rooms, built around a grass court, which opened to the sky, dizzyingly high above. In the glassed-in court he found a small forest of immense trees, all chained to the concrete floor. As he progressed to the seat he had reserved, he felt "more like an ant than an archivist."

His experience using the computer to make his reading selections was also full of frustration with non-working equipment, delays in retrieval, depression from the feeling of no air and light, and so on. He noted the lack of a cafete-

ria, "only an appalling, gloomy little café near the subterranean entrance, with a view of the gagged and bound trees straining toward the invisible sky."

He described how rich the materials used to build and furnish the Library are but declares it "the largest and most depressing of all the monuments of pompous official French culture that have been produced in France since the war, the administration's revenge on the individual. All that French wit, all that charm, all that gaiety, all that somber pessimism, even all that intelligent despair sunk deep into the earth like a missile installation, with bad sandwiches and a chained and bound garden."

His use of the word monument in describing the Library prompted me to search the Web and sure enough under one locates the *Bibliothèque Nationale* under Monuments. In spite of his descriptions, or maybe because of them, this is one National Library I've added to my list to visit some day.

As an opposing view, though admittedly there is no actual description of the Paris library in this book, author **Dan Brown** acknowledged the assistance of the staff of several institutions in performing research for his best seller, *The Da Vinci Code, A Novel* (Doubleday, 2003; ISBN 0-385-50420-9), including the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, (as well as the Gnostic Society Library).

He also has a librarian character in this novel, and describes the library and the librarian in Chapter 92. While this is a work of fiction, much of what he wrote sounds more factual than fictional. The library is described as one of the "most complete and electronically advanced religious research libraries in the world," located at **King's College** in London. The primary research room of this library is a "dramatic octagonal chamber, dominated by an enormous round table around which **King Arthur** and his knights might have been comfortable were it not for the presence of twelve flat-screen computer workstations. On the far side of the room, a reference librarian was just pouring a pot of tea and settling in for her day of work." The librarian is described as having a genial, erudite face, a pleasingly fluid voice, and thick horn rimmed glasses hanging around her neck (ouch). The description of the reference interview, and the search process, both appear to be accurate portrayals. The only two items that seemed off were: the librarian asked why the two protagonists were seeking the information they were seeking (do we normally do that?), and, while the system was working, offered them both a cup of tea. A rather civilized way to conduct our business, don't you think? And the round table and reading room sound much cozier than those of the *Biliotheque Nationale*.

Lost In Austin

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Director, Scarborough-Phillips Library, St. Edward's University, 3001 South Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78704-6489; Phone: 512-448-8470; Fax: 512-448-8737) <leonhard@libr.stedwards.edu>

Another Midwinter Meeting of the **American Library Association** has been logged, a bit earlier than usual, but not a bad way to start the new year. We have been to more than twenty five midwinter meetings but fewer than thirty. In other words, I don't remember exactly and am not going to try to reconstruct my life from that angle.

It is unfortunate that the midwinter meeting has grown so large. Again, I can't remember exactly which year it was but it was an inaugural year and we met in Washington, D.C. For the first time, the meetings could not all fit into the Shoreham and the Sheraton and we could meet everyone we knew either in the exhibits or crossing the street going from one hotel to the other. There was a People's Drug Store right near the Metro station before the metro existed where we would go for breakfast, a home cooked meal with eggs fried just so, over medium with grits and bacon on the side and crispy toast that picked up the yolk that the grits didn't. The women behind the counter were friendly and easy going but efficient, too, traits that came straight from home. All things considered, it is my favorite breakfast spot of all the places I have eaten at conferences over the years with second place going to The Ferris Wheel, that great, Greek-owned eatery near the Palmer House in Chicago. Grits were not served but everything else was good. Both places, too, had regular

clientele who came in for coffee to go and perhaps breakfast, too.

San Diego is a good place to visit in the winter but it doesn't have soul. Give me Chicago in the winter anytime for a meeting. Or Washington, D.C. with its presence created by those rock solid government buildings. I hate, though, to think what it must be like right now, more a fortress than a city. I hope that I am wrong.

"There Ought To Be A Law Department"

It was my good fortune to attend Department of Defense high schools in what was then West Germany. I began as a freshman at **Wuerzburg American High School** in 1958 and graduated from **Karlsruhe American High School** in 1961. The base at Wuerzburg (I actually lived in Schweinfurt) is still there but the one in Karlsruhe was closed around 1994. The post library, instead of being disbanded like the others that were being closed, was offered to and accepted by the **Karlsruhe Public Library** and opened its doors as a branch in 1996.

Without going into details, I have developed a correspondence with the president of the **Freunde der amerikanischen Bibliothek Karlsruhe e.V. (Friends of the American Li-**

brary in Karlsruhe, tax exempt) whose name is **Karen Adams-Rischmann**. She has lived in Karlsruhe for twenty five years (she teaches English there). She worked it out for me to become a friend by letting me buy a book on **Amazon.de** and having it shipped directly to the Library. Otherwise I would have had to find a way to send 25Euros and incur currency conversion charges.

If you would like to join, I am sure that **Karen** will be happy to accommodate you and if you can send her 25Euros, you needn't go to the trouble of buying an American book through a

German outlet. But that is not the main intent here. The main intent is to find an American publisher for **Karen**. Here is some background in her own words.

"I've lived in Karlsruhe for twenty five years, longer than in any other place. This has not made me feel German, if anything more American, but I do like Karlsruhe, more in fact than most Karlsruher, who seem to have a complex about their provincial city. I wonder if you have seen or read about the recent film *Buffalo Soldiers*, which is not about

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