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International Dateline-From the UK-A Global Perspective

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International Dateline — From the UK

by Martin White (Principal Consultant, TFPL, Ltd.)

Regular readers of this column (I hope there are a few!) would be forgiven for wondering why the Editor lets me get away with the “International” heading when the column only seems to cover the UK. I thought it was about time that I made an effort to be more global, and so in this issue you are about to get a tour of Canada, Australia, the UK and just a little of the Netherlands.

One of the benefits of being a consultant is that you can end up in some very interesting places. This year I have accomplished the feat of having lunch on a beach on the Pacific (Half Moon Bay near San Francisco in April) and doing the same again on just about the most eastern point of North America, namely St. John’s, Newfoundland. I was in St. John’s for the AGM of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, having been invited by the Board to give papers on the UK National Site License Initiative and on the future of scholarly publishing. The meeting took place on 14/15 June. If you have not been to St. John’s, do make an effort to go. There is no other city like it, though Charleston actually is quite close. Most of the wooden houses was built after a major fire in 1896, and so there is a homogeneity of architecture that is most attractive. For a presentation on electronic communication the location was especially appropriate as it was from Signal Point, in sight of the conference hotel, that Marconi sent the first wireless signal across the Atlantic to Cornwall in 1901.

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries/ l’Association des bibliothèques de recherche du Canada (CARL/ABRC) was established in 1976 and consists of 27 university libraries plus the National Library of Canada, and the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information. Membership is institutional, and is open primarily to libraries of Canadian universities which have doctoral graduates in both the arts and the sciences.

CARL/ABRC has three basic goals:

To provide organized leadership for the Canadian research library community in the development of policies and programs which maintain and improve the cycle of scholarly communication; To work toward the realization of a national research library resource-sharing network in the areas of collection development, preservation and access; and To increase the capacity of individual member libraries to provide effective support and encouragement to postgraduate study and research at national, regional, and local levels.

Areas of interest to the Association include automation, collections inventory projects, copyright, joint purchasing consortia, preservation and resource sharing.

CARL has its administrative office in the University of Ottawa, under Executive Director Tim Mark, ably assisted by Katherine.

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McColgan. Katherine is also responsible for the web site, which you can find at www.uottawa.ca/library/carl/.

The overall theme of the meeting was "Design and Build: Developing the Canadian Digital Library." As well as presentations from Canada's four regional academic library groups there was also the formal AGM agenda to complete. One outcome of this was the election of Frances Groen, Director of Libraries at McGill University, Montreal, as President for 1999-2001, taking over from Marnie Swanson. A new logo for the Association was also approved, which will appear on the www site in due course.

I am not going to try to give a detailed report on the presentations, but to pick out some highlights. Among them was a presentation by Pam Bjornson, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproduction, about the way in which this project is moving from microfilm access to Web access. Have a look at the project Web site on www.canadiana.org. The presentations from the regional groups all indicated a great deal of activity, and a growing realization that digital library projects can no longer be progressed adequately with library staff multi-tasking these projects and their day job! As a result, there is a move towards appointing project officers who can act as a focus for digital initiatives.

Underlying all the discussions was the proposal that had been submitted by CARL to the Canada Foundation for Innovation for a total of $50 million to fund a national electronic site license scheme in Canada. Of this amount, $20 million was requested from CFI and the balance of $30 million was to be put up by the participating institutions. CFI is a corporation established by the federal government to strengthen Canadian capability for research. Its mandate is to increase the capability of Canadian universities, colleges, hospitals, and other not-for-profit institutions to carry out important world-class scientific research and technology development. The national proposal was requested in November 1998, with a deadline of 19 April 1999, which put considerable pressure on CARL to prepare the complex proposal, and gain the support of sixty-four University Presidents across Canada.

The announcement about the success of the bid came a couple of weeks after the AGM. The Canada Foundation for Innovation will provide $20 million over three years to fund the Canadian National Site Licensing Project (CNSLP). The project is spearheaded by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and will be administered by the University of Ottawa. The project funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) comes from the Institutional Innovation Fund. The $20 million grant will cover 40 percent of the cost of the CNSLP with the remaining $30 million coming from regional or provincial partners and the 64 participating institutions.

The goal of the CNSLP is to dramatically increase the quantity, breadth and depth of the most current research literature available to 34,000 university researchers and 76,000 graduate students in Canadian universities. A national consortium of 64 Canadian universities will negotiate with journal publishers and vendors to obtain pan-Canadian site licenses for electronic versions of scholarly journals mostly in scientific disciplines.

Another of the invited speakers at the meeting was Dr. Marianne Scott, the National Librarian of Canada, who gave a very comprehensive overview of the wide range of projects that are being managed by the National Library. In early July, it was announced that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Sheila Copps, had appointed Ian Wilson to the position of National Archivist of Canada and Rock Carrier as National Librarian of Canada in succession to Marianne. Ian will assume his new position in the fall. Ian Wilson has been the Archivist of Ontario since 1986. He has served as Adjunct Associate Professor, Faculties of Information Studies and Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto and is currently a member of the Ontario Government's Information and Information Technology Management Committee.

Sheila Copps also announced that she had asked Laurier Lapierre to advise her on the establishment of a common Advisory Board to guide the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada into the next millennium. Before I leave Canada, I must mention the tour of the Queen Elizabeth II Memorial Library at the University of Newfoundland that was given by Dick Ellis, the Librarian. The design of the library gives a reading area for over 1,400 students under a sloping north-light roof by terraceing the rows of tables rather like a sports stadium. The book stacks are also rather interesting, being over 14 feet high! The skill with which Dick has used the striking, but rather "odd" design of the building to meet the needs of students and researchers is very evident. It also gives me a chance to note that Dick was responsible for the local arrangements for the CARL meeting and did a magnificent job.

Another guest at the CARL AGM was Steve O'Connor, the CEO of CAVAL Ltd. (Cooperative Action in Victorian Academic Libraries). Steve gave an overview of the situation in Australia as far as library cooperation, digital libraries and electronic journal licensing were concerned. The impression he gave was of a considerable amount of activity, and I will not try to summarize all the details in this column, but would direct you to the CAVAL Web site at www.caval.edu.au. In his presentation, Steve mentioned a paper entitled "Investment in Information and Knowledge Infrastructure" by Neil McLean at the Librarian of Macquarie University, Sydney. This is among the best papers that I have read about value of information to a national economy, and the role played by academic and other libraries. You can find it at www.lib.mq.edu.au/McLean/investment/ and I do recommend that you stop reading this now, and download the paper.

Back in the UK, there has been some news on the corporate front. First came the announcement in mid-June of the merger of the subscription interests of Blackwell and Swets to create a joint company with revenues of around $1 billion. Discussions between the two companies have been taking place for a number of months. At the time of writing this, there had been no news of redundancies, but it seems inevitable that there will be. The headquarters of the new company, in which Blackwell will have a substantial share, will be in the Netherlands. About a week later, came the news that Whitakers had been bought by BPI, the US magazine publishing business of VNU, the Dutch publishing company. A number of companies had been having discussions with Whitakers over the last couple of years, and it seems that the losing bidder was Reed Elsevier. The company was founded in 1838. As with the Blackwell/Swets deal, it is a little too early to assess the implications of the acquisition, but it is surely a step in the right direction.

Meanwhile NESLI continues to make progress, but still rather slowly. The merger between Swets (the Managing Agent for the scheme) and Blackwell (one of the unsuccessful bidders for the role last year) will not have an impact on the administration of the scheme. I will provide a more detailed account of the NESLI situation in the next issue, as it is clear that many publishers decided that rather than rush the negotiations to get into the 1998/1999 academic year, it made more sense to take time, and be ready for the next round of subscription negotiations with the universities, which are now taking place ready for 2000. In the meantime, there is a very good review of the scheme in the current issue of Ariadne, which is at http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue20/jisc-content.