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# Editorial

Peggy Johnson



Much of the library community is buzzing because of the May 2011 Library of Congress (LC) announcement, “Transforming our Bibliographic Framework: A Statement from the Library of Congress.”<sup>1</sup> The result of this initiative could be a move away from the MARC standard that libraries have used as the carrier for cataloging metadata since the late 1960s, when Henriette Avram, a programmer and systems analyst at the LC, developed it. Will a transition from MARC to something new have the same transformative impact that MARC did?

Many librarians today have always worked in a library environment that is based on MARC and do not understand the revolutionary effect its introduction had. MARC made automation of many library functions possible and, perhaps even more important, made possible the exchange of information between libraries, thus fostering cooperation in previously inconceivable ways. It is no coincidence that OCLC was incorporated in 1967 (then called the Ohio College Library Center) as a shared cataloging system, with the first records entered in the fall of 1971.<sup>2</sup>

Before the introduction of MARC, librarians created records for the local catalog in the form of 3 x 5 cards, according to a set of cataloging rules followed more or less consistently across libraries. Shared cataloging came in two forms: LC printed cards (first issued in 1901) and printed catalogs.<sup>3</sup> The LC began issuing the *Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Cards* in 1942, and released supplements through 1952. This was succeeded by *The National Union Catalog (NUC)*, which included cards from other libraries. The NUC was revolutionary in its own way, and was welcomed by librarians across the United States. The premier union catalog was *The National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints: A Cumulative Author List Representing Library of Congress Printed Cards and Titles Reported by Other American Libraries*.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes called “Mansell” because of the publisher, its first volumes appeared in 1968. When finished in 1981, it totaled 754 volumes. If a cataloger was fortunate enough to find a catalog record in a union catalog, he or she carefully retyped that information and created a card set for the local catalog. Essential tools for this work, such as electric erasers and typewriter platens with slots to hold cards, have long disappeared from technical services operations. The arrival of MARC and shared cataloging utilities meant the end of most locally prepared cards in libraries and made Mansell obsolete by the time it was completed.

What is the LC’s intent as it undertakes a major reevaluation of bibliographic control? According to its announcement, the LC “seeks to evaluate how its resources for the creation and exchange of metadata are currently being used and how they should be directed in an era of diminishing budgets and heightened expectations in the broader library community.”<sup>5</sup> To this end, the LC will do the following:

- Determine which aspects of current metadata encoding standards should be retained and evolved into a format for the future. We will consider MARC 21, in which billions of records are presently encoded, as well as other initiatives.
- Experiment with Semantic Web and linked data technologies to see what benefits to the bibliographic framework they offer our community and how our current models need to be adjusted to take fuller advantage of these benefits.
- Foster maximum re-use of library metadata in the broader Web search environment, so that end users may be exposed to more quality metadata and/or use it in innovative ways.
- Enable users to navigate relationships among entities—such as persons, places, organizations, and concepts—to search more precisely in library catalogs and in the broader Internet. We will explore the use of promising data models such as *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) in navigating relationships, whether those are actively encoded by librarians or made discernible by the Semantic Web.
- Explore approaches to displaying metadata beyond current MARC-based systems.
- Identify the risks of action and inaction, including an assessment of the pace of change acceptable to the broader community: will we take incremental steps or take bolder, faster action?
- Plan for bringing existing metadata into new bibliographic systems within the broader Library of Congress technical infrastructure—a critical consideration given the size and value of our legacy databases.<sup>6</sup>

Deanna B. Marcum, the LC's associate librarian for library services, will lead the project, which is to advance in consultation with the Library and Archives Canada and the British Library, other national libraries, agencies that provide library services and products, the user community, and MARC advisory committees. A website for the Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative ([www.loc.gov/marc/transition](http://www.loc.gov/marc/transition)) will provide information, announcements, and resources. The Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative Forum (<http://listserv.loc.gov/listarch/bibframe.html>) aims to provide a place for discussion.

"Transforming Our Bibliographic Framework" notes that comments from the *Resources Description and Access*

(*RDA*) testing community revealed a belief that MARC needs to be replaced "to reap the benefits of new and emerging content standards" (e.g., *RDA* and others).<sup>7</sup> The LC has said that any changes to or away from MARC will be gradual. The implementation of MARC also was gradual, eventually spreading across the globe as MARC 21, but looking back, no one can deny that its impact on the library community was revolutionary. As we ponder the implementation of *RDA* and the possible (probable?) demise of MARC, one can only wonder what kind of revolution is before us.

### Editorial Board Changes

Following each ALA Annual Conference, several *LRTS* Editorial Board members complete their terms and new members join. I want to recognize and thank Kristin Antleman, Elisa Coghlan, and Dawn Hale, all of whom concluded a second term, for their hard work and diligence as board members, reviewers, and solicitors of submissions. We welcome as new members Steven Carrico, Steven Knowlton, Rebecca Mugride, and Anne Sleeman. Finally, I want to thank Mary Beth Weber, former editor of *ALCTS Newsletter Online* (*ANO*), who has been a valued ex-officio member for several years. She will be replaced by Alice Platt, the new *ANO* editor.

### References

1. Library of Congress, "Transforming Our Bibliographic Framework: A Statement from the Library of Congress," press release, May 13, 2011, [www.loc.gov/marc/transition/news/framework-051311.html](http://www.loc.gov/marc/transition/news/framework-051311.html) (accessed May 31, 2011).
2. OCLC, *In the Beginning . . .*, [www.oclc.org/us/en/about/history/beginning.htm](http://www.oclc.org/us/en/about/history/beginning.htm) (accessed May 31, 2011).
3. John M. Dawson, "The Library of Congress: Its Role in Cooperative and Centralized Cataloging," *Library Trends* 16, no. 1 (July 1967): 85–96, [www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/6365/librarytrendsv16i1i\\_opt.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/6365/librarytrendsv16i1i_opt.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed May 31, 2011).
4. *The National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints: A Cumulative Author List Representing Library Of Congress Printed Cards and Titles Reported by other American Libraries* (London: Mansell, 1968–81).
5. Library of Congress, "Transforming Our Bibliographic Framework."
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*