

Indiana

Technical Services, 1983:

An Informal Report

Janet L. Hartzell
Cataloging Services Manager
Allen County Public Library

“What’s happening in Technical Services in Indiana?” How could anyone accurately and completely respond to such a question, when one considers that the library world is in the midst of a technological revolution most of us would scarcely have dreamed possible only ten to fifteen years ago?

Perhaps the most appropriate answer to the question is simply that we are where we are—that is, the Indiana library community is functioning on many technological levels, levels inherently linked to the size of the library and/or its funding. Most of the large libraries in the state have adopted some form of online cataloging system. This availability of local information in a machine-readable format capable of providing the nucleus for an in-house computer system has led the more visionary libraries to automated circulation systems and online catalogs which have searching capabilities that no card catalog could possibly provide. The majority of the libraries in the state, however, fall into a middle category—they are partially automated and anxiously awaiting the moment they can claim to be fully automated. On the other end of the spectrum⁸ are the smaller libraries. Although these libraries no longer type catalog cards because of card availability through jobbers or Library of Congress, their Technical Services departments still operate as they operated twenty-five years ago (in most cases serving their patrons equally as well as the larger, computerized libraries).

Twenty-five years ago, however, technology had not yet given birth to the information explosion, which all librarians must now confront in some fashion. The wealth of information to be accessed, coupled with inflationary prices and shrinking library budgets, has left many people (not just librarians) alarmed about how this information is to be controlled. In 1983, the library community knows that to survive, to provide effective service to the public, libraries must share information and resources. Perhaps this digression seems removed from the original question, "What's happening in Technical Services in Indiana?" yet Technical Services departments are responsible and will continue to be responsible for both control of and access to the information that flows through their departments. Isn't it significant that in the OCLC system, shared online cataloging (a Technical Services function) was operational long before online interlibrary loan (a Public Services function)?

Concurrent and sometimes synonymous with the concept of shared resources is the concept of networking. The goal is, of course, to eventually have a statewide computerized network of libraries so that patrons would, theoretically at least, have access not just to the information physically housed in their library building, but to all the information available in the state. To accomplish this, Technical Services departments have worked and will continue to work many extra hours in such areas as retrospective conversions of all materials (nonprint is equally valid as a disseminator of information and/or entertainment), and updating and general maintenance of the Indiana Union List of Serials.

The information explosion outside libraries has made itself felt inside Technical Services departments as well by the voluminous amounts of paperwork to be handled, along with an increasing number of required statistics to be recorded. Returning duplicate or defective materials may well become a full time position in some libraries—and that does not account for the time spent and paperwork generated in tracking down missing issues of periodicals. The salvation for many Technical Services departments has been the microcomputer. With a relatively small monetary investment, the department can accomplish a multitude of functions—storage of statistics, mailing label lists, acquisition records, word processing, etc. The only problem is that libraries that bought microcomputers for joint use by the public and their staff often find that there is not enough time for both groups to use the terminals productively, especially as library staff members discover more ways to use the computer as an easily accessed storage tool for replacing paper files.

This information is certainly not new; in fact, I have compiled these comments from conversations that I have had over the last three years with other Technical Services librarians. A common theme running through these conversations has been the myopic vision of many librarians, and Technical Services librarians are no exception. All of us need an occasional reminder of what is happening within the library community in Indiana. How easy it is (and necessary most of the time) to become caught up in the internal workings of our own Technical Services department.

My own myopia became very apparent as I examined my initial response to "What's happening in Technical Services in Indiana?" My first impulse was to reply, "We [i.e., my library] have just moved into the twentieth century!" The arrival in Technical Services of two OCLC terminals and one LIBRIS terminal within a two-week period was enough to distract me from a consideration of anything but the basic "how-to's" of the systems. The concept of state networking was easily subsumed by the much more immediate concerns of how catalog cards would be generated, why the printer was not working, or when we should enter a new bibliographic record in the database. Even if the machinery were not new, the daily distractions of Technical Services often play havoc with any serious consideration of long range goals. Somehow, deciding what to do with Victoria Holt becomes a more immediate concern on most days than the much less concrete considerations of the overall role and function of Technical Services departments in Indiana.

In addition to the concerns about the myriads of details within the various Technical Services processes, Technical Services librarians in many libraries are being given new "part-time" hats to wear as adjunct members of Public Services. Wearing more than one hat has been the norm in small to medium public and academic libraries, but the current economic situation has led to doubling of staff functions in many of the larger libraries as well. As a consequence, more clerical and paraprofessional staff are often added to Technical Services in an attempt to counterbalance the professional librarians' change in function.

As more and more demands are placed on Technical Services departments—technological demands, staffing demands, etc., one of our greatest resources has yet to be adequately tapped. We, as Technical Services librarians, must maintain close contact with each

other for reinforcement, suggestions, moral support, and new ideas. Involvement in the Indiana Library Association, or any other professional organization, is important, but a conference meeting once a year cannot be expected to provide sufficient time to address the multitude of challenges that Technical Services librarians are facing.

What's happening in Indiana Technical Services departments in 1983? We are dealing with computers for cataloging, ordering and receiving materials, for creating online catalogs and for circulating materials, for eliminating paper files and recording statistics. We are faced with the task of reconciling three sets of goals: those goals of our department, our library and the state. Finally, we work daily with increased work loads and increased responsibilities but less time to devote to either and often fewer professional staff members than five years ago.

In spite of the almost constant assimilation of new information and techniques and the adjustment and readjustment of routines, we are moving ahead. We ARE making progress. Backlogs of materials have been decreasing and information reaches the public sooner than it did ten years ago in many libraries. Computers are providing greater bibliographic control of information, which makes the work of acquisitions and cataloging librarians much easier. If the cliché is true, "The end justifies the means," then Technical Services departments are well on their way toward that ultimate end of serving the public in the most efficient and effective manner possible.