

# **Information Technology and Libraries at 50: The 1960s in Review**

Mark Czyzyk

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In the quarter century since graduating from library school, I have now and then run into someone who had what I consider to be a highly inaccurate and unintuitive view of librarians and information technology. Seemingly, in their view, librarians are at worst Luddites and at best technological neophytes. Not so! In my view, librarians have always been at worst technological power users and at best true IT innovators. One has only to scan the first issues of *ITAL*, or *The Journal of Library Automation* as it was then called, to put such debate to rest.

March 1968 saw the first issue of the first volume of *The Journal of Library Automation* published. The first article of that inaugural issue sets the scene: “Computer Based Acquisitions System at Texas A&I University” by Ned C. Morris. Here we find librarians not only employing computing technology to streamline library operations (using an IBM 1620 with 40K RAM), but as the article points out, this new system for computerizing acquisitions was an adjunct to the systems they already had in place at Texas A&I for circulation and serials management. This first article in the first issue of the first volume indicates that we’ve dipped a toe into a stream that was already swiftly flowing.

The other bookend of that first issue, “The Development and Administration of Automated Systems in Academic Libraries” by Harvard’s Richard de Gennaro, goes meta and takes a comprehensive look at how automated library systems were already being created and the various system development and implementation rubrics under which such development occurred. Much in this article should resonate with current readers of *ITAL*. I knew immediately that this article was going to be a good read when I encountered, in the very first paragraph:

Development, administration, and operations are all bound up together and are in most cases carried on by the same staff. This situation will change in time, but it seems safe to assume that automated library systems will continue to be characterized by instability and change for the next several years.

I’d say that was a safe assumption.

The second and final volume of the 1960’s contains gems as well. The entirety of Volume 2 Issue 2 that year was devoted to “USA Standard for a Format for Bibliographic Information Interchange on Magnetic Tape” A.K.A. MARC II. Is it possible for something to be dry, yet fascinating?

Some titles of this second volume point to the wide range of technological projects underway in the library world in 1969:

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- “An Automated Music Programmer (MUSPROG)” by David F. Harrison and Randolph J. Herber
  - “A Fast Algorithm for Automatic Classification” by R. T. Dattola
  - “Simon Fraser University Computer Produced Map Catalogue” by Brian Phillips and Gary Rogers
  - “Management Planning for Library Systems Development” by Fred L. Bellomy
  - “Performance of Ruecking’s Word-compression Method When Applied to Machine Retrieval from a Library Catalog” by Ben-Ami Lipetz, Peter Stangl, and Kathryn F. Taylor

And this is only in the first two volumes.

As this current 2018 volume of *ITAL* proceeds, we’ll be surveying the morphing information technology and libraries landscape through *ITAL* articles of the seventies, eighties, and nineties. I think you will see what I mean when I say that librarians have always been at worst technological power users, at best true IT innovators.