Look Back to Look Forward:
The Classification Research Study Group and SIG/CR

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The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order - *Whitehead, 1929.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The members of SIG/CR have been challenged to consider seriously what lies ahead in knowledge organization. To plan for the future, it is important to understand the past. This paper provides a brief overview of problems in classification research from 1957 until 1964 as well as insights into the creation of the Classification Research Study Group (CRSG), which formed the nucleus of SIG/CR in 1970. The CRSG was an exciting, informal proving ground for people in industry, academia, and government which served to bootstrap creative approaches to theoretical and practical problems. Is it possible to recapture the excitement, spontaneity and vitality of this young group, and make at least equivalent progress in the next 30 years?

The first International Study Conference on Classification for Information Retrieval held in 1957 was organized by the International Federation of Documentation (FID) ASLIB (Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, now International Society for Information Management) the University of London School of Librarianship and Archives, and the CRG. The audience included members of the Classification Research Group (formally organized in 1952), several Americans, including Helen Brownson from NSF (National Science Foundation), Eugene Garfield (Documation Incorporated) and Dr. W.A. Wildhack (National Bureau of Standards) (Shera: unpublished list of participants LW/DO'C-Aslib, and summary of the discussions, conclusions and recommendations, CWRUA 27DD529: 9).

At this conference Helen Brownson, representing NSF observed:

> It is true, I believe, that in the States we are not currently working on new classification systems, and I am not even aware of any current research on classification principles. This does not mean to say, however, that we are not interested in the general problem of organizing information more effectively for retrieval. (Unpublished manuscript, summary of the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the International Study Conference on Classification for Information Retrieval, CWRUA, 27DD5 29:9, pp. 13-14).

While much is known about the Classification Research Group in Britain "a typically British affair", formally organized in 1952, commensurately little is known about two other kindred organizations (Foskett, 1962, p. 127, Classification Research Group, 1955; Foskett & Palmer, 1961; Classification Research Group, 1964; Foskett, 1969; Richmond, 1969). The first group, the

Library Research Circle[1] was organized by Ranganathan in Bangalore and Delhi in India (Ranganathan: personal communication, 26 January, 1952; CWRUA 27DD5 10:3; CRDiSD, 1958-1961). The second was the Classification Research Study Group (CRSG) composed of North Americans led by Phyllis Richmond and Pauline Atherton Cochrane. (Richmond, 1963; Richmond, 1961). These three groups held common goals, crafting creative responses to:

- disparate forces at work in the universe of knowledge organization,
- limits of hierarchical classification,
- overwhelming quantity of written records,
- inadequate reflection of the organization of knowledge in library classifications,
- increasing development of specialized schemes for small collections (Richmond, 1963, p. 55-56).

The predominantly oral tradition of the CRSG masks knowledge of its impact. I was fortunate to conduct oral history interviews with Pauline Atherton over the past year.[2] Her observations on the intellectual foment and fervor leading up to the creation of SIG/CR can provide a useful vantage point for reflection on the future.

2. BIRTH OF THE CLASSIFICATION RESEARCH STUDY GROUP

From its inception, the experience of the CRSG was markedly different from the other groups. "For one thing they [CRG] met monthly. They were all an easy subway ride from each other; they could see each other [socially]. They all had practical problems... They beat on each other and had the structural underpinning that Ranganathan had provided. It was *the* meeting to go to when you visited Europe. I went there as often as I could from 1961 onwards. [It] was more vital for that reason, it was continuous, and it had critical mass."(Cochrane: personal communication 27 October 2001, pp. 32-36). "The difference between the CRSG and the Library Circle is that Ranganathan hosted people who were traveling to study with him at the IDRC (International Development Research Center). We were just enquiring and he was teaching, always teaching. ... If you brought him a problem he would set his mind to it. [It was] very interactive" (Cochrane: oral history 30 April 2002, p. 17).

In 1957, Dr. Phyllis Richmond, a recent graduate of the library science program at Western Reserve University contacted Shera about the CRG and wondered, "... if we can get something of that sort going over here." (letter from Richmond to Shera, 4 July 1957, CWRUA 27DD9 1:4). Shera[3] steadfastly supported the fledgling CRSG both as Dean at Western Reserve and as editor of *American Documentation*. Richmond began to call for participants during the latter half of 1958 with announcements in *Library Resources & Technical Services* (LRTS) (Richmond, 1958, p. 236). CRSG meetings were slated in 1959 at the national meetings of ALA, ADI, and SLA. That first year, 72 American and Canadian members along with five visitors from Europe responded to Richmond's call[4] to arms (Richmond: personal communication, 17 November, 1958, CWRUA 27 DD9 1:1; CRSG, 1959).

The group met at the forbearance of the professional societies in empty conference rooms at odd hours. Announcements for meetings were posted on conference bulletin boards and spread through word of mouth. The group was "informally organized, with an open program, and with no visible means of support" (Richmond, 1963 p. 58). Atherton's recollections are the same, of people crowded into meeting rooms, sometimes seated on the floor, freely discussing the problems they were encountering with the information systems they were either creating or wrestling with at their places of employment. "If you wanted to do something formal you could, if you wanted just to talk ... you could" (Cochrane: personal communication, 27 October, 2001/ p. 27).

3. LEGACY AND IMPACT

The affiliations of CRSG membership varied remarkably. (See Appendix 1) Dick Angell and Werner Ellinger worked at the Library of Congress; Benjamin Custer, was Editor of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC); Ralph Shaw, then a professor at Rutgers University; several, among them Allen Kent, Jessica Melton and Jesse Shera, were from the Documentation Center at Western Reserve University. There were representatives from *Meterological Abstracts*: Malcom Rigby and Gertrude Lundin; consultants like David Sparks from ITEK Corporation, people from

industry and the government alike passed through the meetings. "Whenever we were anywhere near Washington, there were usually people from the CIA there ... There were people from the armed forces, from ASTIA, now the Defense Information Center... People who attended the early CRSG meetings had a keen academic, theoretical and practical interest." (Cochrane: oral history, 27 October, 2001, p. 29-32).

Seeking to create commonality of understanding, the CRSG hosted a definitions project and supported the creation of a bibliography of seminal publications which grew as publications by CRSG members were added (Richmond, 1959; Richmond, 1970). The CRSG assembled a traveling loan collection[5] housed at Western Reserve University within the Special Libraries Association Loan Collection (unpublished document, Annual report 1959, CWRUA: 27DD9 1:1). The speakers at the 12 CRSG meetings held at the national conferences of ALA, ADI and SLA (see Appendix 1) read like a who's who in information science.

4. CHALLENGE

I asked Cochrane about the legacy of the CRSG. "Without a doubt the realization that facet analysis had something to offer and that something like the UDC can exist even if it wasn't very big in this country. Out of that and in that classification itself offered something besides an answer for library shelving." (Cochrane: oral history, 27 October, 2001 p. 27). "For both the CRG and the CRSG it was a labor of love. You will never see a note of appreciation or anything like that, but I would say a lot of the [people] generating thesauri would get encouragement from our group. You will not see a body of literature; it was the oral tradition that was important here." (Cochrane: oral history, 27 October, 2001, p. 35).

Perhaps the most verifiably solid contribution is the transition of the CRSG into the American Society for Information Science Special Interest Group on Classification Research (SIG/CR). "I was president of ASIS in 1970-71. ... Except for going to Europe, this (CRSG) was the only group that had any interest in classification research. By the time I was president of ASIS, I said 'We have to improve this organization. It has to take care of people like this spontaneous group.' (Laurence Heilprin) mentioned the need to do something similar to the creation of special interest groups by the national organizations for computer scientists and psychologists. Several other SIGs (special interest groups) came about at almost the same time. This kind of spontaneity was the sign of ASIS at the time" (Cochrane: personal communication, 27 October, 2001, p. 28).

Many questions addressed by the CRSG still remain. Is there a need for a new general classification? If so, how can/should it be created? Atherton muses that [development of a scheme] "will hit us in a different way, it will be incremental like the BC2 [Bliss Classification, 2nd edition]." "I'm sorry that we weren't able to do more." The very technology that served to hinder developments during the heyday of the CRSG, is now well-developed, but it seems that there is less creative thought of the sort pursued by the members of the CRSG. She finished the last interview with this suggestion, "Maybe if we had a stimulating conference..." (Cochrane: oral history, 27 October, 2001, p. 40.)

A challenge perhaps, to the current membership of ASIST SIG/CR and other complementary groups? Her parting words to me were to be sure to bring a copy of *Classification Research: Proceedings of the Second International Study Conference* held in Elsinore in 1964 to any such gathering (Atherton, 1965). It was this volume, which captured the goals and hopes of her compatriots. Embedded within the 1964 proceedings are the presented papers alongside participant commentary. Certainly, today's technology should facilitate an equally complete record of what transpires at a meeting where we gather to discuss and consider what lies ahead for our field.

How far have we come and how far have we yet to go? The concerns in the 1950s are with us still:

- the disparate forces at work in the universe of knowledge organization
- the limits of hierarchical classification
- overwhelming quantities of written records
- inadequate reflections of the organization of knowledge
- the lack of common understanding

At Elsinore they debated:

- the merits of interdisciplinarity
- whether classification has become something of a dinosaur killed by the process of evolution
- whether our models of searching and information systems are robust enough to enhance information retrieval
- whether or not it is possible for machines to categorize and classify the universe of knowledge

To paraphrase from Michael Buckland's recent presentation at CoLIS4 [6], the past is the past, what we take from it is our heritage. I propose that during this revisioning process, we take the time to remember what made the CRSG more than a grand experiment, and to focus on the tasks now before us. In so doing we must not forget that the vitality of the CRSG was due in no small part to the varied composition of the membership. During this discussion we must not only be aware of the topics before us, but also pay attention to which process can best accomplish our goals. The research conducted by the current members of SIG/CR is no less central today than the work of the members of the CRSG. It is essential for us to extend our reach and to provide a space for those within business as well as the academy to explore ideas, discuss intractable problems, and present research. The time has come to look to look forward and forge ahead to seek the next generation of answers to persistent challenges by ensuring that we provide an enticing, dynamic and discursive proving ground as well as the premier venue for openly and critically discussing new ideas and theories even as we continue to provide necessary context for old ideas masquerading as new.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

[1] "One informal voluntary organisation ... is the Library Research Circle. It has no rules except that we, when we meet, we should not gossip but all our thought should be turned on Library Science – not merely in absorbing what is known but in exploring unknown regions in it ... The only subscription is four or five hours of time to be given on Sunday afternoon for joint pursuit and if at all it is possible, some spare hours in the week days for the individual pursuit of what is

attempted on Sundays, so that the next Sunday's work might be along richer lines. The intimacy and informality of our work can also be inferred from the fact that we meet and deliberate in the open Veranda in front of my house. ... The object of the Circle is to promote team-work-in-series in doing research in Library Science. Every sector of Library science can come within its purview." (Ranganathan: personal communication, 26 January, 1952).

[2] I here refer to Pauline by her present legal name. At the time of her membership in the CRSG, her name was Pauline Atherton. I conducted two formal interviews at her home on October 27, 2001 and April 30, 2002 and found her to be a gracious, open and willing participant. In the future, copies of both transcripts will be available as part of the Atherton papers, in the Syracuse University archives subject to any restrictions placed on these materials by the subject. This work was conducted using the guidelines and ethical standards of the Oral History Association and under the guidance of the Human Subjects Committee at Indiana University (Oral History Association, 1989/2000; Indiana University Human Subjects Committee, 2002).

[3] The work of the Library Research Circle and the Classification Research Group often discussed in Shera's correspondence with Ranganathan (Ranganathan: letter to Shera, 26 January, 1952). In 1957, the same year he received Richmond's letter, Shera attended the International Federation for Documentation's (FID) First International Study Conference on Classification Research at Dorking,

[4] This may seem like a small number, but the numbers of those who attended the ADI annual meeting in 1959, and circulation numbers for *American Documentation* in 1960 provide an interesting bit of context. Richmond indicates 201 people attended the 1959 ADI meeting at Lehigh University at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and that this represented the best attendance yet. Of these 76 were ADI members, 108 from private industry, 38 from the government and 52 academics (Richmond, 1960, p. 156). The 1960 ADI President's report indicates a total of 1731 *American Documentation* subscriptions, with 422 of these belonging to ADI members (Shera: *American Documentation* report of the editor October 1, 1960. Notes, CWRUA 27DD5 10:5).

[5] The Bibliographic Systems Center (BSC) was originally a collection of classification systems maintained by SLA, and formally established in 1924 as the "Loan Collection of Classification Schemes and Subject Heading Lists." SLA transferred the "Loan Collection" outright to Western Reserve University in 1965. Western Reserve University renamed the collection the Bibliographic Systems Center in 1966. In 1975 this collection, containing classification schemes, thesauri, subject heading lists, and indexes, was transferred to the University of Toronto. (Richmond, personal communication, 26 December 1975, and 26 June 1976, unpublished document, Exhibit in support of Historical note. The development and growth of the BSC: CWRU pp. 13, 14. Held at University of Toronto).

[6] Buckland, M. (2002). Tutorial on the History of Information Science. Fourth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science: Emerging Frameworks and Methods. July 21-25 2002, Seattle, Washington.

ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS CONSULTED:

Case Western Reserve University, University Archives, Cleveland, Ohio. Jesse Shera papers, Phyllis Richmond papers, Archivists: Dennis Harrison and Tom Steman. *Charles Babbage Institute*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Calvin Mooers papers. CBI 81. Archivist: Elisabeth Kaplan. *Syracuse University, University Archive,* Syracuse, New York. Pauline Atherton Cochrane papers. Faculty papers Archivist: Edward Galvin. *University of Rhode Island University Archives*, Kingston, Rhode Island, Lea Bohnert papers URI 92. Archivist: Sarina Wyant. *Inforum*, University of Toronto, Faculty of Information Studies, Toronto, Canada. Reference Librarian: Nalini Singh.

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APPENDIX 1:   CRSG MEMBERSHIP

(Compiled from membership lists, newsletter references, and Atherton oral history
          **indicates conference speakers)

Officers, and members voting for constitution:
Pauline Atherton, American Institute of Physics. Chairman CRSG
Phyllis Richmond, University of Rhode Island. Chairman of CRSG
Benjamin Custer, Editor of the DDC and chief of the Decimal Classification Division 1956-1980
Paul Dunkin, Folger Shakespeare Library. (1969) *Cataloging USA* Chicago: American Library Association
Werner Ellinger, Subject Cataloging Division, Library of Congress
Florence Hopkins, CRSG Constitution Committee
Margaret Kaltenbach, Associate Dean Western Reserve University, CRSG Constitution Committee
Allen Kent, Documentation Institute Western Reserve University
Gertrude Oellrich, Newark Public Library Chair, CRSG Constitution and Bylaws Committee.
Edith Scott, Assistant Director of Technical Services at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.
Wesley L Simonton, University of Minnesota
Jesse Shera, Dean, Western Reserve University, Editor *American Documentation*
David Sparks, consultant, ITEK Corporation
Vannevar Bush, Gardner, Ralph E. McCoy, Ellen Mitchell, Strauss.

Others:
Dick Angell, Chief of Subject Cataloging Division at Library of Congress
Susan Artandi, Rutgers University
Helen Brownson, National Science Foundation, Science Information Service
Ilse Bry, Librarian at the A.A. Brill Library of the Psychoanalytic Quarterly
Virginia Clark, Chicago, IL
Phillip S. Glasson, Part of classification definitions project
Dake Gull, President ADI, 1960, consultant for GE Information Systems Operations
K. Heumann, Part of classification definitions project
Ted Hines, Rutgers University
Marjorie Hyslop, Society for Metals and Editor of *AMS Review of Metal Literature*
J. L. Jolley, The Fabric of Knowledge: a study of the relations between ideas (1973) London: Duckworth.
Freida Kraines, Part of classification definitions project
Charles La Hood, Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, and Executive Secretary of ADI
Gertrude Lundin, American Meteorological Society
Bernard A. Ower, Part of classification definitions project
Jean Perrault, University of Maryland
Alan Rees, CWRU Medical Library Education services.
Malcomb Rigby, *Meterological Abstracts*
Elton E. Shell, Part of classification definitions project
Sarah K. Vann, University of Texas.
Lois B. Watt, Part of classification definitions project
I. J. Wright, Part of classification definitions project