Pioneers in Library and Information Science. [A Review]

Barbara H. Kwasnik, Syracuse University

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Review

Barbara Kwasnik  
Syracuse University School of Information Studies,  
343 Hinds, Fall, Syracuse, NY 13244-4100, USA  
E-mail address: bkwasnik@syr.edu.

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Pioneers in Library and Information Science.  
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This issue of Library Trends presents an assortment of glimpses into the history of library and information science. Each of the fifteen articles (counting the carefully articulated and thoughtful introduction) provides a unique perspective and is about people to one extent or another; several are more centrally about events, movements, moments in time, or ideas, and most are about several of these. The collection covers a broad range of periods and subjects, and is both varied and cohesive.

In the introductory essay, "When and Why Is a Pioneer," W. Boyd Rayward explains the overarching goal of the collection--to present evidence-based narratives that are not primarily celebratory, but rather, that offer an opportunity for "detailed critical assessments of matters of importance" (p. 676). As such, each article follows its own historical approach, uses its own methodology for marshalling evidence, and reflects its own level of granularity, and even its own voice. As well, the concept of "pioneer" is purposely left "negotiable" (p. 676). The mandate was to present historical facts, not only to provide an interesting narrative, but also primarily to function "as an heuristic for detailed analysis of aspects of the past in the light of present trends of development and vice versa" (p. 679). Thus, while most of the papers follow a general common outline, they are by no means all slices of bread from the same loaf. Even though not all the contributions are equally successful in focusing on the critical perspective, they are all, nevertheless, interestingly interwoven into the overall fabric.

There are many opportunities for reflection in almost every paper, and, what is more, I found myself making connections among the papers, as well as to contemporary issues in the profession. This is exactly what Rayward had promised in the introduction, and he even suggested some ways in which the articles "spoke" to each other and to the present. A successful anthology, such as this one, thus creates an impact that is greater than the individual components.

While each of the papers deserves its own comments, to do so for all 15 would be tedious within the scope of this review. Besides, as explained in the introduction, they are meant to be consumed as a well harmonized meal, and not a disparate series of snacks. Before a discussion of some of the themes that emerged from the papers as a whole, however, here is a quick overview of the contents, grouped in but one of the many ways in which these papers can be construed:

- In the introductory essay, Rayward presents an eloquent discussion of the role of historical research in the field, the unique scope and definition of the concept of "pioneer" as it is variously articulated in this anthology, and the various approaches and resources drawn on by the authors of the collection.
- Marcia Bates' personal and discursive memoir of her student days at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1960s is perhaps the most unconventional piece in terms of style, but at the same time, it puts into vivid and engaging context one institution and several of the leading figures who influenced the early days of information science. Two other papers deal with the documentation movement, and the role of individuals in both promoting it, as well as resolving some of the inevitable frictions between documentalists (information scientists) and librarians. Melissa I.I. Cragin presents a portrait of foster Mohrhardt, who, as a librarian, endeavored to integrate some of the ideas from information science into his work at the National Agriculture Library and the formation of information networks to advance scientific communication. Mary Niles Maack writes about Suzanne Briet, who introduced not only innovation in information services in France, but also had a great impact on classification work.
- Two other papers are also about classification: Clare Beghtol writes about James Duff Brown's early and quite visionary attempts to accommodate the issue of representing relationships among subjects in classification schemes, while Kathryn La Barre in her essay on Phyllis Allen Richmond, depicts the "heady" times of the mid-
The notion that struck me most forcefully was how complex the nature or "making a pioneering contribution" can be. Over time, we tend to take conceptual shortcuts, obliterating nuances, distinctions, and ideas, blurring lines between thought A and thought B, especially through the filters of scholarly papers, citations, embedded allusions, and so on. Dubin's account of Gerard Salton's development and understanding of the vector space model sheds light not only on the model itself (excellently explained throughout, I might add), but also on how errors, misinterpretations, and faulty citations become solidified over time. Even to the extent that the original research team makes the same mistake as others have been making.
While it is a truism to say that no person operates in a vacuum, it is interesting to note just how profoundly the current events of their day and the tenor of the times were crucial to many of the pioneers' achievements. These events provided opportunities, but also were instrumental in whether the individual's work was accepted or rejected, whether there was funding or not for the various "visions," and whether they themselves were able to bootstrap their own thinking on what was going on around them. For instance, for many of the "documentalists," the postwar deluge of scientific literature provided an impetus for development. Suzanne Briet responded to far-reaching transformations in the Bibliothèque Nationale in the 1930s. James Gillis, Everett Perry, and Joseph Daniels, while as different from each other as possible, all shared the desire to advance the reputation of the young State of California. Lionel McColvin was "saturated by the ideals of democracy, social justice, and universalism that people [In wartime England] believed they needed to defeat totalitarianism ... [He was imbued with the 'Dunkirk spirit' ... and Churchillian defiance" (p. 920). Bates remembers not even once being able to complete the course in information science she taught because of the political and social turmoil of life on the Berkeley campus in the 1960s. James Duff Brown witnessed the rise of interdisciplinary endeavors in science and technology and tried to address them in the classification schemes he developed. The social epistemologists were responding to concurrent thought in several cognate fields and were carried along on that tide as well. Several others took advantage of new legislation, available grants, special requests, invitations, and commissions from various institutions and sometimes just being in the right place at the right time.

Besides the qualities or energy, sheer force of character, persistence, vision, passion, sometimes arrogance, sometimes ambition, and often a true and noble desire to serve, I was struck also, by the some of the more practical personal characteristics that seem to mark the successful "pioneers." Among these are a knack for management, the ability to cultivate and exploit social networks, and the surprisingly strong reliance on friends and mentors. I noted also, how many of them had engaged in variety of professional and nonprofessional activities, both in and outside or library and information science. Many "came up through the ranks;" several stumbled into LIS by accident but found a home there; very few knew from day one what they would be doing when they had achieved the height of their careers. What marks them, though, is a flexibility (even for the more rigid of them) that allows them to move forward and adjust the course.

Another surprise came in the role of information technology in the shaping of these pioneers' successes. One would expect them to be on the forefront of innovations. Yes, that is true to some extent. Especially for the information scientists, technology was critical in what they did, and what they dreamed of doing, but it did not seem to be the main thing. For instance, Suzanne Briet describes the day that electricity was introduced into the library, and research could go on after 3 p.m. on a winter afternoon, but that technology was understood in the context of a greater set of values to provide information services regardless of the medium, the subject, and the status of the person.

For many, more important than the technology itself was the role of serving as a bridge between individuals, professional groups, and segments of society. Frances Henne worked on creating such bridges through the development of standards for school libraries. Essae Culver worked at creating understanding between the legislators, taxpayers, library patrons, politicians, and the funding foundations in Louisiana. Foster Mohrhardt built bridges between traditional librarianship and information science. Throughout these essays, we do see instances of individuals who sail on intrepidly on their own, but more often than not we see people who build networks, support movements, and are happy to share their influence in the interests of their causes. As well, almost all of the individuals highlighted in this issue tended to participate actively in local, national, and international professional organizations.

Several of the pioneers in this issue were women who forged new ground as females. Phyllis Allen Richmond was the first female recipient of The American Society for Information Science (ASIS, now ASIST with the addition of "and Technology") Award of Merit. Suzanne Briet, Essae M. Culver, Cornelia Marvin, and Mary Frances Isom all achieved their distinction in a man's world. Margaret Egan's contribution to the foundational philosophy of our field through her work on Social Epistemology was acknowledged to be pivotal in the work of such "giants" as Jesse Shera. What is interesting is that while some of these women were what we might call iron-fisted, assertive women who eschewed the traditional female roles and demeanor, this was not true for all. In fact, then, as now, they spanned the gamut of feminine style, differing as much from each other as women do today.
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There are many other themes that emerge from these fifteen essays: the role of personal values in building a successful career, the force of personality, the difficulty of seeing things clearly in the "middle-distance" (those events we experienced first-hand but some time ago), the need to reexamine inherited and taken-for-granted knowledge, the extent to which events are not independent of each other, the enduring thorny issues, from the deceptively simple "What is a document?" to the more complex:

• "How should we prepare students for LIS professions?"
• "How do we expand the scope of our discipline to accommodate the various related fields of knowledge?"
• "What is the role of standards?"
• "What are useful and effective ways to cooperate?"
• "How do we try new things without throwing out the vetted ideas of the past?"

The individuals described in these papers struggled in their careers with these issues and many others. Rayward and all the authors stimulate some fresh thinking and reflection on many of these topics.