
The Scarlet Letter = A(utomation)

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*What does Nathaniel Hawthorne have to do
with library automation?*

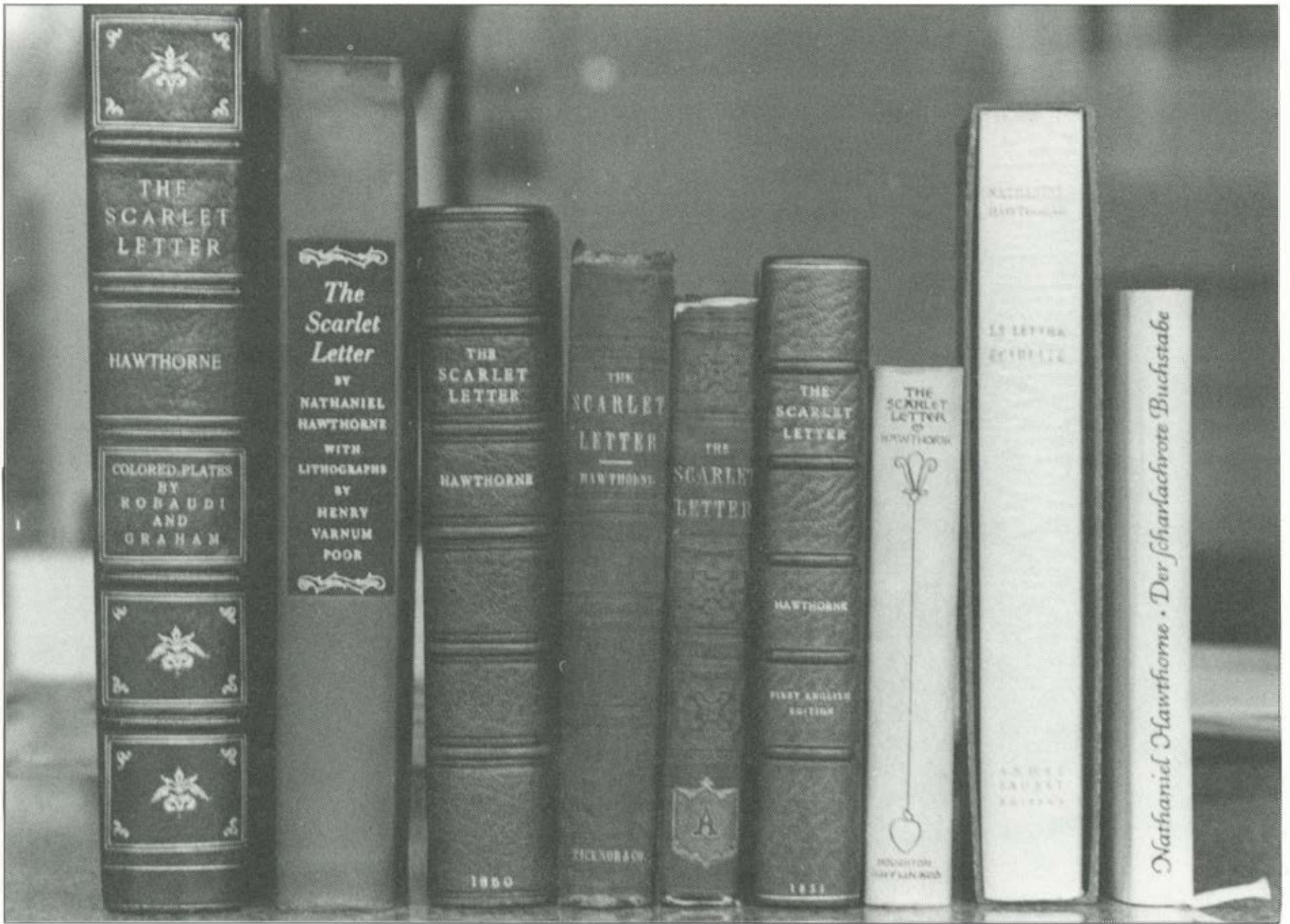
Many of us are currently involved of some phase of implementing an Integrated Library System. Most librarians recognize it as a career opportunity and are pleased to be working in a library that has sufficient administrative and financial backing to introduce automated systems to the academic community. An online catalog with supporting subsystems changes the landscape of the library irrevocably, empowers the user, and alters the daily routines of library staff. We know these things because we see the changes that occur, and feel a genuine excitement because we believe that technology can support study and research in ways which utterly transform a patron's experience. It is little wonder if we become somewhat single-minded in our resolve; the project is demanding, takes collective concentration to be done well, and involves an extended commitment of time and energy.

Introducing an Integrated Library System into an academic environment is, in fact, a consuming experience. We query vendors, stage on-site demonstrations, build a level of competence and confidence among staff, test and evaluate systems, write requests for proposals, badger colleagues with questions and visitations, design evaluation tools, discuss strategies for implementation in endless meetings, participate in contract negotiations, advertise and promote a system of choice, worry about user acceptance, and finally, somehow, orchestrate a phased implementation. The experience is one of the greatest challenges a staff faces,

and in our careers we may only have one shot at it. As a result we're careful, cautious, and we work long hours to bring it off successfully. It is an exhilarating and demanding experience, requiring our utmost effort and attention. The matter at hand is all, and it is easy to become single-minded. The problem is that our concentrated effort can be misinterpreted within an academic community. Despite our devotion and good intentions, it's easy to send the wrong signal.

I sensed this problem about a year ago after a few random conversations with individuals around campus. As our project began drawing attention certain questions came to the surface (and not only from those staunchly unsympathetic to systems development). Were we, in fact, now making a choice between books and bytes? Would we be committing ourselves to an electronic age at the expense of collection development? Were we somehow forging a new value system where books no longer fit into the picture? In short, what about paper and print? Our concentration on technology suggested a new direction which was interpreted on occasion as alien to traditional values. The library was going high-tech. It occurred to me to make sure Automation didn't become a scarlet letter.

These casual remarks set me thinking about system acceptance from another point of view. How would tenured faculty in the humanities or social sciences philosophically view the migration from catalog cards to an online catalog? How would



Editions of The Scarlet Letter from the St. Lawrence University collection.

trustees, emeriti faculty, and Friends of the Library (traditionally committed to supporting acquisitions in special collections) feel about the transition to an online environment? Would staff interpret our concentration as excessive and worry about library priorities? Was it possible to anticipate some of the more typical reservations and be prepared with a sign or signal that the library wasn't losing its balance?

A large-scale automation project nudges the library into the spotlight on campus, especially if the appearance of an online catalog is coordinated with the introduction of an expensive communications network. A project of this scale and cost naturally becomes a topic of conversation. Indeed part of our job is to play a role in these discussions to prepare the academic community for changes to come. We become advocates in the political arena as we urge, explain, and convince those who doubt this investment in technology. We try to make others see the benefits we know lie ahead. In our zeal the library, or a library administrator, can get a quick label. Everything else we do runs the risk of appearing second to automation, especially as dedication day for the system approaches and the spotlight gets brighter.

I would suggest that the spotlight created by automation is an opportune time to present a contrasting view of library priorities. It is the ideal moment to present ourselves as the keepers of

unique collections, preservers of paper and print, advocates of book arts, committed to the dissemination of knowledge and information through the written word. Automation should not obscure the fact that we are, fundamentally, an environment of print.

At St. Lawrence we wanted to create a sign that automation is only a part of what we do, one path we've chosen to take, but not our only avenue of interest or sphere of dedication. For us, the appearance of a handsomely produced bibliography, on the eve of system dedication, celebrated the 40th anniversary of the gift of a lifetime collection on Nathaniel Hawthorne¹ (one of the gems among our special collections), but it also signaled a dual allegiance. The point was to demonstrate balance and perspective in our priorities, while dispelling the notion that a concentrated effort to introduce new

¹*The Ulysses Sumner Milburn Collection of Hawthorniana* (Owen D. Young Library, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, 1989) is a selected bibliography describing a collection which includes all the English and American first editions of Nathaniel Hawthorne, various association copies, letters, manuscript pages, including the complete ms version of "Lemington Spa," photographs, all of the early stories published in 19th century periodicals, and memorabilia. Copies available upon request.



The House of Seven Gables.

technology excludes a concern for paper and print.

There are those in our academic communities who fear that a value system will be tossed out with the card catalog when, in fact, nothing is further from the truth in libraries that support study and research in a scholarly community. But the attention received by an automation project (media coverage, dedications, receptions, promotional literature through Development and Admissions offices) casts the library in a particular light which leaves us in half-shadow. Only part of the operation shows. One has to sense how an automation project is being perceived by others.

It is useful to send a signal which demonstrates a balanced approach to a patron's education and experience, especially within the small liberal arts environment. The student should learn how to handle, use, and appreciate primary research materials as well as become comfortable with the techniques of information retrieval in this age of automation. It is our job to maintain a balance, to introduce technology without abandoning more traditional forms of scholarly experience. Today's undergraduate should be equipped with skills in online bibliographic searching, become facile in exploring resources in CD-ROM databases and Online Public Access Catalogs, as well as gain some experience handling primary research literature, rare or fragile documents, books, prints, maps, or archival material. Automation does not lessen our

responsibility in these matters.

There is a great deal a library can do to balance perceptions, allay concerns, and generally strengthen its image during the time of implementation. A well-timed publication, promoting a special collection or rare materials, is only one way. There are many examples or approaches to take if one senses the need to remind faculty and students of continuing priorities. One might accelerate special exhibits which feature book arts, host guest speakers, stage demonstrations in binding or repair techniques, distribute keepsake printings, or announce tours of archival or rare book facilities at the time a system is dedicated. These are a few the ways to suggest a balanced perspective.

Automation planning and implementation places an considerable strain on library staff, both professional and support staff. Not only will the project impose additional work, but ultimately introduce new tasks which require some adjustment in daily routines. It is understandable if some staff members view a coming automation project with reservation. Not everyone on board will be wild with enthusiasm. For these reasons it is good to have other projects going on within the library, with participation on a voluntary basis. For some this may provide opportunity for a break from automation planning, and perhaps even present a learning experience. For others just knowing a collections-related project is going on, apart from automation,

is a good sign. The Hawthorne bibliography was produced in this way at St. Lawrence—almost as an antidote to the rigors of automation, providing a benefit I hadn't foreseen. The bibliography was an in-house effort, compiled and produced in tandem with the automation project, and served to remind us of other things. In some sense the Hawthorne bibliography proves we weren't swallowed whole by the project.

The point, of course, is that an extended concentration on automation can cause us to be perceived

as single-minded when, in fact, we continue to pursue various objectives, have ongoing responsibilities, and carry out multiple functions. Automation planning and implementation is something else we've elected to do. No better time to demonstrate the multiplicity of our concerns, and particularly our values and intentions with regard to printed materials, than at the very moment an automated system is dedicated.

Everyone's watching. ■ ■

Global librarianship: The role of American academic librarianship and ACRL

By JoAn S. Segal

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Active participation in IFLA is encouraged.

What are American academic librarians doing wandering around the globe attending meetings and meddling in library affairs in other countries? Why should ACRL, a division of the American Library Association, be involved in IFLA and other international organizations?

History

Interest in librarianship beyond the borders of the U.S. has been growing. ALA has had as one of its tenets since earliest days, a responsibility to provide leadership in world library matters. In fact,

ALA was among the founders of the International Federation of Library Associations in 1929 and its members have participated actively in the formation and development of international associations of many kinds. Academic librarians have played an active role in such organizations as well.

The contributions of academic librarians

The nature of the contributions made by academic librarians from institutions in the U.S. fall into twelve major areas: leadership, publications, meetings, educational activities, resource provi-