



A Profile of Ann Okerson

A passion for chocolate, organs and travel, not to mention buying cows – not what many of us would associate with Ann Okerson, who is better known as the guru of licensing and consortia. Ann is currently Associate University Librarian at Yale University, with responsibility for Collections Development & Management and Technical Services, and Coordinator of NERL (the NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium). To many of us in the serials community, she is especially well known for her recent work moderating the liblicense-l listserv – no small task in itself.

Some of you may be thinking that we have had a lot of profiles of Americans recently, but Ann started her life as a European and is now Canadian, being born in Austria and moving to the US when she was six years old. Her family initially settled in Chicago, but moved to Los Angeles and then San Francisco in the late 50s.

Ann read English and German Literature at Pacific Union College in California and originally planned to teach in secondary school but teaching for one semester at a high school taught her that this was not going to be her career. She was accepted into a doctoral program in English literature at UC Berkeley, where she made many friends who were librarians. Believing that librarians spent their time reading literature rather than dissecting it, she went to the Dean of the Library School there and was offered a fellowship to do the Library program, where she earned her MLS.

Soon after this she emigrated to Vancouver in Canada. The first professional position that

became available to her was at Simon Fraser University, and in many senses from that early point she has never left serials. She rose to be head of SFU's Serials Division and spent a sabbatical year working at Blackwell's Periodicals in Oxford. Then, craving some additional commercial working experience, she set off to the east coast to manage the library services at an antiquarian bookseller Jerry Alper.

In 1990 the "serials crisis" really hit American academic libraries very hard, and for five years Ann was in the middle of things as Director of the Office of Scientific & Academic Publishing at the Association of Research Libraries in Washington, D.C.

When we think of consortia, we tend to think of Ann. Throughout her more recent career, she developed a strong sense that co-operative collection development would be even more productive in the electronic medium than in print. In 1995 OhioLINK was gaining strength, and when being interviewed by Yale she pointed out that, if the private institutions did not co-operate together, "the public universities will eat your lunch". In 1995, Academic Press had begun to market its 175 e-journals to consortia and showing huge economies of scale. Ann wanted to test the possibility that Yale and its research library peers in the North-eastern United States could band together for the benefit of all concerned, so she took a lead in convening 18 large public and the private universities to act as a single e-licensing group. In 1996, NERL was formed and the libraries signed with Academic Press and they have not looked back – having

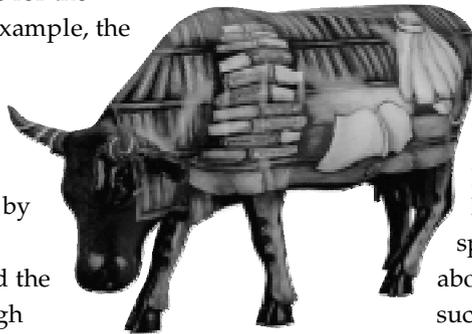
since then licensed some three dozen large databases on behalf of the 18 NERL members and about 25 smaller affiliate libraries. Every two years, the group asks the question, "Shall we stop now?" and each time the group agrees to continue its collective work and to expand its range of activities. For this consortium it is necessary to be agile – the funding sources change, as they are not all private schools – and the savings are significant. The collegiality and Cupertino are exemplary.

In January of 1997, Ann began the liblicense-l listserv, which she continues to moderate to this day. In fact, her involvement with licences started in November 1995 when she was given a licence for an important database to sign and return to the supplier. When she read it she said, "Wait, we can't sign this!" She was thought unreasonable, since the University has been signing this database provider's licence for the previous three years. For example, the licence did not distinguish between mechanical and electronic reproduction ("no type of reproduction is permitted, by any means mechanical or electronic") so Ann phoned the vendor and "got on her high horse". Whereupon the vendor quite reasonably asked, "What do you need our licence to say?" She quoted the US Copyright Act Section 107 on fair use, the vendor inserted the fair use clause into the licence, and it started from there. In February of 1996, the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) gave Yale a grant to create a Web site that was replete with licensing information. In turn, that grant was followed by two others and the work has now culminated in both downloadable licensing software and the model licence recently adopted by the DLF and backed by two dozen large US research libraries.

Ann's contacts with UKSG go back a long way. In 1978, Ann was on a sabbatical year working for John Merriman at Blackwell's in Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, on a classification project. The Blackwell's experience also allowed Ann to attend the Frankfurt Book Fair and offered educational visits to a variety of U.K. universities. Her memories of the time include

hiring a car from "Rent a Wreck" in Oxford and breaking down on country roads all over England – and Wales – and being overwhelmed by the daffodils in Aberystwyth. At Oxford she also indulged one of her passions – for organs and organ music – by practising on the organ Keble College. It was during this time that she attended the second ever UKSG conference in York. She also remembers how cold and snowy it was in Edinburgh when she attended the UKSG conference as President of NASIG, some years later.

In her collection development career, her most unusual acquisition was that of a COW. In 1999, Zurich held a "cow parade," that presented artistically decorated cows as public art. The event was such a success that in the year 1999, the City of Chicago created its own Cow Parade with 300 artistically decorated cows. Last



summer, 500 cow statues graced the streets of New York. One of these cows, a book cow on Park Avenue opposite the Borders Bookstore, was very cleverly painted. Ann immediately fell in love with this bookish creature and spent the summer finding out more about the cow and raising funds, to successfully bid for it at auction for the Yale Library. The cow was delivered to the University Library in October of 2000, just in time to join in the University tercentenary weekend celebrations! The main problem of course was the acquisition process and the cataloguing – is she part of a series and therefore a serial, or is she a monograph? The cow, which is named "Cow to Book" by its Czech artist, has become a local celebrity. After being introduced at the 300th celebrations at Yale, she tours New Haven, working with the public libraries and local colleges, providing merriment and fund-raising opportunities.

When asked about hobbies and passions, Ann admits that her great obsession is with dark chocolate. She researches chocolate wherever she goes, whether in London or Paris or other world capitals where library meetings are held. She pores through phone books, engages in discussions with concierges and conducts serious and diligent tasting. She is a member of a gourmet chocolate club in Paris and, of course, is

a lifetime subscriber to Chocolatier Magazine. Her research has proven conclusively, at least to her, that, contrary to general belief, the French make the best chocolate, and she believes that she created the first chocolate database in the late 80s.

What about the future? Of course there is always the travelling, and from time to time the opportunity to have a vacation as well. Ann's favourite cities are Vancouver and Paris, because of the wonderful quality of life, their diversity of activities and good food, and, of course, their cultural and aesthetic qualities, but for a vacation she would choose Morocco, where she has never been but dreams of visiting one day.

But, back to work. What will the next issues to attract her attention? Her latest project is the one-year e-journal archive and preservation planning work being funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation at Yale University and other libraries in the United States. If this goes well, then Yale Library would hope to secure funding for a more comprehensive project. One of the

biggest problems for libraries these days is figuring out how to cope with the existing dual electronic and print environment. Yale Library's project partnership with Elsevier Science hopes to help in educating the library and publisher communities about the need for archiving, and how a library/publisher maintained site could work. In addition Ann continues her work with the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) and the LIBLICENSE project, and she sees herself continuing to be 'shackled to serials' for the foreseeable future.

URLs:

Ann Okerson's home page:

www.library.yale.edu/~okerson/alo.html

LIBLICENSE project:

www.library.yale.edu/~llicense/index.shtml

ICOLC home public site:

www.library.yale.edu/consortia

NERL public site:

www.library.yale.edu/NERLpublic