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When the Christian Librarians’ Fellowship (CLF) was first formed in 1956, those early librarians were not just focused on their own needs, but they were also concerned with the information needs of students at Christian institutions. Part of their earliest vision was the establishment of the Christian Periodical Index (CPI). And so began a project which continues to the present day. It has far exceeded anyone’s vision at the time if its creation. Who knew about the coming explosion of publishing – to say nothing about the Internet! Yet the mission of CPI – to provide access to English language articles and reviews from an evangelical perspective – has not changed in 50 years, though it has broadened its target group from the original CLF membership.

Non-OCLC members can contract with OCLC members to provide interlibrary loan. Northwestern College also has worked out an agreement to allow non-OCLC members to access their holdings.

Changes in OCLC’s offerings continue to provide new opportunities to the Christian Library Consortium. At the 2006 CLC membership meeting, Paul Cappuzzello of OCLC proposed OCLC Services for Groups, which includes a union catalog on WorldCat, collection analysis, resource sharing, and other services in a package for consortia such as CLC. OCLC now offers libraries one free batch load of holdings into WorldCat. The CLC Team is looking into how to offer the OCLC Service for Groups to its membership and hopes to provide new cost-saving benefits and avenues for resource sharing during the next half century of ACL.

According to an article by Ruth Butler, the first editor of CPI, published in The Christian Librarian in May/August 1982, a committee was formed in 1957 with Ruth Butler, Miriam Waggoner and Dorothy Spidell as the original members. The first issue was published in 1959 for the Washington Bible College meeting of CLF and indexed seventeen periodicals for a cost of $4.00 for members and $5.00 for nonmembers. Ruth Butler says, “By 1960 the Index had been so successful that the organization accepted the recommendation of the committee and the first cumulated volume was published in 1961 for the years 1956-1960.” So the early indexers did some retrospective indexing in order to take the content back to the beginning date of the organization.
The number of periodicals indexed has gradually expanded over the years from 17 to over 100 at the current time. In the early 1970’s the index began being issued quarterly with three quarterlys and one cumulated annual. The annuals were then cumulated every few years until 1985 when the number of entries made this too cumbersome. Since then only annuals have been published.

Other committee members who served under Ruth Butler included Ora Ann Sprague, May Leo, Ivy Olson (who was the first Book Review Editor), Al Krober, and Barbara Nelson. In the early days, the work of the Editorial Committee consisted of going to Buffalo, New York, in January and spending a couple of days filing little 3x5 slips of paper, checking headings, making decisions about new titles and various indexing policy decisions. It was tedious work, but there was also good food and fellowship, with lots of laughter. If dorm rooms were not available, the Butler’s opened their home. Ruth’s husband, David, became an honorary member and host, even when necessary working the circulation desk at Buffalo Bible Institute which became Houghton College/Buffalo Campus. After the committee left, Ruth then spent hours finalizing the indexing, pushing at indexers to get their work submitted, hiring a typist, proofreading and correcting errors by getting them typed and cutting and pasting them into the final printer copy, arranging to get it printed, and then mailing out the final product.

In 1976 Ruth resigned as chairman of the Editorial Committee but continued as circulation and publicity manager until 1991 when Steve Brown became Managing Editor. In 1976 Barbara Nelson became the new editor and chair of the committee which moved its meetings first to Owosso, Michigan, and then to Auburn, Alabama. Al continued on the Committee, joined in the next few years by Stanford Terhune, Ruth Good, and Bonnie Woollet (Travers). When Bonnie resigned as Review Editor, Doug Butler came onto the committee. My time as editor was obviously just a holding period until Doug finally realized it was his calling. He had grown up watching his mother sort little pieces of paper, and proofreading and cutting and pasting corrections, and always said, “I will NEVER work on that stupid index!” God, however, was just amused. In 1987, Barbara resigned as editor and Doug took the reins. The only other person to have the editorial responsibility was Dennis Read who took over in 1989 for one year while Doug was in Bolivia.

In the early 1980’s, ACL began investigating automation procedures. A committee made up of Barbara Nelson, Steve Brown and Woodvall Moore met to look at options. The first automation consisted of outsourcing the typing of the content from the little slips of paper. This was done by a company called Infornotics. They created a computer file, but proofreading and corrections continued to be done the old-fashioned way. After Doug took the reins, the automation of the index took a series of steps that eventually led to the development of CPI-E, the electronic version developed and hosted by BCR. The ribbon
cutting ceremony for CPI-E was held at the 1999 ACL Conference at Lee University. The article and pictures of that event were printed in the September 1999 issue of *The Christian Librarian*.

While the entire Team (somewhere along the line ACL committees became teams) can take credit for the electronic project, the member who spent (and continues to spend) the most hours is Steve Brown who maintains the CPI database. Beside taking the last pass through the index before sending it to be printed or to BCR to be mounted electronically, he spent hours cleaning up the database. Clem Guthro may have been exaggerating only slightly when he said in the September 1999 issue of *The Christian Librarian* that Steve “spent about a million hours cleaning up the database” and working with BCR to get this project off the ground. The data had come to him in many different electronic formats and with many iterations of indexing rules and subject headings.

Since then the Index has grown so much in contact and complexity that there are now three editors. Doug continues as overall Editor with Steve Brown as Associate Editor. Steve sees that all the data is in the correct form for both print and electronic editions. Stan Terhune is the Retrospective Indexing Coordinator. The CPI Team has been systematically working to put all the paper issues into electronic form, as well as indexing missing issues, indexing retrospective issues published before the title was initially included in CPI.

In the meantime in 1993 the committee chairmanship moved away from the people with editorial responsibility. Jule Kind came on board as chair. Of course, the committee no longer sorts little slips of paper, and the annual committee meetings focus on policy issues. Gradually each member was given a specific responsibility for the index. Barbara Nelson came back on the Committee, first as Director of Marketing, then in 2002 as Indexer Training Coordinator. The newly titled Marketing Coordinator position was then given to Sarah George in 2002. The first official secretary of the Committee was Mike Van Huisen, followed by Jamey Wilkes who also makes the first pass through the subject headings of the regular indexing before it goes to Doug. Jan Bosma became the Electronic Access Coordinator, succeeded by Clem Guthro who did the negotiating with BCR which resulted in the new electronic product. When he resigned, this position was folded into the position of Full Text Coordinator and Electronic Format Coordinator. Beryl Pagan had the position of Full Text Coordinator and now handles both responsibilities. Printing/circulation responsibility has probably had the most changes. Catherine Beaird was the only Circulation Manager who served only in this capacity. Jan Bosma and Steve Brown have done one or both parts of this responsibility over the years, always in addition to many other duties. Currently these functions are handled out of the Association office in Cedarville.

One thing is certain – this project could not have been possible for the last fifty years without the often unsung efforts of the volunteer indexers.