

Editorial

Filling in the Blanks

By Jacqueline Snider, Co-Editor

One of the perks of living in a university town is that distinguished academics often visit. I heard Dr. Peter Stallybras of the University of Pennsylvania talk about “blanks” and the importance of writing. He described forms such as customs forms, indulgences that were printed and purchased hundreds of years ago, and the evidence of writing that appears in family bibles and other published documents. As I sat listening, the idea of invisibility and visibility came to mind. Blank forms require certain kinds of information such as name, address, and so forth. During paper shortages, people wrote on anything to practice penmanship, hence, the repetition of letters and names found in family bibles. In that same vein, family bibles often contain the names of relatives, siblings, and parents; thus, moving from the realm of the invisible to the visible, the impersonal to the personal.

What does this have to do with libraries and this issue? Catalog cards go beyond providing classification information, similar to filling in blank forms, to containing pencil annotations which personalize and embellish the item’s description. Thus, like the family bible that includes personal names, the catalog item becomes even more visible, and alive.

The invisible and visible extend to the current discussion of what to call our Association. Are special libraries invisible, and require us to constantly explain and justify ourselves? Will ASKPro make us more visible and set the record straight? This journal issue examines visibility during SLA’s 100th anniversary. Two of the articles describe programs that reach out to patrons and researchers, and make those facilities and services more apparent and relevant. The third article wrestles with what school library administrators call themselves; their self-identification.



Photograph of Card Catalog in Central Search Room, 1942 (Courtesy of The National Archives)

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