We are pleased, as editors of this special two-part issue of IEEE Annals of the History of Computing, to present articles that explore a range of computing applications developed to solve library problems. In this first issue, four articles deal with the precomputer era of punched cards, the early development of data structures and standards for library applications (machine-readable cataloging, or MARC), and two important case studies of automated-systems implementation in two major university libraries, Illinois and Toronto.

In the second issue for July–September, the articles deal with information retrieval in the library context; how these early applications were perceived in terms of transforming both the library and the librarian; the Council on Library Resources, which was instrumental in supporting early automation efforts; and finally, a fascinating tale of attempts at applications that overreached themselves—Project Intrex.

Obviously, these articles do not comprise a complete history. They do suggest, however, some of the complexity that must be dealt with in such historical studies, including issues of methodology, organizational implications and relationships, and the diversity of viewpoints through which library applications might be problematized. They also raise questions about what happened beyond the various cut-off dates. Given the articles’ authors, one can’t help wonder about possible alternative explanations.

We are also aware that, for the habitual Annals audience, our articles might well have offered more technical detail about systems hardware and software and fuller accounts of some clever ways in which their limitations were overcome.

The articles in these issues represent merely a beginning of systematic study of what so far has been largely dealt with in the literature in a fragmentary way, usually as incidental or by way of introduction to something else. Inevitably, in such an undertaking as ours there are major gaps. At a fairly basic level of analysis, we have no formal study here of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and the other bibliographic utilities and specialized library networks. There is no extended account of the Library of Congress’s role nor of the developments of international standardization under the aegis of the International Federation of Library Associations and its Universal Bibliographic Control initiatives. There is no comparative study of automated library systems being developed in the UK, Europe, or Australasia, nor of the gradual internationalization that came to characterize the bibliographic/bibliothecal environment.

Articles about key figures would also have extended our understanding of historical events. In this context, many of those figures central to the history of library automation also played a broader role in information retrieval developments. These individuals are listed on the Pioneers Web site of the American Society for Information Science and Technology at http://www.asis.org/Features/Pioneers/isp.htm.

The articles were carefully refereed, and we would like to thank the referees, who were outstanding in the knowledge and care they brought to the task. Several were individuals whom we had tried to entice into submitting articles themselves. Their responses as referees made us glad they could participate at least to this extent.

We hope that readers will find the articles interesting and enjoyable. And, where readers realize that what is presented could be questioned or further extended because of their own backgrounds and experience, we hope they might be prompted to fill in and extend the record.