

# THE INFORMATORIUM

---

February 21, 1967

## CURRENT CONTENTS -- NINTH ANNIVERSARY

CURRENT CONTENTS is now nine years old. To be more precise, CURRENT CONTENTS OF CHEMICAL, PHARMACO-MEDICAL & LIFE SCIENCES is nine years old. Since the first issue for 1967, however, CC's title has been condensed to CURRENT CONTENTS, LIFE SCIENCES.

Actually, a predecessor, CURRENT CONTENTS MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES would have been ELEVEN years old. And yet another predecessor, CONTENTS IN ADVANCE, would have been THIRTEEN years old. These historical details are part of the ninth anniversary story of CURRENT CONTENTS.

We are frequently asked "how did ISI ever get the idea for CURRENT CONTENTS?" Contrary to popular misconception, CC, like most inventions, was no "flash" of genius. It grew. It evolved. CURRENT CONTENTS began to emerge at the Johns Hopkins University's Welch Medical Library Indexing Project, probably the world's first full-time research project on scientific documentation.

The Welch Project, directed by Dr. S.V. Larkey, was started in 1947 to study the application of machine methods to medical and scientific indexing. As in every generation for the past century, scientists were concerned about keeping up with and retrieving the "literature". The Welch Project suffered from a lack of public relations. Its accomplishments are not too widely known. Nevertheless, its many reports are still quite pertinent. Sponsored by the former Army Medical Library, which subsequently became the National Library of Medicine, the Project's main interest was the CURRENT LIST OF MEDICAL LITERATURE--the predecessor to the present INDEX MEDICUS.

I joined the Welch Project in 1951 as a replacement for Dr. Williamina A. Himwich, one of CC's Editorial Advisory Board members. The Project needed to keep up with the world's documentation literature. So in 1953 I launched CONTENTS IN ADVANCE, which consisted of 50% photo-reductions of contents pages from library science, documentation & computer journals. Four contents pages occupied one 8½ x 11 sheet. CONTENTS IN ADVANCE found a few hundred subscribers but it was really ahead of its time and ultimately perished, as did the Welch Project, in 1953.

In 1955, using a pocket size format MANAGEMENT'S DOCUMENTATION PREVIEW was started. In 1956 it became CURRENT CONTENTS OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES. Like CONTENTS IN ADVANCE, it never really took-off. By 1957, however, we learned that a number of

pharmaceutical companies wanted a similar service covering medical and other journals--mainly as a solution to the problem of routing journals. Some firms produced their own special editions. Lederle Laboratories even mailed a number of copies to some academic contacts most of whom considered the service extremely useful. In 1957, Charlotte Studer Mitchell, a very sharp medical librarian at Miles Laboratories, suggested that Eugene Garfield Associates (ISI's predecessor) provide a similar service for her company. The late Alan MacWatt, librarian at Lederle, also gave encouragement and advice.

We rented a Xerox platemaker, and a Davidson small offset press and printed loose leaf pages in a converted chicken coop. Subsequently we convinced several companies to use the same service so we could lower unit costs by increased circulation. A few firms, such as Warner Lambert gave us advance commitments. Essentially that is how CC LIFE SCIENCES was born in 1958.

At first it was not possible for an individual to subscribe to CC. The minimum order required was 25 copies. The industrial price for 25 copies was and still remains, for this quantity, \$60 each per year.

At first, CURRENT CONTENTS covered about 200 journals and provided no indexes or author addresses. But CC was prompt and meticulously regular. Soon inquiries started coming in from university professors and other individuals--many of them irate that only 25 copies could be purchased. Thanks to the prodding of Dr. H.P. Rusch at the University of Wisconsin McArdle Laboratories, we set up an educational discount. McArdle was our first university customer.

Marvin Schiller, ISI's Executive Vice President, joined me in 1958 as a part-time marketing consultant to help sell CC as a subscription service. We set the educational rate at \$50 per year. That's where the rate has remained. We worked day and night selling subscriptions by direct mail, phone calls and visits to meetings. Although CC seems so obviously useful to most scientists now, it was not that way in 1958. Scientists and teachers could not understand why a weekly publication, smaller than some primary journals, had to charge \$1 per copy. The first issues of CC were only 32 pages per issue. Today 160 is typical and 192 may sometimes be necessary in 1967. But CC contains no advertising and has no federal subsidy. We also provide European subscribers free air delivery--a major factor in its acceptance.

In 1960 we began CURRENT CONTENTS OF SPACE, ELECTRONIC & PHYSICAL SCIENCES INCLUDING PURE & APPLIED CHEMISTRY--quite a mouthful. Now it is simply CURRENT CONTENTS, PHYSICAL SCIENCES.

As the months and years passed, CC kept adding more journals--about ten each month for several years. CC services now cover about 1500 jour-

nals. We must be cautious what and how much we cover. There are always additional journals that could be added to satisfy the desires of individual editors or readers.

From the outset, we realized that the most critical factor in CC's acceptance was timing. To this day we do everything possible to get contents pages listed at the earliest possible time--many of them in advance. At first this developed animosity among some librarians. They were faced by patrons demanding journals not yet on the shelves. This antipathy decreased as the years passed. Furthermore, we provided our OATS service for those who needed an article that could not be obtained from a local library. OATS and our address directory supported, in addition to timing, the second cardinal factor in CC's operation. Access to the journal articles, in one form or another, must be provided in a successful information service. A few publishers could not understand why we needed to provide OATS or to include authors' addresses. But we are proud that we have worked out amicable agreements covering hundreds of journals and today the OATS service is a major international scientific library. The CC address directory undoubtedly accounts for a large percentage of all reprint requests received by authors throughout the world.

Readers' interests change--so do journals and areas of research. Decisions to add or delete cannot be made lightly. A listing in CC can dramatically alter a journal's financial and editorial condition. In many instances editors have informed us that scientists in their country were more willing to publish in a journal listed in CC. The effect of such a listing is obvious from reprint requests which are received due to listings in CC.

CC can exert a constructive influence on journals by asking them to set minimum standards. Naturally, it is more difficult to change the well-established journals. CC readers can help by contacting the editors of these journals directly. Express your opinions on such matters as language, format, addresses, typography, etc. We'll be glad to send you a list of our criteria of excellence.

Perhaps a lack of foresight led to our failure to systematically educate graduate students. Many of them see CURRENT CONTENTS in libraries or use copies bought by faculty advisors. But this is not the same as formalized instruction on how to use CC--or how to build and organize a reprint collection. In addition, ISI needs to educate scientists in the use of other information tools such as our SCIENCE CITATION INDEX, INDEX CHEMICUS and ASCA. For this reason ISI now operates an extensive lecture-seminar program.

ISI is developing and refining computer services such as ASCA (AUTOMATIC SUBJECT CITATION ALERT) but CURRENT CONTENTS is still the most economical system available today for dealing with the

journal literature. Of course, CC must change with the times and try to satisfy the needs of special groups. For this reason we have begun a new edition of CC primarily designed for the industrial chemist. CURRENT CONTENTS, CHEMICAL SCIENCES will in no way affect the present coverage of chemistry by CC LIFE SCIENCES and CC PHYSICAL SCIENCES. However, we realize that some chemists who now read either of these may find CURRENT CONTENTS, CHEMICAL SCIENCES more to their liking. ISI also plans to start new CC editions in other active and growing areas of research.

In closing, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the role that CC's Managing Editor, Beverly Bartolomeo, has played in publishing CC for 470 consecutive weekly issues without interruption. Beverly came to ISI in 1958 and has seen CC and her staff grow considerably during that time. The names of others who also deserve recognition now appear in each issue of CC. I also want to thank the members of CC's editorial advisory boards who do the important job of keeping us in close and regular contact with readers and their problems.