19th Century Masterfile: 1106-1930
Studies in Historical Research

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Andrea Twiss-Brooks
Co-Director Science
Libraries Division

Name of Library: John Crerar Library

Name of University: University of Chicago

Location: Chicago, IL

Population Served: 4,900 undergraduates; 9,820 graduate, professional, and other students; 2,168 faculty and other academic personnel

Paratext Product: *19th Century Masterfile: 1106-1930*

Andrea Twiss-Brooks
Co-Director, Science Libraries Division

About the John Crerar Library

The John Crerar Library is home to more than 1.4 million volumes in the biological, medical, and physical sciences as well as collections in general science and the philosophy and history of science, medicine, and technology. Opened in 1984, the library resulted from the merger of the previously independent John Crerar Library with the University of Chicago.

From the time of its establishment in 1895, librarians at the Crerar Library began acquiring early works of science and medicine. Today these collections range from the classic texts of Vesalius, Galileo, and Newton, to equally rare but lesser known works by investigators and researchers who helped to establish the intellectual milieu of modern science. These books and manuscripts, numbering more than 25,000 volumes, are housed together with the University of Chicago Library's significant holdings in these areas.

Reference Challenge

With its unique and extensive collection, the John Crerar Library attracts researchers in a wide range of areas. Andrea Twiss-Brooks, Co-Director of the Science Libraries Division, shared with Paratext a story of one such researcher who knew of the reputation of the Crerar Library and hoped the staff could help him with his research on pre-World War I technology of aerial torpedoes.

The researcher had looked in historical collections and through various aeronautics and aviation journals. Library staff searched in standard science and technology databases, but most of them didn't go back far enough to capture what the researcher was seeking. They also searched in history databases but didn't find the level of detail that was needed.

The Paratext Solution

Library staff felt they needed to cast a wider net to uncover resources from the appropriate time period. They knew that general indexes such as *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature* and *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* might provide information that appeared in newspapers, not just in journals and periodicals.

"We had used *19th Century Masterfile* primarily for the humanities and social sciences, but not so much for scientific or technology information," said Andrea Twiss-Brooks. "Knowing that the database covered *Poole's* and numerous additional indexes, *Readers' Guide*, we decided to give it a try. What we found in *19th Century Masterfile* was really on topic for our researcher." Andrea said their search on aerial torpedoes led to very good technical information that appeared in newspaper accounts of the period, when conveying technical detail was compatible with contemporary journalistic style. The resources they found were cross-disciplinary, including articles in *Palmer's Index to the Times (London)* as well as in popular engineering titles.

Why Libraries Need 19th Century Masterfile

According to Andrea, **19th Century Masterfile** is an excellent source for information on technology in the late 19th and early 20th century. "**19th Century Masterfile** captures articles from general indexes at a time when there were few if any separate science or technology indexes. This makes it of significant value for our library. Because of the scope of coverage, I look there for primary source information from this time period." Andrea pointed to several reasons why libraries should consider providing **19th Century Masterfile** to students and to their research community.

- The database covers a **broad array of subject areas** in a time period often not well-served by other databases.

- **19th Century Masterfile** is **easy to search**, making it suitable for undergraduates as well as more advanced researchers.

- The ability to **search newspapers and periodicals** in the same resource yields more complete results.

- **Access to primary sources** provides contemporary scientific accounts compared to other databases that focus more on the scholarship of the history of science, technology and medicine (STM).

Since discovering the range of information in **19th Century Masterfile**, Andrea said library staff has used the database for other challenging research questions including elevated railways, public baths and the effect on public health, and yellow fever outbreaks. "**19th Century Masterfile** is a great resource for us. The information we find often provides a unique perspective since newspaper accounts approach a topic quite differently than a medical or scientific journal. This gives our researchers fuller, more well-rounded results than relying solely on standard STM databases would."

Andrea acknowledged that Crerar Library is fortunate to have such a rich collection that encompasses many of the titles in the database. They also have a robust interlibrary loan service to supplement their collection. But, she said, "Libraries don't have to be as specialized as we are to benefit from **19th Century Masterfile**. Even undergraduate programs with a strong modern history curriculum would benefit, especially if research is a focus."

About 19th Century Masterfile

19th Century Masterfile: 1106-1930 began in 1999 by offering the only enhanced, expanded digitization of William F. Poole's seminal *Index to Periodical Literature*. Since that time NCM has expanded to include more than 8 million citations and over 60 indexes covering periodicals along with books, newspapers, patents, and government documents published from the 12th century through 1930.