History with an Impact: The Most Cited Articles in the Journal of Library History and Its Successors over the Past Fifty Years

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History with an Impact: The Most Cited Articles in the Journal of Library History and Its Successors over the Past Fifty Years

Abstract
The *Journal of Library History* established itself in 1966 as a leading venue for publishing scholarship addressing libraries and librarianship. In recognition of the journal’s 50th anniversary, this study uses data derived from Google Scholar to identify the articles in *JLH* and its successors that have been cited most often. Additionally, this essay reveals the journal has contained scholarship that cites library history both inside and outside the discipline of library and information science.

Disciplines
Journalism Studies | Library and Information Science | Publishing | Scholarly Publishing

Comments
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Historians are fond of celebrating anniversaries. In 2014, for example, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War era continues to fascinate Americans, while we also mark the centennial of the outbreak of World War I, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the start of World War II, and the twenty-fifth year since the fall of the Berlin Wall which ended the Cold War. In the field of library history, the first issue of the flagship *Journal of Library History* appeared nearly fifty years ago in January 1966. In early 2015 the fiftieth volume will roll off the University of Texas Press and be distributed in print and electronic formats to librarians and libraries across the country. Given that many, many journals in the field of librarianship have short life spans, it would seem appropriate as we near the half-century mark of *JLH* and its successors that we take a moment to assess the influence of this long-standing publication on the scholarship of our discipline as well as on the many others that thrive in the academic arena.

The approaches taken to evaluate journals and their impact come in many guises and flavors and the library literature is saturated with dozens and dozens of such analyses. (1) Maria Gonzalez in her magisterial study of the various versions of the *Journal of Library* has provided a recent and quite thorough analysis. (2) Over the years others have used bibliometric analysis to investigate the journal literature reflected in the pages of *JLH* and its successors. (3) But no one, as far as I know, has adopted the methodology undertaken in the current study to examine how academic journals had used the literature of library and information history as the intellectual basis for their published scholarship.

“working paper”
Initially, I had considered choosing my personal favorites among the dozens of articles that had appeared in *JLH* and its later iterations over the past few decades. But that would have been a highly subjective list reflecting my personal likes and dislikes. Instead, I took a different tact and decided to use a more objective measure such as Google Scholar as the vehicle for identifying articles most often used by scholars over the years in furthering the cause of library history. Recently a number of studies have appeared in the literature of library and information science using citation analytical tools such as Google Scholar, Web of Science or Scopus. (4) Another researcher might have found different results using Web of Science or Scopus, but my intention was to use focus on one citation tool at this stage. Certainly future scholars could expand on my approach by using other platforms for this task. What follows is one—and certainly not the only—way to assess the impact of what appeared between the covers of the *Journal of Library History, Libraries & Culture, Libraries & the Cultural Record*, and *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* on the scholarship that has appeared in various academic journals over the past fifty years—both inside and outside of the library literature. Finally, I focused my research on journal articles rather than books, because I believe that Google Scholar handles the citation activity for journals better than for books. It somehow seems appropriate that I adopted an analytical approach based on the foundational work of Eugene Garfield and his *Science Citation Index* that first appeared fifty years ago in 1964. Although my methodology was pointed toward journal articles, in the future, it would be quite instructive to learn how our discipline’s writings were incorporated into book-length studies.

My methodology was straightforward and relatively simple. Using the “Advanced Scholar Search” feature of the website, I queried Google Scholar to return results for the specific journal title, such as *Journal of Library History*. It worked best to put the title in quotations since by doing so I limited the response to articles published in that title only. Although Google Scholar returned citations from not only journal articles, but also books, reports, and numerous other digitized sources, I limited the current study to journals with articles yielding the highest number of citations. The overall results were then divided somewhat arbitrarily into smaller chronological segments. At the outset, I had hoped to break the data down by decade, but I was not always able to do that cleanly while respecting the various versions of the journal over time. Thus for the purposes of

In addition to a listing of the most cited articles during each time period, I also captured the citing journals associated with those articles and include a listing of the citing journal titles as well. I was especially curious to learn what non-library science journals cited scholarship from JLH and its successors. It is one thing to have library history cited by JLH, it is another to have it cited by journals from other disciplines not usually associated with librarianship. The results revealed some rather interesting aspects of how the articles in library history have entered the citation streams of other disciplines. My work here must be considered preliminary at best since I will be attempting to summarize in just a few pages the impact of our sub-discipline’s literature on the larger context of multi-disciplinary scholarship over a half century. My findings might serve as the basis for a much more rigorous analysis of the nature of the articles that cite the writings found in the pages of JLH and its successors over the past fifty years. At least that is my hope.

The sections below represent the articles with the highest number of citations in Google Scholar during each time period. For the most part I used as my cut-off those articles that were cited at least 10 times. But the more recent publications sometimes did not reach that threshold, so even the most cited articles did not reach 10 citings. The articles are arranged within each section by publication date with the earliest article appearing first. Below each citation is a listing of the latest date the article has been cited in a journal. I was curious as to lifespan of the older articles and was pleased to see that many of them continued to be cited even decades after they first appeared.

I also included information about the percentage of citations coming from journals as a format. One can see that overall there is a rather wide variation for
the percentage of citing literature coming from journals only. As we know, Google Scholar captures its data from an array of citing sources including reports—both published and unpublished—dissertations, books, and other types of documents available full text via the Internet. For the purposes of this study, I limited my results to only journals citing the articles, but future research could expand the results to include all types and formats of citing literature.

Following the list of highly cited articles in each section is a table that summarizes the citing journals associated with those articles. For non-Library Science journals I have included the base Library of Congress call number. If the journal cited the articles more than once, that number is supplied in the “No. of times citing” column. It is probably not unexpected that over the years the various iterations of *JLH* represent the journal that cites these articles the most. Each table represents a composite of the journals citing articles for that time period. Future research could use a more granular approach that could analyze for each article the journals citing it and how the *JLH* content was used in shaping that scholarship. That level of detail is beyond what I sought to do, yet it is clear to me that in order to fully understand how library historical scholarship is incorporated into the broader scholarly realm such detailed assessment would be required. I would hope that other historians would undertake this effort in order to understand more clearly how our literature has influenced the work of others.

Indeed, what is especially intriguing to me—and something that deserves more investigation—are the non-Library Science journals that cite these articles. That our own discipline displays an interest in library history writings is not that surprising, but a cursory look at Tables 1-6 reveals the existence of a wide range of academic subjects represented—and not just in the field of history. Table 7 summarizes the non-Library & Information Science journals and their citing patterns within this paper’s chronological segments, while Table 8 does the same thing for Library & Information Science titles. By perusing these two tables it is clear that the subdiscipline of library history has created a literature that is attractive for the creation of new scholarship not only in non-history library science journals but to a wide range of journals in other disciplines.

Beyond Table 8, I have placed a short list of articles that have appeared recently in *Information & Culture* that have begun to generate

Latest citing journal date: 2007


Latest citing journal date: 1998


Latest citing journal date: 1980


Latest citing journal date: 2012


Latest citing journal date: 2011


Latest citing journal date: 2011


Latest citing journal date: 2000

   Latest citing journal date: 2007


   Latest citing journal date: 2007


   Latest citing journal date: 2014


   Latest citing journal date: 1994


   Latest citing journal date: 2013


   Latest citing journal date: 2014

   Latest citing journal date: 2007

   Latest citing journal date: 2011

   Latest citing journal date: 2008

   Latest citing journal date: 2014


   Latest citing journal date: 2011


   Latest citing journal date: 2008


   Latest citing journal date: 2010


   Latest citing journal date: 2012


   Latest citing journal date: 2007


   Latest citing journal date: 2005
Libraries & Culture 1996-2005


Latest citing journal date: 2004


Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2014


Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2014

   Latest citing journal date: 2014


   Latest citing journal date: 2012


   Latest citing journal date: 2013


   Latest citing journal date: 2009


   Latest citing journal date: 2011

   [Insert Table 5]

Libraries & the Cultural Record 2006-2011


   Latest citing journal date: 2009

Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2012


Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2013


Latest citing journal date: 2011

[Insert Table 6]
One can see that there were a wide variety of topics treated by the articles most heavily cited in the different chronological clusters of this study. And in some respects it is difficult to generalize very much about specific topical trends that stand out beyond the well-known and obvious introduction of writings on the history of women and minorities in librarianship that began appearing in the 1970s and 1980s. Not surprisingly, Michael Harris and Dee Garrison’s 1975 historiographical piece received its share of citations. Over the years it is interesting to note the number of philosophical and theoretical pieces that continued to generate attention, even after many years had passed after their publication. Anyone familiar with the core scholars of our subdiscipline over the past half-century will see their names appear again and again as cited authors. (5) One can see the slow introduction of writings on the history of the book and reading that began appearing in the latter years of twentieth century represented by articles authored by the Zborays, for example. A broadly taken view of the entire corpus of writings suggests that the literature referenced here reflected a slow, yet steady movement beyond the investigations of specific libraries to more nuanced histories of the library as a social agency thriving within the changing information environment of our age. These highly cited articles deserve much more analysis that I can provide here in this introductory assessment.

Certainly as interesting as the subject matter of the essays is the information displayed by the accompanying tables that capture the citing journals for each chronological segment. These tables summarize the citing journals in alphabetical order with additional call number information for the non-library science titles. Here again, there exists a rather broad range of citing journals reflected in tables 1-6. Tables 3 and 5 contain the largest array of journals outside of library science that cited the articles within their respective time segment. Not only are there a large number of individual titles reflected in these two tables, but there is also a broad range of subjects represented. Why the authors of the articles in these particular journals used writings from the pages of *JLH* and its successors as the basis for their scholarship is an excellent topic for future research that goes beyond my efforts, but remains an exceedingly important area of investigation. By looking more deeply into the scholarship that uses library history beyond the disciplinary borders of librarianship would tell us a great deal about how our writings are used in the broader academic context.
Viewing tables 1-6 shows the remarkable range of subject areas that find library history scholarship useful for non-library science research. Table 7 summarizes in one place all the non-library science citing journals across the six chronological segments arranged by LC call number. From religion to history to social science to literature to computer science and technology, it is apparent that library history scholarship has contributed to writings far beyond the field of library and information science. We have often suspected this, of course, but here is proof. The most heavily cited articles in *JLH* and its successors have found their way into research across the subject spectrum. We are not an insular subdiscipline by any stretch of the imagination.

Although the titles represented in Table 7 present a certain level of fascination given what they reveal about historical scholarship in the larger arena, the titles listed in Table 8 provide their own share of interesting data. We, of course, should not be surprised that the various versions of *JLH* would show high citing numbers. Nor, should we be shocked that *Library Quarterly* and *Library Trends* produce high figures as well given the role both journals have played over the years in showcasing historical writings. I was impressed, however, that a journal such as *Information Processing & Management*, which focuses on basic and applied research in information science, computer science, and cognitive science, would be one of the more active citing journals in this table. I was also struck by the few instances that the British library history journal, *Library History* and its successor *Library & Information History* were noted as citing journals. More than likely the reason for this is that the British journal publishes more non-United States library history, while the most heavily cited articles in this study mainly concerned themselves with topics associated with activities in this country. I would certainly like our British cousins publish more articles about the history of libraries and librarianship that take place in this hemisphere!
The list of citing journals in Table 8 is quite extensive and demonstrates that library history scholarship finds its way into a wide range of library and information science publications. Indeed, the titles in this table represent many of the major journals in our field not only in the United States but from international sources as well. Authors writing in publications covering all types of libraries and functions within libraries have found the information produced in *JLH* and its successors useful sources for their research.

**Information & Culture 2012-2014**


[Insert Table 9]

The section devoted to the most recent cited scholarship for the period 2012-2014 is still quite new and reflects articles published in *Information & Culture: A Journal of History*, the latest iteration of the *JLH*. The journal’s name change is significant in that it mirrors the shifting emphases of library and information science to include a broader definition of information and its role in our culture. In his introduction to the new journal’s first issue, William Aspray, the new editor,
noted the controversy over the change in scope, but insisted that the revised format would afford historians of libraries and librarianship a place where there work could reside side by side with historians of information enabling everyone to enjoy a wider audience for their scholarship. (6) I, for one, am hopeful that all varieties of library and information history can coexist peacefully in the new journal.

Because of the smaller number of citations associated with the new articles, Table 9 reports only a few citing journals. Yet, one can see that even here the non-Library Science publications are prominent in the list and represent nearly half of the titles listed. It will be interesting to see how the articles in the Information & Culture are used in future scholarship. As of now, it appears that the journals outside our discipline are showing more and more their appreciation for the importance of library and information history in their research.

This essay is, I think, the first of its kind to use citation data from an aggregator like Google Scholar in an effort to identify what the scholarly community has viewed as important historical work. And in some respect my humble effort here only scratches the surface of what can be done. By drilling more deeply into the articles that cite these authors we could determine how the literature of libraries and librarianship has informed future research. How do other authors use these articles? Do they serve as the basis for an argument or are they simply included as “see also” references? Are they part of a deliberate literature review for another disciplinary approach? All good questions that additional research could answer. By exploring in greater depth the reason for the popularity of these articles, we could create a greater understanding of the role of library and information history in the larger context of late twentieth century scholarship. A worthy goal indeed.

Endnotes


5. Gonzalez provides a much more detailed analysis of the prolific authors in her recent dissertation “*Crises in Scholarly Communications*” with a number of authorship scatter diagrams situated throughout her study.