

## History of the Joint Automation Project

In 1983, SALS (Southern Adirondack Library System) desired to develop an integrated, automated library system. SALS application for LSCA (Library Services & Construction Act) funds for a retrospective conversion of its union catalog was denied by the New York State Education Department, but the Department said that it would entertain an application involving two or more public library systems in the Capital District. Upper Hudson Library Federation in Albany was not interested because it already had an automation provider, but Mohawk Valley Library Association (MVLA) in Schenectady was eager to participate.

An out-of-cycle LSCA application was submitted to the New York State Education Department in 1984. This grant made it possible to begin the retrospective conversion of the SALS and MVLA card union catalogs into MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) format to create a single automated union catalog of all of the holdings of all of the public libraries in the eight counties served by the two public library systems.

The database of bibliographic records served multiple purposes: circulation control, bibliographic control, online and offline access to the catalog, interlibrary loan, print products, management reporting and resource sharing among all of the then 52 sites in the eight counties.

A contract was executed between SALS and MVLA and each contributed about \$105,000 from undesignated state aid to purchase equipment and software from Data Research Associates in St. Louis.

A Joint Automation Governance Board was formed with four representatives appointed by the boards of each of the two public library systems. Those eight people elected a ninth person to be a disinterested member. By-laws were created to outline the governance of the joint project.

A large retrospective conversion project was begun at SALS with temporary labor to convert the card catalogs of SALS and MVLA. Total federal money dedicated to this project over a three-year period amounted to \$307,000. Currently, technical services staff at SALS add new records and manage the database. MVLA (now Mohawk Valley Library System, MVLS) contracts with Schenectady County Public Library for this service.

The computer system was originally managed and operated by SALS' director, Michael O'Connor. As the project expanded, a computer system manager was hired. As need determined, other staff members were hired.

In 1986 Saratoga Springs Public Library was the first library to begin using the new automated system and was followed by other member libraries under fee-based contracts.

May of 1988 marked the demise of traditional card catalogs in the eight county area and the introduction of a CD-ROM union catalog. The AutoGraphics Company placed the database of holdings onto a CD-ROM that ran on a microcomputer. Soon, every user in every public library in an eight-county area had access to the holdings of every other library in the area. The microcomputers were purchased with undesignated state aid and a special legislative grant sponsored by Senator Hugh Farley.

By 1999 the CD-ROM catalog was no longer cost effective or the most efficient means of providing access to the bibliographic database. Grants from both systems assisted all libraries to fully participate in the automated services of the joint project. Site visits were made, wiring installed, pcs purchased, policy files established and training began. Over a three-year period, each system trained staff at member libraries in using the circulation system, the web catalog and the online databases. 57 public library sites in the eight counties are now online to the central system via frame-relay circuits for library automation and Internet use.

The union catalog (<http://catalog.sals.edu>) and the system wide licensing of periodical and other databases for all library sites has transformed even the smallest library into a substantial library for both traditional public library purposes and for research.