

RESEARCH DIRECTOR'S REPORT

PAUL R. POWELL

Editing of the *First Line Index of The Dictionary of American Hymnology* has been a challenging and frustrating, yet altogether worthwhile experience. When we began data entry for the project five years ago, there were those who suggested we scan the IBM cards as a quick and easy way of getting the *Dictionary* into an electronic format. At the time scanning equipment was in its infancy, but even if we had scanned the cards, the end result would have been a picture file of the cards we already had on microfilm. Creating a useable and useful index from those scanned cards would have been a daunting task even with the most sophisticated computer equipment. Furthermore, we had no money for equipment or staff, and raising money to approach the project in this manner would likely have taken nearly as long as doing the data entry. Instead we proceeded with modest funds, terrific data entry software developed for us by Jeff Hopkins of HPO Software in Phoenix, and a handful of dedicated volunteers from among our members.

Creating a comprehensive index of 5,000 hymnals published over more than 300 years presents challenges in any format, print or otherwise. No other genre of poetry would present quite the same difficulty of indexing by first lines. No editors would dare change the wording of the first lines of well-known poems to suit their own whims or the presumed whims of their readers, nor credit the poetry of one author to another because certain authors were more acceptable to their readers. Nor, indeed, would they rearrange or omit certain stanzas. Imagine what would happen if an editor were to edit that wonderful first line of Robert Frost's "Whose woods these are I think I know, his house is in the village though" to something like "Whose trees these are we think we know, their houses are in the town below." Yet, almost from the beginning of hymn publishing, editors have taken liberties to make hymns acceptable to their intended users.

Working from the hymnals themselves, typists for those IBM cards had no choice but to copy the first lines, authors, refrains, titles, and other details that appeared on the pages before them. They sometimes added notes on the cards which we could not incorporate into the CD-ROM. Those notes provide valuable hymnological data that justifies keeping the microfilm version should your library have the set. On the other hand, the CD-ROM version will provide far greater flexibility since all of the indexed fields plus keywords will be searchable and sortable.

As Leonard Ellinwood and his assistants collected and collated the cards, they attempted to indicate the

original first line or its translation, along with the known author, on the first card of each set. Typists working from the hymnals had no way of making all occurrences of a first line consistent. When collected and collated, minor changes such as "O God" rather than "Our God, our help in ages past" would have been placed in parentheses or brackets but filed as if all occurrences were the same, so that in this example, the first line would have appeared "Our [O] God, our help in ages past." Even in an electronic database, all occurrences of such altered first lines must be so listed in order to identify them as being the same hymn.

Furthermore, ascribing a hymn to a more recognizable or approved author undermines the accuracy of searching or sorting by author. Unfortunately, not all typists of the cards or the computer files understood the importance of maintaining Ellinwood's edits of first lines and authors throughout all occurrences of each first line, and hence the necessity of yet another editing in the process of preparing the data for publishing as a CD-ROM.

Names have been almost as problematic as first lines, not only from the standpoint of ascription, but in the way names were or were not printed in the hymnals indexed. Some editors gave no credits and others gave only last names or initials. Also, for many decades women authors were seldom identified by their own names, but even if they were, they might later have been identified by their husbands' names, with identification changing yet again upon remarriage. Then, of course, there is the problem of pseudonyms for both women and men. Wherever possible, names have been standardized to a single format with alternates or pseudonyms indicated in brackets. In the source hymnals, translators and authors of original texts were often transposed, or the names of only one or the other was printed on the page with the hymn. Also, in hymnals with both words and music, authors and composers have been confused in entering the data. As you can see, compensating for all these variants is not an easy editorial task.

In addition to the foregoing editorial challenges endemic to hymn publishing, problems arise related to spellings, contractions, abbreviations, and devices used by editors and printers to make words fit between the staves of music. For instance, we find "bless'd" or "blest" versus "blessed," "sun-shine" or "sun shine" rather than "sunshine," "tho't" instead of "thought," or "the eternal" contracted to "th'eternal" whether intended by the author or not. We have attempted to resolve all such difficulties by standardizing them to a

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single format, at least within all occurrences of the same first line. Words such as "Oh" standardized to "O" and "Saviour" to "Savior" have been attempted throughout the whole of the more than one million entries. Of necessity, editing of non-English entries for spelling, capitalization, and diacritics must wait for succeeding versions, or we would be another five years finishing.

Finally, doing data entry from the IBM cards or the microfilm is in fact working from secondary sources, and the editing of the results, at least in this first version of the CD-ROM, is completely dependent upon the accuracy of the original typists of the cards and the data entry persons during this most recent project. Furthermore, certain editorial decisions have been made which cannot be substantiated until the whole of the database can be cross checked with the original hymnals.

Why, you may wonder, would we want to produce this database with its errors, inconsistencies, and omissions? For one thing, flawed though it may be, version 1.0 of the *First Line Index* will make it possible to correct and complete the process of incorporating all hymnals published in the United States and Canada between 1640 and 1978; to incorporate hymnals published since 1978; to add additional fields such as scriptural references; and to link the index to other databases. For another, no larger or better master index to American and Canadian hymns exists.

We expect that this first version on CD-ROM of *The Dictionary of American Hymnology, Parts I & II: Bib-*

liography of American Hymnals and *First Line Index* will be available for sale later this year. Nearly 50 years in the making, the *Dictionary* will be the largest and most comprehensive hymnological database in the world and a wonderful new finding aid and research tool for church musicians, scholars, hymnwriters, composers, and anyone else needing access to hymns published in the United States and Canada. We praise God and thank the hosts of both volunteer and paid workers who have brought it to reality.

In the next issue, in my final column as your Director of Research, I will outline some of the research projects which the *Dictionary* will facilitate, with perhaps some serious and not so serious highlights of my work with the project. Meanwhile, may I suggest that you write a note of appreciation to Mary Louise VanDyke, whose address and email appear on the title page of this journal. More than any other person, Mary Louise has kept the *Dictionary* project alive and pushed it along ever so graciously from a huge collection of some 700 boxes of IBM cards into an electronic format accessible to all. Along the way, she has provided the ultimate in user-friendly service to thousands of Hymn Society members and others. Your cards, letters, and emails would mean so much to her. Thanks, Mary Louise, for your many years of faithful service! ♥

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