

Improving on our Pettee difficulties: updates and tags

Philip Harvey

Pettee Classification update

On April 2nd 1997 I received a letter from John Trotti at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. The main gist was that updating of the classification had been slow but that UTS was now in the last phase of reducing all changes and putting the whole update on computer disk. At that time they had only gone through the first few letters of the classification, and Trotti predicted much hard work and expense before the whole project was finished. He did not spell out how comprehensive this update was, how up-to-date it was prepared to be, or whether or not it was an update concerned primarily with American numberings.

My colleague Hal Cain sent out a request for information on Atlantis (ATLA discussion list) and I have collated the findings as follows:

Dottie Thomason at Union Seminary in Virginia says (5 June 1997)¹ that it is hard to estimate how many libraries in the States now use Pettee. Subscriptions to *Pettee Matters*, last issue August 1992, numbered 13 in Australia and 43 in the US and elsewhere. So something like a quarter of users are probably in Australia. The general vagueness of information displayed by those who did respond to our call is an indication in itself of Pettee being a dying star in America.

Libraries in the United States continue to change over to LC Classification. Reasons given include:

- Nothing is done about updating Pettee.
- Pettee is an outdated classification system.
- LC classification is taking over, if it hasn't already, as the preferred system in the US
- It is easier to manage LC numbers on computers systems, especially when they are already on the record.
- Faculties and library committees are persuaded by LC's universal acceptance, ie. it pays.
- An inability to find staff who have even heard of Pettee, let alone how to apply it
- High costs associated with original classification.
- Confusion of some students who use Pettee for the first time (Note: how Pettee could be more confusing than LC at first glance escapes my understanding!)

Julia Pettee herself would not have been surprised by these developments. "In my opinion, in the very nature of things, neither a classification of knowledge nor a book classification can have more than a limited period of usefulness. Our library catalogues have much more chance of permanence than our library classifications and will probably be useful long after the present topical arrangement of our books has grown hopelessly out of date."²

None of this affects us very much though, as we are not in a position to change our classification overnight. (It is worth remembering that some of these libraries are larger college libraries.) Nevertheless we have reached a point where authority for updates is at a critical impasse. As Alvaro Perez, Library Director at Latin American Biblical University, Costa Rica, said to us in his email, "updating the system in an isolated way is like ... creating islands with no bridges between them"³ ie. there is a lack of standards.

This leaves Australian classifiers in a perennial quandary. What are we to do? Wait for the Trotti updates? Or go ahead with our own irrespective of what may come out of Virginia? Until now we have done the latter, and it is my feeling that, in many respects, we have reached the point of no return. We simply cannot backtrack now to suit the changes (whatever they may be) that Trotti adds to his new edition. What kind of newness will there be in this new edition? We might find we are still leading the US with original numbering and that Trotti's additions will be too late.

As it is, we wait and watch. Not a very satisfactory situation. And while we wait, I see no reason not to continue with the antipodean practice we have set in train: pool our numbers, discuss them in Pettee Sessions at the annual conference, come to some mutual agreement, maintain the new numbers as our own Australian standard. The practice we have recently begun of refresher courses, both at the local chapter and national levels, has come of necessity and is a welcome boon to our handling and understanding of the Union System.

Communication with those at Richmond, Virginia, continues. In her original letter Dottie Thomason said that John Trotti "is trying to get the whole schedule, additions and all put into Wordperfect on a disc."⁴ I asked her what was meant by "additions", were they simply the additions listed in Pettee Matters from time to time or were they a systematic update. I asked if this was intended as the long-awaited new revised edition. I also asked what UTS intended doing with the disk. Would a disk or hard copy of same be available to libraries? Could it be accessed or downloaded on the Internet? Was this update to be treated as authoritative? Replies to these questions are still coming, but then I am presuming whatever is happening at Virginia will take some time yet to emerge.

MARC tags with Pettee numbers

Certain libraries in the States use specific approved tags for their Pettee numbers, though when these records are downloaded the tag changes to suit their local system. We cannot do this at present in Australia, mainly because the tags are not used on ABN.

The two signs of hope in this area are the 079 (Other Classification Number = OCN) and 084 (Other Call Number = OTN) Tags.

079 is specially devised for schemes other than the major ones, but to get Pettee on it requires an application to ABN for the letter in the first indicator. OCN would then simply need to have P added to it and we could fill in our numbers at will. The feeling is that at the present stage in ABN's history it is unlikely to do anything about new requests for tags. However, if we wait and see what happens next, the National Library

may be quite prepared at some future date to accept our proposal for a Pettee Tag at 079. The main thing we need to do is have a united front on this issue, with all ANZTLA libraries that use the system supporting the proposal.

084 has a Subfield 2 that can be filled in with the letter z. This z permits classification codes other than those listed in the 084 introduction to be used in the subfield a. In other words, 084 can be used now using the subfields a and 2 for Pettee numbers.

At the Joint Theological Library we think that 079 is ultimately more useful than 084. The sooner we can make a request for a Pettee code at 079 the better. Until then, if we are agreed, we could use 084 until such time as we get approval for 079. Of course, if your need is simply to see what other libraries have given as their classification number this can easily be answered by searching the holdings statement attached to any ABN record.

Endnotes

1. Thomason, Dottie. (thomason@utsva.edu). (1997, June 5). Pettee classification. Email to Hal Cain and Philip Harvey.
2. Pettee, Julia. "The organization of knowledge and its bearing upon library classification", Archives, the Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, [n.d.], in Graham, M. Patrick, et al, (eds.) (1996). *The American Theological Library Association : essays in celebration of the first fifty years*. p.192.
3. Perez, Alvaro. (bsebila@sol.racsa.co.cr). (1997, June 9) Message from A Perez. Email to Hal Cain and Philip Harvey.
4. Thomason, *ibid*.

**The Benedictine Community of New Norcia, Western Australia
is holding**

a New Norcia Studies Day on Saturday 20th June 1998, 10am – 3pm
at St Ildephonsus College, New Norcia. Speakers and discussions will focus on the theme : *Heritage and Development : a discussion of New Norcia's future*. Cost including lunch and refreshments : \$20.00 waged person, \$10.00 concession. More details from Wendy Pearce on phone 08 96548018, fax 08 96548097, or email norciawa@newnorcia.wa.edu.au. Register by sending full name/address/phone and fax plus cheque to Wendy Pearce, Archivist, Benedictine Community, New Norcia 6509 by 11th June 1998.

The 1997 edition of *The ABTAPL Union List of Periodicals*, edited by Evelyn Cornell, is now available. The List (200 pages, A4 photocopied in spiral binding) includes the philosophy, theology and religious studies journal holdings of 37 different institutions in the UK and should prove a useful tool in tracing the locations of titles. Publication data is given for some titles. It is hoped that the coverage of bibliographical details will increase with future editions.

Cost of *The ABTAPL Union List of Periodicals* is GBP12.00, p&p GBP3.00. Cheques should be made payable to A.B.T.A.P.L., and sent to : Ms Evelyn Cornell, The Library, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS. For further information please email evelyn.cornell@kcl.ac.uk.