

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 3, 2021.

Universes of Library Cards

Until now, I have been writing mostly in this series about the 22-member Westmoreland Library Network, which is both a Federated System (as described last time and archived at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org>) and a District Center among 29 under the PA Department of Education, Office of Commonwealth Libraries. The WLN's patrons are served under a single library card as is pictured here. Westmoreland County is still not a large universe of library cards in comparison to some others, and there are other library universes that serve larger groups of members outside of the world of public libraries. Let me explain by example.

The American Chemical Society (ACS) says this of itself: "We provide information, education, career services, professional development and engagement programs to help our members and scientists thrive in an ever-changing global economy." If that sounds something like library service, it is.

It is library service on a grander but more specialized scale. The ACS publishes more than 65 peer-reviewed journals of its own, in which its members publish scientific articles. These journals are at the core of the ACS collection, but not at all the whole of its access. And the ACS has more than 152,000 members worldwide from more than 130 countries, so journals, science books, readers and more make for a global library community.

Every member of that ACS community has a "Magic Library Card"; it is the ACS membership card itself, each of which has a membership number, a number that opens an on-line door to newly published materials and an archive going back many years. The early ACS as a much simpler and smaller entity was founded in 1876. Its very sophisticated, archival "library" has its origin in 1895 and is known now as the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS); CAS is a division of the American Chemical Society.

"CAS innovations have fueled chemical research through development of the CAS RegistrySM and CAS databases which contain invaluable information for chemical scientists, including SciFinder[®] and STN[®]." These trademark names, too much to write about in this one article, designate proprietary scientific databases and searching instruments within a body of work that is the chemical enterprise and more. STN covers the broader range of scientific literature, as well as intellectual property.

Chemists and others depend on these on-line collections to ferret out what is already known within an informed and comprehensive database. That is the way of science. In fact, I will say that the model should be a way of public life as well, such that we all might be less susceptible to the swarms of harmful nonsense that otherwise get published by vested interests as a part of our everyday experiences.

The nonsense requires no card to access, is not kept to an informed standard, and has no positive value. Chemists and other scientists do not abide that, cannot abide that to

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be successful professionally, and that is why they draw on the ACS and its very extensive library resources, as well as other societies like it.

Our public libraries, including WLN libraries, strive to present this kind of capacity to the general public as well, on a much broader range of subjects and to a wider range of ages, and that is what the WLN's Magic Library Card and the American Chemical Society's member's card and all libraries have in common. It is the public library that teaches our children to use a library in the first place, to eventually know how to use a professional library properly. That teaching is what makes public libraries most relevant in a modern world.

Charles B. Greenberg
Immediate Past President, WLN Board