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The Format That Time Forgot!!! The Return of the Microcards [<Insert Scream Here>](#)

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[TRAIL Logo - Technical Report Archive & Image Library]
[CRL Logo - Center for Research Libraries]

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Microcard Format: History & Collections

Format History

- Developed in the 1940s, hybrid of catalog card + content
- Anticipated wide dissemination, primarily to academic libraries
- Short period of production/adoption (1940s-1960s); eclipsed by microfiche (Jamison, 1988)

Problems Associated With The Format

- Requires unique micro-opaque card readers
- Developed to save shelf space, less so for patron use (Bacon, 1950)

AEC Collection History

- Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) adopts the format for publications in the 1950s (Jamison, 1988, p.10).
- "Forty-nine depository libraries have been established throughout the country...The Commission has authorized establishment of 15 additional depositories. When completed, this library system is intended to make available at least one collection of nonclassified documents in each metropolitan area of 500,000 or more persons" (Strauss, 1956).

[Image of a Microcard reader]

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TRAIL Microcard Digitization Project

Project Intro

- Technical Report Archive & Image Library (TRAIL) has been digitizing U.S. government-produced technical reports for 15+ years.
 - Active volunteer group of sci-tech and government documents librarians
 - 51 institutional members in 2021
 - 80,000+ print technical reports available to date (open access)
- Microcard Pilot project
 - Pilot was to test digitizing this format
 - 1,000 card pilot to identify workflows, partnerships, and benchmarks (Milburn & Phillips, 2019)

[Image of a micro-opaque card with 22 pages, titled "Problems in Planning Facilities for Radiochemical Process Development" by A. Charles Jealous.]

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Project Partnerships and Status

Microcard Digitization Project Elements

- Content: University of Arizona - AEC microcard collection
 - 33,000 reports (50,000 microcards) from University of Arizona
 - AEC collections vary in size. An informal survey across four institutions indicated a range of materials from 22.4 linear feet to 109.7 linear feet of microcards
- Digitization: Commercial vendor
- Post-processing: University of North Texas (UNT) & TRAIL Processing Group
 - UNT takes digital file of entire card and divides into report pages & adds metadata
 - TRAIL Processing Group will create catalog records

Project Status

- Delivery of microcards to vendor from November 2020 to May 2021
 - 100% of microcards delivered to vendor
 - 59% of batches have been scanned
 - 2% have been uploaded to [UNT TRAIL Microcard Collection](#)

[Image of one open drawer of micro-opaque cards, with three rows. The drawer is completely full.]

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Project Outcomes

What does this mean for librarians/libraries?

- Open Access - available to all
- Search interface (it's good!)
- Sci/tech content rediscovered
- Free up physical space - confidently discard
 - TRAIL is saving a physical set of microcards
 - Libraries can contribute to fill gaps in digitized set
- Adds to the corpus of AEC materials in the TRAIL collection
- Easily accessible, readily available

To learn more or get involved, contact jen.kirk@usu.edu.

[TRAIL 15 Logo]

[Screenshot of browsing titles within the TRAIL microcard collection]

[Screenshot of title page and digital library navigation for the report: "Kinetics of Alkylation and Acylation of Nickel Dipivaloyimethide"]

References

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Milburn, M., & Phillips, M. (2019, May 22). *Breaking Down Barriers to Accessing Technical Literature on Opaque Microcards*. Texas Digital Library. <https://tdl-ir.tdl.org/handle/2249.1/156389>

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