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Looking Backward and Forward

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LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

ELLIS MOUNT

The change in the title for this section (adding “And Forward”) is due to a suggestion made at the Sci-Tech Division’s annual meeting by a member. She’d noticed that each one of these essays seemed to relate some past event or phenomenon to the present or the future. Since this was what I had in mind when this feature was added, I’m following her suggestion.

In certain disciplines, especially physics, there are great numbers of preprints of articles presumably already submitted to various publications for possible acceptance. In order for scientists to make use of the data contained therein, for years it has been common for authors to send copies of their preprints to their friends and to selected universities, particularly to physics libraries at those institutions.

The Spring 1967 issue of *Sci-Tech News* contains an article by Robert N. Ting, then head of the Physics Library at UCLA, proposing a new way of handling preprints. (1) He cited suggestions made by prominent scientists, including one by

Dr. Michael Moravesik of Lawrence Radiation Laboratory that all preprints be copied in quantity and distributed to some “300 preprint libraries” in the world. The editor of *Physical Review*, Dr. Simon Pasternack, understandably took the position that his journal would refuse to consider for publication any “paper for which more than 75 to 100 preprints had been distributed.”

Ting proposed that the Sci-Tech Division manage a National Preprint Clearinghouse to collect all preprints and then send out a weekly accession list to all interested libraries. Costs would be underwritten by a government subsidy. He proposed a simple listing of authors and titles, alphabetized by authors.

Without doing a lot of checking, it is safe to say that the Sci-Tech Division never got involved in this project. What did happen is that one library, the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center Library, did initiate a publication, beginning in 1969, entitled *Preprints in Particles and Fields*. This weekly listing, still going, lists new high-energy preprints

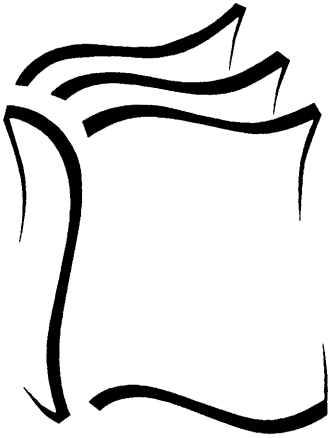
received by that library, giving authors, titles, and preprint numbers. The entry for each item also indicates whether the subject matter involves experimentation, theory, instruments, etc. A humorously-named section entitled "Anti-Preprints" lists published versions of former preprints.

Perhaps the areas of science most interested in some organized way to identify and locate preprints are being taken care of by this publication. On the

other hand, are only the high-energy physicists concerned about such ephemeral documents? Are there other fields that might well adopt a similar plan for their preprints? Why not think about the role preprints play in your fields of endeavor?

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1. Ting, Robert N. Preprints and the physics library—a crisis and a proposal. *Sci-Tech News*. 26:11-12; 1967 Spring.

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