

On the Survey of a Research Library by Scholars

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A *Faculty Survey of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries*, made for the Bibliographical Planning Committee of Philadelphia and published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1940, has long been hopelessly out of print. While we have recently thought of attempting a new edition of the volume in order to bring it up to date and reveal the progress that has been made since the survey was first issued, the writer has recently learned with some surprise that the volume was so well regarded outside the Philadelphia circle that a brief report on the method by which it was produced might be desirable.

The lamentable fact is that most of the raw material on which the volume is based has not been preserved. Any very full exposition of the methodology, therefore, is not to be thought of, but it has been possible to piece together the following brief account.

The Bibliographical Planning Committee of Philadelphia grew out of the effort to bring about a greater degree of integration and cooperation among more than 150 libraries through the compilation of the Union Library Catalogue of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area. It was supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which was administered by the University of Pennsylvania. The Committee was engaged in the compilation of a very summary classified tabular *Guide to Re-*

search Materials in Libraries of the Philadelphia Area, and it felt the need for a much more detailed analysis than existed of the holdings of the larger libraries such as those of the University of Pennsylvania, the College of Physicians, the Academy of Natural Sciences, and the Franklin Institute. It therefore attempted to stimulate some of these libraries to undertake self-surveys of their own collections. The University of Pennsylvania which was strongly represented on the Committee and cooperating whole-heartedly in its work, promptly responded to the appeal.

In September 1939 Dr. George W. McClelland, the Provost of the University, wrote to all department heads asking them for the names of the members of their departments who had most to do with library materials and presumably the best knowledge of collections. When this information had been secured, it was planned to draw up a complete list of the fields to be covered by the survey,¹ and of the persons designated to carry out the evaluation. Dr. Albert C. Baugh, Professor of English and Chairman of the Faculty Library Committee, was appointed to direct the survey. Meanwhile, Dr. Conyers Read, Professor of English History, and a very active and interested member of the Bibliographical Planning Committee, as its Chairman, undertook to prepare as a kind of pilot project, or model, a survey of our library holdings in English history, the

¹ For the classification see the *Survey* as finally published, pp. IX-X.

subject of his particular competence. This he had finished within a month in a document of some eight pages which the Bibliographical Planning Committee then had mimeographed in fifty copies for distribution to faculty members who were to be charged with making the remainder of the survey.

Some ten days later Dr. Baugh held a conference of thirty-five members of the faculty to set the plan in motion. These were all persons very familiar with the library who had agreed to evaluate the books in their particular fields. Copies of Dr. Read's pilot survey were placed in their hands, and in the discussion which followed much attention was given to establishing a common understanding as to what was to be expected. Dr. Baugh announced that he expected to have all reports in his hands, ready for editing, within ten days or two weeks.

Exactly three weeks later Dr. Baugh was able to present to the Bibliographical Planning Committee the first draft of a completed survey, which was enthusiastically described in the minutes of the meeting as "an exceptionally fine job, done in an amazingly short time—almost unique in library literature." The secret of its success had evidently been the provision of adequate and competent secretarial help and the cooperative willingness of a group of scholarly experts who were very familiar with their segments of the library collections, to take the necessary time away from their other duties to complete their assignments promptly.

Three members of the Bibliographical Planning Committee were assigned to read the manuscript critically and note inconsistencies and important lacunae. Thereafter there is abundant evidence of the work of the staff of the Bibliographical Planning Committee in reference verification,

minor editorial revisions and corrections, and the ironing out of inconsistencies which were required in order to prepare the manuscript for publication. Dr. Baugh asked for a little more time for some revisions and for the inclusion of sections on the business and law libraries and on certain special collections which had so far been left out of consideration.²

Two weeks later Dr. Baugh reported that the preparation of the additional material was well under way, and Mr. C. Seymour Thompson, the university librarian, had undertaken to contribute a section on the bibliographies and other reference tools in the main or general library. A period of one additional month was then allowed for the completion of all additional material by the contributors, and arrangements were made for the writing of the preface and the introduction by Dr. Read and Dr. Baugh. The staff of the Bibliographical Planning Committee undertook to prepare the index—one which, it must be acknowledged, has not proved wholly adequate.

By January 23, 1940, only two and one-half weeks beyond the deadline, the completed manuscript of the *Survey* was in the office of the Bibliographical Planning Committee and was in actual use in the study of the research resources of the Philadelphia area. Meanwhile plans had been made for its printing by offset lithography and for its distribution through the University of Pennsylvania Press. By the middle of April the volume had appeared. The total production cost of its 202 pages in paper covers, in 500 copies (there were actually two printings) was \$800.

Apart from the speed and economy with which the volume was produced, the follow-

(Continued on page 308)

² By the time the finished manuscript was ready for printing the number of contributors had grown to eighty-two.

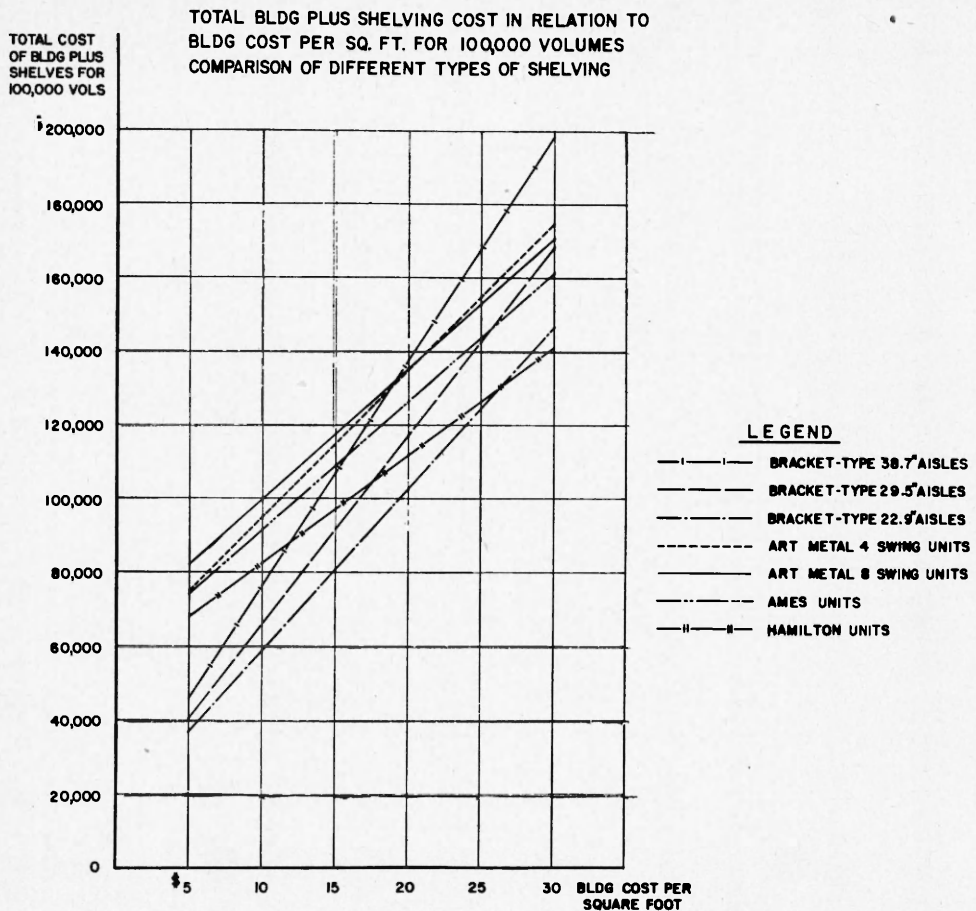


Figure 5

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(Continued from page 291)

ing features seem worthy of note. It was a survey made "not by the distributors of books but by the users of books. . . . It represents an appraisal of the library collections of the University by the experts in the several fields of knowledge represented on the University faculties." Though it was mainly confined to the libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, it occasionally

reaches out and calls attention to other important collections in the Philadelphia area. It is designed to be definite and factual and to reveal weaknesses as well as strength. Though it cannot be claimed that the sin of self-glorification has been wholly avoided, it perhaps comes as near to objectivity as could be hoped for in any self-survey.