

Charging Systems

Charging Systems. By Helen Thornton Geer. Chicago: American Library Association, 1955. 192p. \$3.75.

This comprehensive handbook was designed primarily to be a guide to the selection of a charging system which would best meet the needs of an individual library. From this one might infer that the book would be of little value to already established systems which are satisfactory enough not to be creating pressures for consideration of change. But this is not the case: in the first place, the charging system in any library should be questioned periodically in the light of technological and system improvements which are constantly being made. Recommendations by surveyors, consultants, and evaluative study groups show that many libraries are using antiquated or unsuitable systems, resulting in waste of staff time, irritation to the reader caused by mistakes, and unnecessary delay in service.

Many large and complex libraries can advantageously install systems in branches, certain reading rooms, etc. which are different from the one best suited to the main circulation point. For example, a single-card system like McBee, using no book card but exploiting one card to serve as call slip, classed circulation file, and time file, is out of place in an open-shelf reading room, where the reader already has the book in hand. Many research libraries have college or other open-shelf collections. Such collections should not employ the general circulation system, thus creating the absurd situation of having a reader fill out a call slip for a book he already has.

The author has presented the advantages and disadvantages of 17 different charging systems and also has described the routines for them involved in charging, discharging, and handling renewals, reserves, and overdues. However, it is not necessary to read the entire book, for happily she has also given an outline of these advantages and disadvantages in terms of procedures, personnel needed, equipment, and patron relations. Almost any library which has not recently reviewed its charging system in the

light of the many existing ones could to advantage exploit Miss Geer's compact study. Libraries attempting to do this will find the task much easier because of her compilation. Until now, it has been necessary for us to dig this information out of the literature as best we could. Close study of several of the systems best known to the reviewer shows that the author is correct in technical as well as general points for those systems; from this it may reasonably be deduced that she has been equally faithful in the presentation of the systems which the reviewer is not qualified to evaluate.

These practical handbooks and manuals treating various facets of the more earthly aspects of library operation not only serve to answer handily the questions we want answered, but also serve to call to our attention the desirability of reviewing procedures which we sometimes too long neglect. This handbook is one of the better ones.—*William H. Jesse, University of Tennessee Libraries.*

Reference Services

The Development of Reference Services through Academic Traditions, Public Library Practice and Special Librarianship. By Samuel Rothstein. (ACRL Monograph No. 14) Chicago: Association of College and Reference Libraries, 1955. ix, 124p. Paper, \$2.75; cloth, \$3.25.

Dr. Rothstein limits his survey of reference services to research libraries in the United States and to the years 1875 to 1940. A final chapter looks briefly at developments since 1940, including documentation. He cites a published statement distinguishing between reference librarians and documentalists, a statement which Dr. Rothstein answers succinctly and with evident pleasure.

Particularly interesting is the picture of the American scholar at mid-nineteenth century, a gifted and often wealthy individual with his own library, independent of other scholars and institutions, and dependent for publication on commercial agencies. In contrast the scholar of the middle twentieth century is a professional working with one or more institutions and dependent on

libraries for his research because of his own lack of wealth and primarily because of the mounting mass of research materials. He demands easy access to these materials and he also demands reference service of a high order.

The development of this reference service is the subject of Dr. Rothstein's study. He sees the public library as the initial agent promoting personal aid as the core of library service and reference service in large public libraries developing from this simple aid to

readers. Its development in university libraries lagged for various reasons, notably the attitude of administration and faculty towards reference librarians.

The author has skilfully traced the evolution of subject specialization in the general research library and university library, special librarianship in the legislative and municipal reference fields and, since the first World War, in the industrial research library.

Dr. Rothstein's analysis of the forces that have shaped the evolution of reference service is masterful. Only a well-controlled mind could see the pattern in so many fields of reference service and present each fully, clearly and readably, pointing out the factors of policies, practices and relationships in their development.

This ACRL Monograph should be read by all reference librarians, and perhaps with benefit by library administrators. It has substance and meaning for many of us.—*Florence M. Gifford, head, General Reference Division, Cleveland Public Library.*

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