

The College Library: New Demands and New Approaches

By WYMAN W. PARKER

IN THESE VERY RECENT YEARS, there is an insistent and importunate throbbing in the life of the college library. There was, of course, a sustaining flow beneath the library portals between the World Wars, but now that leisurely meandering stream is quickened and focused by stimulants stronger and more lasting than those prophylactics for tired blood. There is actually developing in the college community an attitude toward the college librarians which is akin to the concept of librarians and teachers held by the general public in the nineteenth century.

The last half of that century was a particularly good time for libraries and librarians; only the sky was the limit. The public library movement was surging forward in a great ground swell, and access to more and more books was believed to be the sole answer to the model republic's concept of equal opportunity and true democracy for each and all. It was found, however, that books in generous quantities are not the great "equalizers." But books do open the gates of horn described by Plato, where true dreams issue. And we now appreciate the fact that the individual is curtailed by his own limitations of personality, adaptability, and mental capacity.

The librarians, too, were giants in those days: Antonio Panizzi, Bulkeley Bandinel, Eduoard Edwards, and Richard Garnett in England; Joseph Green

Mr. Parker is Librarian of Wesleyan University. This paper was read to the meeting of the College Libraries Section of ACRL at Beloit College, July 20, 1963.

Cogswell, Ainsworth R. Spofford, William Frederick Poole, and Charles C. Jewett in the United States—all men of vision and action, builders of great collections and moulders of concepts to which we today have frequent occasion to pay homage. They felt some of the limitations we do—but those were the physical ones and not the psychological ones we also contend with: for them it was time, space, and money. They never had enough money for books, buildings, or staff, nor were their communications good enough to acquire satisfying numbers of books on the continent in spite of their occasional trips there. On the other hand, in those days that enthusiastic American bookseller Henry Stevens of Vermont told Jared Sparks he thought "that 1,000 volumes of good American books in Austria would be equal to half a dozen Presbyterian missionaries and two steam engines!"¹ Then American librarians bewailed the lack of book material in America, yet they managed over the years to amass good basic col-

¹ Herbert Baxter Adams, *The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks* (2 vols., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1893), II, 522 n.

lections through careful and persistent purchase and the judicious use of exchange programs such as that at the Smithsonian, which later became an international agreement.

We have found in this century that books and buildings are not enough—for example, look at the hundreds of Carnegie small-town libraries which remain like those gruesome vaults in cemeteries—open for deposit only. What was needed as well as books and buildings was a spirit of inquiry and a lust for learning which is a highly infectious virus passed by contact with a provocative and exciting teacher who is passionately committed to the search for truth and the transmission of this love of life through learning.

This new exciting climate of opportunity seems in large part due to the enormous breakthrough in science—knowledge of recognizable frontiers—in space, in the body, in the mind—which may be conquered. The race with Russia for the moon has accelerated our entire educational program and has touched off a beneficial investigation of the curriculum and methods of teaching and learning. There is now a curiosity about the physical world akin to that of Elizabethan England which will bring in great understanding of the world and the body—the macrocosm and the microcosm.

We all feel it; students and faculty alike come to the library with urgent problems. There is a new respect for our profession, although we have yet to compete with the Peace Corps for recruits. There is even a possibility that the library *could be* the heart of the campus; at least maybe the library can contain and care for the heart, which, of course, is a true symbol of those great books we do own. Even an ALA conference gives evidence of preoccupation with those problems with its Conference Within a Conference. When before has this concerned the whole profession? Perhaps

college librarians muffed the ball and the profession as a whole has picked it up? Anyway, it is preferable to consider this a problem needing the sympathetic attention of all librarians representing the entire book resources of the nation.

The fact is that we all have more *and better* students than ever before. They are bursting with energy and enthusiasm—and, alack, their horizons are boundless. This, of course, is good as far as their ideas go but it forces the librarians to attempt to satisfy limitless interests. There is now more advanced work in the colleges than ever before. Our faculty members demand more effort and expect a higher standard of performance than previously. Honors work or the individual project is in evidence on every campus and is increasing constantly. In truth, the undergraduate curriculum has become so accelerated that in many instances a fine student goes to graduate school from college knowing well the tools of research while the superior scholar may even gain an AB having had the equivalent of a first year of graduate study.

Each of us can testify, too, that faculties have become more demanding in the library. We know professors expect more of their students, and we are gratified that they expect more of the library. They want more materials, more reference services, and more and better all-round library services. They expect more specialized knowledge of reference materials and bibliographies; they also expect personal introductions to librarians responsible for great concentrations of materials. Their work, too, has become more exacting; young instructors have more complicated PhD topics and the established scholar's research is ever more specialized.

Librarians now feel a greater importance at budget time—at least one has to entertain the insistent requests of numerous department heads for additional book funds. Deans and provosts are now more

interested in the details of library statistics in their continuing course of a series of applications for research money, Ford funds, National Science Foundation grants, or just plain government money for buildings and scholarships. And it is a wise librarian that then and there makes clear to the dean that five per cent is the accepted figure which should be earmarked from such funds to take care of the use by grantees of books and building. Yes, Mark Hopkins' log is indeed hollow, but happily it is stuffed with books and newspapers on film.

Now the college library has its limitations. In addition to budget restrictions, the stacks can usually hold only several thousand titles. In spite of the new instructor who expects the library to have nearly the holdings of his graduate institution—in his field only, of course—we ought to be glad there is a limit to the collection. After all, the college's chief claim to its status is that it is selective. The college curriculum gives the student a limited choice of courses in those disciplines which the college philosophy holds essential for a fine education. Thus the college library presents on its shelves, more or less consciously, those books which we believe most significant for use in this learning procedure. We should be as proud of our selection of books as the faculty is of its tight curriculum. Certainly the standards ought to be commensurate and numbers are not always a virtue.

Variety and range, however, are essential, for we want students to have the same opportunity to choose among quantities of books as they must have to consider various ideas. Their decision is important only as it strengthens the process of discrimination between the good and the bad, the true and the false, satisfaction and restlessness, virtue and dishonor, wisdom as preferable to just knowledge. We want students to learn the process of choice which they may subse-

quently apply to business and profession. Surely lawyers, for example, cannot learn all the details of every business they may have to represent. But they know the techniques to acquire enough facts upon which to bring the legal process to bear.

There are certain accepted aids and axioms for selectivity with which most of us are acquainted. For example, in buying books one follows the curriculum and selects in accordance with strengths and interests of departments. If your college offers no courses in home economics you need only the standard text on nutrition and *The Joy of Cooking* and possibly *Casserole Cookery*. Paperbacks have eased some of the burdens of librarians while enriching students with ready texts and, we hope, a pride of ownership. At least the frustrations of the reserve collection have been lifted in many areas, particularly for the literature courses, where selection of required texts is definitely based upon paperback availability. When book funds are allocated to departments it is helpful to have each department's book buying authorized (or centralized) by one designated representative. Many departments will consider their policies of library purchasing at staff meetings at the beginning of the academic year and review annually their periodical list for deletions, additions, and back file investments.

The college librarians are responsible for the full utilization of the campus book collection. In addition to sitting on one's hands and waiting for the public to call for a specific title, there are things that librarians can do to make the collection known. Good librarians not only know their collections well but they also know the faculty and what to call to the attention of various professors (such as books received as gifts; books purchased; uncataloged books in the attic; and books being published which should be purchased by the department). They know

what projects students are working on, and they help them construct bibliographies. It is important, for example, that the library receive early notice from the honors college (or any similar project on campus) of the assignment of individual thesis topics so that appointments can be made by the reference staff to discuss them with the students.

Instruction in the use of the library (for freshmen and new faculty), tours of the building and its services, talks before specific classes, and just leading a student to concentrations of books in his area of interest—all these count in spreading the word about the library. News of books can be disseminated in various ways; for example through lists of new accessions, special bulletins, library publications, college news articles, and by sight of the book itself—on a designated new-book shelf, displays on tables and in odd corners, major exhibits, minor exhibits, and even by sending the book through the campus mail to a likely and responsible professor. In this regard, the *Dartmouth College Library Bulletin* since its revival in 1957 has done outstanding work in pointing out good collections of material within the library that might be exploited for fruitful research. *Books and Libraries at Kansas* treats of larger concentrations of material there, and the recently discontinued *Johns Hopkins Economic Library Selections* gave fine guidance in an important field.

Finally, there is the problem of trying to secure enough in the way of materials for student honors work and faculty research, which always appears to be more wide-reaching than the present collection. There comes a time when the topics assigned do not make any sense in terms of one's collection and one's collecting policy. Here is where self-restraint is called for, by librarian and professor alike. It is not easy to call off a particular thesis topic but it surely makes sense if

none of the student's material can be located on campus. One must be sure, however, that every reasonable effort to satisfy a logical demand is made before declaring an impasse. The answer to a professor's insistence is "no funds." If he can get the additional funds—and if the purchase makes some sense in the planned development of an area—then everyone is ahead. It is increasingly possible to obtain such research funds from a wide variety of small foundations and individual donors, but, new areas cannot be opened for course offerings without special underwriting for adequate library coverage. No one really expects the already strained library book budget gladly to envelope the kind of incubus dreamed up by some overly-enthusiastic professor busily riding the specialties of his subject. The faculty can appreciate a conservative administration's not giving early financial support in such cases.

Several new factors have entered the picture to ease the accessibility of library materials. Some old techniques have become newly prominent when adapted to research work. Photolithography has recently been applied to the reproduction of back files of periodicals as well as to the duplication of library catalogs. Thus we are finally going to get the entire *British Museum Catalog* as used in Panizzi's famous circular reading room, and fabulously difficult-to-obtain issues of periodicals and sets are now available for just plain money, such as the *Transactions of the Royal Society of London* from Vol. 1 (1655) and the *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo* of Moscow from Vol. 1 (1931).

Microtext has at last become a substantial part of the research portion of libraries. Recent dissertations are available on microfilm for a price through a deposit of master films in Ann Arbor. (As an aside, let us not forget that tremendous archive of half a million Ger-

man dissertations at MILC.) Such great ventures as the Evans titles (all books printed in or about America up through 1800) and the nineteenth-century *British Session Papers* are available, on Readex cards. Even greater concepts are definitely projected such as the STC and Wing catalog titles (all books printed in English and in England up through 1700). It is likely the whole document production of a foreign government or all the periodicals of an entire language may be at hand well before the last quarter of this century. These ingenious cards and films can easily be mailed, transported, borrowed, loaned, burned, or torn without undue concern, for replacements can be secured from master copy in the publisher's vaults.

The securing of articles in periodicals not held on campus has been expedited by the sale of photocopies, and even the text of modest-sized books can be acquired in Xerox copy. For a decade certain periodicals have been unavailable on interlibrary loan, and it is only a question of time before no periodical will be available on loan. By use of such camera and contact copy we can easily fill in missing pages, volumes, years, and sets for comparatively modest costs. This will have a tendency to tighten our collections, making them more complete in some areas, and prompt us to throw out, sell, or swap unrelated fragments. Thus the book collection can be tuned-in, and toned-up to present an entity and not a magpie gathering.

College librarians can do each other good service by the exchange of information on technical and mechanical advances which can be of positive use in the library. These are areas now being exploited, knowledge of which can be helpful to the librarian in his task of acting as a clearinghouse of information for the campus. The electronic storage and retrieval of library material has been con-

finied to remote-from-campus activity such as the great government research agencies. But now, with the American Society of Metals literature being processed at Western Reserve University's Center for Documentation and Communications Research, it all comes considerably closer. If one knows of the existence of such aids in his field, he can be ingenious about securing access to them.

Cooperation is not new to librarians but there is now a new importance and urgency for the joint use of materials. MILC and HILC have shown that there are ways for both large and small institutions to gain from common access to valuable materials. And ways—unconventional, perhaps, but workable, which is more valid—can be found if librarians *want* to cooperate and can be constructive about it. Combined lists of periodical holdings for an area, exchange of information about unwanted or unused material, publicity about great strengths in definite fields, liberality in loan privileges for students of neighboring institutions—all are things in the air—and all have the virtue of expanding one's holdings and services to help meet the larger demands. Cooperative storage of books and films, cooperative purchase of books and films, and the cooperative use of these and other resources of the area, can all be possible given the will to work it out.

The twentieth century frontier in the academic library world may be the librarian. They—we have been wonderfully cooperative in the past with interlibrary loan, and in building up the home collection. Now to extend the services and resources of the college library, ingenuity and the will-to-cooperate must be employed. Money and mechanical contrivances can only go so far—thereafter it must be a mutual sharing in the use of the truly great resources in the United States. ■■