

PUBLIC LIBRARY
ADMINISTRATION

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By

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TO
E. W. L.
WHO KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS

PREFACE

THIS book is primarily intended as a basic textbook for library school use in the instruction of students of college grade who are preparing themselves for the executive position of librarian. It will also be found useful by those persons who are trying to discover for themselves the elementary principles of the administration of a public library.

Because of the wide scope of the subject, the discussion is limited, so far as possible, to the affairs of the administrator of a free public library, maintained under state laws, having an appointed board of trustees, receiving its main support from direct taxation or municipal appropriation, manned by a staff of approximately thirty people, and giving service to a community of approximately one hundred thousand population. To designate this type the general term "medium-sized" library is used. As a matter of fact, the principles which have the most value for the student are those which are equally applicable to small and large libraries as well.

To make the book more useful to any student, whether he pursues his study in a group or individually, a few selected references are added to each chapter. These may serve to lay emphasis on important considerations, and to amplify matters

which deserve further treatment than can be given them here. The book aims to give the student ideals for his work of managing a library, and to establish in his mind the proper principles of action. The application of those principles he must, as an administrator, work out in his own particular field of endeavor. Experience adds necessary expertness.

Because of the availability of the extensive bibliographies of Messrs. Cannons and Wheeler, no attempt has been made to include a complete bibliography. The references chosen for this book have to do directly with the more limited conception of public library administration, as the direction or management of a public library.

In the formal classroom instruction of the library school, investigation, solution of problems, reports, discussion, and conference are admirably adapted to the treatment of library administration. If actual practice supplements such methods of acquiring knowledge, so much the better. In that case, this text may serve as a point of departure. By way of equipment, there should be available in the files of the school as complete a collection as possible of printed data on business management and control of representative medium-sized American public libraries. With such a wealth of material at hand assignments may be made more intelligently and more satisfactorily for all concerned than through repeated questionnaires. The material would quite

naturally include annual reports, schemes of library service, publicity material, organization data, budget figures, cost data, facts concerning personnel, and printed administrative forms.

Among many other libraries characteristic of the medium-sized type, on which this discussion is based, are the public libraries in these cities: Albany, N. Y.; Davenport, Iowa; Des Moines, Iowa; East Cleveland, Ohio; East Orange, N. J.; Erie, Pa.; Flint, Mich.; Gary, Ind.; Haverhill, Mass.; Houston, Tex.; Kalamazoo, Mich.; Kenosha, Wis.; Manchester, N. H.; New Bedford, Mass.; Peoria, Ill.; Quincy, Mass.; Racine, Wis.; St. Joseph, Mo.; Sioux City, Iowa; Somerville, Mass.; Spokane, Wash.; Springfield, Ill.; Springfield, Mass.; Superior, Ill.; Syracuse, N. Y.; Tacoma, Wash.; and Wichita, Kan.

Here is set down no new thing, nor is any claim made for originality of any kind. But in the quaint phrase of another (Luther Pratt wrote in his *Introduction to arithmetic*, New York, 1824): "I say without diffidence, that the work contains *as much* originality, as any other modern production of the kind; but whether it will be more useful, must be tested by experience."

It is impossible to indicate all the aid and suggestions, acquired by a variety of experience, lavishly given by library school faculties, librarians, students, and laymen. The contribution has been generously made in the hope that librarianship may be ad-

vanced by so much. Both aid and spirit are appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. I am especially indebted to Dean William F. Russell, Teachers College, Columbia University; Ernest J. Reece, School of Library Service, Columbia University; C. Seymour Thompson, University of Pennsylvania Library; Hiller C. Wellman, City Library Association, Springfield, Massachusetts; to Miss Clara Whitehill Hunt, Brooklyn Public Library, and Carl H. Milam, of Chicago, who read the manuscript in its various stages of development and brought to it discerning criticism, based on the fruition of their long professional experience.

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CHAPTER 1

The Librarian as Administrator

LIBRARIANSHIP, in the modern sense of the word, is a new profession. "That the true service of librarianship, as carried on by highly educated and well-trained librarians, ranks as a profession seems established beyond controversy when measured by the [accepted] definitions and criteria. That it is so regarded in the accepted thought of the day is indicated by the recognition accorded it by educational experts, official bodies and government agencies."¹ Librarianship is growing in importance as a community force. It is gradually taking its place with other professions in pecuniary, social, professional, and personal rewards.

It is an uncrowded profession. Indeed, it offers possibly more opportunity than most other professions to men and women of moral worth, wide interests, high purpose, broad culture, technical training, and executive ability, who are willing to devote time and energy to thorough preparation for large social service. Perhaps its most satisfying personal reward is the opportunity it offers for

¹Herbert, C. W. (see References at end of chapter), p. 609.

service in the intellectual and moral life of the community.²

The librarian's duties

The technique of administration is a modern development in librarianship. We have had generations of librarians who were collectors of books, bibliographers, classifiers, catalogers, and scholars. The urge today, following the tendency of the times, is to emphasize the organization and administration of book service. The librarian is the executive officer of the library, responsible directly to the trustees and indirectly to the public. He should be a good executive and administrator, able to organize work effectively, to formulate plans and policies, to make decisions, and to direct the work of others.

The library's service to the community must be efficient, intelligent, and alert. Theoretically, the opportunities for such service are unlimited, and the possible results are immeasurable. In reality, they are no greater than the vision of the administrator and his power to realize his dreams. The spirit and purpose of the library's administration, the effective-

²"An energetic man at the head of a public library can be more than a librarian to the community. He can act as a leader in public thought. . . . he may look forward to a life of great pleasure but of modest income. His position is generally secure and he has an opportunity to assume a place of importance in the community. . . . It is absurd for a young man to enter this profession unless he is attached to his fellow men. . . . He must have a sympathetic spirit and love for the community." (John Cotton Dana, in *Library Journal*, 46: 169, Feb. 15, 1921.)

ness of its organization and its influence in the community, depend to a large degree on the earnest effort, clear vision, and practical common sense of the librarian. About him and his work the library moves, and it is largely he who makes or mars its service. He is the director of the members of the staff, and should be their leader, adviser, inspirer, and friend.

The position of librarian in a progressive city, if properly filled, is a "man-sized" job. In it a strong, capable, well trained, mature man finds play for all his powers. It is a position for which a young man needs years of hard and painstaking preparation. He should not expect appointment to such a position at the end of his library school course, for it is questionable whether at that time he would have sufficient maturity of judgment or variety of experience to fit him for the solution of the problems which would confront him.

The day's work of a librarian possesses interest, action, and complexity. A typical day cannot be described, for variety is a large element in every day's work, and a typical day does not exist. A composite picture is not satisfactory, because such a picture is artificial, and must be shadowed in detail. The librarian of the public library in a city of about 140,000 population has recorded the principal activities of several actual working days, and a part of this record will perhaps serve as well as any avail-

able data to indicate the scope of a librarian's activities in a well administered, medium-sized public library.

"MARCH 24, 1927. THURSDAY

Staff meeting, 8:15 to 9:15. Books on sociology were discussed by three staff members.

Looked over mail, which is always open and ready for consideration.

Dictated letters in reply to four received.

Short conferences with each of three branch librarians, and with one staff member who handed me her resignation to take effect in April. One branch needed cleaning; a second had several reference books mutilated by high school students; the third considered changes in schedule and book needs.

Interviewed a book salesman.

During this time there were several telephone interruptions, most important of which was one from a real estate agent investigating prices for a branch site.

The library editor came in with copy for next month's bulletin, just before lunch.

Lunch in the staff room from 12 to 12:30.

Attended meeting of the Board of Directors of the Women's Department of the Chamber of Commerce, from 12:30 to 1:30. Suggested having Mr. —, of the American Booksellers' Association, give a community book talk in the city and speak before the noon meeting of

the general Chamber of Commerce early in the fall.

Visited the Court House, 1:30 to 2:30. Interviewed the county auditor and the county treasurer on tax valuation and the probable amount that will be available in the library fund for the year 1927-28.

Called newspaper to have photographer go to the South Side branch and take a picture of posters displayed there.

Advised a young railroad employee on a course of reading to improve his English.

From 4 to 5, at the South Side branch library to announce the winners in a library poster contest that was conducted in the 6A grade of two schools.

(Thursday has two regular meetings, the staff meeting at 8:15 and the board meeting of the Chamber of Commerce at noon. The visits to the Court House and to the South Side branch were, of course, unusual.)

MARCH 25, 1927. FRIDAY

Called at the City Hall at 8:30 to see the mayor on some library business.

Looked over the morning paper; then the mail.

Dictated letters, a few more than usual; among them, replies to two applications for positions.

Discussed bulletins with the head of the children's department and the head of the cir-

ulation department; also some rearrangements of the display desks in the lobby.

Looked over book orders and conferred on several points with the head of the order department.

Lunch hour.

Signed letters.

Short conference with the head of the stations work concerning a station recently established, and another held in a church room which is now used for religious instruction at the same time.

Interview with a teacher who would like to come into the library for the summer.

Interview with the library editor, when final decisions were made on copy for the April bulletin.

Worked on the budget for the new year until time to go home.

(That is a fairly typical day when I remain in the building, but the subjects requiring consideration vary greatly in the course of a week. Two afternoons a week I help at the loan desk during the rush hour if needed. I often have a quiet hour late in the afternoon when I can consider plans for the future or check on some detail work that I wish to do personally, as there are fewer interruptions at that time than earlier in the day.)”

It must not be inferred from this outline that each task of the librarian is clear cut, and that a definite

amount of time may be allotted to it. Frequent interruptions occur, and several tasks must often be kept under way at the same time, for there is constant overlapping. The librarian must often wait for the details of one piece of work to be done by others, and while so waiting he must utilize the time for the accomplishment of something else.

Although it is difficult to draw hard and fast lines between the different activities of a librarian, because they are never entirely separable, they include three fairly distinct kinds of work. As an executive, the librarian must supervise the routine of everyday tasks, and must take part in the actual performance of many of them; he must also serve as the representative of the board of trustees. As an administrator, he must organize the work and formulate plans and policies for its continuous development. Beyond all this, as the city's librarian he is responsible to the entire community, and must maintain a close relation with all its component parts, its institutions, its individuals, and all its activities; in this sense the librarian becomes something of a diplomat.

These duties—the executive, the administrative, and the diplomatic or civic—are imposed on every librarian, though in varying proportions in different institutions. The smaller the library, the larger is the proportion of time naturally devoted to routine duties, for in a small library the execution of work,