THE ROLE OF THE STATE LIBRARY
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

(A talk in "legi-visual" form)*

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I. Introduction

Specific examples of requests received by the Indiana State Library illustrate the important part that a state library plays in the development of local library collections.

1. A request from a small library for help in weeding its total collection, including a large accumulation of dust-covered gifts in a dirt-floor basement.

2. A request, from a small library that is preparing to move into a handsome new building, for help in weeding and reorganizing its total collection. It was realized that the uninviting appearance of its book stock would detract from the appearance of the new quarters and that the location of the various types and classes of materials on the open shelves called for reorganization in order to facilitate use by public and staff.

3. A request from a medium-size county library for aid in its appeal to the State Tax Commission when the local Tax Adjustment Board had seriously reduced the new library tax levy. A substantial increase in funds had been proposed for developing

*Ed. note: This is frankly an experiment. By producing a speech in this form the author feels it "is capable of being read and visualized at the same time."
the library's collection of books and other materials, long needed. The increase was justified by the recent doubling of the county's assessed valuation resulting from the construction of a huge regional power plant in the county. The State Library was able to help in effecting a satisfactory compromise settlement by personal consultation with the Tax Commission.

4. A request from a new State Commission on the Aged and Aging that the State Library prepare an exhibit and reading list for a state conference to be staged by the Commission. This led to the library's collaborating with the Commission in dispatching a special letter to all libraries of the state, enclosing the reading list and urging special attention to the development of services for older people and for local agencies working in this field, with helpful suggestions.

II. The State Library: General Observations

1. By "state library" is meant that agency of state government which provides library extension services. In some states this is an independent Public Library Commission; in others it may be a division of the State Department of Education; in still others an integral part of the State Library. The national trend is to bring Extension into an integrated state library system that embraces many different library services maintained by state government. This has the advantage of bringing the total resources and services of the State Library to bear on the extension function of serving all libraries of the state.

2. The State Library is a natural and legal partner of all public libraries of the state. It is supported by public funds, as are local libraries, and its law authorizes and requires it to extend services to local libraries. This partnership tends to make the State Library a kind of "mother library" to the small libraries of the state.
3. The State Library feels a close affinity to local libraries, based on a direct knowledge and understanding of them. This comes from its extensive daily mail-order loans to libraries, from personal visits by local librarians, trustees and patrons to the State Library, from the collection and analysis of statistics which the State Library gathers from all libraries, and especially from visits to local libraries by extension field consultants. Local libraries feel a kind of ownership-dependence on the State Library. All libraries are knit together, through the State Library, into a state service system that can be based on mutual understanding. The State Library's information and knowledge that is gathered from all libraries is available, and can be applied, to every individual library.

4. The State Library feels a special obligation to exercise leadership on the growing edges of library development in the state. Examples:
   (a) audio-visual services (some State Libraries administer Library Film Circuits, as in Ohio, Missouri and Indiana).
   (b) promotion of new library developments, such as Adult Education and service in the field of the Aged (I., 4 above).
   (c) interlibrary cooperation and federation, especially in the development and use of book collections.
   (d) the housing or disposing of less-used materials, which is a critical problem in nearly every library.

5. State Library services to local libraries bear strongly on "developing local library collections." This is related directly to the nature and development of the State Library's own collections, both general and special. There is widespread ignorance of the scope of State Library collections and of the services offered, on the part of many local librarians and especially the public. Therefore it is most important that local librarians know their State Library well so that they may utilize
its resources and services to the maximum advantage of the local library and the public it serves.

III. The Local Library Situation

The State Library sees, and attempts to serve, local libraries that represent every variation in size and in quality of facilities and services. Some of the smallest libraries are relatively the strongest; some of the larger are relatively the weakest. The following general observations attempt to summarize local library situations and suggest bases for relationship to the State Library.

1. The smaller the library (in book collection and funds), the greater the need:
   (a) that the collection be as strong as possible, within financial limitations. This calls for special skill in selecting the best books that are best adapted to known needs in order to have a live and healthy collection.
   (b) that the collection be kept strong, i.e., that it be kept up-to-date, attractive, usable and reliable.
   (c) that the collection be supplemented.

2. The smaller the staff, the greater the need:
   (a) that the librarian make the most of the limited resources available. This calls for a maximum knowledge of the inside of books at hand.
   (b) that the librarian be resourceful, both within the library and outside. Enlisting the help of specialists in the community can be of vital importance in developing the library collection. Isolation from other libraries is often a factor that emphasizes the necessity of resourcefulness on the part of librarians of small libraries. We may therefore add:

3. The greater the distance from a larger library (i.e., from a city of, say, 50,000 population or more) the greater the need:
(a) that outside assistance and supplementation be available.
(b) that the local library make constant and systematic use of outside help.

These observations point to the State Library as a ready source of help to the small libraries of the state especially, but to medium and large libraries as well, as the following specifics will amply bear out.

IV. Specific Services of the State Library

The following enumeration of types of services, with illustrative examples, will make clear the Role of the State Library as it relates in particular to "the nature and development of the (local) library collection."

1. Advisory services.
   - Extension field consultants deal constantly with book selection problems and practices, weeding and discarding projects, advice on dealers and discounts, etc.
   - Advisory service in the field of adult education has had emphasis in recent years, covering program, methods and materials. State libraries have had special help in this from state universities, as in Indiana.
   - Overcrowded book shelves bring frequent calls for help to the State Library. This suggests the necessity, even in smaller libraries, of segregating less-used materials in compact storage apart from active materials; also the possibility of establishing a central depository at the State Library to serve all libraries of the state, relieving them of the necessity of keeping quantities of little-used materials.
   - (many of these advisory services relate to larger libraries as well as small).
2. Lending services.
   - Interlibrary loans from the State Library serve virtually all libraries of a state. Such loans to meet individual local requests make the State Library a veritable "mail-order house" for local libraries, large and small.
   - Such loans have added significance in enabling local libraries to select books for purchase after seeing and using them and recognizing those that meet a continuing local need.

3. Supplementation services.
   - Deposit collections, or "traveling libraries," constitute a major service of many State Libraries to local public libraries, and often to local schools. A modified form of this service is Indiana's "Book Lending Program" which operates in circuits of a dozen or more libraries, each library receiving a new collection of books every ten weeks from the State Library book car. One hundred sixty libraries receive such supplementation service regularly.
   - Large specialized collections maintained by the State Library, such as Federal Documents, Periodical files, State and Local History, constitute another form of supplementation service, which benefits larger libraries as well as small.
   - State grants-in-aid are a growing form of assistance to local libraries administered by state libraries. These are sometimes designated for book purchases exclusively, but in their more general form still have an important bearing on the development of local book collections.

4. Special staff services, or on-the-job work projects.
   - Field consultants from the State Library frequently accept special assignments of work in local libraries for several days at a time. This may be the planning and directing of a major weeding operation (see V below), or
making a professional survey of the local library, or organizing a cooperative undertaking among libraries of a region, as, for example, in book selection or book buying or interchange of books. (Indiana has libraries which interchange current popular novels when they become "read out".)

5. Publications services.

- Preparation and distribution of reading lists and book selection aids is a common State Library practice, as in Wisconsin and Oregon.
- A regularly published state bulletin or professional journal is issued by many State Libraries, sometimes in collaboration with the State Library Association. Indiana's Library Occurrent is 50 years old this year. Such publications usually contain lists which serve as selection aids, as well as general and special articles relating to the interests of librarians.
- (these and other publications serve larger libraries as well as small).

6. Materials distribution services.

- State government publications are usually distributed to local public libraries under a legal authorization. Some of these are suitable only for larger libraries but others are of great value to all libraries.
- Occasionally the State Library purchases an unusual publication in quantity and distributes it to all libraries. Indiana did this with the paperback Wonderful World of Books. Robert Downs' Books That Changed the World (available in paperback) merits the same library distribution. [Ed. note: This testimonial was unsolicited.]

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7. Demonstration, exhibit and promotion services.
- The State Library often assumes responsibility for a library demonstration. Indiana, for example, administers a Library Film Circuit in cooperation with fourteen participating libraries as a demonstration in the area of educational film service by libraries.
- State Library demonstrations of bookmobile service are more common.
- Promotion efforts are common to all State Libraries, e.g., Indiana's project in the field of the Aged (I., 4 above).
- Many State Libraries maintain exhibit collections of books, especially reference sets and juvenile books that are supplied by publishers, for librarians to examine, and for exhibition at library meetings.
- (these services relate to larger libraries as well as small).

V. Special Consideration of WEEDING

The State Library receives probably more requests for advisory and staff help relating to weeding and discarding than any other kind of requests.

1. General observations.
   (a) Exhaustion of space is usually the urge that prompts these requests—a desperation move and last resort. This may be due to preoccupation or inertia or to a genuine lack of time. Often a log-jam of gifts that have accumulated for years paralyzes the librarian and necessitates a call for help. One state extension person suggests "Long looking at the same shelves makes librarians blind to what is there, how bad it may be and how sad it looks to others."
   
   (b) Requests for help in weeding, on analysis after the operation, seem to indicate often a lack of knowledge of this important operation, or a lack of confidence in own ability or judgment; too often a reluctance, almost fear, to
discard anything (the old complex that preservation is more important than use); or a feeling of need for support from an authoritative source in an operation of violence.

(c) Weeding offers a threefold opportunity which may be stated as aims:

- To improve the collection itself, e.g., by discovering "unbalance" that has occurred as a result of changes in the community over the years.
- To improve the physical arrangement of materials in the interest of their most effective use.
- To improve appearances. (Have courage to replace those dirty and unsightly books!)

(d) In any large weeding operation it is well to involve the board of trustees, to gain their understanding and approval. In small library situations it often helps to have the State Library representative meet with the board for the purpose.

2. Procedures.

(a) Plan weeding as a training process (self-training or staff training) that will go on afterward as a continuous process.

(b) Conduct it as a selection process ("negative selection") that will reveal replacement needs.

(c) Direct it to the three aims noted just above.

(d) Add the zest of treasure hunting. A real rarity may turn up at any moment to call for protective custody, BUT a rarity may often better be sold in order to buy something that is much more necessary to have.

VI. Conclusions

1. The State Library is legal partner and ready helpmate to all local libraries.

2. All libraries have need for some of the services of their State Library--the smaller the library the
greater the need.

3. State Library services are widely varied and so devised as to meet all kinds of needs as far as possible.

4. Full knowledge of these services is essential to assure that a maximum of benefit is derived from them.

5. In no area is the role of the State Library more important than in the development and supplementation of local library collections.