SUMMARY

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The institute speakers, and the ensuing discussions, looked at reference work from four different approaches: the nature and spirit of reference service; its extension through effective public relations; its strengthening through greater knowledge of the materials and users; and its improvement through better organization and better selected and trained personnel.

As for the first, there was general acknowledgment of the role of the library as an information center, in which the reference service concept as developed in the United States plays a principal part. The reference librarian is recognized as the interpreter of the library's collections. To do this well calls for special talent and skill.

In the community constellation of institutions, organizations, and associations, the function of the library is to serve as a center of information. In any community there are many different "publics" with many different informational needs and demands. The individual library user probably belongs to several groups, e.g., he is a citizen, a father of a family, a businessman, and an amateur musician. His need for information may vary from details of a purely factual type as a date or address, to a question which requires the use of the library's whole resources on a certain subject and the borrowing of material not in the library. Among the publics which can be identified in any sizable community are groups concerned with its government, business, industry, labor, and transportation.

On the second approach, public relations was broadly defined as "a long term function which evaluates public attitudes and needs, which forms policies and procedures identified with those attitudes and needs, which explains problems and policies to both staff and public and develops programs and services which will earn public support and understanding." A salient point was made that everyone concerned with the library, from the members of the Board of Trustees down to the
youngest staff member, represents the institution to the public. Thus all should be fully informed as to its plans, policies, resources, and services. This means that internal communications must be strong; without such communications there can be no good internal public relations resulting in understanding, harmony, and peace. Unless internal relationships are satisfactory, relationships with the general public in the community will not be satisfactory.

Publicity was defined simply as the tool which can be used to tell the story of the library to the community. Fortunately, libraries can get good publicity without great cost if they are adroit. Much free publicity will be given by newspapers if library publicity agents are just and impartial toward all newspapers and willing to adapt their demands to the exigencies of the journalist's life. Display advertising for the library may be donated by public relations experts in banks, department stores, and other businesses. Radio and television work may be done by librarians if they are really competent performers but it is often better for the library to indicate what is wanted and allow experienced people to produce the show. Accuracy and truth in advertising are absolutely essential and the library must be especially careful never to create a demand which it cannot fill. Finally all librarians must constantly and soberly keep in mind the fact that good service is the best and least costly publicity.

A related aspect of public relations has to do with the costs of information service. Statistics of costs have a place in every municipal report and, in the form of evaluation of the service as an aid to individuals and as an exploitation of the library's resources, are considered good publicity to present to governing boards and the general tax-paying public. It was pointed out that cost studies are simply studies of cost and have nothing to do with the value of the service.

In considering whether reference service is worth what it costs, two important questions may be raised. First, how much would it cost to gain the information which reference work produces, if there were no such organized service; and second, how much more use is made of the collection to which the library has devoted a large proportion of its income, because of the personal aid provided by the reference staff? These are questions no one has attempted to answer, but they are suggestive of important studies which might be made in the future.

Thirdly, it was recognized that the selection of materials for reference service is an individual problem in every library
for in each community the character and distribution of the
elements in the population differs from that in others as do the
problems faced by each. Reference service must be based on
a continuous survey of community needs on the one hand and
on the other on a regular examination of the literature of all
these subjects in order to select the materials which are clear-
ly relevant to local problems. The basic facts and figures on
the local economic situation in relation to that of the state,
the nation, and the world at large must be readily available as
this is of importance to all the library publics. At the same
time the educational, religious, artistic, recreational, and
scholarly institutions and associations of the community should
likewise receive comparable consideration in book selection
and reference service. As the speaker put it "the library
must not only identify its public but be identified with it.''
The primary importance of a knowledge of the community's
population composition and of the community's problems in
every field as a background for book selection and information
service was brought out. Also, if the community needs are to
be met, staff members and particularly reference staff mem-
ers, should know as much about community affairs as does
the chief librarian. The public library should be a prime
source of local information of all sorts, historical, industrial,
governmental, educational, and recreational. It is also well
to involve as many local people in library service as possible
--people of talent and specialized education who can help to
answer unusual reference questions and give excellent advice
on book selection in specialized fields.
The most distinctive characteristic of a good reference
librarian, is his ability to select reference materials wisely
and to use them skillfully and effectively. Thus the Planning
Committee for the institute included a survey of recent refer-
ce books--those published since 1950--as an important part
of the program. The papers and discussions brought a number
of ideas concerning the nature of reference publications in each
field and some discernible trends.

For example, considerable progress has been made in
establishing bibliographic control over the literature of the
social sciences in which the work of the International Commit-
tee on Social Science Documentation has been valuable. How-
ever, the pattern of publication of reference materials in the
social sciences since 1950 has been irregular and out of
balance; certain subjects and types predominate while others
are neglected. Important additions to reference resources
have been made in American history, international law and
international relations, and in statistics, especially on the international and comparative level. Yearbooks and atlases, bibliographies and guides to the literature of various subjects have been favorite types of publications. Though the pattern of publication is spotty many valuable works have appeared, and quickly proved their utility in reference departments.

In the humanities, many handbooks, guides, and companions have recently appeared. Many new yearbooks, religious reference books, language dictionaries of various types, and biographical dictionaries on English artists of various types have been published since 1950. On the other hand few new special or subject encyclopedias or dictionaries of outstanding importance have been issued during this period.

Three factors have affected reference work in the sciences since the end of the Second World War: a tremendous increase in the volume of literature, especially serials; increased use of foreign literature; and the emergence of new types of literature. The difficulties of literature-searching and the problem of bibliographic control of scientific publication are serious.

The research report, usually made by a company or research organization working under a contract, for a government agency, and classified as to secrecy, has presented many difficulties in scientific libraries since the beginning of the last world war. Though the problem still exists the appearance of several indexes supplementary to the U.S. Government Research Reports series, have greatly helped in the identification and location of such reports.

Two types of scientific publications, neither of which is exactly new, have appeared in greatly increased numbers of late—the guide to literature and the annual review. Excellent guides to the literature of chemistry, geology, biology, psychology, and medicine have been issued and have been thankfully received by special librarians and students. Annual reviews in many subject fields are useful as a starting point for bibliographical references on very recent topics.

Fourth, as for reference personnel the average reference assistant is a liberal arts college graduate with one crowded year of library training of which perhaps two to four semester courses bear directly on his reference work. Larger libraries require persons with special subject knowledge in the sciences, literature and art, for instance, but even these are usually inadequately prepared for the work. The question is, how can libraries improve the qualifications of their reference staffs so that they will be able to meet the demands with which their work confronts them?
The successful in-service training program at the University of Florida Library as described by the director of the program was a fruitful source of ideas. It was found that as every worker is an individual case where performance is measured against the requirements of his position or the position to which he may be expected to seek promotion, a choice of training methods must be made. These included guided experience, understudy methods, formal academic training, staff meetings, and staff conferences. Any training program to be successful must have the full support of the administration. The head of the reference department must consider in-service training a chief duty and be willing to devote adequate time to it. The staff must understand its purpose, and its goals must be definite and capable of realization. Each individual's program should be well suited to his needs and provision for periodical appraisal of progress should be made.

Reference librarians should be most carefully selected in order to secure persons of ability, people who have a large bump of intellectual curiosity and perseverance. It was shown, too, that they need to have the opportunity to examine and to study new sources and book selection aids when not actively engaged in public service. They need to be alert and amenable to change and new technology. For example, the importance of speed and convenience as elements in reference service and the use of modern means of communication, especially the telephone and teletype, were stressed.

Finally, two recent events have focussed the attention of librarians on the importance of the principle of cooperation in reference service, the first being the publication of the Public Library Standards of 1956 and the second, the formation of a Reference Services Division of the American Library Association to unify the work of several bodies formerly concerned with reference matters.

The conference discussion was concerned with organization on national and regional levels. The Standards actually consider the fully developed reference and circulation service of the large city systems, particularly those organized on the subject departmental plan, with regional and local branches, and extensive interloan systems, to be the ideal service which ought to be available to every citizen. The system idea can also be carried to all areas even rural through regional libraries centering around the largest city in a populous county or the public library of the largest reading center in a group of less populous counties. If this development can be accomplished only through legislation which must be based on a long process...
of educating the public to see the library as more than a local institution, local libraries may well prepare for the future and secure many of the benefits of cooperative service by forming an association of reference staffs for mutual aid. Formal, statutory organization of the type desired may finally displace the informal cooperation which could be accomplished by our own initiative and effort.

On the national scale the new Reference Services Division is primarily interested in the improvement of reference service and its extension to all parts of the population now unserved or poorly served in this respect. It hopes to sponsor bibliographic and research activities and is interested in the education and training of reference librarians. Its broad program and well-considered goals should command the loyal support of all workers in the reference field and its large initial membership reflects the satisfaction of reference librarians in the establishment of such a division. It is indeed fortunate that at a time when the public libraries of the nation are setting up standards which involve a great expansion of reference service, a better organization of reference librarians should be available to inspire them and direct their efforts toward worthy goals.

In closing, the point was made that reference service is the ultimate library service since its object is to insure the meeting of the library patron with the materials or knowledge which the library is established to afford him, an attitude that has been held since the beginning of the modern concept of reference service. The papers and discussions at the institute were evidence that the leadership long displayed in the field of reference service by American libraries is to be maintained.