

SUMMARY

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It is customary at Allerton Park conferences for one of the members of the faculty or the staff to give a summary of what transpired, and this time this happened to be my job. You can well understand that this isn't a very enviable position. In the first place, you have to go to every one of the meetings to hear what takes place. Also, you have to stay awake at the meetings you attend, which sometimes is a little difficult. Then you get up and try to tell the people, who are intelligent, and who went to the meetings and stayed awake, what they heard, when they already have a pretty good notion of what they heard anyway. As a result, a summary like this satisfies absolutely no one. Half of the people will wonder where in the world you heard what you say you heard, because they didn't hear it, and the other half will wonder why in the world you didn't hear what they heard. Nevertheless, we have this little device, and this is like a social institution--once we have it, we can't get rid of it, and I suppose we'll go on forever having these summaries.

It was apparent from the outset that this group was different from many groups that have arrived at Allerton Park. They were experienced conferees. They had been going to conferences for a long time, they had actually many times been at conferences together--because the state librarians get together in an organization--and they had met on several occasions in respect to the Library Services Act. Consequently, in a way more was expected of them than might have been expected of a less sophisticated group. And they responded. They responded well and they responded quite accurately.

Anyway, 67 hours and 30 ducks ago--but I'll have to explain the ducks. There is a big duck farm near Allerton, and so one of the meals at each Institute is duckling which we get

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from the local farm, and that's the special meal of the conference. Anyway, 67 hours, 30 ducks, 740 pancakes, 1,123 cups of coffee, and one cocktail party ago, the conference started. We came together with the purpose of taking a hard look at the Library Services Act, what it has meant, and hopefully what it might mean in the future.

The first thing to be done at the conference--and actually, things don't always happen in exactly the way in which they are reported in the summary: something that really belongs at the beginning of the Institute, or at the beginning of the whole intellectual process of the Institute, might have happened near the end of it; but still, as you look back on it, you realize that this was the first part. So what I give here is not actually chronological, but I think it's more or less the way an idea was developed. The first thing that was done was to look back at the first five years, and as the conferees looked back, they found it good.

There were all kinds of statistics to prove that the Library Services Act has made a magnificent contribution to the development of public libraries in this country. Statistics were provided to show that some 36 million people now either have library service for the first time or have library service which is greatly improved as a result of the first five years of the Library Services Act. Some 1,500 counties have benefited. We also learned that the state agencies have been greatly strengthened as a result of LSA. For example, some 800 new people have been added to the staffs of these agencies who could never have been hired without this additional money. Some of these were professional people, and some, of course, were clerical workers and bookmobile drivers. A total of 288 bookmobiles have been purchased from LSA funds and are now in use by public libraries all over the country. One can quickly see, in this somewhat dramatic way, how much this direct help would mean to public library development.

Also, there have been a strengthening of the idea of libraries, a better understanding of libraries, and a belief in libraries, as a result of the excitement and activity generated by the money from the Library Services Act. Many people have begun to think about libraries as they have never done before. Library trustees, realizing that many of their long withheld hopes might now be practicable, were brought into the programming for their libraries. There was a high degree of personal involvement by a number of people in library planning throughout the nation.

✓ The state library agencies needed strengthening--badly.

It was brought out in the course of the Institute that some of these agencies represented the weakest part of American librarianship. For various reasons, partly because of political domination, partly because of being out of the general stream of the library profession, and partly because of low salary scales, they had difficulty getting top-grade personnel. Moreover, their total budgets were often inadequate. As a result, many state agencies had not, for the most part, been very successful. There were, of course, some outstanding exceptions.

Because state agencies had often been weak and ineffectual in the past, a number of librarians had blamed them for actually holding back public librarianship in this country 50 years or more. All, it was said, that the state agencies had done, through small contributions and a little low-level guidance to manifestly inadequate libraries, was to nurse along the weak. It would have been far better, it was felt, for these small, so-called libraries to have been discouraged and allowed to wither away.

Well, so much for the state agencies. At the same time that they were being strengthened, so was the Library Services Branch, that department of the federal government under the Office of Education, which for a number of years has conducted a statistics-gathering and an advisory service for public libraries in this country. Under the LSA, the Library Services Branch has been able to enlarge its staff to include specialists in various aspects of librarianship. The revitalized Branch now fulfills a positive and dynamic leadership role.

At this juncture, it looked to the conferees as though the key to all that had happened up to the present time had been money. It was the shot in the arm that came from having \$7.5 million that made all the difference. For the first time, libraries in this country began to feel that they, too, were part of the affluent society. And what a difference it made!

After that rather satisfying look at what had happened, there was an effort to look into the crystal ball a little bit to see what might be ahead, and the general feeling was that this was going to be good, too. For one thing, there were a number of predictions, on the part of those who should know, that the Library Services Act in one form or another is here to stay. It was pointed out that at long last libraries are very popular among the legislators--to be for libraries is like being for motherhood. One is always for libraries, as one is for the church, and the politician is quick to recognize that. The politicians also, in supporting libraries, gain a great deal of good will for

very little expense. After all, they're putting only \$7.5 million a year into it, and they've got back an astonishing amount in the way of tangible results. And then there is the tendency that we mentioned before: social institutions just don't die very easily.

The people who are involved in all this are already planning for the new legislation which will be necessary in 1966, and the planning is pretty well developed, as well as the strategy for its presentation to Congress. The main change in the Library Services Act that they would like to bring about, as reported at the Institute, is that, instead of being limited just to rural areas, any new legislation would call for the improvement of library services throughout the United States, including urban areas as well as rural. However, Congress is notably rural-minded, and any hope for including urban areas under the Act may be misplaced; the Act will likely be simply a continuation of rural support for some time to come.

There already is evidence that other funds for libraries, in addition to those from LSA, will be forthcoming. For example, in the education bill which did not pass but went a long way in the last Congress, \$47.5 million was provided for the improvement of libraries in schools, colleges, and universities. This had been fully approved in committee. It is very likely, then, that in an act of a similar nature in the next Congress, or a couple of Congresses from now, there will be a substantial amount of money for library improvement.

Well, so much for the two looks--backward, which was good, and forward, which was optimistic. But over everybody at Allerton there were hanging some rather nagging doubts about what really had taken place during the last five years. It was felt that there were a lot of questions and a lot of problems that we really didn't get at--we kind of ran up to them, but then waltzed back.

For example, someone asked, "Have we gained only superficial results during the past five years?" To be sure, 288 new bookmobiles sounded very impressive and could be proudly described. But, as someone said, "288 bookmobiles for what?" These bookmobiles, it was pointed out, simply use the public roads to bring substandard library service to local areas, instead of doing, as was suggested, what business and industry and the schools are doing, using the roads to bring people to services which meet established standards. There was a question as to whether it had been wise to get 288 bookmobiles, only to continue substandard service. Then someone said, "What about the reference books?"--referring to the col-

lections of basic reference sources which have been distributed to the smaller libraries hitherto deficient in these essential materials. And again, the question came back, "Reference books for what?"

In the unvarnished view of Lowell Martin, the effect of the last five years of LSA has been only the continuation of the policy of "fragmentation and convenience" that has dominated American public librarianship for half a century. This policy has fostered small and inadequate fragments of libraries presumably on the theory of making library service convenient to the small group of people who live near each fragment. While one side of the coin showed that through the Library Services Act some progress had been made in creating larger units of service, the other side of the coin showed that the new larger unit was often little more than a combination of a handful of relatively weak libraries. All this did was to provide a combination of weaknesses rather than something that was in itself basically strong and vital.

There was a great deal of talk about demonstration libraries under LSA, where some outside money for extra staff and books would be provided to a local community to demonstrate what library service could mean. Now the idea behind all this is that, if you demonstrate so conclusively to the people who are living there and use the service that this is what they want themselves, then, of course, they will support it. Well, what happened to a disquieting number of the demonstration libraries? It was discovered that when the time came for the people in the area to take the libraries over, they didn't. They simply weren't willing to spend their own money to do it.

Thus, you can see that the group had some rather harsh and unpalatable thoughts about themselves which they were willing to talk about. Then someone from outside librarianship came along and confirmed just about all the depressing things we had been saying about ourselves. The outsider was Professor Phillip Monypenny, who is now carrying out a major survey of state library agencies all over the country. Mr. Monypenny pulled no punches as he told us what he had discovered. First, he observed that librarians had developed a superb political technique in getting the LSA as well as a number of state legislative proposals enacted, but he added, "Look how little you've gained for all this activity and all this energy!" Then he contrasted what the public libraries have been able to get for their support with what is regularly expended on public highways, mental institutions, and nearly every other publicly-supported facility. It has been relatively but a drop in the bucket. He

remarked that state library budgets are to him astonishingly and appallingly low and that the range of services which they have set up under these budgets is equally inadequate. He had also taken a good hard look at the demonstration projects. He pointed out that they don't show what is realistically possible to a group of people in the community and suggested that this is one of the reasons why, in many instances, they have not fulfilled their purpose. He further observed that the state libraries are simply engaged in holding the hands of some small units that never should have been allowed to continue anyway. And as he looked at the paths which librarians have chosen to follow in carrying out their work, it looked to him as if they could not be very productive ones. This was a shattering blow to all assembled, as you can well imagine.

After reflecting along these lines, the group began to be willing to verbalize and indicate that actually, money by itself is not enough. They concluded that, in the first place, they have to have people: good personnel is the most important element in the success of a library program. There have been some efforts toward enlarging and upgrading the supply of trained librarians. New personnel have been added to the various agencies already. Scholarship programs utilizing LSA funds have been developing rapidly; many new scholarship proposals are underway. It was abundantly clear that, if the opportunity available because of the LSA were to come to fruition, the profession as a whole has a considerable responsibility to recruit and train the necessary personnel.

The personnel required, the group realized after the experience of the last five years, must be creative and imaginative to an unusual degree. The opportunities of modern librarianship cannot be fulfilled with old, outgrown, and outmoded techniques. New ways of doing things that heretofore have not even been thought about will be needed. Many of the group emphasized the need for effective planning; others underscored the need for research in the future development of librarianship. Up to the present time, most of the things which have been accomplished were done on the basis of guesses or hunches or the fact that Joe Smith has been successful with this or that idea over in Iowa, so let us try it too.

By research the conferees did not mean surveys, important as these are, not just reports on the "status quo," but experimental studies of the fundamental aspects of librarianship. Some speakers pointed out that research is the lifeblood of industry, that our commerce simply couldn't continue without the new ideas which are the result of research. By the

same token, if the new librarianship is going to have its new techniques, new devices, and new concepts, this calls for research based upon bold and imaginative experimentation.

During the next five years, it's just possible that the state agencies are going to emerge from the somewhat passive role that they have had in the past, that they will become initiators instead of suggestors. As one of the state librarians dramatically said, "It is necessary for us in the future to lead by action, and not try to lead by indirection."

The group were united in their call for a stronger federal Library Services Branch. This amounted virtually to a mandate. The officials of the Library Services Branch themselves recognized the necessity of changing their own configuration to become a statistics-gathering, fact-finding, research-pursuing, fund-securing, and administering body. This they already are in part. But they intend to intensify, extend, and deepen their efforts and activities.

In conclusion, then, we could really say that the past half-decade has been exciting and stimulating, and the accomplishments certainly marked. It was quickly acknowledged that one reason they were so marked was because the starting point was so low; anything that was done was bound to stand out. Nevertheless, they were accomplishments. It was agreed that the next five years can be just as exciting, if less hysterically and stridently so; just as stimulating, if perhaps not quite so heady as the years past had been; and just as rich in accomplishment, for it would be the accomplishment of maturity. As one of the speakers said, "Surely you are at the beginning of a new era," and I think the group agreed. The only thing was-- could they meet the challenge to make it truly a new era?