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A Summary and Overview of the Conference

There were fifteen speakers at this Institute, excluding chairpersons and makers of announcements. I was asked to summarize and bring out the highlights of their remarks. I shall leave aside the details and specifics of individual titles and focus on matters of more general import. I shall speak of those ways in which it seemed the remarks and concerns of the speakers at this conference are typical of what (good) librarians do in regard to any specified subject. Later I shall discuss the ways in which they are not.

1. A good librarian usually becomes aware of an emerging problem area of general interest reasonably early, and of its ramifications and implications.

Several speakers pointed out how recently the problem of environmental control has come into the limelight, and how pervasive it is. In 1965, according to Quigley, the ACS made its initial decision to work on the problem. The National Environmental Policy Act was passed in 1969, but according to Friedlander EPA is already funding 4,000 projects. Zimmerman pointed out that only in the last few years have standard tools like the *Subject Guide to Books in Print* and the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*, used some of the appropriate subject headings. On the other hand, Veyette reported that *Engineering Index* has used subject headings dealing with the pollution of the environment since before 1900, but that was for technical literature for engineers and apparently had no great impact.

The problems of environmental control are of major import to all main types of libraries. Richardson described how a high school student project in this area involved and affected the school library. The public library is involved and concerned generally, and Collins and Zimmerman described the special involvement of the Denver and Chicago public libraries respectively. Academic libraries get involved in supporting research (which Metcalf and Davis
described) and study (Friedlander and George); relevant special libraries get very much involved also, as discussed by Imberman and Anglemyer.

This is at least the fourth conference for librarians on this subject in 1972; in the spring there was a week-long one at Kalamazoo by the Western Michigan University library school; in the summer there was a one-day meeting in connection with the Special Libraries Association annual conference; and in September there was a three-day National Environmental Information Symposium at Cincinnati, by EPA.

2. A good librarian learns how to identify relevant materials and their sources.

Over the years librarians have learned to cope with pamphlets and other ephemeral materials, with phonograph records and films, with "unpublished" research reports, with reprints, and today or tomorrow we will have to deal with video-cassettes and magnetic tapes, and who knows what else? Almost every speaker said that there is a tremendous amount of literature relative to the environmental sciences (Thomas noted that more than eighty federal government agencies are still involved, and Veyette said that it is hard for any one person to stay abreast of all the current literature in even a specialized area of the field), and that it is not well indexed, or as neat and tidy as we would like it to be. I have absolutely no doubt that librarians (at least good librarians) can cope with these problems. One reason for this confidence is that in ten years, the course in government documents (at the University of Illinois Library School) has gone from one to three sections a year solely on the basis of student choices, showing that students sense the ever-growing importance of documents and want to be as well-prepared as possible to cope with them. We will need money and we will need time; we may not get either, but if we do I am certain that we can solve these technical problems.

Metcalf said several times during this conference that he hoped that the University of Illinois Library has a particular paper-covered research report which he considered important for future efforts to build on; knowing the University of Illinois Library as well as I do, I am confident that it does have that report and has it bound, cataloged, classified, and sitting on a shelf somewhere ready to be used. I would guess that the first major contribution of librarianship to the cause of environmental science will be in the field of bibliography, appropriately enough.

3. A good librarian learns rather quickly how to select appropriate materials for purchase or acquisition, and to cooperate with other agencies in increasing total availability of library holdings.
As Brodine told us, many current books on environmental problems for the general reader have been hastily written and are not always well done. Zimmerman said that the criteria he uses for selecting books in the environmental sciences are essentially those used by the Chicago Public Library for selecting other books and, specifically, science books. And Friedlander, too, reported using the standard selection tools for science books. Librarians have learned to examine a copy of a book, if possible, before buying it, but this is not always easy or convenient in technical fields. I liked what George said in this connection, essentially, "Don't worry too much about the merits of each particular book, but try to get a good collection and publicize it."

Several speakers pointed out the desirability of knowing the specific purposes of a given collection, so that you can tell what is relevant and what is not. Librarians have long ago reconciled themselves to not having in one library everything on a given subject, and to relying on other libraries and on other types of libraries for things their own library does not have now or may never have had. The idea of a national system or network of libraries is far from perfected or finished, but in practice it works reasonably well, sometimes (as Imberman said) because librarians themselves agree informally to make it work. We have learned to make devices like union catalogs to help us locate, in other libraries, materials we do not have in ours (and both the Illinois Institute for Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are beginning to move in this direction). Collins said that if you are going to serve well the people who come to you, you have got to know what other related agencies have and are doing. This is not done easily or automatically; there is a continual need for librarians to learn ever more about the resources and services of other libraries as well as of other agencies.

4. Librarians are able to organize materials so that they may be readily found and used.

To my recollection, not one speaker dwelt on this topic. Two Institute registrants were discussing with me the need for a special classification of materials in the environmental sciences, and each hopes to outwait the other before beginning work in this field. I am confident that either of them can do it and do it well, and maybe the most important result of this conference is that such a new special classification will have its beginnings here. But for most general-purpose libraries, we absorb materials on the environment into our general cataloging and classification schemes, perhaps with some new subject heading, cross-references, and class numbers. Librarians are so familiar with these technical tools that we forget what a botch of things is usually made when a layman tries his hand at them. I assume that the failure of the speakers to refer to these matters is at least in part because of their unspoken confidence that librarians can and will handle them effectively.
5. A good librarian helps patrons to find what they need.

Librarians have learned many devices for this end, e.g., bibliographies, literature searches, and the reference interview to pinpoint what is desired. More and better ones are needed (one of the most successful things the Illinois Institute for Environmental Quality did was to prepare and distribute a packet of selected relevant materials for elementary school children). Schneiderman said that librarians should structure a procedure for regularly following up on services rendered, to see that the information provided was indeed adequate. He also pointed out that decision-makers need digested information, and Collins said that librarians have got to analyze, package, and provide in usable form the relevant literature which they have. In this connection, a device worthy of imitation is the Library Pathfinder, begun by Charles H. Stevens in 1969 at the M.I.T. Library. A Pathfinder is a sheet of cover-stock paper devoted to one subject and including the relevant subject headings in the card catalog, a few of the important current textbooks, the relevant book classification numbers, references to appropriate pages from a few handbooks or encyclopedias on the subject, some of the best bibliographies on the subject, titles of the leading journals, the best indexes to periodical literature on the subject, etc. (These are available for $1 from Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., Reading, Mass. 01867.)

Still, as Brodine reminded us, it is relatively easy to find specific information in answer to a particular question. Good librarians get to know the materials in their collections, and not just by the covers. They usually know what to recommend to a particular reader for a particular purpose; if they do not, they ought to. They also need to know who are the available subjects experts, and they do in the Denver Public Library.

6. The really good librarian will bring relevant materials to the attention of patrons who need them but do not know that they need them or may not know that they exist.

This approaches the idea of activism that Schneiderman discussed—i.e., of not waiting for people to come and ask for what they need but of taking our knowledge and expertise to those who need it without being asked. If there is only one thing you remember from this conference, I hope it will be his advice that librarians should be at least as active in getting people to use their services and books as they have been in getting those books back when they are overdue. This is certainly part of the modern concept of librarianship—i.e., a good librarian should normally and routinely keep informed on what concerns his patrons (whether they be teachers and students in a school, researchers in a laboratory, or the city councilmen and adults in a community); he should anticipate their needs for literature and for information;
he should keep up with what literature and information are available on the
topics in question; and he should take the initiative in bringing the literature
and information to those clients.

I think we would all agree with this in general and in principle. The usual
problem is: Just how do you get to know what it is that concerns your
patrons? The best single method is to get to be a member of the team which
is doing the research or seeking a solution to a problem. Metcalf told us that
research under the auspices of the University of Illinois Institute for Environ-
mental Studies is being done by interdisciplinary task forces, in one case with
seventy people from twelve departments. I suspect that no task force has a
staff member of the university library on it. On the other hand, Richardson
told us how a "media specialist" was on the curriculum team in Oak Park,
and Schneiderman suggested that every buck slip for approval of a new policy
ought to have a place for the comments and concurrence of the librarian.
Again, some recent experience of the University of Illinois Graduate School
of Library Science is relevant. In the last several years we have had grants
from NSF and NLM to pay for the preparation of science and biomedical
librarians. A part of these programs has been a practicum in which each
student was assigned to a researcher on campus to act as his bibliographical
assistant. We know that the students profited greatly from this experience,
and that the research scientists also benefited from the students' services.

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There are at least two regards in which the remarks and concerns of
several of the speakers at this conference are not in accord with what most
librarians now typically think and do. I will try to summarize those remarks
and add a few questions of my own, but I do not profess to give the
answers—each of us must do that for himself.

1. Is control of the environment really a crisis problem, and is it likely that
people generally are going to be willing to pay the price which will
probably be required to save the environment?

Schneiderman said that, as a result of the changing needs of our society,
private property rights are being circumscribed. Metcalf made the point that
the more materialistic a society, the more impact it has on the environment;
he quoted from The Limits of Growth (the study done for the Club of Rome)
that man has only about fifty years in which to secure a balance between
population, food supply, natural resources, pollution, and industrialization.
Brodine said that environmental problems are of extreme importance to all of
us, and not just to the technical experts; she also referred to the dangers of
using new technological developments when we still do not know much about
their by-products. In a sense, the reorientation of the ACS, as described by
Quigley, is evidence of the conviction of its members that the environmental problems are indeed serious. Both Brodine and Anglemyer referred to the international scope of environmental problems, and to the conflicting interests of countries at different levels of development. As I understand it, many of the industrially underdeveloped countries are willing to take on the environmental problems of the advanced nations in order to secure a higher standard of living for their people. Some of the underdeveloped nations feel that the drive for reforms to protect the environment are, at least in part, a disguise for neo-colonialism designed to hold back their progress and to protect the industrial advances of the developed nations.

It seems likely that zero population growth will be necessary for restoring environmental balance. Are we really ready to accept this—not just for other nations but also for our own, and not just for other people but also personally? It seems likely, as Brodine put it, that we shall have to try various social experiments to test possible solutions, and that these will probably involve basic social changes. Are we really prepared to change our way of life in order to restore and preserve the environment? George indicated how far such changes may have to go, viz., a restructuring of the Christian religion as well as a restructuring of the division of wealth. None of these people are alarmists, but the inescapable conclusion seems to be that we all face a drastic reordering of our priorities and revision of our values and daily lifestyle in order to protect the environment. Are we really prepared to pay that sort of price?

2. Is the role of library materials and information (in regard to environmental problems) sufficiently important for decision-makers, technical experts and the general public that librarians are justified in changing some of their traditional attitudes in order to do all that they can?

Schneiderman wants librarians not only to be activists but to be environmental activists. This involves at least three things—(1) the dedication to environmental problems of a substantial percentage of time, money and effort of even general librarians; (2) an implicit commitment to the cause of environmental control (he did say that librarians should make their services available to those on the other side of the question, but I doubt that he would urge us assiduously to collect literature favoring steel mills in place of farms and to press that literature on zoning boards); and (3) an active involvement as librarians in the process of public discussion and ultimate political decisions on the many environmental issues. This is a far cry from what most librarians now do for any issue and specifically for environmental problems. Are we really prepared to make any such major shift?

Another way in which some of the speakers (e.g., Schneiderman,
Brodine, and Anglemyer) would have librarians contribute to the solution of environmental problems is by working for the free or unimpeded circulation of available information, e.g., by opposing censorship of research reports, by collecting copies of the original drafts of reports, and by working inside our various overhead organizations to secure ever wider availability of internal documents. Again, this stance is different, more difficult, and more exposed than the traditional role of librarians, even including our efforts to oppose censorship of books; are we really willing to take on this new and difficult task in order possibly to protect the environment? It will certainly require a reordering of priorities, values, and goals of almost all librarians and libraries. Stephens referred to the action of the St. Louis Public Library Board of Trustees in declining a grant for the establishment of environmental information centers in several branch libraries on the ground that the proposed program would appear to depart substantially from the public library's traditional and avowed stand of neutrality in controversial issues. I suspect that the boards of trustees of most public libraries would have taken exactly the same stand.

These are not easy questions to answer, and all we can hope to have done here is to have raised the questions, thrown some light on them, and helped you begin to think about them.