

Review Articles

The Survey at Cornell

"Report of a Survey of the Libraries of Cornell University for the Library Board. . . . October 1947-February 1948." By Louis R. Wilson, Robert B. Downs and Maurice F. Tauber. Ithaca, Cornell University, 1948. 202p. (Lithoprinted.)

In 1942 a pseudonymous W. Bolingbroke Johnson published an excellent detective story, *The Widening Stain*, in which the action centers in a university library of fantastic architecture and atypical organization. Its rumored identification with Cornell is supported by the survey report here reviewed. There are fortunately few, if any, substantial collections of research materials which can share with Cornell such an unenviable history of thoroughly decentralized control, inadequate and inappropriately designed space, and what must be characterized as irresponsibility toward its libraries on the part of the university administration. The description of such a situation has unusual value as a statement of what might have resulted on many other campuses, had better judgment not prevailed years ago; and as a warning to those universities whose library situation includes some of the disabilities reported of Cornell by the surveyors.

The Cornell library picture contains all the classic elements of administrative chaos. A collection of 1,300,000 volumes—studded with such gems as the Dante, Petrarch, and Icelandic collections—is maintained and served through a jerry-built organization of more than thirty autonomous or loosely related library agencies, of which the university library and the agriculture group are the largest and most general members. Over-all control of Cornell's libraries is consigned to a faculty group—the library board. Such expensive operations as the purchase of books and binding, the exploitation of university publications for exchange, and cataloging occur in a variety of ways without sensible coordination or unified control. It is to Cornell's credit that the university is willing to display, for the benefit of others, the results of *laissez faire* management.

It is beyond the purpose of the survey to discover the source of this situation. To do so would be a valuable exercise in library history and an illuminating chapter in the record of university administration. It is easy to attribute the cause to the scholar-as-librarian—a type which has figured more than once in Cornell's history—and to his preoccupation with the gathering of books. It is more probable, however, that the dual sources of Cornell's support: private endowment and governmental appropriations and their reflection in the university's organization are the root of the trouble.

The Cornell survey team represents high authority in the fields of library government and statesmanship, resources, and technical services. Its recommendations are consistent with trends in librarianship manifested during the last two decades. If realized in the form of decision and action, they will raise the Cornell libraries, in time, to the level of libraries at comparable universities.

The Cornell survey report is of especial value to the administrators of large university libraries because the comprehensive surveys which preceded it—with the exception of the Stanford survey, as yet unpublished—have dealt with small collections. In no other survey have the many problems of a large library collection operating in a complex university been so fully examined.

In 1939 the Wilson-Branscomb-Dunbar-Lyle survey of the University of Georgia Library established a survey pattern for university libraries. During the ensuing decade this pattern has been applied to Indiana, Florida, South Carolina, Stanford, and—with modifications—to Mississippi. The results have been, and will continue to be, useful, wholly apart from their value to the examined libraries, to students and practitioners of university library administration. They are case studies of whole libraries; they reveal in detail the application of the best professional thought to problems which confront all scholarly libraries. There is hazard, however, in repetition: the hazard of the stereotype.

Perhaps we approach the end of a period. Many of these surveys occurred in an administrative interregnum, laying the foundation for a new program. Within the decade of these comprehensive surveys much change in chief administrative positions has taken place. It is conceivable that this crop of vigorous regimes will adopt a new attack. Two alternatives suggest themselves: the survey by non-librarians, supplementing modern administrative theory; and the limited, specific study of a single problem.

Most library surveys are made by librarians. Although they may add the weight of outside authority to locally-held views, they are drawn from a common reservoir of wisdom; a survey by experts is next door to a self-survey. It would be interesting to experiment with an examination of the end-products of library techniques and administration by the users, rather than the manufacturers.

An alert administration can readily identify a handful of specific local problems that will certainly yield to determined expert study, without being able to supply—from stock—the expertness required, or the time needed. This calls, not for the grand, comprehensive survey, but for a concentrated attack. What university administration will be so realistic as to employ a specialist in research, or a series of experts, to explore its community's needs for the subject cataloging of certain kinds of materials; the relation between undergraduate teaching methods and library services; or the analysis of the reference function in the large university library system? These are matters which commend themselves to the graduate library schools, but there is some doubt that libraries can await the necessarily slow processes of such agencies.—*Donald Coney, University of California Library, Berkeley.*

The Survey at Columbia

"Report of a Survey of the Technical Services of the Columbia University Libraries," by Maurice F. Tauber [and] L. Quincy Mumford. "A Report on Certain Problems of the Libraries and School of Library Service," by Louis R. Wilson, Keyes D. Metcalf [and] Donald Coney, chairman, New York N.Y., Columbia University Libraries, 1947. 57p., 85p. (Mimeographed).

These two publications, taken together, constitute a survey of the most important problems which confronted the new library administration at Columbia when it assumed responsibility for the libraries and the School of Library Service about five years ago. The release of these reports has been delayed because they were prepared in 1944 for the guidance of the university administration and the library administration, and these purposes could be served without publication. The reports have now been made available because it appeared that many of the problems faced at Columbia are not unlike those to be found in other large university library systems, and hence the solutions proposed by the surveyors for Columbia might be considered to have applications in other institutions. Even where the problems of an institution's libraries may seem quite unlike those at Columbia, it

is not unreasonable to expect that the recommendations made for Columbia may suggest solutions which might be suitable.

These survey reports may be considered as administrative reports, since they deal in very considerable part with problems which had been identified by the library administration, and for which, in at least some instances, tentative solutions had been proposed. They are concerned primarily with problems that fall within the jurisdiction of the administrative officers of the libraries and of the university rather than with matters of interest to members of the faculty or to the administrative officers of the various colleges and schools. Although this type of survey has apparently come into fairly common use by administrative officers of large libraries, the reports prepared as a result of these studies are seldom made available in published form, and are not widely known. These Columbia reports are the more welcome for this reason.

A second feature of these survey reports is the method by which they were prepared. They are not based so much on extensive compilations of data and extended series of conferences with faculty members and general university administrative officers as are some library surveys. Instead, the reports