THE MECHANICS OF BOOK SELECTION

Jack Chitwood

There is not a large mass of literature dealing with the mechanics of book selection. Most references to this or related topics are concerned either with the broader aspects of policy, with the "why" of selection, or with order procedures. It is possible sometimes to ferret pertinent information from these materials; on the other hand, it is obvious that many book selection policies are predominantly concerned with the mechanics of selection rather than with policy.

Within the past four or five years we have had synthetic presentations in textbook form of observations of these mechanics. These texts, Wulfekoetter's Acquisition Work,1 Carter and Bonk's Building Library Collections,2 and Wheeler and Goldhor's Practical Administration of Public Libraries3 have, in general, followed the pattern of Drury4 in his Book Selection, published over 30 years ago. Comparison of these presentations would indicate that no significant changes have taken place in the routines of book selection.

Only Wheeler and Goldhor mention the Greenaway innovation, which varies from the conventional approval copy method of acquiring books for examination, and only Carter and Bonk give any extensive coverage of methods used in larger agencies to assure systematic mechanical procedures for consolidation of book requisitioning. The latter accomplish this coverage by reprinting statements of procedures from various types of libraries in one of the appendices of their book.

Discussions of related topics often prove quite valuable as well as revealing--a kind of serendipitous discovery, we might say. For example, the book Reviews in Library Book Selection by Merritt, Boaz, and Tisdel5 should be studied by any administrator contemplating a change in procedure or policy of selection.

Since I felt that the published literature available was too meagre and because I thought I might possibly make some discoveries of benefit to us which would not otherwise be presented to the profession, I decided to send an informal request to librarians asking for a description of book selection procedures in their institutions. A total of 511 libraries were sent these requests. Of these, 300 were medium-sized and larger public libraries serving populations of 50,000 or more. The remaining were college and university libraries having materials budgets of $20,000 or more.

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Academic libraries responded as indicated:

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<th>Budget</th>
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<td>$ 20,000 - 50,000</td>
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<td>50,001 - 100,000</td>
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Public libraries responded as shown:

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<th>Population</th>
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<td>50,000 - 150,000</td>
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<td>150,001 - 500,000</td>
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The response to this request was quite good. Replies were received from 270 institutions, or almost 53 per cent of the total to which requests were sent. Responses from public libraries were 54 per cent (162 out of 300), and from academic libraries 108 replies were received, or 51 per cent. A very small number of respondents refused to supply any information for various reasons, the most frequent one being lack of time, although, surprisingly, unhappiness with their institutions' procedures was given as the reason in four cases. No attempt has been made to treat the data statistically since the information appears to lend itself better to broad descriptive techniques.

Our perspective on this problem was that of "how" libraries select materials, not "why" they select particular items. From this viewpoint there appear to be at least five basic questions:

1. Who is responsible for selecting materials?
   (a) Does anyone review initial selections?

2. How do selectors become aware of the needs for materials and of materials available to fill these needs?
   (a) Are there other than original selection units?
       (1) If so, do they all use the same sources of information?
       (2) If they do not, what are the characteristics of the kinds of sources used?

3. How are original authority unit selectors' decisions communicated to duplicate authority units?
4. Are selections (requisitions) consolidated?
   (a) Who does this?

5. How is the total selection decision transmitted to the ordering unit.

The organization of this presentation is from the viewpoint of type of library. Academic libraries are described as one unit, and because adult materials and children's materials in public libraries have distinctive selection procedures, these are presented separately.

Procedures in Academic Libraries

Academic institutions have traditionally distributed their library materials budgets to their teaching departments on the basis of formulas satisfactory for the given institution. This distribution results in varying, but usually minimal, amounts of unencumbered funds being retained by the library; the remaining funds are ordinarily encumbered for periodicals, continuations, and reference materials. There appears to be a trend away from this traditional division of funds, noticeable in some larger institutions and in those where there have been recent changes in the library administration. This trend places larger portions of the budget under more direct control of the library administrator and, at the same time, makes more real the library's responsibility for the proper development of the collection.

The library's retention of actual control of the funds would appear to provide for a more economical and consistent approach to collection building. While faculty may protest initially, they are free to suggest purchases; many institutions report that they find most current publications requested by faculty already in the collection or on order. In institutions where the faculty has fund control, the administrators indicate that collection building is extremely difficult because of the varying degrees of interest of the faculty personnel. No report indicates a really consistent procedure of faculty selection in these cases. Selection is assumed to be the teaching department's responsibility and is left to its members. Only one control feature is required by the library: all requests are supposed to be approved by the faculty department head or his designee. In a few instances, reports indicate that this practice is strictly adhered to and that unsigned requests are returned for signature.

Publishers' information brochures and out-of-print catalogs are ordinarily referred to faculty for examination. Institutions maintaining central desiderata files search the latter and place orders before referring them to faculty. No institution reports that current trade bibliography is referred to the faculty. This information is usually examined by members of the library staff who prepare suggestion slips and send them to the faculty.
Upon receipt of faculty requests, which may be in any form although, a standard card is usually suggested, the order or acquisition clerk is expected to verify the correctness of the bibliographical information in appropriate standard sources. The Library of Congress Catalogs, Cumulative Book Index, American Book Publishers’ Record, or dealers’ catalogs are the most frequently mentioned sources, although foreign bibliographies are indicated when appropriate. After the bibliographical information has been verified, the title is searched through the catalog, outstanding orders, and in-process files; it then is placed in the order routine unless it is found to be an unintentional request for added copies.

Larger libraries and libraries with subject departmental organization vary this procedure considerably. In the latter all requisitions are routed through the appropriate subject divisions where the bibliographical verification and searching take place. Larger libraries which have acquisition units have this searching performed in a pre-order unit.

Libraries which retain control of funds, and these are in the majority, depend more upon the library staff to initiate requests; in fact, this becomes a major responsibility. In most subject departmental organizations, the department is responsible for building the collection and devotes a great deal of time to analysis and searching.

Current publication requests may be transmitted to order units by coding brochures and bibliographies, usually Publishers’ Weekly. Most frequently, however, these units are expected to use standard request cards which are to be bibliographically correct and adequately searched before they are forwarded to the order unit. Library of Congress proof slips and Library Journal review cards are acceptable requisition forms in some institutions. Retrospective requisitioning for individual titles follows the same routine; however, because speed is an important factor, some routines may be detoured to accelerate the process.

In this type of library operation faculty requests are encouraged; in many institutions active faculty-staff cooperation in the development of segments of the collection is very successful. Particularly encouraging to most of us are those institutions which require faculty-library cooperation in the development of curriculum and specific courses. There are few which report this activity, but undoubtedly it is becoming more frequent.

Several institutions report automatic approval contracts with varying numbers of publishers. Materials received in this manner are examined, and decisions to keep or to reject such materials are made by the appropriate personnel, depending upon the authority pattern of the institution. Very few institutions indicate that the head librarian personally reviews requisitions, although heads of smaller libraries frequently do so. Most institutions mention a cost figure—
most frequently $50—beyond which purchases require the director’s signature. The University of Denver reported that the library staff has regular book selection meetings at which it examines requests received and listings of current publications. The purpose of the meetings is to arrive at decisions for ordering, to acquaint the staff with items being purchased, and to reduce the opportunities for areas or titles being overlooked. Such meetings undoubtedly produce other benefits.

Larger academic libraries quite often have professional bibliographers working in areas in which it has been decided to build or rebuild a hitherto neglected segment of the collection. These staff members may or may not be assigned to the library staff; they are hired on the basis of knowledge of a subject, language, or geographical area and usually have almost carte blanche authority to requisition materials. The use of such bibliographers is the most distinctive feature in differentiating the selection procedures of medium-sized academic institutions from those of larger academic libraries.

All staff selectors make the greatest use of current trade bibliographies as their source of information about the availability of materials, Publishers’ Weekly being the universally mentioned title. All institutions distribute publishers’ advertising and catalogs to faculty and staff. Library of Congress proof slips are mentioned by both San Fernando State College and the University of Connecticut as sources of information; purchasing, although not necessarily requisitioning, in the latter institution is done after the receipt of the proof slip so that processing will not be delayed by waiting for Library of Congress cataloging information. Many other institutions use Library of Congress proof slips for selection information, but Connecticut is the only institution reporting planned delay in purchasing current publications. Retrospective selection and purchasing of foreign titles receive the greatest attention from larger institutions and from those which recently created graduate programs. Purchases in these cases tend to be by extremes, either in isolated titles or in blocks of materials.

There appears to be a growing trend for even the smallest academic institutions to develop an acquisitions unit with at least the authority to coordinate the requisitioning of materials. In many cases, the acquisitions unit actually selects materials and is responsible for the development of the collection. This system may tend to place the public service personnel in the position of suggesting possibilities for purchase rather than to give them selection authority, in which case it removes selection authority from those having direct contact with users.

I should think that an organization with an acquisitions unit of this type will soon find its public service personnel little interested in keeping up with current publications. This practice may become detrimental to morale; yet it also has the advantage of allowing the
public service group more time to concentrate upon the materials actually in the collection. This latter function should contribute more to the creation of superior librarianship than checking reviews and trade bibliography allows. It is even conceivable that libraries could cease purchasing for an extended length of time, but would be able to continue to give excellent service with the materials on hand if the staff continues to enlarge its knowledge of these.

The major distinction between academic and public libraries, as far as mechanics of selection are concerned, is the need in the latter to provide for the coordination of selection between units within the same institution. In order to provide for effective book collections and at the same time reduce costs, means have had to be devised which make possible the simultaneous acquisition and processing of as many copies of the same title as may be wanted. In addition, public libraries are expected to provide new adult titles for circulation as near to the publication date as possible. Some academic institutions are also concerned with speed of acquisition of current titles; one reports that it expects to have half of its orders for current titles filled within two weeks and 80 per cent within one month. No other academic library indicated this interest, however.

Procedures in Public Libraries

The mechanics of selection in public libraries are greatly affected by these factors. All public libraries try by some method to have all units which may expect to want a title to select it at the same time, and they try to see that new adult titles are on the shelves, ready for circulation by the time they are published. They also attempt to involve in the selection process those staff members who are working directly with the public. These requirements contribute toward complex selection methods.

Only slightly less complex are the problems associated with the selection of children's and young adult materials. Because these categories do not have to be ready for use by publication date, a more leisurely pace can be followed. However, most children's librarians and young people's specialists feel that these materials must be read by local staff even though most reviews of these materials are prepared by respected colleagues and appear to be more critical than are those of adult books. In smaller libraries the staff must depend upon reviews and authoritative bibliographies and, when lucky, upon visits to book fairs or larger libraries near them. Reviewing media most frequently mentioned are the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, Library Journal, and Hornbook. A number of libraries cooperate by making their reviewing and examination services available to neighboring smaller institutions.

Librarians actually working with these age groups do the selecting. In institutions having limited staff, particularly limited
specialized staff, the professionally trained children's librarian is usually considered the coordinator for the selection of children's materials and in many cases actually selects for all agencies. The heads of extension units, although not specifically trained as children's specialists, often become so by default and necessity. They read or examine and review children's materials in much greater quantity than they do adult materials.

In larger systems or systems where there is adequate staff performing children's services and where a large portion of the materials can be acquired for examination, all materials are read and reviewed. These reviews are presented at children's services meetings where the decision to acquire or to reject is made. In systems having large coordinating or supervisory units, the reviews from the field staff are evaluated and decisions made in the coordinating office. In either of these types the materials are available for examination by selectors and other interested personnel. Lists are prepared which indicate both accepted and rejected titles, and accepted items are often coded to suggest possible value and use.

These lists serve as requisition forms to be checked by selectors and returned to the coordinating office before scheduled times. At this office selections are evaluated in terms of the agency selecting, and quantities are consolidated onto a master requisition form, ordinarily a multicopy type. The requisition is forwarded to the order office while one copy is used for requisitions-out files. In some libraries the consolidation of requisitions takes place in the order department, which appears to be the proper location for such activities. In those libraries having acquisition units with responsibility for coordinating requisitioning procedures, the consolidation takes place in this office. Other institutions make this a function of the book selection unit which may be a part of a larger office.

Three articles detailing children's materials selection practices in three types of libraries, large, medium, and regional and county, appeared in a 1961 issue of Library Journal. These articles provide specific details of practices described in general in this paper.

There are three basic methods through which adult materials are requisitioned in public libraries. The first is by the personal selection of key professional personnel. Even in a few institutions serving large geographic areas, such as are found in consolidated county and regional systems, the head librarian performs all of the mechanics of selection. When these institutions are fortunate enough to acquire additional staff, selection duties are assigned to them, usually upon the basis of the function which the new staff member is to perform. Most frequently the head librarian retains fiction as his area of selection, possibly because this is the group of materials he needs to know best because of expected complaints, but also because one of the
first specialists to be hired is one in reference, where nonfiction will be used most frequently.

Institutions which use this method of selection indicate their choices by coding devices marked in reviewing media; the most often mentioned media are the ALA Booklist, Library Journal, and Virginia Kirkus' Book Service. These media are then routed to clerks who search the catalog and the outstanding order file to prevent unwanted duplication before preparing the order for transmission.

The smaller the budget, the more likely the institution is to deal directly with publishers or local book stores, since in either case the total discount is better than it would be if purchase were directed through a wholesaler. Dealers' representatives also contribute more to selection decisions in institutions with smaller budgets. Smaller institutions in the vicinity of larger cities frequently go directly to cooperating book stores where they select from a store's stock. One larger system sends representatives to select from a wholesaler's shelves the materials to be examined "on approval."

As institutions grow larger, although no definite line of demarcation can be drawn, complexity in the mechanics of selection is a concomitant development, which leads to the second general method of selection, selection by committee. Since budgets for books and additional staff are likely to increase proportionately, the need for assistance in materials selection occurs at about the same time. The first step in the organization of the committee for selection appears to be the "committee of the whole." This committee is composed of the professionally trained staff, which at this point ordinarily consists of the head librarian, the reference librarian, and the cataloger. Even in institutions without the formal committee organization, consultation about book selection is usually conducted in an informal committee situation.

At this point of development, coding the reviewing media is still the method used most often for indicating selections; some selectors will indicate a need to read some titles before adding, in which case these will be sent for "on approval." These are again forwarded to a clerk who prepares a preliminary consolidated order, which is referred for review to the head librarian. The latter then makes the final selection of titles, indicates or approves quantities to be ordered, and returns the approved forms to the order clerk for placement with the vendor.

It should be noted that when there is a special department represented in the library's organization, the head of this department has almost free range in selection, even though the institution may otherwise be committee prone. Thus, the head of reference selects all reference titles, and the head of children's work selects all juvenile titles without the aid of assisting committee members. As institutions
grow in complexity, the same principle holds true. Committees are reserved usually for general materials, mainly fiction and popular nonfiction.

The need for complexity in selection mechanics is directly related to the size of staff and number of units which have to be kept informed of the materials being chosen. A library system which has branches responsible for building their own collections has to keep all responsible personnel informed if it is to provide an opportunity for the consolidation of requests at one point and at one time in order to reduce the confusion and consequent extra, expensive labor in ordering and processing. Procedures must provide, too, for the acquisition of materials near the time at which they are being advertised in order to take advantage of the publishers' promotional activity.

This practice creates the need for the third basic method of selection which is common to larger public libraries, a method which involves the preparation of a list of approved titles for the selection of added copies. The major variation in practices is in the method used for qualifying titles approved for selection by extension units and is ordinarily based upon selections of the central or main library units. Sometimes the selections are made by committee, sometimes by individual selectors.

The larger the library, the more likely it is that fiction and at least popular nonfiction will be read; one library indicated that over 70 per cent of the titles purchased during the previous year had been read by the staff. This appears to be a misdirection of time and energy. Most libraries of any given size will buy essentially the same titles in these categories with very few and relatively insignificant differences. Experience has also indicated to the writer that reviews by staff members are very seldom critical or evaluative; rather they tend to grow less so the longer the reviewer has been a librarian. In addition to the doubtful value of such procedures is the difficulty of obtaining approval copies soon enough of all titles which, it may be thought, need reviewing. It also appears to be questionable to neglect the reading of nonfiction, which is based presumably upon facts and which could be evaluated and at the same time to insist upon reviewing fiction, which does not even pretend to be factual and is admittedly imaginative. Staff reviews when used are ordinarily written and attached to the book for examination by other staff members. They are also used at staff book selection meetings when representatives assemble to hear them. Ordinarily they are limited to two to five minutes of presentation time; a large number of larger and medium-sized libraries use the book selection meeting as one of their selection procedures.

Not all libraries try to read all titles, however; and there are almost as many ways of selecting books as there are libraries. A few selected examples of institutions present interesting variations.
The Evansville (Indiana) Public Library is a medium-sized institution using a committee system. The committee in this instance does not operate as a selection unit; the selection is still done by public service personnel representing specific service responsibilities. The function of this committee is to produce a list of acceptable titles from all those which it may know are available and from which the various selection units may choose. The committee is specifically charged to provide enough titles that selectors will have some freedom of choice. The committee is small; it consists of three persons, with the librarian, assistant librarian, or chief of technical services serving as chairman. The chairman is assisted by one professional from the circulation department (Evansville has no subject departments) and one who is doing adult work in a branch.

The committee produces its list from selections made from any sources it chooses although these tend to be the reviewing media familiar to us all. Sixteen titles ranging from the Essay and General Literature Index to Recreation are on the regular reviewing list. Advertisements are considered for titles as are reviews and bibliographies. These are coded to indicate approved titles and are given to a clerk who then prepares the list. In addition, Evansville has Greenaway Plan contracts with a number of publishers and uses selections from these for its list, too. The committee decides by unanimous vote which items are to be listed from those nominated. However, placing a title on the acceptable list does not indicate that the title will ever be in the library, for although the committee has the authority to requisition, this is not its main purpose. Its lists are coded, however, to indicate those titles which it considers especially valuable for specific consideration. The list is duplicated and distributed to all agencies which are expected to indicate titles and quantity wanted; titles not listed are not available to selectors. All selection activities are scheduled, and reviewing media and books, when available, are kept ready for selectors to examine during the time the list is current. At the end of the period the lists which have been returned are given to the order clerk who examines them for requisitions and prepares a consolidated order.

Apparently Evansville is not concerned with having copies of books in the Central Library collection before they are available to extension units, a very common requirement in most public libraries. It would appear that this library has faced an issue fairly which permits a community agency to build its collection to suit the community. On the other hand, this approach must increase processing and public service problems.

The Indianapolis Public Library abandoned general staff reading for selection purposes in 1957. Emphasis was then channeled toward reading for public service in the expectation that those working in any agency should be familiar with the materials in the agency rather than
toward having time diverted from so basic a responsibility. To those who have a basic distrust of professional reviewers this practice is heresy, but it appears to be working quite successfully.

The Indianapolis Public Library is organized on a subject departamentalized scheme, and extension units are not allowed to have materials which are not represented in the central collection other than for special interest reasons, e.g., ethnic communities near a branch. The subject units, of which there are five, are responsible for the original selection for the system, all of which is controlled by coordinators of adult and children's services. A Young Adult Consultant assigned to the Adult Coordinator's office serves to advise units on the selection of materials and on service for this age group.

All subject divisions receive general and specialized reviewing media and are sent pertinent publishers' brochures as they arrive. Extra copies of publishers' catalogs and brochures are forwarded from the coordinator's office where files are maintained of all catalogs later than those appearing in the current Publishers' Trade List Annual. The coordinator also maintains extensive general bibliographic resources. Upon receipt of the general reviewing media, the coordinator's staff search the files of requisitions outstanding and titles being considered and indicate the status of all titles listed before forwarding them to the subject divisions.

As quickly as the reviews are received the divisional staffs read them and underline informative and evaluative passages. The publications are returned then to the coordinator's office where a card is typed in duplicate for all reviews indicated. The coordinator's copy is filed in the master file, which is composed of titles being considered and requisitions outstanding, and the duplicate goes into the divisional consideration files.

On a predetermined schedule the divisions select titles from their consideration files for requisition, the total value of which is based upon a prorated portion of their budget. Arts and Social Science Divisions submit requisitions weekly, while the Science and Technology Division, the Business Library, and the Teachers' Library prepare monthly requisitions.

The subject unit prepares a three-part requisition form for any title wanted. In addition to the usual necessary bibliographic information the form calls for the number of copies wanted, indicates whether the title is to circulate or to be used for reference, and identifies which unit is requisitioning it. All reviewing information which has been collected to this point is attached to the original and duplicate copies of the requisition and is forwarded to the coordinator's office. The third copy is retained for agency files.

The coordinator examines each group of requisitions and discusses with the division head any titles of doubtful value or titles not included which should be added to this current requisition list.
Although the coordinator has the authority to disapprove any item, in practice it is seldom necessary for him to do so. The coordinator's staff then place approved titles on requisition lists, two copies of which are distributed to each requisitioning unit. These lists are very comprehensive and omit only the most expensive and specialized titles, since one of their purposes is to inform the entire staff of the total book selection picture.

The requisition list is so designed that it provides a short excerpt from a review as well as the location of other reviews which have appeared and thus serves as an informal index to reviews prior to the appearance of the *Book Review Digest*. It also is coded by the division heads or the coordinator to indicate titles which are judged to deserve careful consideration by extension agencies. Extension units are free to requisition any titles in the central collection, but are urged to consult with the coordinator concerning titles of doubtful value. They are allowed seven days to make their selections, indicate the number of copies wanted, and return one copy of the list to the coordinator's office.

The coordinator then examines each returned list to evaluate the general appropriateness of the selections made and consolidates the approved extension unit requests into the requisition of the original authority unit. The consolidated requisitions are forwarded to the order office, where the original is validated and returned to the originating unit to be filed in that unit's outstanding requisition file as a record of when given titles were actually ordered. Added and replacement copies are listed on the requisition list if they are in the current requests of an originating agency, and twice each year a general replacement requisition period is announced. Periodically the coordinator examines portions of the collection and prepares a "basic" list of titles in the categories studied. Only titles in print are listed so that extension agencies can use the list for requisition purposes. This list follows the design of regular lists and is processed in the same manner although it is titled to distinguish it from them.

In addition to requisitioning from reviews, Indianapolis participates with a number of publishers in advance copy review plans. Some of these are standard "on approval" agreements which require the return of unwanted items, but most are Greenaway contracts to take and keep all trades titles issued.

When these publications arrive, four to six weeks prior to publication date, they are routed to the adult coordinator's office. If a title is new to the library, a requisition form is typed for it and placed in the book. Files are searched for any evaluative information which may have been collected, and any found is assembled and placed in the book with the requisition. One copy of the requisition form is then forwarded to the division in which the title, if accepted, will be classified to inform the division that the title has arrived and to indicate that
any additional information should be sent to the coordinator's office, where it will be assembled with that already on hand.

The books are placed on shelves by divisional category for weekly examination and decision by division heads. These decisions are reviewed by the coordinator, and those items accepted are separated from those rejected. Extension unit administrators come to the central library at least once each week to examine these materials as well as the new titles which have been processed during the preceding week, which are also on display in the coordinator's office. These administrators indicate their decision by symbols marked in unit blocks on the requisition form; both negative and positive decisions must be shown. At the end of the examination period these requisitions are examined and evaluated by the coordinator and consolidated by the coordinator's staff. The consolidated requisition and the accepted books are forwarded to the order section while rejected Greenaway plan titles are assembled for later disposition. Rejected "approval" titles are returned to their source.

A copy of the weekly listing of "New Books Added to the Library," a publication of the Technical Processes Division at Indianapolis, is used as a requisition form for added copies wanted of the books on the list which are displayed in the coordinator's office for a week. The coordinator's staff consolidate requisitions for these materials at the end of the week and forward the requisitions to the order section. Thus, there are at least two, and sometimes three, opportunities for extension units to requisition most titles. Pamphlet material is treated in essentially the same manner, the exception being that there are no reviews available for these materials.

Although the Indianapolis procedure might appear to be more complex than necessary, it was established to give all units an equal opportunity to build collections systematically and to provide for a continuing information program about books being selected for all staff working with the public. By approaching selection mechanics in such a comprehensive manner, the administrator hoped to interest the staff in a broadening educational program, and thus indirectly to provide better informed assistance for library users since a number of time-consuming functions usually associated with book selection would be consolidated into one office or reduced to routines.

For use as requisition forms the Memphis Public Library prints its own 3" x 5" slips (rather than lists). These are prepared by the order department from codes indicated by the circulation department head in ALA Booklist, Publishers' Weekly, and Library Journal. The slips are distributed to branches and are arranged in the same order in which they appear in the periodical from which they were taken. Information included indicates sources of reviews in addition to the necessary trade and bibliographical data. The branch librarian marks the number of copies wanted of any desired title and returns those
slips to the circulation department where they are consolidated onto the master requisition card, which is one of the copies of the original printing. The branch slip is then returned to the branch for its files.

The consolidated order is prepared in five copies, all a part of the original printing, one of which remains in the circulation department file, one goes to the catalog department, and three are sent to the order department by way of the Director’s office. The order department then sends two to the vendor.

This library also has Greenaway contracts. When these arrive, they go to the order department, where requisition slips are prepared, and are then referred to the Book Selection Committee which assigns the book to a staff member for a review, to be written on the requisition slip in the book. Weekly reviewing meetings are held at which selectors mark the review-requisition slip to indicate the number of copies wanted. The circulation department head transfers the number of copies wanted by each agency to individual requisition forms for each and sends them to the appropriate branch. From this point the procedure is the same as that used for requisitioning from reviews.

The largest public libraries have separate book selection units which are usually responsible for at least the functioning of the mechanical procedures of selection and in some instances are the selection authority for the system. For instance, the Milwaukee Public Library operates with an acquisitions librarian. However, the central library subject department personnel, of whom there are 25, are the selectors for the system. At Milwaukee the basic book information tool for the mechanics of selection if Publishers’ Weekly which is coded by the selectors for titles which they want ordered. These titles are in addition to the volumes which are received from various other sources, such as gifts from publishers and an automatic approval copy plan which brings about 100 volumes a week into the Milwaukee library selection procedure.

The selectors, who also catalog their selections, serve the public, and maintain their collection, indicate their decision in the books which have been placed upon designated shelves in the processing area. Items having special significance for branch collections are marked to draw the branch selection committee’s attention to them. The Milwaukee branches are organized into three groups from each of which a representative is selected to meet with the Acquisitions Librarian each week. From all the materials on the selector’s shelves, which includes pamphlets and documents in addition to books, this committee selects items for each of the three categories of branches which it thinks to be of interest to neighborhood libraries. A list of these selections, along with trade and review information and a description form of the material is mailed to all neighborhood branches, which indicates for which group each is recommended.
Milwaukee lists are made from actual examination of materials by committee but the actions of the committee are imposed upon extension units unless the unit objects. A recommendation by the committee for a particular group constitutes a requisition for all libraries in the group unless an agency calls to cancel specific items. Titles listed but not recommended for one group, or unlisted but being added to the central collection, can be requisitioned by agencies in other groups by calls to the processing department.

At Philadelphia control of the mechanics of selection is assigned to a head of book selection. Here, too, subject department heads initiate selection by coding familiar reviewing media. Requisitions are placed for items indicated and upon receipt are sent to a New Book Room. The central library department heads examine these and indicate which are for “central only” and those which are to be recommended for branch consideration. Only titles having reviews can be considered for branches. The head of book selection acts as an adviser in this procedure.

Reviews may be from Library Journal, the staff, or New Book Room reviews, which are edited statements from Kirkus or other sources and endorsed by New Book Room staff as suitable after study of the title in question. Controversial titles will have several reviews, sometimes three or four, from the staff. Staff reviews are required of most fiction titles. After reviews are received, the head of the book order room re-examines them and determines which titles are to be included on the weekly checklist of books approved for branch purchase.

Every Wednesday the titles listed and those assigned to “central only” are assembled for branch ordering along with the checklist. Branches examine all titles and in special cases can order “central only” titles. On a bulk order slip branch selectors indicate the number of copies needed or desired titles. Central departments which want additional copies use the same form.

Three times a year the Fall, Winter, and Spring Announcement issues of Publishers’ Weekly are reviewed by a committee of branch and central staff under the chairmanship of the head of book selection. At these meetings a list of titles expected to be in demand is prepared for direct bulk ordering without waiting for the titles to be examined. Philadelphia, the home of the Greenaway Plan, has contracts with sixteen publishers to receive their trade items prior to publication. These are coordinated into the book selection routines described above.

Quite obviously the ultimate solution to many of the problems of book selection has not been found. Each institution has been forced to adopt procedures acceptable to the various units involved in the selection process, and most indicate reasonable satisfaction with their own solution.
From this observation point a suggestion might be in order: would the use of cards, similar to those published by Library Journal, as the publication form for trade bibliography and reviewing media aimed at the library and book trade be a big step forward? In working on this paper I was impressed by the amount of copying which is done from journals for institutional distribution. Some publishers are already issuing cards and some libraries are experimenting with photographing entries in American Book Publishing Record for cataloging purposes, perhaps even for selection procedures although none indicated this practice in the material sent to me.

REFERENCES


