EMERGING TRENDS IN INTERLIBRARY COOPERATION

Cooperation among libraries is by no means a fresh and new idea. I need only mention interlibrary loan, centralized cataloging, personal use of reference, bibliographic records of holdings among groups of libraries, and agreements on planned joint acquisition of resources, including one among three large libraries in Chicago that is dated 1895. I do not know when the first book was exchanged between libraries in the United States, but I do know that the February 1913 issue of Library Journal carries an article on interlibrary loan that asks how long larger libraries can continue to carry the load of requests from smaller libraries without some compensating return. Illinois began to answer the question half a century later by passing state legislation providing payments to designated reference and research centers.

The early literature does not use the word cooperation as much as we do now, but the term may well apply in its purest meaning to the spontaneous, informal sharing of resources that was fairly common by the turn of the century. For a considerable period, libraries in cities, towns, schools, colleges, and universities were hard pressed to keep up with immediate and mounting local demands. Following this came a considerable lull in concrete cooperative projects among libraries. A man trying to keep his own boat afloat does not have much time to engage in squadron maneuvers with others, but a man who realizes he is destined in time to sink alone, does look around for help.

Librarians began looking around for help in earnest after World War II. The 1944 Post-War Standards for Public Libraries incorporated the concept of systems. Research libraries jointly sought to catch up on acquisitions delayed by
the war, and finding that they did not come to blows in dividing up accumulated materials, applied the same principle to future acquisitions in the Farmington Plan.

If we apply the word cooperation, in the sense of working together, to the earlier interlibrary activities, then the recent effort might be characterized more as "structured coordination." Actually current plans do not introduce many new kinds of cooperative endeavor or service. What is new are the structures for coordinated action.

This is implied in our dependence on the word "systems." We are seeking to institutionalize cooperation. New York, which has led the way in many respects, now has two congeries of systems: the public library structures and the reference and research agencies, the latter with new boards of directors and new staffs. The bulk of their work to date can be fitted under the same five essentials of planned acquisition, interlibrary loan, interlibrary direct use, comprehensive bibliographic records, and joint technical operations. If the New York reference and research systems had existed fifty years ago, they might have developed much the same programs as are emerging today.

There is a new element, and it might well have a greater impact than structures for coordination. I refer to automation and electronic transmission. Think what facsimile transmission, made practicable and economical, will mean for interlibrary loan as we have known it—we can see the image now rather than getting the book itself two weeks from now. There is a chain effect here: if direct access at a distance can be provided, we must also take a fresh look at planned joint acquisition—it will be more efficient to have a transmission center in one large library than to seek to orchestrate the separate holdings of various libraries. Interesting in this regard is the RAND Corporation report entitled *A Billion Books for Education in America and the World,* with its conjecture about serving specialized America with 100 libraries of 10,000,000 volumes each. Machine-readable bibliographic and cataloging information which will not only affect localized cataloging combines, but will also permit various forms of joint records of holdings must also be considered.

How soon will the mechanized library appear? I would not venture a guess, and it may not come at all in the form now envisioned. I recall that when I shifted to publishing ten years ago and found myself caught up in endless publishers' luncheons, one could bring down the group at the table in derisive glee by telling the newest story on how the computer had loused up a recent publishing venture. Today practically every one of these publishers works with machine-readable tape for setting type, justifying margins, hyphenating words, laying out pages, and assigning page numbers.

Publishers' luncheon tables are not amused by computer stories today. They have returned to talking as publishers, about what books are needed and how they can be created. The automated library will no more eliminate librarians than automated printing has eliminated publishers. It will simply permit them to concentrate on practicing librarianship, which has to do with what resources people need and how to provide them.
LIBRARY COOPERATION TODAY

In the last decade or two, some librarians have moved beyond mere talk about cooperation to genuine concern about the limitations of their own resources; efforts and growing interest in what might be accomplished jointly are prevalent. This is an intangible move, occurring in the minds of library officials, but it is a first requirement if service is to get off dead center. Where this psychic step has not been taken, and there are many places where it has not, precisely there is where joint action among libraries is absent or lagging.

I believe that concern exists to a degree on the part of the several types of librarians—public, academic, school, and special. Up to this point we are dealing with an outlook that is not confined to one or another type of library.

The second step of contact and consultation has taken place in many localities, states and regions. The plant of cooperation grows under the glow of direct human exchange. It is a source of comfort to find that others are in the same fix as you are, and is further reassuring to hear that by holding hands members of a group may more effectively meet their common problems. Meetings at this stage are likely to have considerable warmth but few tangible results.

It is here at the early stage of contact and consultation that the libraries of the several types part company. Each group has its own problems and hopes, separate from those of other types of libraries. Small wonder that in the succeeding steps—making plans, getting money, establishing structures of cooperation—the types of libraries have for the most part gone their own ways.

The concerned and consulting group is likely to make plans, big or small. That stage is marked here in Illinois by the Rohlf Report, and I suspect that one could find less formal plans among groups of college and school libraries in the state. It follows from the parting of the ways at the preceding step of consultation that most such plans are for one type of library.

The fanciest plans have been for public libraries. The published standards for this kind of library assume joint endeavor. Federal funds have been used for cooperative public library planning. The state library agencies—which for the most part are really public library agencies—have either sponsored planning or engaged in it themselves.

To this point librarians have been mostly talking to each other. Now with a plan in hand they must talk to the holders of the purse strings. The reason why money has been essential is that the plans really do not propose cooperation among libraries. What they propose is new agencies in one form or another—usually called systems—to which libraries can go to get the advantages of a larger unit. I think the distinction is more than semantic or technical, as we will see shortly in analyzing existing public library systems.

The response from government sources of money has been encouraging. Illinois librarians have found that it is possible to present the cause of libraries to state officials and get a positive response. Other states have also had a degree of success, even when their plans were not made as carefully as those of Illinois. If nothing else could be claimed for the cooperative systems concept, it has proven to be a means to focus attention on library needs and to open added channels of
support. If you are inclined to be cynical, you might push this a step further and wonder whether these systems programs in some states were really designed to promote cooperation or to tap state money.

My theme at the moment is that there has been a discernible advance through the several steps of the cooperative sequence among libraries. We are in a mood for joint action.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS

While public library systems are by no means the only form of current library cooperation, they are at present the most active spot and preempt much of our attention. They deserve review here both as a trend in themselves and as an indication of the direction in which we are moving. While they do not formally involve various types of libraries, we may be able to learn from them.

The cooperative library system is the modern version of the larger unit library. The earlier form was the county or multi-county library, to which we gave a generation of effort, only to realize after building a thousand county libraries that this was really not what was meant by modern library service. We had to learn the hard way that the combination of weak agencies into a unit serving a larger piece of territory did not make for effective service. It took twenty-five years to learn this lesson. The experience should make us less than confident that we have since found revealed truth.

Now, rather than building up county or multi-county libraries, the approach is through the system—meaning by this a coordinating structure of some kind, retention of local autonomy, voluntary participation, flexibility of territory, and selectivity of projects. The individual library needs to do very little to become a member of a system, and must continue to partake of very little in order to remain in the fold. The present-day library system is most permissive. This is at once its strength and its weakness.

A rich variety of state plans have grown up within this framework. New York broke though by creating separate library centers within regions, around which individual libraries could gather to share resources and services provided for them. Pennsylvania is betting its money on existing larger libraries spread throughout the state, thus avoiding an added bureaucracy. California does not have a uniform state-wide pattern but sponsors decentralized cooperative ventures, with the result that the North Bay group is quite different from the Black Gold cooperative centered on Santa Barbara, and this in turn is different from the regional reference program based in Fresno. Maryland starts from its foundation of county libraries covering the state and instead of multi-purpose cooperative units adds interlibrary agencies for distinct functions—new processing centers, interlibrary loan and, shortly, interlibrary reference centered on the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. The variety among state plans for library systems is one of the most encouraging signs in the picture.

The Illinois plan has elements of several of these, and it remains to be seen whether it is the best eclectic combination for the circumstances. The systems design is taken from the New York model and the reference and research design from Pennsylvania. Given these sources, I would like to make an obvious
suggestion; New York has just completed one of the very few evaluations we have of systems programs in any depth. The prime effort in that evaluation was not to analyze structure as such, but to assess its effect on service, down in the local library. In over-simplified summary, in many smaller libraries there were discernibly more books available to the reader, in some libraries use of interlibrary loan doubled, and in a few libraries there was demonstrable improvement in staff service in the form of reference and advisory performance. You may have noted that progression of terms from many for better resources, to some for opening a wider world through interlibrary loan, to a few for effect on staff performance. The toughest job in a systems program is to improve service in the front lines, the quality of performance of staff in local libraries. Note also in the New York evaluation report the mounting strain that was found on the systems structures at the point of the central or headquarters libraries. You will also find in that report a reaching for a regional base for both service and financial purposes that is larger than the natural contiguous local systems.

As to the Pennsylvania reference and research program, there has been no detailed evaluation of this except in the recent re-survey in that state, but you will find benefit in going through the minutes of meetings and noting the program developed by the council of the four regional resource libraries.

Let me now return to a closer look at common elements and possible problems in public library systems as they have developed. Their most frequent services are interlibrary loan, building up of reserve resources, and advice and consultation for local staff. Does this have a familiar ring? Of course—it is the standard program of state library agencies, as set forth in considerable variety in the 1963 Standards for Library Functions at the State Level. Rather than being billed as cooperation in the sense of several units sharing strength and each helping the other, the usual library system might better be described as a localized state library service agency, financed by state funds, providing various services of particular value to smaller libraries, and used by local units alert enough to take advantage of them.

This characterization is not intended to diminish systems but to place them within the spectrum of library cooperation. I am disturbed when existing local systems are somehow assumed to be the sum and apex of interlibrary cooperation; they are, on the contrary, only a start, and indeed are simply a more localized way of doing what we have done in the past.

Seen in this light, we can more objectively consider questions about these new systems. They call for relatively little commitment on the part of local libraries. Library systems only slowly develop a sense of widespread identification that would hold them together in time of stress. Until then they are more like dispensers of aid to underdeveloped countries, and those who receive are not always as grateful as the giver would wish. The first test comes two or three years after systems are formed, when promise has become reality, and some libraries feel disappointed. Another test comes when the largest and strongest units in the enterprise assess what they get out of the system program as compared with what they could get on their own with their share of the system funds. We are dealing with a tenuous structure, held together not so much by mutual benefit and common sacrifice as by persuasion, gifts and a call
to remote professional standards. Under the circumstances the systems directors would do well not to be too concerned about job security.

I would like to see more required of local libraries for participation in cooperative ventures. The sustaining power of a joint project that I enter with you is that we each put something in, thus feeling that the enterprise is our own, and we each get something out, thus feeling that it is worth the effort. I cannot rightly call this an emerging trend because system directors, like their forebears in the state capitol, tend to hold up the prospect of rich rewards for little sacrifice, and hesitate to mobilize a genuine mutual aid society where each member has to contribute. One hard contribution could be in the form of money to support expanded system programs decided upon jointly by the members themselves, the money not to be deducted from already limited local funds, but coming perhaps from the county level which also has an inter-jurisdictional library interest, or from new region-wide library districts.

Some localities do not participate in systems programs right from the beginning. Others—a larger number—are technically part of the system but participate as little as professional and public opinion will allow. Do not make the mistake of equating the theoretical opportunity for system benefits with the actuality of better service for all the people. Many Americans are getting better library service through agencies participating in organized cooperative programs in their areas, but many more—in and out of the system, not holdouts and dropouts alone—are exactly where they were before. I anticipate increasing concern about the non-participants, more direct pressure through granting or withholding of state funds to get them in, and in time clearer state criteria and regulations defining participation.

Most of the public library systems exist as the result of a transfusion of state money. Interestingly this is not the case in California, which is far behind others in state aid to libraries. Yet in some areas of that state there is more local action in interlibrary cooperation than in some of the states making substantial grants. California lacks state funds but has local commitment. I am uneasy about other states that have money from the state capital but minimum local interest and concern. I hope this type of involvement is not one of the emerging trends in joint library organization. Passing the buck, shifting the problem to the systems area or region or state, getting outside money, setting up a separate center so that we can each go back to our own office and let someone else worry about interlibrary development would be disastrous for library cooperation. From this little excursion into public library systems, we can extract some fairly tangible trends that are likely to appear also in cooperation among types of libraries: building of new structures, assignment of separate personnel to the job, infusion of fresh funds from the outside, dependence on voluntary participation, flexibility in both the territorial and the governmental bases, and a search for equity to compensate larger libraries which give more than they receive in joint action.

ARE WE PREPARING FOR 1970 OR 1950?

For all the present activity, library systems have been slow to get moving. The concept in its present form is at least twenty-five years old. The same
comment of slow development applies to other forms of cooperation, whether within or among types of libraries.

This could be dismissed as the subjective judgment of an impatient man, except that it leads to a further and more disturbing question. Our present modes of cooperation were conceived a generation ago. They were designed to meet the needs of the immediate postwar world. Now twenty years later we are just beginning to move on a wide scale. Could it be that using the concepts of the past we will get library service suitable only for the past? I am trying to say that a well-developed library service in the present systems pattern might have been equal to the demands of 1950 but may not be equal to 1970.

Why equal to 1950 but not to 1970? What really has changed in the interval? This is not the place to go into a detailed statement of the trends of the times, but let me simply remind you of a few factors that have profoundly changed in twenty years and which will almost surely continue to do so in the next two decades. As a society we came out of the depression and the war with the narrow purpose of getting our economic system back to normal productivity. What it took us longer to see was that in the process the very nature of that system had changed, from a base of energy to a base of knowledge. In making stock market investments today, for example, it is wise not to select the company with the greatest productivity but the firm with the most active research program and the greatest reservoir of human brainpower. It is no accident that we have many more students and that their numbers are increasing most rapidly at the higher levels of education.

One could pick up various social trends and develop them in many directions to show the likely differences between library requirements twenty years hence and twenty years in the past. Let me develop just one trend, growing out of my reference to a society of specialists. (By specialists I refer not solely to researchers within universities and laboratories but to individuals throughout our society who work, read and get information within defined and particularized areas.) My point is that each of these individuals function less in a limited spatial community and more in a far-flung special-interest community. Of course they operate locally as parent or grocery shopper or church goer. But in their specialties, for which they seek library resources, they are part of a wide fraternity and communication network, and they have more contacts, read about and exchange ideas more extensively within this far-flung network than they do with the neighbor three doors away.

Yet the public library, for one, is a space-oriented institution, a delivery system defined by territory. It is for this city, that town, the other county. It has branches in local neighborhoods. The concept behind it is how far a person will go to get a physical book. If he will not go beyond the crossroads, we will send a bookmobile there. But if we take the increasing number of individuals who are also specialists as our users, and bring in emerging communication devices as means to get resources to them, we have a new ball game.

The question shifts from how far the user will go to get the book, to how far we will shortly be able to send the book to him. Instead of asking how many blocks or floors the reader will walk or how many miles he will drive his car, we might better ask what is the practical working radius of Telestar. We are an
earth-bound institution. As and if spatial limitations are removed, the implications for the structure of library service are profound, and also the implications for relating ourselves directly and selectively to the motives of readers. This leads me to one trend that I sincerely hope emerges—the building of evaluation into any cooperative library endeavor. Illinois is spending substantial sums to improve interlibrary loan. But is information on who is using this service, for what purpose, with what results, at what speed, and at what cost being gathered? Interlibrary cooperation will be a winding path of disillusionment unless we stand off and judge ourselves as we go along.

The recent national study of public library systems by the Nelson Associates organization was an attempt to evaluate an important cooperative trend, but it fell short of its mark. To begin with, they had $50,000 to judge 1,000 agencies, which works out to $50 a shot. Even then, significant returns might have been achieved if libraries had adequate before-and-after data on what they are doing, but this was not the case. I advise that Illinois should not venture too far on a systems program, or on any other cooperative venture, before taking stock.

COOPERATION AMONG TYPES OF LIBRARIES

Shifting the base of cooperative planning to the various types of libraries might provide a means not only to get more riders on the present bandwagon but also to jointly plan new vehicles. This starts with the very framework within which we think about the totality of library service. Our taxonomy has an institutional base. We speak of the four kinds of libraries—actually they could be grouped into three kinds, or five, or more—which are defined by the type of organization that foots the bill: government, school, university or business-industry. Thus, when we refer to cooperation among types of libraries, we mean in part not solely cooperation among libraries but between this city and that school and the college at the edge of town and the large industry out in the industrial park. We have not only the separateness of libraries to bridge but also the separateness of these discrete parts of our governmental-educational-economic fabric. It is one thing to get the several libraries to agree, but another to get the city council and the board of education and the trustees of the university and the manager of the aerospace company to sign a contractual agreement. But by accomplishing this, libraries may find that their programs get much more attention from officials.

In the process of achieving cooperation planners may have to re-think their roles and functions. For example, we very much need an agreed upon division of responsibilities between public and school libraries. But this in turn rests upon clarification of just what the school conceives to be 1) its proper scope and limits and 2) its achievable performance in providing the resources needed by its students, and equally upon clarification of 1) just what part the public library should properly play and 2) how far it can responsibly commit itself in the light of its other publics and objectives. These turn out to be soul-wrenching questions; and, once again the relevant data are often lacking. I find that when discussion starts between school and public librarians, there is no
clear evidence of just what high-school students need or actually seek, or even of what teachers ask them to seek; ask teachers and you get one answer, ask librarians and you get another. In a research project now getting underway in Philadelphia we are going directly to students themselves for the answer.

In the process of planning across the lines separating types of libraries, we will need to drop our institutional provincialism and think more in terms of library users and library functions. There is more than one way to cut the library pie—it does not necessarily have to be quartered into the four existing kinds of libraries.

One alternative approach is in terms of groups of users. There are children, students, the individuals as specialists I have mentioned, and other groups, and each seeks different materials and uses them in a different way. It is interesting that when one mentally starts from scratch and imagines the proper and ideal facilities for each of these groups, that the results vary widely for each. Yet as most libraries are now organized we often combine facilities for several types in one agency. This is particularly true of the public library but it also applies elsewhere in the prevailing structure; for example, every university librarian is conscious of the push and pull between provision for students and provision for researchers. There are also very different library needs required for the people in the city ghetto and for the people in the remodeled brownstones and in the high-rise apartments not far away. The former presents a challenge that is raising questions as to the very role of the public library. The latter constitute our most cosmopolitan public, those who conceivably may be an inner force that can help rebuild the city. Rather than a more-or-less standard branch seeking to serve both and not right for either, and a more or less standard school library, serving both, planners could consider the possibilities of a new kind of group library for each, which could serve the total range of needs and interests of its own public, students and adults alike.

Another alternative is by function to be served. Let your imagination go on a library specifically designed to provide information—England and France have both gone in this direction—or to meet the growing cultural interest (the library cultural center) or the mounting concern with technological development (the library technological center).

I, of course, am not advocating that we tear down our public and school and university and other libraries and build new agencies explicitly for children or students or researchers or information seekers or culture vultures, but I do think it is a growing concern for meeting better the needs of the various groups that pushes us toward cooperation among types of libraries. The same individuals come into your institution as into mine, and we find when we sit down that they are coming to both of us for the same purpose, and we may even go further and admit that neither of us is doing very well by them. Here is the beginning of wisdom. We may be stuck with the institutional division into types of libraries, but we have an opportunity to develop joint programs to overcome some of the disadvantages of this arrangement, seeking out the groups of readers and the functions of reading now not well served.

Another emerging trend, which may well be abetted by planning between types of libraries, is to take a fresh look at the geography or territorial base of
library cooperation. How large should a cooperating group of libraries be—the school and public library within a small town, the libraries within an existing system, all the libraries in a large region or whole state, or even beyond the state boundaries? There is of course no one answer. One kind of program may be built on how far librarians can conveniently go to meet periodically, another on how far the user will go to get resources, another on how far one can make a telephone call without paying a toll, on up to the distance and cost factors in rapid electronic transmission.

We should beware of accepting without question the geographic limits of any existing cooperative programs. It could be that the recently-created public library systems in Illinois are transitional structures, to be replaced in time by more appropriate units. As the systems mature, and their directors have time to look ahead, they will be thinking of inter-system possibilities—maybe inter-system necessities. One such necessity could be a far broader tax base, the comprehensive library district, larger than present conceptions, because a good system is not going to rest with what it can accomplish with forty cents per capita, or fifty cents or even one dollar.

Special geographical factors enter into the picture in metropolitan areas and along state boundaries. I doubt whether wholesale annexation of smaller places will occur on any wide scale around big cities, but I do anticipate new special-purpose functional agencies to deal with matters that cut across arbitrary governmental lines. This need has been easiest to see in matters of transportation and water supply and sanitation. It has been less clear in education, and as a result some of the best and some of the worst schooling in the country is available within metropolitan centers. Libraries have started to cross these lines. In some form I anticipate the metropolitan library agency, perhaps growing from the present systems—certainly I hope that the one step of systems will not be interpreted as perfection and prevent further needed structural development. Or the process of enlargement may take the form of systems for systems, for special purposes, such as automated cataloging, or a bibliographical communication center, or an information bank.

State boundaries are a parallel problem. I have yet to be involved in a state-wide study that did not to some extent involve adjacent states. In Pennsylvania there is a whole northern tier that is oriented to cities above the New York border, in New Jersey one of the severe problem areas is directly across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. Even in California, people living east of the Sierra Nevada go much more frequently to Reno than they do over the mountains to Sacramento.

Larger structures, greater territories, the far-flung interest group—but what about decentralization and local control? This applies to libraries as well as to schools. We may fortunately have the ingredients to keep the scales in balance in our field. The individual local library on the one side, the interlibrary cooperative structure on the other. As you build higher, do not neglect the foundation. Indeed, the purpose in the end is not a fancy super-structure but greater strength where resources and people meet.
References


