



Introduction

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THE PURPOSE of this introduction is to justify publication of the papers which follow. There are at least three main reasons that such attempts to review the status and assess the trends in public library development are needed often and soon, even on the heels of the Public Library Inquiry. These are the necessity for flexibility in the face of changing social trends, the importance of a clear statement of goals and objectives, and the values potential in a program of research.

Cultural lag on the part of any institution is inevitable. The best we can do is to minimize the gap between the demand and the response; the worst contingency is that the institution will become ineffectual and in time disappear. The hallmark of our western industrial civilization is change, often rapid and overwhelming. The magnitude of the technological developments of the last fifty years staggers the imagination, and there is good reason to think that we are on the threshold of even more sweeping inventions and discoveries. These movements in themselves constitute a challenge to the library, but even more is that true of the patterns of behavior they produce. It is hard to think of any social institution which has remained static in the face of the volume and rapidity of such alterations in the last several decades, and certainly the public library has not.

Looking backward we can see occasions on which the rejoinder to new social trends was made early and successfully; but when we confront the problems of our own age, there is uncertainty both as to the nature and probable duration of various social changes, and even more doubt as to the correct course to follow. The result is that an institution often operates according to social conditions once relevant but progressively less so. To minimize this lag requires persistent effort,

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both to correct earlier views and to report new changes. There are various ways to do this job; President Hoover's Commission on Recent Social Trends represented one way, and the Public Library Inquiry used another. This journal uses yet a third method, that of summarized and evaluative reports by qualified librarians of what is being said and done in their profession. In effect this is the method of pooled judgment, with critical remarks by an observer. One cannot read the papers that follow without getting a sense of the social changes librarians have noticed, and a review of the adaptations they are making in response. To spread this information may help to spur advance on the part of other public libraries.

A second main purpose it is hoped these papers will serve is to throw light on the goals and objectives of the public library. A clear statement of such aims is important because, correctly framed, they may be the fountainhead of policies and hence a guide to procedures and operations; they may determine the organizational framework of the institution; and, by definition, they alone can provide the criteria for measurement or evaluation. And in order to serve they must be expressed in clear, precise, and specific terms; they must be of such nature that attainment can be measured against them; they must be practical in the sense of being achievable, rather than utopian; they must deal with important aspects of the effort of libraries; and they must aggregate a unitary whole, and not remain a set of disparate items.

It takes little study to realize that public librarians have not thought through their purposes in these terms. As a result there is diffusion of aim, so that justification can be found for almost any activity; and often there is frustration, as a consequence of attempts to achieve status as an educational agency. It perhaps is little wonder therefore that such formal goals as have been defined are given lip-service but no consistent role to play in deciding library policies, in influencing structure, or in measuring. As opposed to possible formal and ultimate objectives, every library improvises for itself a set of actual goals as a result of each decision and each change in organization. The Public Library Inquiry brought out the nature of these *de facto* aims through an analysis of concrete operations. It made evident that if goals are not fashioned so as to determine policies, then day-by-day pursuit of policies will produce in effect the institution's real designs, however incomplete or contradictory.

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What more than anything else makes objectives useful and viable is their phrasing in terms of expected alterations in the behavior of people. Thus and thus alone can they serve as measuring sticks; and without gauging of movement toward an end we can but drift on the sea of subjective judgment. But to strive for changes in human behavior in such broad areas as education, information, and recreation is to attempt what is far beyond our presently available resources and skills. Several of the papers in the present compilation relate to the purposes of public libraries, and such summaries of thinking and action in the field should help in appraising from time to time the current progress, beside reporting the methods being used.

It is natural that the library's goals may indicate much as to what social trends are relevant, and as to what responses or adjustments are most appropriate. It is equally clear that in striving to achieve designated aims, various avenues are open. The creation of new methods, and the correct choice of available ones, can be aided by thoughtful consideration in advance, by trial and error, and by research and experimentation. Of these, the last has been the most neglected in librarianship. Research here is thought of in its strict sense, embodying careful formulation of a hypothesis, and the devising of rigid tests of its accuracy; systematic collection of evidence; and continuous awareness of the difference between causality and correlation.

The papers following, and indeed the whole conception of *Library Trends*, contribute to facilitating the use of the research method, because one of the first steps in scientific investigation is to survey all relevant literature, knowledge, and experience. And that is essentially what has been attempted here. Some authors, in addition, have pointed out the problem areas most in need of attention, and indicated the most promising approaches to them. The papers have striven mainly to present a record of what has been and is, but it is to be hoped that the summary will also lighten the burden of those seeking new information through research.

There are great difficulties in the path of such investigators, but there are equally great potential rewards. The successes in the physical sciences and in the social sciences generally should encourage us to apply investigational techniques to our problems. Every paper in this collection deals with an area in need of study; and the research needed not only is greater in amount than can possibly be done at library schools, but in many cases lends itself more to treatment by practi-

tioners and in the field than by students. If the public library is to be an effective agency, those directing it must be conscious continually of the major modifications in the society it serves. Such changes may be sorted out in the light of the institution's goals, and the evaluation of progress made is best done by the research method. These are the reasons the present collection of papers on current trends among public libraries is offered to the profession.