Libraries in the Work of
Government Agencies

RUTH H. HOOKER

The great variety in the activities and interests of the federal government has resulted in the establishment of agencies touching almost all phases of human endeavor. This in turn is reflected in a wide diversity of special libraries within these agencies. (The word “agency” as used in this paper means any organizational unit of the federal government.)

Libraries in the federal government exist primarily to assist the agencies of which they are a part, either to take care of their internal business or in some way to further their function or mission. Due to this requirement the libraries differ widely as to the subject content, the type of service rendered, the kind of equipment required, and the organization of the library itself, as well as its place in the unit to which it is attached.

This variation is easily demonstrated in any attempt to categorize federal libraries by type. For example, in Table 1 are shown the several categories in which those federal libraries fall which are listed in the most recent edition of *Library and Reference Facilities in the Area of the District of Columbia.*

The archives category which appears in this table consists of the National Archives; the foreign affairs library is that of the library of the Department of State; and the general library is the Library of Congress. The college and university libraries are those serving Gallaudet College and Howard University, which are federal institutions, departments of law and medicine being embraced in the latter. The twenty libraries of economics include a wide range of specific subjects, such as those of budget, treasury, and banking and procurement. Fine arts libraries in the federal government may occasion surprise until one remembers such institutions as the Freer Gallery

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of Art and the National Gallery of Art. Hospital libraries, however, need astonish no one, nor should the large number of libraries concerned with law and legislation. The libraries classed as military and naval consist only of those devoted to administrative, operational, and historical aspects. The libraries of medicine and public health might be grouped with the science libraries, yet make up a recognized category.

The large number of libraries classed as photographic is of interest. Some of these deal with the subject of photography, such as that at the Naval Photographic Center, but most are collections of photographs rather than books. The school and institute libraries include the National War College Library and the Armed Forces Industrial College Library, besides others. The large number of science and technology libraries will be understood when it is known that among them are libraries of cartography and geography, as well as of engineering and of the physical and chemical sciences. The final group in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type or Subject of Interest</th>
<th>Number of Libraries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and university (including departmental libraries)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and legislation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military and naval affairs (administration)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and public health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and institute</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology (including cartography, engineering, etc.)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security, housing, labor, and veterans’ affairs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
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the table brings together a number of libraries whose common denominator of interest might be termed sociological, but which remain rather miscellaneous.

The services rendered by federal libraries differ widely from one another in accordance with the kind of library or other peculiar situation. For example, those in educational institutions occupy a place more nearly related to that of college and university libraries than to that of other federal libraries. The service offered by the Armed Forces Medical Library is at least partly due to the fact that it is not located immediately adjacent to a large body of patrons, and that it has the greatest wealth of medical literature existing in any one library in the world. Also, the sort of library and type of work done often require widely varying equipment. The storage equipment used by (a) a map library, (b) a library of photographs, (c) a law library, (d) a library which collects files and clippings relating to legislation, and (e) a library specializing in unpublished scientific and technical reports bearing security classification will be of at least five different kinds. The same is true as regards reading room equipment, tables, measuring instruments, projectors, and copying apparatus.

The differences which begin with the services required and which extend into materials collected, and thence to equipment, are of course reflected in the qualifications of the staff. Here they are at their maximum. There is much greater similarity between a library of maps and other libraries than between the cartographer who supervises the map library and the librarians in the other libraries. Thus, too, historians, under the name of archivists, direct libraries of official records, and people with scientific or technical training serve, with the title of information specialists, in special libraries known as technical information centers.

The primary purposes for which a federal library is used to further the work of its agency is usually one or more of the following: (1) to provide information needed in the conduct of the agency's business; (2) to serve as an immediate instrument for the execution of the agency's policy and program; and (3) to assist in the execution of that program through its morale-building ability.

The library as a source of information for its agency. The first of these purposes, and the most common, is represented by the special library set up to provide selective and timely information, in whatever form, which will further the work of the agency. Most organiza-
tions which have libraries support them at least in part, and sometimes exclusively, for this purpose.

In order to understand the environmental conditions under which the federal libraries work, it is necessary to turn to one of the over-all organizational handbooks such as the Congressional Directory or the United States Government Organization Manual. While these publications are hardly adequate for a full understanding of government activities—even the comprehensive data provided by the President’s Budget can scarcely achieve this—they do suggest the various concerns, strata, and functions of the federal agencies served by the libraries. The library of any one agency necessarily serves a large number of interests.

Taking, for example, a hypothetical agency, the Office of Radioactive Waste Disposal, it is apparent that its needs for information fall in the following fields: (a) legal and legislative reference (to insure its operation within federal laws, to plan its operations in accordance with state laws, to provide its counsel with materials to arbitrate claims, etc.); (b) public administration (to equip its administrators with information, to establish management training programs designed to achieve efficient operation); (c) program administration (to give the agency staff information reflecting the over-all adequacy and effectiveness of its program); (d) program materials (to provide the staff with specific information needed in the course of daily operations, which may involve historical, statistical, financial, or other economic or sociological data, or which may be devoted to such matters as research and testing. Thus the library’s materials must cover many disciplines: nuclear physics, chemistry, physiology, sewage systems, and water supply, to suggest only a few). The library of this hypothetical agency, therefore, must provide the services and materials which will meet these needs.

Most large federal libraries consequently either have collections of legal publications or a law library branch. It is necessary for officials to know the history of the legislation related to the agency, as well as other laws which may affect it. Some libraries make a practice of collecting legislative histories automatically when legislation would affect its agency. The Federal Security Agency, for example, has bound sets of such histories.

Most of the federal libraries also provide collections on management, and of background social, economic, and cultural literature which may serve to document the success, or lack of success, of the
agency’s programs. Their principal collections, of course, are in the specific subject areas of the agency’s interests—periodicals, documents, and books in the scores of technical and scientific fields represented by the specializations of agency employees.

However, no one agency library is, or can be, wholly self-sufficient. The proximity to each other of such libraries, and their common interest and principles of economy, make for a more highly developed interlibrary loan system than exists elsewhere in the world.

Not only do they lend heavily to each other, but the Library of Congress provides a loan service which most federal libraries depend upon to a considerable extent to supplement their own holdings. While it is true with libraries everywhere that they must look to others for material completely out of their fields, most federal libraries in Washington build their collections with the expectation of borrowing all items not in fairly regular demand if such items are beyond their immediate range of interest. Because of its enormous resources, the Library of Congress, which lent 99,900 volumes in 1951/52, carries the greatest burden. Thus it is actually supplementary to the libraries in almost all federal agencies and has a hand in serving them all.

The Library of Congress may also serve to demonstrate how library service supports government operations. While it exists as a separate institution, i.e., not a part of any agency, and though it has taken on much of the character of a national library, its raison d’être is its work for the Congress. This is primarily related to the legislative process. While the members of Congress have always used its general services, as their problems grew in size and complexity they needed more and more specialized assistance. The first formal provision for this was an item of $25,000 in the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Appropriations Act for 1915 “To enable the Librarian of Congress to employ competent persons to prepare such indexes, digests, and compilations of law as may be required for Congress . . .” 2 Ever since that time there have been constantly increasing special aids to the Congress, which culminated in the formal establishment of the Legislative Reference Service as a department of the Library of Congress, as authorized by Section 203 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946. The history 3 of this shows a marked trend of the members of Congress to depend more and more on such special assistance. Some of the kinds of matter it makes available upon request to members of Congress are research reports on subjects under investigation or involved in legislation, the results of personal discussion with a subject specialist,
“spot” information furnished either orally or written, material bearing on a particular problem, and a limited amount of translation, graphic, and photoduplication service. The Service will also assist members with the preparation of statements for use in speeches, and with bill-drafting when the normal provision for this is inadequate. Statistics show that about 16,000 inquiries were handled in the fiscal year 1945 and well over 45,000 in 1952; also that in 1946 the staff numbered 79, and in 1952, 160. Through the Legislative Reference Service the Library of Congress is in truth contributing to the work of its “agency” —the Congress.

In common with a large number of special libraries in the technical, scientific, industrial, and economic fields, the federal libraries provide their agencies with a variety of information. More and more the agencies are delegating to their libraries the compilation and editing of indexes. In some cases these deal with the agency’s own productions, such as a list, recently issued, of the Department of Commerce publications—a bibliography of items selected for their usefulness in research, rather than a complete compilation. A similar function frequently delegated to the library is the responsibility for preserving archival copies of the publications of the agency.

Another function which is being more and more frequently assumed by federal libraries is the preparation of indexes, and sometimes abstracts, of literature from all sources which is pertinent to the work of an agency. Sometimes these are started as newssheets, to assist the library in advising its users of new material available. They are usually selective, and arranged in whatever way the agency finds most useful. These very requirements sometimes make them the most valuable bibliographic tools in the fields covered. Some cover a broad subject and some a narrow and detailed one. The tendency to treat one topic fairly thoroughly has certain advantages. The primary purpose of advising an agency of the literature accessible is accomplished, while for others interested in the same matter, there is provided a ready-made tool.

In consequence of the natural desire of individuals to want needed publications on their desks, and because budgets will not permit following this to any large extent, it has become necessary in most agencies to find some means of controlling it. Publications essential to the work of an individual or a group are sometimes called “working copies,” and the necessity is recognized of placing them in offices and laboratories. However, if there is a central control, or even a central
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record, duplication of these “working copies,” or the tendency to multiply them unduly, can be kept to a minimum. Frequently if a group requiring a handbook or serial knew that there was one in the next room it would suffice, and the central record provides such knowledge to all who initiate requests for additional copies. There is an increasing tendency to place such a control or central record in the agency’s library. When this is done the library usually becomes the only place in the agency through which publications can be purchased. It may then be the responsibility of the librarian to see that all individuals and groups within the agency are served as adequately as the funds will permit.

To these special library services may be added the systematic routing of periodicals, bulletins, and news releases. While routing systems in the federal libraries have few original features, the size of the agencies brings many problems. Parenthetically, the most popular of all titles routed is the *Congressional Record,* with the *Federal Register* running a close second.

The library as an instrument of agency policy and program. While most library users of publications such as the *United States Government Organization Manual* turn to it for brief factual information on the composition and activities of the federal agencies, it has one major feature which should not be undervalued. This consists of the statements of agency “mission” or function which are universal in government. Each federal library has prepared, revised, and prepared again for management purposes a formalized statement describing its functions.

Thus, for example, the mission statements for the Patent Office, in the Department of Commerce, together with information as to its legal authority, may be found in the *Government Manual,* where there also is a similar statement for its library, as follows:

Scientific Library and Search Room.—A scientific library containing over 37,000 scientific and technical books, over 44,000 bound volumes of periodicals devoted to science and technology, the official journals of foreign patent offices, and over 6,000,000 copies of patents issued by foreign countries, is maintained in the Patent Office for use of the examiners and the public. A public search room, containing numerical and classified sets of patents, is maintained for the use of the public in searching and examining United States patents and their records.

The Patent Office Scientific Library, therefore, in that it has been
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created to facilitate the searching of patent literature by attorneys and inventors interested in making patent applications, acts directly as an instrument to help the Patent Office perform its mission.

Similarly the Office of Technical Services of the Department of Commerce has, as a part of its mission, responsibility to serve "as a clearing house for the collection, editing, publishing, and dissemination of scientific and technical data for the purpose of promoting economic expansion and development." 7 The program with which the Office carries out its responsibility is well known, and is alluded to in several of the papers in this issue.

Probably, however, the outstanding examples of federal libraries as instruments of agency policy and program are those of the United States Information Service. The Department of State may maintain two libraries in the same foreign city—one a USIS library and one in the American Embassy. These two will have collections almost opposite in subject content. The Embassy library may be full of publications telling about the country in which it is located and comparatively little about the United States. The purpose of this, of course, is to assist its staff to a better understanding of the country to which it is assigned. Since, on the contrary, the purpose of the USIS libraries is to acquaint other people with the United States and its culture, they contain publications mainly about the United States. These libraries are the theme of Lacy's paper, also in this issue.

The Library as a factor in developing morale. In the execution of its program it is sometimes necessary for an agency to set up an entire library system in support of morale. This is usually true whenever large groups of people are confined in areas under other than normal living conditions. In such cases the libraries perform functions similar to those which the public library discharges in the normal community—functions related to recreation, information, instruction, and inspiration. They really are public libraries for special groups, provided by the agencies responsible for the groups concerned. They provide library service, for example, on naval vessels, in army camps, and for patients in hospitals. Several of such systems are described in Mohrhardt's paper.

About seventy years ago the Congress realized that many book collections and small libraries were springing up in the federal departments in a haphazard fashion, without much thought or plan except for the needs of the moment. When appropriating $500 for the library of the Treasury Department in 1882, an economy-minded
Congress added, “And for the purpose of limiting the appropriations, the head of each department shall report to Congress, at the beginning of the next session of Congress, the condition of the several libraries in his department, the number of volumes in each, and duplicates in all, and a plan for consolidating the same, so that hereafter there shall be but one library in each department. . . .” At that time government departments were relatively small and compact, and some found that the collections were not large even after getting them in one place. As time passed and the federal government grew in scope and complexity, many new libraries were started, each to help implement the work of an agency or one of its subdivisions. By 1940, instead of one library, most departments had many. Most of these were highly specialized in nature, and were intended only to further the missions of the particular units of which they were parts.

In the structure of federal agencies the library is found in many different places, depending sometimes on the organizational concepts held by the administration, and sometimes on the use-relationships of the library. In a few agencies the library is a part of the research division. There has been a recent trend to place it under whatever branch would correspond to the office of the deputy chief of the agency for administration. It appears at various levels in this office, sometimes reporting directly to the head and sometimes one or two steps below. In only one instance known to the author—the U.S. Department of Agriculture—has the librarian reported directly to the head of the agency and in that Department a recent reorganization has removed the library by one step. It is a frequent pattern in technical or research agencies for the library to be one branch of a technical information office, with that unit having under its jurisdiction other branches, such as those concerned with the editorial, publication, reproduction, and public relations functions. This is actually no change in pattern, inasmuch as the technical information office is usually in the administrative department.

Since the agencies themselves are constantly realigning their organizations, either to accommodate new functions or to perform current ones more efficiently, their libraries are inevitably subject to reallocation. Not only is this a subject of continuous study by agency management sections, but it is the special topic of inquiry by outside consultants who are from time to time called in to improve efficiency. The most recent over-all survey in line with this is, of course, that of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Govern-
ment (the Hoover Commission). Enactment of its recommendations will inevitably have an effect on the organizational status of a number of the federal libraries.

One of the pronounced trends in the federal library picture since 1940 is the gathering of several libraries in a department, either by the actual combining of the collections and staff to form a single library or by establishing a close working relationship which in effect sets up a library system. Probably the first large consolidation was that of the Department of Agriculture under Ralph R. Shaw in 1942. Since that time there has been amalgamation of some, if not all, of the libraries in the Department of the Army, the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Bureau of the Census, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Treasury Department, as well as a coordination into a system, of the libraries in the Department of the Navy. In general these unions have been of the departmental libraries in Washington.

There are also varying patterns in the relationship of the departmental and the field libraries, some of which are described in Mohrhardt's paper. In general, however, it is the exception rather than the rule for a single library authority to cut horizontally through an entire department, including the field services. In most cases the consolidation which has occurred has been of units serving the parts of a department which are physically close enough together to make the use of one central library practical. The relationship of this central library to others of the same department varies from a close one to almost none. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has assembled in its own building the collections and staffs of the libraries of the Social Security Administration, the Office of Education, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The resulting library maintains a branch in Baltimore to serve the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Section. In addition the departmental librarian has coordinating responsibility for the libraries of the National Institutes of Health and Saint Elizabeth's Hospital; although these have separate collections and staffs, and function within the institutions which they serve.

The trend toward the amalgamation of libraries and library-like functions of an agency is primarily for economy and increased usefulness. The two go hand-in-hand, since reduction in cost frequently makes possible added services. Figures from the Veterans Administration libraries show that the expense of centrally procuring and cataloging publications, under their special circumstances, is much
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less than the costs would be if each individual library independently performed the same operations. In referring to central procurement, however, there is evidence to indicate that it effects economies only when the libraries for which it is used are similar and their collections tend to duplicate one another, so that one cataloging covers a number of copies, as does one purchase arrangement. Where it has been tried for libraries varying widely in types of books bought, the results have ranged from questionable to highly unsatisfactory. A further advantage in the consolidation of libraries located contiguously is that single copies of little-used but important publications will suffice, where otherwise each library might keep copies to provide for infrequent but certain demand. Often there also is an over-all saving of space and personnel.

One of the most pronounced trends in federal libraries is the active desire of the librarians to cooperate in areas of common interest. This is sometimes done through professional associations, such as, in Washington, the Professional Activities Committee of the local chapter of the Special Libraries Association. In 1952, as described in Dunbar's paper, a subcommittee of this group proposed a revision of the job-classification standards for Civil Service library positions. Another subcommittee of the same organization is at present pioneering in drafting classification standards for documentalists. There is now no series of job descriptions for persons working in documentation, when their activities do not fit into the library series. Another cooperative project under consideration by the same committee has to do with the circumstances affecting the binding of books and periodicals in federal libraries, such as cost, specifications, and speed of delivery. Federal librarians have known for years that something should be done in this matter, and many have tried individually, but this is the first time it has been attacked cooperatively.

In recent years there also have been ad hoc committees which have helped the libraries concerned to serve their own agencies better. One of these was the group for standardization of information services described in Mrs. Brownson's article. The improvements included a standardized format for the catalog card providing for exchangeability of product, and an agreement not to catalog another agency's reports, thus preventing much duplication of work. Another committee set up a bibliographic clearinghouse through which one library could avoid making a bibliography which was already in process in another library. While not all such cooperative projects come within the scope of this
paper, it is significant that a single agency frequently can be better served because its librarian cooperates with others in over-all plans. It may be said in conclusion that the federal libraries both make direct contributions to the work of their agencies, and are used as instruments for carrying out larger program activities. To discharge their responsibilities, they are established in a variety of relationships which, because of the lack of agency organizational stability, are quite likely to change from year to year. Despite the wide variety of status, federal libraries can and do work out common problems by cooperative effort.

References

6. Ibid., p. 282.
7. Ibid., p. 261.