



Introduction

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IN AUGUST 1938, Mr. John B. Kaiser entitled his contribution to the University of Chicago Library Institute "Personnel: the Key to Administration."¹ This title was a statement of a conviction widely held in the profession. Expressed in many different ways, it was the instant, automatic response of all who were approached regarding plans for this issue of *Library Trends*. The sheer size of the subject, its multifaceted nature, when applied to questions of policy and practical administration in the many different types of libraries, dictated compromise with the ideal of completeness in planning this issue. No attempt has been made to discuss and to assess trends in each of the fields. Rather it has been the intent to review the major questions involved, particularly emphasizing the individual, for here is often the danger for the personnel worker or administrator faced with the need to meet the tests of a modern scientific approach to personnel matters.

Certainly self-criticism was in order twenty-five or thirty years ago all through the profession. Little defense could be offered for the highly individual, frequently temperamental and quixotic handling of personnel matters a generation ago. Libraries as small units in local government or as parts of larger institutions, often enjoying independent or semi-independent status, frequently fell deplorably short of satisfactory standards of personnel practice. Many still do, but if any significant trend can be detected from the general field of personnel policies and practices in the library field, it is that, in self-defense, if for no other reason, library administrators must formulate their policies, must seek to meet standards in fields comparable to their own, if they are to gain and hold the personnel essential for growth and development. The small size of almost all library operations is at once an opportunity for the finest kind of personnel work and a temptation to neglect it altogether. No library operation reaches the size, complexity, and impersonality of the industrial units common to

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our society. With few exceptions, the staff can be known to the administrator individually. Administrative hierarchies are modest in size or absent.

Nationally, the profession, especially since the thirties, has recognized the need to raise educational and economic standards, to develop classification and pay plans and to apply them objectively, to relate categories of employees to employees of similar requirements elsewhere in the public service structure or the business world. The strongest force working for this goal, one which has notable achievements behind it, which has tremendous influence and has been a source of strength for the smaller library especially, is the American Library Association's Board on Personnel Administration. A review of its history and operations needs to be made, and its mission now clearly stated.

The emphasis placed in this issue on the individual is evident in the lead article, "The Librarian," by Ralph Munn. Mr. Munn's perspective on the librarian, what he was, what he is becoming, and his place in society, keys the issue. The individual is viewed through each of the rest of the articles by way of his morale, his preparation for the work, his placement, his orientation to the job, and his career. The last two articles, the one by Hazel B. Timmerman, "Classification and Pay Plans," and John B. Kaiser's "Civil Service and Libraries," are overviews of two major developments in personnel work in libraries on which information on trends is primary to all administration.

It is regrettable that so many desirable and useful studies had to be omitted. Personnel questions applied to the different fields of library work have been and are being discussed in other issues of *Library Trends*, but a study of staff organizations, of migration in connection with individual development, of the Board on Personnel Administration mentioned above, of methods of estimating performance, of the value of large versus small institutions as trainers, of new requirements implicit in the adult education activities, all would be desirable at this point.

Personnel standards in libraries have risen with requirements for the profession and with the growth of objective administration and the development of stated policies. Whether librarianship was an occupation or a profession a generation ago could have been debated, but the creative accomplishments of the day of the builders could not. That there is any magic in a set of standards that will transform all who meet its prescriptions is open to question. We can only hope to make it more probable and to control conditions for individual and

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group development. A profession essentially implies a profession of faith and a way of life based on training and natural endowment of a high order. Personnel work has only one aim, and that is to enable the librarian to act creatively in bringing reader and book together.

Reference

1. Kaiser, J. B.: Personnel: the Key to Administration. In Joeckel, C. B., ed.: *Current Issues in Library Administration*. (University of Chicago Studies in Library Science) Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939, pp. 279-300.