
Introduction

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IT IS AN INTERESTING, even curious, situation that in teaching and writing about librarianship relatively little has been said about acquisitions matters. The traditional curriculum, even as it survives today, has given heaviest attention to cataloging and classification and considerable attention to reference work or public service, but very seldom has there been any devoted attention to acquisitions work. One could perhaps set up a trinity of library activities: acquiring books, organizing books, and using books. Certainly in the total library economy the procurement of books and thus the development of book collections is a major and responsible function; yet our attention has been centered on the other two functions.

There is an occasional course called "Acquisition of Library Materials" or "Problems of Acquisitions" in recent library school catalogs. Some courses labeled "Technical Processes" apparently give attention to routine office aspects of acquisitions work, but more frequently they appear to be concerned with classification and cataloging and binding. Possibly some of the newer courses on "Resources and Materials" consider procurement, but the course descriptions generally refer to a survey of the literature of the subject field in question or to methods of appraisal of that literature. One might hope that courses on the history of libraries would give at least some attention to the basic aspect of the history of any research library, the development of its book collection, but indications are that this is seldom the case.

Even the organization of the national professional association bears out this observation. The Division of Cataloging and Classification is an ancient and powerful group, but the Board on Acquisition of Library Materials was created as recently as 1951.

Here then was some justification, if any were needed, for planning this issue of *Library Trends*. Here also is some reason for failing to look adequately at all aspects of the matter, for most of the con-

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tributors ran into this general failure to think about acquisitional matters. They found the literature on the subject thin or non-existent. This accounts for the unexpected necessity for writing letters and imposing questionnaires on librarians. No other issue of *Library Trends* thus far has been so dependent on this procedure for assaying practice and thinking in the field. Here then perhaps is the primary trend; libraries and librarians just do not trend sufficiently in the direction of acquisitions. All persons concerned with this issue consider this negative situation most unfortunate and deserving of a remedy.

In this issue the contributors have tried to probe from several vantage points rather than to depend on a clean vertical or horizontal slice through the subject. The two initial articles deal with a related pair of major philosophical trends in over-all acquisitional strategy. Librarians of research libraries have given much of their energy and attention in recent years to the total adequacy of American library collections, as a glance through the minutes of the Association of Research Libraries will reveal. Because collecting "in the national interest" requires a high measure of cooperation in the acquisition of library materials, the first article justifiably looks over also the literature on "cooperation," which is the second major trend in strategy. The second article then takes a good hard look at the actuality of cooperative acquisitions, especially in terms of regional collecting. What is revealed by this look is a matter of great concern to most of the other contributors, who point individually to the need for better regional collecting policy. As a matter of fact, at this stage in library history apparently only the American children can have effective library service without the need for regional collecting programs.

Next are discussed two parts of the book market, an important subject not adequately understood by most librarians. After the market place follow three, out of many, special types of library materials: serials, government publications, and scientific and technical publications. Here the complicated task of acquiring them is considered. Two specialized procedures for procurement, via publications exchange and microreproduction, come next; and then the authors review two types of libraries in acquisitional terms, public libraries in general and school and children's libraries in particular. The issue concludes with a careful study of the complex internal operations required by the acquisitions program.

By using this method many important aspects of the whole problem are necessarily overlooked, the place of gifts in developing a book collection, for example. In this age which seems to need its National

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Association of Societies Friendly to Libraries, this is no small subject in itself. What high drama there is in Wilmarth Lewis' quiet statement in his *Collector's Progress*, "I am giving my collection to the Yale Library."¹

Throughout the issue the authors are aware of being parochial, but it was so difficult to gather information about American libraries that they did not have the temerity to look abroad. But perhaps from this tentative probing both author and reader may begin to understand the composition and nature of acquisitions work today. Some trends have already been noted; the several contributors will elucidate them. Needing a bit more emphasis in this introduction perhaps are some of the problems encountered.

Singularly lacking in the literature and certainly beyond the capacity of this issue is anything like a synoptic view of collection building in research libraries. Librarians know something about the selection and procurement of single books for children's libraries and something about assaying the literature of a particular science, but who can tell us much about that great adventure, the development over generations of a university library collection? What about, for example, the high strategy as well as the procedures involved in deciding whether to buy, and then buying, the Sadleir Collection that is mentioned later in this issue, or, for another example, the distinguished Stellfeld Music Library recently purchased at Michigan? A little has been hinted about the former;² the fascinating details of acquiring the latter have appeared recently in a report³ that should be required reading and become a model for many of us, because there are clearly too few such effective reports in library literature. When is it wiser to plunge in and buy *en bloc* and when to piece together, book by book, over the years? How does one marshal and use effectively the book gathering skills of a university faculty? This is a fascinating business on which too little is written or taught for the benefit of younger librarians. Good histories of individual libraries in these terms would help, but there aren't many. What about the skills involved in searching out the book riches that our research libraries need? The writings of Lawrence Powell and Gordon Ray, cited later, are stimulating reports, but many more are needed to encourage and train young acquisitions people.

And so there is a gap in education and in training. Where are the courses in the history, organization and use of the antiquarian book trade; courses in the fascinating history of books moving through time and their grouping and regrouping into collections; courses that would

enrich the book knowledge of young librarians and avoid the mechanical and the callow; courses that would tend to answer the strong plea entered by R. A. Miller:

A final conclusion relates to personnel in American libraries who are empowered and entrusted with the acquisition of foreign materials. In America, order and acquisition departments are capably managed. The procedures are standardized and a great amount of work is accomplished with a minimum of error and waste. Our acquisition departments are efficient because the full time of a responsible person is taken with problems of management, personnel and production. But a small seed of doubt that I picked up somewhere in Europe is constantly growing. Acquisition is more than a mechanical process, even when selection is left entirely in the hands of specialists or faculty. There must be time for the responsible person or persons in our acquisition departments to assimilate the book knowledge which comes to them daily. Somehow or other, our research libraries must develop bookmen and bookwomen in our acquisition departments, persons who are personally interested in the books they handle and in the trade history of these books. It is evident to me now that I must provide in Indiana University library for the kind of acquisition knowledge that enables a library to grow in quality. Provision in this case must include these measures: less pressure in insisting on mechanical results, opportunities for growth in book knowledge, salaries equivalent to the best elsewhere so that personal security and reward are not sought elsewhere, and a constant identification of acquisition personnel with the highest objective of a research library, book quality.⁴

An imaginative, book-wise and effective acquisitions librarian is a gem in any library setting, and as one who knows has said, "There is no excitement like the hunt . . . for books." This issue of *Library Trends* should suggest why these observations are true.

References

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