



# Management and Operation

FELIX REICHMANN

THIS REPORT is mainly based on a questionnaire which was answered by thirty-one American university libraries. The findings, are primarily applicable to the work of the acquisitions department of large research libraries. In keeping with the thoroughly individualistic nature of these institutions there is a great diversity as to the place of the department in the general library structure; a similar heterogeneity can be found in the definition of its function and duties.

In the early thirties a proposition was discussed which would integrate acquisitions and cataloging into a technical service division. This movement gained great impetus during the forties, but seemingly has slowed down during the last years. No definite trend can be predicted at the moment. The ratio in the libraries investigated is twelve technical service divisions against nineteen.<sup>1, 2</sup> The new organizational pattern also evoked strong objections, for instance, the thoughtful criticism of R. C. Swank.<sup>3</sup> One of his points is undoubtedly well-taken: cooperation between acquisitions and cataloging can be achieved without organizational change. The answers to the questionnaire do not reveal that the libraries with technical service divisions have achieved better cooperation than their sister institutions. However, the merits of the new plan are not so easily dismissed. The fundamental points, such as decrease in cost, increase in speed of processing, flexibility of personnel, and adaptability to new methods, have not been documented by either party.<sup>4</sup>

It is accepted by everybody that cooperation should exist between the two departments. Either a superior administrative officer or meetings between the two department heads should establish adequate channels of communication. Generally, parts of the multiple-order form are used to forward bibliographical information. In one library the catalog department is responsible for searching. However, in more than half of the libraries the relations do not seem close enough to

---

Mr. Reichmann is Assistant Director of Cornell University Library.

## *Management and Operation*

streamline the operations and to prevent duplication of operations. Entries are not established by acquisitions, or, when established, they are not accepted by cataloging without rechecking, and the flow of work between the departments is not regulated.

Almost all acquisitions departments have organized their work in two to six sections; the most common division is to differentiate between ordering of books and work with serials. A number of institutions, however, have a more complicated breakdown. The University of California in Berkeley, for instance, which seems to have the best organized and best staffed acquisitions department, has organized the work as follows: bibliographical identification, searching out-of-print books, ordering books, serials, receiving and processing, and book-keeping. Another thoughtful organizational breakdown is used by the University of Washington with the following sections: bibliographical identification, accessioning and typing, book orders, serials, gift and exchange, and binding. This example also shows how much work not directly connected with the purchase of books is administered by the acquisitions department. Of thirty-one reporting libraries, twenty-six have a gift and exchange section, seven control binding, seven supervise documents and four administer photoduplication. A great number are in charge of interlibrary loan wrapping and mail distribution, three administer the payroll for the entire library, two supervise book-plateing and one acquisitions librarian is the main public relations officer of the institution. There is undoubtedly a good internal reason to burden the department with such a variety of duties, but a word of caution against too heavy a load of heterogeneous functions is appropriate.

The variety of work assigned to the department makes it difficult to establish a standard for staffing. One finds generally a ratio of two and one-half to three clericals to one professional; such a staff unit is needed for every \$35,000 spent through the department.

No matter how the individual library distributes its responsibilities for book selection, every acquisitions librarian should have an ardent interest in this problem. In seven institutions his work is guided by a formal statement of acquisitions policy, in twenty libraries the department head is fully aware of a formulated, although unwritten policy; only four departments do not participate in the selection process. The majority of the departments have the responsibility of filling in gaps in serials and purchasing general reading material; five cover bibliography; and two purchase and suggest in all fields. In many libraries the acquisitions librarian participates in book se-

lection committees; in two institutions he holds the chairmanship (the general book committee in Louisiana State and the weekly book selection committee in the University of Washington). Ten departments read *Publishers Weekly* regularly; three check the different national bibliographies; three consult the book review sections of leading newspapers; and three select from, or distribute, L.C. proof sheets. Other book selection tools used by the departments are: *New Serials Titles*, *East European Accession List*, *L.C. Information Bulletin*, *Stechert-Hafner Book News*, *U.S. Quarterly Book Review*, and *Books Abroad*. All departments have the obligation of routing publishers' announcements and second-hand book dealers' catalogs to the respective selectors, and also accept budgetary responsibility.

The statement of the Postwar Planning Committee<sup>5</sup> of 1946 suggesting a re-examination of order routines still rings true today. The complexity of operations performed by an acquisitions department will never permit librarians to rest on their laurels, at least, not with good conscience. The process of testing regularly the efficiency of operations is facilitated if all procedures are described in a manual. Ten of the thirty-one libraries have such a guide.

As no manual was available for examination, no description of searching and bibliographical identification can be given. Five libraries have a time limit for searching; Cornell University library stipulates a maximum of fifteen minutes per title—however, the regulation is not strictly enforced. Most libraries give as time limit, "Reasonable," or, "According to common sense." The ordering proper is commonly done with multiple-order forms. Twenty-four libraries in the survey used this device.<sup>6</sup> The form generally comprises seven parts. In addition to this method, an efficient department will also resort to a variety of other forms and form letters.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately very few libraries make use of machines or other mechanical appliances to streamline the order work. Practically every large library utilizes McBee cards or IBM machines, but the application of these techniques is largely confined to circulation records and to work with serials.<sup>8, 9</sup> Of the thirty-one libraries investigated in this survey, three use IBM equipment for order work, a fourth, for accounting only; two profit by McBee cards; and seven apply photographic techniques, however, generally only for claiming and copying bills.

Speed is, next to accuracy, an important feature of the department. Orders should be ready about two to three days after selection. Most libraries seem to adhere to this rule; only a few mention a time lapse of approximately one week; one library, on the other hand, reports

### *Management and Operation*

that all orders are ready within twenty-four hours. As the flow of selection cannot be regulated, only a library with a very large staff will be able to follow this example. In case of second-hand book dealer catalogs utmost speed is mandatory. Cornell's routine asks for selection within twenty-four hours and for the placing of the order on the same day the checked catalog has been returned to the department. Other libraries have a three-step routine: selection, immediate request for reservation, and orders placed within three days. Most libraries report that they place daily orders for new books, both with American and foreign dealers. Orders for jobbers or main agents in foreign countries are better consolidated into one or two letters weekly. Greater frequency will increase the workload, both in the library and with the bookdealer, and may result in less favorable discounts. Domestic orders should be filled within two weeks; for foreign ones, the approximate time lapse is six to ten weeks.

In his section on "The Current Bookmarket" Fleming Bennett provides detailed information on the choice of agencies for supplying in-print books. The sections on serials, on books for children and on government publications give further attention to this matter, which is a major problem in acquisitions work.

Most probably only the fortunate institutions which have mechanical equipment have claiming under complete control and can claim all outstanding orders at stated intervals. A great many departments report that they are dissatisfied with their claiming procedure, but lack of personnel makes an improvement impossible. They commonly use various techniques, such as form letters, part of the multiple-order form, double postcards, or similar methods. If the dealer reports the unavailability of an item, the department has to find it in the second-hand book market. This is a difficult, time-consuming, often frustrating, but a very important operation. The good public relations of the library will be influenced by whether or not the department can "deliver." Most libraries put a bevy of devices into operation, such as monthly advertisements in the *Antiquarian Bookman* and similar journals, mimeographed want lists, and letters to special dealers. Some libraries prefer to give their want list to one dealer on a six-month's exclusive basis. Wing gives special attention to the complicated matter of the antiquarian market in another article in this issue.

Another irksome question, for which hardly any library has found a completely satisfactory answer, is the disposal of duplicates.<sup>10, 11</sup> A small number should be added, some can be destroyed, and many items should be given to other institutions. Periodic sales to students

and faculty may bring some relief and bulk shipments can be sent to the U.S. Book Exchange. Selected books can be used for exchange purposes or offered for sale. To put duplicates in storage is too expensive; besides, it does not solve the question but only postpones it. Miss Welch's article on "Publications Exchange" discusses duplicates at greater length.

The efficient work of the department depends to a large extent on the quality of records. Since no library has an abundance of staff, the number of records has to be kept to a minimum. An outstanding order file is indispensable. It consists of main entries filed alphabetically and is kept in the department. Twenty-eight libraries follow this standard procedure. Three institutions find it more useful to file outstanding orders in the main catalog. Other supplementary files are arranged by fund (necessary to calculate encumbrances), and by order number (as possible aid in claiming). Four libraries keep an additional file arranged by dealer. After receipt of the book the card is removed from the outstanding order file and control is exercised through an in-process file. This file need not be kept separate, but can be integrated into the main catalog. The necessity of an accession record has been seriously questioned. Very few libraries still keep an accession book,<sup>12</sup> where entries have to be made by long hand; but a card file accession record remains and may have a limited renaissance. In those European libraries which shelve their books according to current numbers, the accession record becomes a shelf list. In American libraries it has two objectives: it gives a chronological record of acquisitions and its serial number helps to match books and cards.<sup>13</sup> The first item may have mainly sentimental value, although future historians may think otherwise, but the second is often very useful. Some libraries which have abandoned accession records have therefore reintroduced the serial number. Of the thirty-one libraries, eight have an accession record, one has serial numbers without a record. The individual parts of the multiple-order form are used for these files; sometimes one part can be utilized for two records. For instance, in Cornell the slip which registers the encumbrances according to funds becomes, after receipt of the book, the in-process record; the card in the order-number file is transferred to the accessions index; and the entry in the outstanding order file is used for bookkeeping purposes.

Lena Biancardo<sup>14</sup> has written a thoughtful dissertation on desiderata files. Files which are to be advantageous to the day-by-day operations of the department should be small, under 1,000 titles, ar-

## *Management and Operation*

ranged by author, and kept separately. Subject-arranged files are useful if there is a possibility or an intention of making a concentrated drive for the acquisition of the titles listed. Of the thirty libraries which answered the question, four have no desiderata files, twenty-four follow the standard procedure, one interfiles with the outstanding order file, and one combines outstanding orders, in-process cards, and desiderata.

Many libraries keep a multitude of other files, generally to record past and unsuccessful transactions. In this category belong records like: cancellation, sold and cancelled, and dead file. One institution keeps an index of quotations received, one department reports twenty files, and one says bluntly, "Too many to list." It is impossible for an outsider to pass judgment whether all these files are worth keeping; however, every department should periodically scrutinize its records and eliminate the non-essential ones according to Metcalf's standards. "A record should not be kept unless in the long run it saves more time or money than it takes to make and use."<sup>15</sup>

Most libraries divide their book funds into two parts; roughly seventy per cent is allotted to specific subjects, thirty per cent is kept in a reserve fund. Only one institution has no reserve fund, and four have no subject allotments. The allocation of funds to subject departments has been widely discussed in the literature<sup>16, 17</sup> and is of great interest to the acquisitions librarian as he needs a well-thought-through formula of fund distribution to correlate intelligently the requests of the different selectors. The allocation of funds, however, does not mean that the financial authority of the library is confined to reserve funds. Two-thirds of the libraries report that they can buy on all funds without authorization of the subject department.

This freedom to purchase entails the grave responsibility of having at all times a complete control of the financial status. Only five departments do not carry on bookkeeping operations; in these institutions the library administration has taken this responsibility and shares it with the accounting office in the central administration. In all other libraries the standard operating procedure is roughly as follows: the central accounting office of the university keeps the entire money available in a lump sum, writes the checks for the bills duly authorized for payment, and sends a monthly statement of the account; the acquisitions department is responsible for processing the bills and recording the expenditures according to subject allotments or endowed funds. The department should also know how much money has been mortgaged for orders posted but not yet received. Some libraries

calculate the encumbrances only during the second half of the fiscal year. That seems to be like locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen. It is hardly worth the effort to calculate the encumbrances exactly in dollars and cents, but the department should always have a fairly accurate conception of its financial obligations.

Six libraries report a supervision of their accounting systems by the university comptroller. In most institutions the relationship between the central accounting office and the acquisitions department is limited to the auditing of bills and sending of twelve monthly statements; two libraries report a yearly audit; and two check the total of their free balance against the general book account in the auditor's office. Two-thirds of the libraries state that accounting regulations do not limit their freedom to decide purchasing procedures. The restrictions reported from the ten other libraries seem to be of a slight nature; for instance, bids are requested for single orders over \$2,000.00. There is the possibility that the wish of the accounting office has influenced the frequency of bills forwarded for payment. In twenty-nine of the libraries queried, eight pay daily or several times a week, fourteen weekly, and seven monthly. The division of labor between the comptroller's office and the acquisitions department has worked well, thanks to the chief financial officers of the universities, who have shown understanding for the peculiarities of book purchasing and confidence in the bookkeeping abilities of the acquisitions department.

The department generally submits monthly statistics and consolidates these statements into one, more formal, annual report. The data reported include the number of orders placed, money spent, and a breakdown of expenditures according to allocations. Cornell adds figures for encumbrances every second month. It is advantageous to make short statistical analyses periodically to test the efficiency of operations. The department should be able to answer the following questions with fairly accurate figures: discounts (broken down according to material or agents), time interval between placing of an order and its receipt (according to agents), unfilled orders, unintentional duplication, response to advertising for out-of-print books, and frequency of bookkeeping errors.

Most selectors like to be informed when their requests are filled. Many libraries report, however, twelve perform this service only if requested; in two institutions the circulation department takes over this function, in two others, the catalog department; three libraries do not report at all. In addition to individual reports, general acquisition lists are fairly common. No library can publish a complete list, but

## *Management and Operation*

sixteen institutions distribute selected ones at intervals, varying from twice a month to twice a year. The list is generally prepared by the acquisitions department; in one institution it is made in the director's office, and in three others, by the catalog department.

Acquisition work has many facets. It needs knowledge of books and familiarity with the book trade, it demands broad vision and respect for the minute detail, it requires understanding of the scholar's problems and of the needs of the accountant, but most of all it calls for an outgoing personality who loves both books and people, loves them in their glory and in their foibles. No one will meet all the qualifications of an ideal acquisitions librarian, but everyone takes pride that he works for the library's most important objective, the development of its book collection.

### INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS CONTRIBUTING INFORMATION

Officials of the following libraries cooperated in supplying information for this article: Brown, California (Berkeley), California (Los Angeles), Chicago, Colorado, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Illinois, Iowa State College, State University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins, Kansas, Louisiana, M.I.T., McGill, Missouri, New York (Washington Square), Northwestern, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Rochester, Stanford, Texas, Virginia, Washington (Seattle), Washington (St. Louis), Wisconsin, and Yale.

## *References*

1. Cohen, J. L.: *Centralized Technical Processes Divisions in Libraries*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, New York, Columbia University, 1951.
2. American Library Association. Division of Cataloging and Classification. Committee on Administration. *Technical Services, Policy, Organization and Coordination*. Unpublished, 1954.
3. Swank, R. C.: The Catalog Department in the Library Organization. *Library Quarterly*, 18:24-32, Jan. 1948.
4. Tauber, M. F.: *Technical Services in Libraries*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1954.
5. College and University Postwar Planning Committee of the American Library Association and the Association of College and Reference Libraries. *College and University Libraries and Librarianship*. Chicago, A.L.A., 1946.
6. American Library Association. Division of Cataloging and Classification. Committee on Administration. *Multiple Order Form*, ed. by E. B. Colburn. Chicago, Microphotographic Laboratories of the University of Chicago Library, 1949.
7. Sweet, A. P.: Forms in Acquisitions Work. *College and Research Libraries*, 14:396-401+, Oct. 1953.
8. Parker, R. H.: *Library Applications of Punched Cards*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1952.
9. McGaw, H. F.: *Marginal Punched Cards in College and Research Libraries*. Washington, D.C., The Scarecrow Press, 1952.



FELIX REICHMANN

10. Cantelmo, William: The Disposal of Duplicates. *College and Research Libraries*, 2:333-336, Sept. 1941.
11. Milkau, Fritz, ed.: *Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft*. Vol. 2, Leipzig, Harrassowitz, 1933, pp. 197-205.
12. Caldwell, John: *The Use of the Accession Book in the Libraries of Pennsylvania Colleges and Universities in 1954*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Philadelphia, Drexel Institute, 1954.
13. Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
14. Biancardo, Lena L.: *Desiderata Files in College and University Libraries*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, New York, Columbia University, 1950.
15. Metcalf, K. D.: The Essentials of an Acquisition Program. In Chicago University. Graduate Library School. *The Acquisition and Cataloging of Books*. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1940, pp. 76-94.
16. Coney, Donald: An Experimental Index for Apportioning Departmental Book Funds for a University Library. *Library Quarterly*, 12:422-428, July 1942.
17. Broestl, J. A.: *A Revised Index for the Allocation of the University Library Book Fund to the Various Subject Departments of the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and of the Graduate School of Western Reserve University*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Cleveland, Western Reserve University, 1951.