



Films in the Library

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THE LIBRARY, whether it be school, public, university or industrial, is still so closely associated with only the printed page that with the introduction of other materials in non-book forms the acceptance of such has been relatively slow. The "storehouse of knowledge" in many respects has not been retarded by just the patrons, but by those who work directly with the library tools. With the increasing means of communication and the vast need for a quicker and broader knowledge of world problems the libraries have been slow to use the new media. Our complex civilization requires more and more understanding; therefore, the library no longer should act as a "storehouse" but a "communication center" serving its patrons with the quickest and most thorough materials.

The extensive use of motion picture films and other audio-visual materials during World War II pointed out to the American educators the tremendous potentialities of this new medium of communication. Unlike the printed materials, films have from the very beginning had a large potential audience. The barrier of illiteracy that has prevented the spread of knowledge and information by means of the printed word is no longer a stumbling block with the use of films. Communication by the spoken word in addition to the visual media can provide a revelation to those who have remained untouched heretofore by the library.

Of course, as in any medium there are disadvantages. Films, as books, must win respectability and acceptability as a tool of learning. The printed page has held an honored position as the symbol of learning for many generations. For centuries even after the invention of the movable type, book learning was almost the only learning and limited to certain classes in the community who by virtue of position or wealth could afford to become literate and to gain access to the printed materials which until the last century were very restricted

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in quantity. Print, for a long time, was almost exclusively an instrument of communication for information and what used to be called literary culture. The mass production of light novels, mysteries, and other forms of popular entertainment so familiar today is chiefly a development of this century.

On the other hand, motion pictures first achieved wide use as a popular medium of entertainment and have remained primarily such ever since. The association of films with entertainment, which exists in the minds of the majority of old and young alike, has been a distinct handicap in developing any widespread use of films for other purposes.

Fortunately the public and the educators have begun to recognize the educational value of films. The producers have become aware that the medium must be used with the full range of its own possibilities and not in the limited scope of printed materials. The development of the documentary technique in film making and the animated drawing alone have created minor miracles in winning acceptance. In spite of the unpleasantness of World War II, the armed services did serve as a proving ground for the tremendous possibilities of films in the training programs. The amazing effectiveness of films in these programs demonstrated beyond all doubt that as an educational and informational medium the film has indeed come of age.

The next problem that arose in the use of films for educational purposes was that which involved all audio-visual services: to what extent should audio-visual and book services be correlated in a single library program? The usual arguments against library participation were that the methods and philosophy of audio-visual instruction differed from instruction through books; and that these methods were not understood by librarians; audio-visual education is a specialized field with its own materials, problems, and objectives; and the average library is not regularly equipped or staffed to care adequately for the materials and equipment from a technical point of view. A kindly argument has also been voiced that the audio-visual field justifies independent status parallel to the library.

On the other hand, it can be strongly argued that audio-visual aids ought not to be viewed in opposition to printed aids, but should be integrated with them. Both are instructional aids used together in the same educational process, and, if properly related, supplement each other.

The motion picture compels attention. It shares this characteristic with certain other visual materials, especially those projected on a

screen in a darkened room, but the movement and change in a motion picture attracts the viewer and holds his attention. With sound the film may provide an experience of high emotional quality. Like other audio-visual materials including print, the motion picture is an edited version of reality. This very editing, which may involve manipulation of time, space, objects, can heighten reality by eliminating distractions and point up relationships that might be overlooked.

The motion picture, if combined with the printed word, can become the greatest influence towards universal culture and understanding the world has ever known. The need, therefore, for an educational film program exists in every city in the United States whether it be large or small. By no means should the rural areas be excluded from such services. Progressive librarians know that the printed word in its various forms is no longer enough to meet the demands of our complex society. They know that interest and demand are present in their communities waiting to be developed. Experience has shown that wherever film programs have been started they generally have been enthusiastically received and supported.

In 1924 the American Library Association created the Visual Methods Committee which in 1940 became the Audio-Visual Committee. Meanwhile, in 1939 a survey of motion pictures was made and questionnaires were sent to 251 libraries and library agencies by the Visual Education Committee of the American Library Association. Of the 119 replies received only four libraries reported they owned and loaned films, but ten others reported the sponsoring of films in connection with adult education work. Projectors were owned by three libraries. Forty-six of the libraries offering advisory service concerning films reported that there was little call for it. Of those that answered the questionnaire sixty per cent subscribed to the Educational Film Catalog. In summing up the results of this questionnaire Mary U. Rothrock stated in the article "Libraries and Educational Films" in *ALA Bulletin*, "as yet libraries do not take motion pictures seriously as a means of diffusing ideas."

During World War II, the demands for the use of 16 mm films came into prominence. In 1947 the Carnegie Corporation made a grant to the American Library Association for the establishment of a Film Advisory Service at the American Library Headquarters to assist librarians on policy, administration, selection of materials, bibliographic and reference work in films and to promote library cooperation with other agencies working with information films. At the time this office was established, with Mrs. Patricia Blair Cory as library film

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advisor, only a dozen libraries had film collections of their own. Before the war the general-interest films numbered only five hundred titles, in contrast to 25,000 films produced the first seven years after the war. Today almost 4,000,000 feet of new film per year are made available to the 16 mm users. In 1948 the first edition of the U.S. Department of Education's *Directory of Film Libraries* listed 576 film libraries. Of this number only twelve were public libraries in the United States maintaining film collections; and 137 were members of a cooperative film circuit. The next edition of the 16 mm Film Libraries *Bulletin*, in 1949, identified 897 such libraries. The third edition, issued two years later in 1951 listed 2,002 libraries. In the *Bulletin*, 1954 there are 2,660 listed. In March 1954, the public libraries in the United States reported the circulation of 54,689 16 mm films shown to 3,840,482 patrons.

The public library, which is a center for the distribution of information, is one agency that can serve the needs of the community for films. It should be pointed out that the library has the staff already skilled in cataloging materials, correlating various types of related materials, and acquainting the public with materials available.

According to a report made by Mrs. Cory in 1948 to the Educational Film Association,¹ the American Library Association recommends that a library must serve a city of at least 25,000 to 40,000 population before it could be able financially to own and maintain a film library. The report also recommends that any library regardless of size can be a center of information as to available materials and their sources and a place of assistance to community members. However, establishing and maintaining a fully adequate service is not only beyond the budget of most smaller libraries, but the use of a small collection of films soon reaches the saturation point in the smaller communities. A film collection should not be given room in the library unless the budget is so arranged to cover adequately the expenses of maintaining an up-to-date collection. Also the budget should provide for a professional staff to service the collection. Since it is difficult to achieve and maintain these standards on a small budget, the answer to film service in the smaller cities and towns is the cooperative film circuit.

A library should have as high standards for its film collection as for its book collection. The problems of selection encountered will be the same. A film library which is over balanced with out-of-date government films, shorts which are old and in poor taste, or the classroom type film is of little use to the community. Again, the attitude of a library toward accepting a film that is sponsored by an organi-

zation to promote its point of view is the same as accepting a book under similar circumstances. Most libraries do not reject books because they represent a philosophy from that held by those responsible for their selection. Therefore, the criteria can only be: is this film an honest approach to the problem, or theory, or point of view, it is presenting. No one individual should assume the full responsibility for selecting or censoring films. A group composed of representatives of various organizations or a screening committee to recommend the acceptance or rejection of films can be useful. The groups may vary with each film subject.

After selecting materials, the next question is how to help people make the best of them. The cataloging should provide for careful annotation based upon the particular needs and uses of the specific community. Surveys and studies can be made to find the needs of the community in terms of materials. Having the person or persons responsible for cataloging the films work part-time with the film borrowers is another excellent means of learning the requirements.

Workshops or demonstrations to instruct people in the techniques of using films and projection equipment correctly should be offered. These instructions should be given to not only the interested public or members of community groups, but more especially to the staff of the library. Within a system the staff should be made acquainted with the philosophy behind the organization of a film collection and then informed regularly about the addition of new materials.

Staff members should be greatly encouraged to correlate materials, both book and non-book. It is also ideal to render a service of supplying units of materials or lists to accompany films, including related books, bulletins, pamphlets, magazine articles, still pictures, posters, maps, and other illustrative aids.

Newsletters or published lists are means of acquainting the public with materials available in their community. The establishing of Film Previews or Film Forums help to bring the community into the library, but more especially to give the community an insight into the possibilities of the library. Motion pictures in the public library serve as an ideal vehicle for public relations as well as for education. They attract people who failed to realize that their library had anything to offer that would interest them. They serve many times as the first introduction to the library for a citizen who thus becomes exposed to library services through the trained library personnel. Such public relations are more subtle and effective than many forms of library publicity, and more than justify the small expense involved.

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In an effective film program, one of the most important features, in addition to good promotion and service, is the care and handling of the film. Unlike printed materials, the staff as well as the patrons of the film library must be carefully instructed in the care and value of the materials used. Specific regulations should be set up for the loaning of films to the users. This may be in the form of a time limit the film is to circulate to one user. Also directions should be given to the projectionist concerning the proper care toward the film. Many film libraries have the regulation requesting the patron not to rewind the films after using. This has become almost universally standard. Therefore, upon returning the film to the library the process of that film for the next user is somewhat simplified.

A systematic check of all films used should be the routine in all film libraries. Whether the films are checked by an electronic film checking machine or through the slower manual methods, the important thing is preventive measures that will save future film damage. Careful repairing and regular cleaning, along with lubrication will prolong the life of the films in any library.

A good training program that acquaints the library staff with the correct methods of using projection equipment and the processing of film is of primary importance. The staff in turn can impress new users with the importance of correct film handling. There are a number of films demonstrating the proper operation and care of various projectors as well as films that bring out the significant facts in the use of films. It is advisable that a small collection of such films be made available to patrons for their instruction.

Film services for children have so far played a minor role in libraries for several reasons. The majority of films produced for children have been mainly intended for classroom use, and in many areas the schools are using these films to great advantage in providing supplementary material to the classrooms. Still there are not, today, enough children's literary films to build an adequate library service for children. But with the increasing demands for motion pictures not only in the field of children's films, but also in the hundreds of related fields, the producers are beginning to realize the value in producing films of high quality.

The awareness of the public library's responsibility toward adult education has been increasing. As early as 1926 the Council of the American Library Association authorized the appointment of an Adult Education Board whose function was to promote interest in adult education and to cooperate with the national and regional or-

ganizations whose program included various phases of adult education. The field of informal education is one in which films have just begun to make themselves felt. Films have given to libraries a new medium of information that is dramatic as well as educationally sound. They have vitalized both librarians and library programs and have enabled libraries to reach farther into their communities than before. In other words, the people come to the library and the library goes to the people. Films are helping the public libraries to fulfill more completely the role in American life assigned to them by the American people.

Agencies other than the public library are responsible to the community to provide film services such as the schools, churches, universities, health organizations, business, professional, and fraternal groups all having common objectives of enlightenment and enrichment. The motion picture can be one of the important facets in the program of services these agencies offer the community. To use their film resources fully all agencies having film collections seek some means for cooperation, working together for the common interest of the community rather than combating each other for control.

Colleges and universities have frequently been more diligent in the promotion of film use in the public school than they have on their own campuses. The bulk of 16 mm films is that used by the public schools. Nevertheless, the universities are aware that a communication revolution has created a different world for the college student of today—one which calls for a revision of college teaching.

The extension divisions of American universities and colleges were responsible for questionnaires sent to a sampling of thirty colleges and universities thought to be representative throughout the United States. Of the eighteen institutions that responded their case studies document the impact of films on college teaching, and indicate that universities are also producing films for their own need.²

Thirty years ago the foreign classroom began using 16 mm silent films. Some of these films were produced in the United States, other production being confined to a few of the European countries, particularly Great Britain, Germany, and Sweden. The war brought an interruption of several years during which educational film production virtually stopped except for the United States. In the last five to ten years there has been an increase in the international production of instructional films. Private producers in England, France, Belgium, Sweden, Australia, Japan, and the United States are making a significant contribution to world education.

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The educational film is clearly allied both in function and substance to those older media of communication which have gained universal sanction as library materials. As an instrument possessing unique virtues in disseminating facts and ideas, the film's already substantial role seems destined to increase in scope and importance.

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