



Introduction

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THE STATE LIBRARY in the United States and the provincial library in Canada are special kinds of libraries which need definition and explanation. Each is an official part of state or provincial government and is supported by government appropriations. Strangely enough, there may be from one to five separate library agencies in any given state, for state libraries perform five major functions.

Varying widely as to number, location in the organization of government, and in the amount of annual appropriation, state agencies may have the dual purpose of serving the official government and also the state's general population. In some states the strength of demands from both these sources may very well be the cause for a real problem in ambivalence of purpose. Libraries on the local level may expect a strong kind of state service program reaching the public at large while the agency may be faced with serving satisfactorily an official government from which it derives its income. It is not always possible for state agencies in these circumstances to budget by function, thus clearly indicating what services are to be rendered.

The reader is referred to R. H. McDonough's chapter in this issue for a full description of the library functions normally assigned state agencies. The statement, *Role of the State Library*,¹ drawn up and recently released by the National Association of State Libraries, is the most recent studied version of the subject. Its significance rests in the fact it was composed by practitioners who know its potentialities.

Two main reasons dictate that this treatment of state libraries be more a description of prevailing conditions than a critical analysis of emerging trends. First, the location of the agency within the framework of government naturally makes change and development slow in materializing, and detection of trends more difficult. And secondly, there is an absence of significant reports and studies on state agencies in the professional literature. Of all the public library service agencies,

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the state library is the least well-known in literature. Although no comprehensive study of it as a type exists, there is a committee of the American Library Association which has outlined such a study and is seeking a sponsor for its realization.

No doubt remains about the assigned place of the state agency in the plan for complete public library service. That has been fully and authoritatively covered in the profession's basic literature dealing with evaluation and planning. Three of these works, *Post-War Standards*,² *A National Plan for Public Library Service*,³ and *The Public Library in the United States*,⁴ all agree that state libraries occupy the key position in all plans and efforts to advance public library service to its rightful place in the nation's total education program. However, the *Inquiry*,⁵ and other documents on the subject accord only a few agencies the ability and strength required to live up to responsibilities.

The responsibility placed upon the state library agency by the profession² is staggering and, in the majority of cases, wholly out of proportion to its existing strength. Moreover, it is discouraging to learn that the recent increase in financial strength of state agencies has been absorbed by the rising economy rather than converted into new growth.

The services expected of state libraries are so numerous and varied as to require an organization approaching the stature of the average state department of education. Contrasted with this is the hard fact that no state agency is as large in staff or as well financed as the largest city library within its own state. The big assignment of duties and services desired from state libraries includes continuing research, fielding a corps of consultants, operation of a large circulation and reference library as well as a system of branches, providing examination and supervision services, maintaining a fiscal and statistical bureau, and conducting an active legislative lobby program.

The most importance is attached by authorities^{1, 2} to the state library's role as integrator of local library services and expediter of quality in order to provide a minimum standard of service for the individual citizen. Valid as this duty may be, planners must take into account the findings reported by the *Inquiry*⁶ that librarians, boards, and local governments have been anything but eager to participate in arrangements proposed for larger units of service.

The five library functions performed at the state level are: law library, legislative reference, state historical library, general library, and extension services. Because the profession at large is primarily interested in only the last two functions this report concerns itself

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mainly with these. It is the extension responsibility which carries the heaviest burden of importance in the plans for complete and adequate service in every state. Separate agencies frequently perform each of the first three functions, and there is small variation in methods between different state agencies.

State libraries make constant efforts to implement thorough legislation plans for growth and improvement, sometimes successfully, but more often unsuccessfully. In some cases permissive legislation has been secured without a parallel appropriation for implementation. Less than half the states have legal certification, a recognized foundation stone in the structure of adequate service. Less than half the states provide financial grants-in-aid, although there is universal agreement that state assistance to the local community is essential in providing a minimum quality of service.

Although there are several contributing influences at work on the expansion and growth of state libraries since World War II, it is not at all clear which has had the most telling effect. Probably the most important factors have been the expanding scope of state services and the general increase in state tax revenues. The state library along with all the other agencies and offices of government has come in for its share of increased support. In addition, increasing attention by the profession to the importance of the state library has been a strong stimulus to state personnel.

Among the notable trends in the development of state and provincial libraries, the oldest is that of removing the executive position of state librarian or its equivalent, the commission executive secretary, from partisan politics. This is considered a great improvement, since it is assumed that an incumbent chosen on merit basis will have a more lasting interest in the continuity of a service type program than one chosen for interests in a political party. A concomitant development is the growing frequency to specify in the agency's basic law the educational qualifications needed by an incumbent. In those states where this has not taken place, persons other than professionals continue to be appointed.

The growing practice of constant re-evaluation of policies for the state or provincial library service program is another, and one of the more encouraging signs. The reader will note that Carma R. Zimmerman and Ralph Blasingame recommend an extension in this practice. Only by such critical analysis plus careful implementation can the over-loaded, busy agency progress toward its major objectives. The

limitation of resources with which to meet its responsibilities forces the state agency to establish priorities on its services.

There has been a prevailing trend to isolate the legislative reference or research function from the state library giving it a separate existence with responsibility only to the legislature. The expansion of state government and the increasing need by its lawmakers for extensive service between sessions are the most likely causes for this trend.

Another promising trend has been the increasing state support of public library service through greater financial assistance. This trend became noticeable in the 1930's and has been conspicuous since 1945. However, recent significant increases have been almost altogether in those states which already had state aid appropriations rather than in those states where there has been none.

State aid stimulation grants have been reported as a significant factor in the number of county and regional libraries being established. However, only one state agency has listed it as of first importance among the many types of effort made for this purpose, suggesting that state aid is not among the stronger influences in improving local library service.

Clearly discernible is a trend to attach regulations to state aid grants. More and more libraries are being required to meet minimum standards of service as a condition in qualifying for grants. Authorities on the subject recommend this on the theory that the state must receive some assurance, in return for its support, that measurable improvement will result.

The predominant trend in promotion effort is toward the establishment of larger units of service. Larger units of service are a keystone in the "systems of service" which have been recommended for so long. Yet despite this effort, small independent library units have increased in number and re-organization to provide larger units of service has not progressed to any appreciable extent. While some consolidation has occurred, the idea of improvement of local service through such re-organization is more easily comprehended by state library representatives than by local people. The big obstacle in this struggle consists of a deep-rooted devotion to an established taxing district. It must be exchanged for a new concept of "larger area of service." It is far easier to sell people who have no local library establishments the idea of a service area large enough to provide a minimum quality of service.

Only personnel on duty with state agencies can fully appreciate the

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task magnitude of working for, with, and to help the multitude of "Things" as described later by Angus Mowat in this issue. State library extension officials know all too well the disappointment and frustration that comes from the failure of carefully planned efforts to create a new alignment of local services designed for improved and cheaper services per tax dollar. Local satisfaction with a static inadequacy, complacent librarians or boards of trustees, protective jealousy, or misplaced pride are all encountered in the current move to bring the state library, its services and personnel, closer to the local operating level.

One of the most confounding problems faced by state agencies is the growing shortage of qualified personnel. An agency may be happily successful in its drive to extend and consolidate service only to be forced to retreat by the lack of professional librarians available for new duty. If the Federal Library Services Bill becomes law and state libraries succeed in pushing back the rural frontier with extended service areas, it seems safe to predict that there will not be an adequate professional labor force to man the enlarged service.

State and provincial libraries may take their cues from the Twentieth Century Fund's new report⁷ of estimates for the next decade which has analyzed the causes of governmental expenditure behavior. Changes in volume and kind of public services, their cost, and the changes in population will be the principal influences at work in the future. State libraries face the job of justifying their plans to the lawmakers and to the people if they are to move their programs boldly ahead.

The Federal Commission on Inter-governmental Relations⁸ has strongly suggested that the several states take necessary action to increase their own capacity for meeting the needs of modern government. It also predicts that states will find it increasingly necessary to direct and assist local government with any service program which it is not strong enough to conduct alone. Here, then, is a direct challenge as well as an open opportunity to every state library to follow a charted growth.

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7. Dewhurst, J. Frederic, and Associates: *America's Needs and Resources—A New Survey*. New York, The Twentieth Century Fund, 1955, p. 590.
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