



Direct Public Services

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A STATE OR PROVINCIAL LIBRARY may provide the data used in drafting a law of far reaching significance, be the source of information for one more historical novel, supply a winter's reading for an isolated family, or aid in locating a citation required for the successful solution of an important case. "Bread and Circuses" was the title of a state library report a few years ago and a better characterization could not be found for some state libraries. Research material for the scholar, reference material for legislator and government worker, technological information for business man and industrialist, and books which enrich and add sparkle to living are all a part of state library service. It would not be correct to say that every state and provincial library has an impressive collection of materials and caters to a wide variety of people, but there are government-supported libraries in many capitals with good library service for jurists, lawyers, legislators, business men, historians, genealogists, writers, government workers, club program directors, the blind, and just plain people. In these states the public has discovered that its state library supported by public funds has a richness that is matched only by the best city libraries.

Each state or legislative library collection reflects the particular needs and interests of its government. The libraries were started with a collection of law books to which were added books on government, political science, history, and finally significant publications in all fields of interest to the state and its citizens. The collection of official documents was a natural development for the early library and it is not surprising that this was expanded to include all materials about the region. The establishment by the federal government of depository libraries and the development of the exchange of publications between states further strengthened the libraries. To answer questions quickly and accurately the state library, along with all other good reference libraries, acquired many indexes, bibliographies, handbooks, and en-

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cyclopedias which reveal a subject. The acquisition of this material over many years has developed in most states a book collection of real substance.

To make this collection effective, certain well-defined state library services developed. They are usually law, legislative reference, general reference, history, archives, government publications, and service to public libraries. Each one of the functions can be discussed as a separate service, and in some places each one is an independent agency. To become ensnared in a discussion of the organization of library service for these fifty-eight governmental entities, or whether one agency or several is best for a particular government is fruitless.

Services for government-connected personnel follow rather closely the three branches of government: a law library for the use of the courts and the attorneys of the state; specialized reference service for legislators; and general reference for executive departments. In Canada the principal law library in the provincial capital is maintained by a private law society with small government-supported legal collections for the use of courts and attorneys general in the legislative libraries.¹ This is in marked contrast to the United States where in thirty² states the state-supported law library is the largest, and in certain states the only sizable, legal library in the state. These thirty states do not include California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York where the state law libraries are among the largest in the country but are exceeded in size by outstanding private collections. The smallest state law libraries are in North and South Dakota reporting 26,000 and 30,000 volumes respectively.

Although size is not indicative of quality it is a fact that to provide adequately for the legal needs of a state the collection must be fairly extensive if individual requirements are to be met satisfactorily. One hundred and fifty years ago the legal books a lawyer needed were few and could be placed on shelves near his desk. Today the literature is extensive and the successful lawyer needs a large library. It is not surprising that states have accepted the provision of a law library for the courts, which is open to all attorneys and administrative agencies, as a primary state responsibility. The interests of every citizen are involved in this effort to forward justice.

Legislative reference service in the United States and Canada developed because a special group of people, legislators, needed a service which the reference department of a state library could not provide. The general reference, or law library, had the necessary materials but the philosophy of the reference librarian based on the theory that

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the patron should do the actual work himself precluded effective service for legislators. For that reason it became necessary to provide a small working collection of books, reports, periodicals, and newspaper articles on subjects currently under discussion, with a staff able to assemble information from these resources and present it in a concise and understandable form. Today's legislator must be alert to the problems of his constituency, have a broad concept of the probable effect of the laws which he helps to make, be able to see beyond the self-interest of groups and select the best course from recommendations of state department personnel. He has little time for thoughtful reading on the many subjects under discussion, but he needs the benefit of the best thinking on a subject, knowledge of the experience of other states, and reliable facts if he is to serve the state with wisdom and integrity.

A Council of State Governments' committee on the services needed by legislators included the legislative reference function and defined it as "the process of discovery, procuring, maintaining and utilizing current materials likely to provide both ready answers and more detailed replies to questions and problems which come before the legislature . . ." ⁸ In every legislative reference library many questions are quickly answered and a number of important research studies undertaken each year. The legislative librarian, as the librarian in industry, prepares bibliographies on special subjects, informs members of publications of particular interest, and assembles data from published and unpublished sources and presents it in digested or tabulated form. To enable the librarian to give swift service various indexes and special collections of materials, often newspaper clippings, are made by the legislative reference staff. The most important of these is an index of all bills introduced, with a day by day record of progress, and a comprehensive subject index.

A few state libraries participate in orientation programs for freshman legislators and use newsletter techniques to inform members of special materials and services available. Bill drafting has been included with legislative reference service in a number of states. Since the staff required must have legal rather than library training this function would appear to be one of organizational convenience within the state rather than of library significance.

In a number of provinces the activities of the legislative libraries are almost entirely concerned with reference service to members of the parliaments. In a report on the legislative libraries of Canada the committee commented that too few of the elected representatives used

their libraries.⁴ W. R. Roalfe in his study of law libraries reported twenty-three state libraries with legislative reference departments.⁵ The current issue of *The Book of the States*⁶ does not include all of these agencies as the principal legislative reference service. Here is a needed service and its successful operation is a challenge for every state library.

Work for the staff of government departments has not been a subject of discussion at meetings of state librarians, nor has it received much attention from writers about state libraries. Occasionally biennial reports, or leaflets describing the services of a library, contain references to this phase of state library responsibility. At the California State Library a reference librarian is assigned regularly to state department problems, and a few state librarians have reported special projects with other state departments such as providing books for specific purposes, jointly sponsoring reading programs, and preparing subject bibliographies. The services available for the executive branch of the government should be as intensive and as specialized as those provided for the courts and legislature. It is one of the most important services which a state library can provide. Library materials needed by department personnel cover all subject fields and have a strong similarity to those useful to the legislature. While members of the legislature are concerned with a subject as it relates to the functioning of the government, officials and department assistants need more comprehensive information. The legislator must have sufficient data to determine whether or not a fish hatchery should be established, while the department official must be as well informed and have in addition the latest research on all phases of fish culture and hatchery management.

Without doubt every state and legislative library can top the story of Isadore G. Mudge and her staff reading the complete works of an author for the president of Columbia University, with many experiences of scanning complete works to place in context a quotation imperfectly recalled by the governor, or of reading page after page of a newspaper to locate a political speech. Professional workers in increasing numbers are being employed by states, and the opportunities for reference assistance are multiplying. It is not, however, only professional personnel who turn to the library for help. In an ever-expanding government there are many clerical and other workers who need materials for on-the-job education and spot reference. If state or legislative libraries fail to give service to officials and employees, department libraries will be started, creating many small libraries and a weak central unit not unlike the situation found on some university campuses and the states' resources scattered.

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Reference work and the loan of books and other materials for judges, legislators and department employees are special library functions and the library, or libraries, created by the government for this purpose have personnel and materials to answer the needs of a selected clientele. In a few states and some provinces additional library responsibility is not accepted by the state beyond assembling historical and archival collections, which are essentially for the use of historians and the state group, and only incidentally open to the public. The majority of libraries, however, have welcomed the public to their reading rooms, and made their books available for home use.

Loan and reference service is available in twenty-four states and one province for people living in communities or isolated regions where public library service is non-existent and it was recently reported to the California State Library through a questionnaire that an additional seventeen states and two provinces give direct service to any resident. The legislative libraries of Canada recognized this responsibility to the general public and reported to the Canadian Library Association "While originally conceived for the purpose of providing Legislative reference service in the main, Legislative libraries have quite legitimately expanded their service beyond this function. For the most part the resources of these libraries are (and if not, should be) such as to make possible a wider public reference than is possible or practicable to expect of even an expanded public library service."⁷

This opinion is shared by the members of the American Library Association, Coordinating Committee on Revision of Public Library Standards.⁸ A draft of the preliminary report of this committee proposes a plan for improved public library service based on a three-level system of libraries. The first unit is a local library near every reader; the second is a regional library within reasonable traveling time, which will provide the services of a good city library; and the third is the state library which is described as the source of specialized materials and the agency for answers to difficult information inquiries.

It is logical for state level library agencies to provide service to the 27,000,000 people in the United States, and their counterpart in Canada, who do not have local libraries. The type and amount of service ranges from sending out titles requested by a few people to a vigorously promoted service which includes the use of book-mobiles and an effective program of answering borrower's questions. The reference work is comparable to that of any moderately large public library with questions running the gamut from simple to complex. In addition many states have special services to encourage the use of books. In North Dakota a program chairman can send in the

topics for a series of discussion meetings and the library will recommend and provide suitable materials. In Illinois the library prepares booklists and acquires reference and other materials of special interest to labor groups. The Legislative Library in Ontario has the additional responsibility of the professional library for the teachers of the province. Several libraries have reading courses and award certificates upon successful conclusion, and many issue mimeographed or printed booklists on subjects of general interest. Location in the capital city of headquarters for many state-wide organizations offers state library personnel an excellent opportunity to promote reading and discussion on the important topics of the day. Recently a member of the Louisiana State Library staff served as chairman of a steering committee on adult education. The purpose of this committee was to bring together representatives of all organizations, institutions and agencies engaged in programs directed toward the education of adults. Also the New York State Library working with other groups, including libraries, participated in a thirteen-week television series named "World of Books." These are only a few examples of programs which aid the individual in his search for recreation and information.

In every state there are handicapped people. Fortunately the majority can, and do, use regular public library services, but the blind and bedridden need extra attention. The oldest library service to handicapped people, loaning books to the blind, is provided by six state libraries, while twelve city libraries, one county library, two state welfare departments and four private libraries act as distributing agents for the remainder of the country.⁹ The number who can read Braille is limited, but the development of talking books has expanded educational and recreational opportunities for these people, and as a result placed heavy burdens on the city libraries and private institutions that give state-wide service. In at least one state, Oklahoma, projected books, and ceiling reading machines are available for loan to the bedridden. The state library, of all the libraries in a state, is an appropriate central agency for the selection and distribution of materials for the handicapped.

D. S. Freeman addressed the Richmond, Virginia, meeting of state libraries on the "Interests of History and Research" saying in part, ". . . the state library is essentially the historian of the state. I think its first duty lies in that direction."¹⁰ That there is general agreement with this famed historical writer is evident, for in every province and state there are official collections of books, maps, documents, and pictures bearing on the history of the state. Universally, legislative bodies

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have agreed that this is a function worthy of government support. To be sure private historical societies preceded the state in some places, and several agencies may carry out all of the activities necessary, but it is recognized that here is an area which requires the facilities and legal backing of a government to achieve even moderate success. In a recent study the Legislative Council of Alabama¹¹ describes the functions as care and custody of official archives, assembly of all materials bearing on the history of the state, encouragement of historical research, and responsibility for spreading information about the state's history. The historical collection is made up of manuscripts, books, pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers, documents, pictures, films, in fact any form of communication relating to the present or past of the region which can be organized within a library. The publications may be creative works of native sons or yearbooks of local clubs but together they tell the story of people living and working for a better life.

Although the historical collection may receive little attention from state librarians writing in current library publications, there is no doubt that the rare, documentary, and general resources which relate to the state and its subdivisions are among the most valuable and generally sought after resources which the library provides.

As libraries have assembled collections concerning the state they have often acquired important imprints and unusual collections of manuscripts. It is not surprising that collectors wishing to preserve for scholars the efforts of years of searching for important publications and documents should give these valuable materials to state libraries. The British Columbia Legislative Library has a valuable Shakespeare collection, the Sutro branch of the California State Library is well-known for its seventeenth century pamphlets and broadsides, eighteenth and nineteenth century Mexican documents and priceless Hebrew manuscripts and books, and at the Virginia State Library the Poe collection is an important resource in American literature. If a careful count were made, there could be uncovered in many libraries at least one collection of interest to students.

To the library patron who hunts heads in the jungle of family trees the state library is a "must." In the past some librarians looked with scorn upon this egotistical searching but many state libraries developed important genealogical collections for which present-day social scientists are grateful, for here is revealed the people who lived in the preceding centuries. To the genealogical collections have been added such publications as privately printed diaries, playbills, and

political broadsides, the military and civil lists of state and local governments, all equally important sources for the historian who no longer records history as a series of battles or headline events.

To these riches, whether they are in the state-supported historical society, a special archives collection, or the state library, there must be added the official publications of local, county, and state governments and complete files of the maps and newspapers of the region. These publications are essential in any research involving political, economic, or social conditions of a state. They currently inform a citizen of the work being done by his government and they serve as a link between the past and the present ultimately providing the scholar with factual materials by which he can judge the progress of the state. It is interesting to note that when the legislative librarians of the Canadian provinces began a survey of their respective libraries in 1947, the Canadian Library Association referred to the group a request from the Canadian Social Science Research Council for consideration of the "inadequacy of the files of publications of the provincial governments of Canada in each Legislative library."¹² It is quite possible that similar conditions exist in some of the states since securing official publications from ever-multiplying departments is fraught with many hazards not the least of which is turnover in the position of clerk in charge of mailing lists. A few states have enacted laws to provide safeguards against such eventualities but even in these states constant vigilance is required if completeness is achieved. It is not enough that the library assemble all of these materials in an organized collection. Other states and the national government have need of the publications. Every state library has an obligation to prepare frequent checklists of its state's documents. It is encouraging that at least thirty-one states¹³ are issuing periodic checklists of these valuable resources.

Icko Iben,¹⁴ in an article on newspapers, reports that many state libraries regard the preservation of the newspapers published daily and weekly in cities and towns as a major responsibility. In the American Library Directory, 1954,¹⁵ there is hardly a state or legislative library which does not include newspapers in its special collections' listing.

A state library, as any other library or institution, must define its objectives before an effective library program can be developed. In some states these may be limited, with the result that only a few services are necessary and in others they may be broad requiring all of

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the activities described. If the signs which point to the future can be a guide, state libraries will do well to reconsider basic objectives in terms of the services which can best be performed at the state level, as well as in terms of the needs of the government and people of the state. There are no written standards by which to determine the quality of service of state libraries but there are signs which indicate that there are goals which some libraries are not reaching. The state library should be pre-eminent in law, legislative and government reference, history and archives and general reference. Roalfe concludes his section on state law libraries with a warning: "Furthermore, the information secured in this study clearly indicates that the law library service is by no means always as effective as it should be and that both formal changes and a greater degree of cooperation are in some cases greatly needed."¹⁶ The trend toward separation of legislative reference libraries from state libraries and the growth of department libraries are danger signals which should not be overlooked. Holdings of books, periodicals, films, and other materials must be extensive and the staff expert in using the materials if the service is to be of high quality.

The recommendation that the state library be a third level of public library service suggests the opportunity of providing unusual reference service for all the people of the state. Some state libraries, particularly where there are several agencies, will need to give serious consideration to the development of a reference collection, broad in coverage and superior in quality. The increase in establishment of library outlets close to the people will bring a lessening demand for general public library service; already two state library agencies have reported a decrease in requests for recreational material. The state library staff through its association, at the state capital, with government workers and state-level organization personnel is in a strategic position to encourage the use of all media of communication. There are many opportunities for state libraries to improve and increase the quality and organization of library services, and the challenge of providing the best possible service for government workers, historical materials about the state for research, and superior reference service for all the people should be the objective of every province and state. The promotion of the free exchange of ideas and free access to the resources which makes this possible are the responsibility of every library and the state library should be a vital part of this free system of education which provides these services for every citizen.

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