



General Problems

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GENERAL PROBLEMS in mobilizing and developing library resources through cooperation is a topic broad enough to cover many aspects of librarianship and its philosophy if, indeed, it has a philosophy. At least it can hardly be denied that librarianship has its problems and that cooperation is a basic one.

The need for cooperation will be emphasized at the outset because the very slow pace at which cooperation has developed can be attributed to failure to recognize its necessity and, back of that, failure to understand the history that underlies this necessity. Comments on the need for cooperation will be followed by a discussion of some of the basic reasons for the reluctance of librarians and their institutions to support wholeheartedly the cooperative enterprises that will have to be developed if library resources are to be built up nationally as some of us think they can and should be. The financial problems of cooperation will be considered, including the possibility that foundations may be interested in this field, and the article will conclude with an attempt to outline the national requirements in library resources toward which cooperative efforts ought to build. Comments will be general for the most part in order to avoid needless overlapping of subsequent chapters, which deal with more specific problems and forms of cooperation.

Why do libraries need to cooperate? How did this need arise?

A seriously oversimplified answer might be simply that they are now living in the latter half of the twentieth century, not in the early years of that century or in the middle of the preceding one. It was barely more than a century ago that Harvard's library, already more than two hundred years old, and then the largest library in the United States, had only 100,000 volumes. For more than thirty years now it has been adding a greater number of volumes than this to its collection every year, and so have the Library of Congress and the New

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York Public Library. A hundred years may not seem very long to one who has been in library work for more than half that time, but the world of libraries has been enormously changed during that century.

Even so, the need for cooperation was beginning to be recognized a hundred years ago, and there were voices crying in the wilderness about library problems that, as we are finally coming to realize, can best be solved by cooperation.

One of the first of these voices, if not the first, belonged to Joseph Greene Cogswell, a member of the first group of American scholars who went abroad during the second decade of the nineteenth century to take advantage of the graduate education that was then available in Germany, particularly at the University of Göttingen. There Cogswell discovered what a great research library could mean to a scholar in the pursuit of knowledge and the effort to advance its frontiers. He came back to his homeland intent on seeing to it that eventually a student in the United States could have the advantages then at the disposal of his German colleagues. After serving for two years as librarian at Harvard, he resigned when he reluctantly concluded that President Kirkland, while he seemed to be interested in better service for undergraduates, gave no evidence of understanding the desirability of creating a great research library.

Cogswell did not forget his dream. Through Samuel Ward, a banker, he became acquainted with one of the financial geniuses of his time, John Jacob Astor. He was taken into Astor's household and, when Astor's will was probated in 1848, it was found that a very large sum of money, by the standards of those days, had been left to found a reference library for the people of New York City. Cogswell was given the opportunity to take charge of this enterprise, and he was so successful that the Astor Library—now an integral part of the New York Public Library—was soon far ahead of all the country's older libraries, whether college or university, proprietary or tax-supported. It was indeed the first great reference and research collection to be assembled on this continent.

The Astor Library made available to scholars first-rate library resources in most fields of knowledge. It made a great direct contribution to American scholarship, but its example was more important still, for it demonstrated how useful and desirable such collections were. It was inevitable that the example should be followed before long.

A second voice belonged to John Langdon Sibley of the Harvard Library, who has gone down in history as the man who boasted that all the books belonging to his library were on the shelves except two, that he knew who had these, and that he was on his way to retrieve them. In doing this he was simply preparing for the annual inspection of the library that was required by the rules. If he approved of the rules established by his superiors he may have been partially responsible for policies that seem extremely old fashioned today. In any case, he was also responsible for something that was a striking innovation in his time—he ransacked the attics of the Boston area for printed materials of a kind that had not hitherto interested librarians, and he gathered these together in the Harvard College Library.

The new materials were more ephemeral in character than those that Cogswell had collected, but were to prove highly useful as sources for historical research. As time went on, the collecting of this pioneer was copied by other librarians. Even so, the pace did not approach the speeds to which we are accustomed until Archibald Cary Coolidge took over at Harvard early in the present century and, using his own funds generously to supplement those that he was able to persuade his friends and the University to contribute, began to acquire library materials on a scale of which Sibley and Cogswell may never have dreamed.

Others were soon eager to follow. Institutions giving advanced degrees made unprecedented sums of money available for purchase of research materials, yet the appetite for such materials appeared to have become completely insatiable; faculties and graduate students demanded more and more. It should have become clear at this point that something would have to be done; to at least a few librarians interlibrary cooperation seemed the most promising way out because they believed that it could help by reducing duplication in both acquisition and cataloging.

Long before this, however, there had been still a third voice crying in the wilderness. At the time when Cogswell and Sibley were making history in the field of acquisitions, Charles Coffin Jewett was attempting to introduce revolutionary innovations in cataloging. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century when he became librarian of the newly established Smithsonian Institution, he hoped that it would become the national library, and this was not an implausible

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idea because the Library of Congress had not yet shown any signs of developing along these lines.

Regarding himself, therefore, as the natural leader in American librarianship, Jewett did his best to bring into being a national library association; he believed that his profession would benefit greatly if he and his colleagues could begin to meet and work together and talk over their mutual problems. These, of course, are all steps that must precede cooperation. He realized that a major problem was to devise a satisfactory plan for bibliographical control of library collections that would not bankrupt libraries or reduce their funds for acquisition and public services so drastically that they would be crippled. Card catalogs were in their earliest infancy; the book-form catalog was still in vogue, and Jewett believed that its cost of preparation and printing could be reduced if each book could be described once and for all, with the description recorded in such a form that it could be made available easily, quickly, and inexpensively to each library that acquired the book. His idea was a good one, though he probably did not realize how difficult it might be to persuade one cataloger to accept the work of another. But he did not get far enough with his plan to discover whether or not it could survive the difficulties that plague cooperative projects generally; he ran head-on into mechanical trouble, the warping of the stereotype plates on which the record was to be kept.

The important thing is that Jewett was interested in cooperation and that he did something to make American librarians aware of the need for it, though the growth of this awareness was a very slow process. Librarians were eager to build up their collections along the lines indicated by Cogswell and Sibley and, later, Coolidge; as the new century began they were stimulated by demands from faculty members and a growing horde of candidates for the doctorate. It has been said with considerable justification that the first qualification for a librarian is interest in collecting. Rivalry, moreover, has always characterized the relationship of institutions of higher learning; this rivalry has been stimulated by competition in sports, particularly football, but has by no means been confined to sports. The atmosphere has not favored cooperation.

In spite of this, cooperation has had a prominent place in library thought during the past fifty years and has been gathering momentum. The difficulty of raising funds sufficient to meet growing library

budgets has made this inevitable. The four major items of library costs are housing, acquisition, cataloging, and service; the first three of these, it has appeared, might be materially reduced by cooperative effort.

If growing cooperation can be characterized as inevitable, it may seem surprising that it has not developed much more rapidly. An examination of major factors that have delayed progress seems to be desirable.

Lack of realization of what had happened is one such factor. The great majority of librarians are so wrapped up in the details of their work and so interested in them that they have not considered what has been happening as the libraries have grown older and larger. They have tended to feel that finances were not their responsibility, but that libraries are obviously essential to our civilization and that adequate support is bound to be provided. This attitude has not been restricted to the lower ranks; head librarians have been inclined to say that they were building the kind of libraries their faculties wanted and that all their efforts must be devoted to this task, leaving finances for presidents and boards of trustees to handle.

There has also been a lag in realization because the problem of library growth seriously affected only the very large libraries, and these, until very recent times, could be counted on the fingers of one hand. It was not until the 1920's that more than four American libraries, the Library of Congress, Harvard, Yale, and the New York Public Library had more than one million volumes. Within a generation the number of libraries in this size-group has increased sixfold; the number will double within the next ten years.

It has been a difficult period during which to find time for sitting and thinking about the future. First there was a depression, then World War II, and then almost unprecedented prosperity. During the next fifteen years, it may be added, the great influx of new students will help to hold down the per-student cost of operating libraries, and it will be possible to argue for increasing library appropriations on the ground that an increasing number of students must be served. In fact, however, costs in a great research library depend to a very limited extent upon the number of persons served; the size of the collection, the cost of additions to it, and provision of bibliographic control are the chief items. More reading-room space is needed when student-bodies grow, but it is easy to demonstrate the need for this and hence, usually, easy to obtain it.

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Realization of the problems entailed in library growth may have lagged also because so many other things have been growing rapidly that it has not seemed particularly remarkable. Indeed, the strongest of all arguments against cooperation is that it is not really necessary—a nation that can spend \$100,000,000 for a short-lived airplane carrier and billions for atomic research can certainly afford what is needed to build up its libraries. It can be argued that proper development of libraries would save us more than it would cost by enabling researchers to avoid the duplication of work that has already been done but is not known because library service has not been adequately supported. If this is so, why need libraries be forced to undertake something as inconvenient as interlibrary cooperation? This is an argument that may have been insufficiently considered in professional literature; yet, if additional funds were made available to our educational institutions, is it entirely clear that they ought to be spent for the tools of research rather than for higher salaries and for research itself? The author will not attempt to settle this argument, but rather will continue his effort to explain what has happened as a means of illuminating the problem.

Tradition and habit have been powerful factors in delaying cooperative advances. The chief duty of the librarian is to make his library grow, and to make it grow as rapidly as possible—this has been an almost universal assumption for a long while, and there is much to be said for it. Most of those of us who have had chief responsibility for a large library have believed—rightly so, in this author's opinion—that the acquisition program is the one thing that must never be forgotten, and that a librarian, in the long run, will be remembered for what he has accomplished during his term of office toward building up the collections. Cogswell, Sibley, and Coolidge will go down in history primarily as collection-builders. Harry Lydenberg, certainly one of the greatest and most versatile of librarians, did superb work in many lines, yet he will be remembered most of all as the man who, more than anyone else, was responsible for building up over a long period a collection at the New York Public Library that was more comprehensive and better selected than any other the country has known. Most of our greatest libraries are monuments to the collecting genius of individuals who were determined to build them up even though limited funds may have made it necessary to leave them poorly housed, poorly serviced, and poorly cataloged. At least they

acquired the material when it was available and preserved it for posterity.

Emotional and psychological factors may have done even more than tradition and habit to block cooperation. The men and women who reach the higher administrative positions are, for the most part, those who have more than their share of natural independence and self-reliance. They are not the sort of people who have an inborn desire to rely on others. In other words, they are not cooperative by instinct.

Moreover, the institutions for whom they work and the institutional administrators to whom they are responsible, notably deans and presidents, are also for the most part endowed with the competitive spirit. The deans and presidents regard similar institutions as rivals with whom they have competed for faculty members and for funds; it is well to remember that, whether he likes it or not, fund-raising is likely to be the president's chief job. The institutions compete for students, and are fierce rivals on the athletic field. It is not surprising that their libraries should also indulge in competition.

One unfortunate factor in interlibrary rivalry is that it is commonly on a numerical basis. This may be absurd; but measurement of library quality is a very difficult matter, while it is easy to compare the number of volumes on the shelves. Some of the volumes may be worthless and some may be almost impossible to locate through the catalog, but all can be counted. It is easy also to boast of rarities and special collections, regardless of whether or not they are used. Manuscript collections are impressive, even if the library does not know how to care for them. The universities, on their part, may be duplicating professorships in fields where there are not enough students to go around; some institutions have boasted that they have more departments than any other in the state or the region. Any competitive absurdities of which libraries may be guilty can be matched in other parts of the institution; enough has been said, perhaps, to indicate why the general atmosphere has not encouraged interlibrary cooperation.

In addition to the non-rational factors that have been considered, obstacles to cooperation include the difficulties of overcoming objections from those whom the library serves. A research scholar wants his book when he wants it. He may be old enough to have had to wait for years for an opportunity to go abroad to obtain his research material because American library resources were insufficient to meet

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his needs; but now, with a growing collection in his own institution, he may be convinced that he cannot do his work unless the books can be placed on his desk within ten minutes after he calls for them. Worse still, he is likely to be convinced that, if his library does not own a book he wants, this failure is to be blamed on the fact that his foolish librarian has embarked on some strange and inexcusable co-operative scheme, either because he was lazy or because he took a malicious pleasure in making research difficult for scholars on the faculty.

“Why cooperate?” he may ask. “Why not stand on our own feet instead of continuing to depend for some materials on another library?” One answer, of course, is that it is a matter of interdependence—if each library has some material that is not elsewhere, total resources can be vastly increased. Moreover, if the professor will devote even a little of his ingenuity to planning ahead, he may often be able to request books that are in other libraries a few days before he needs them and thus avoid delays.

The psychological factors, particularly rivalry and impatience, are important, and there are few individuals in either the teaching or administrative ranks of institutions of higher learning who have not been affected by them. They are characteristic of professors as well as deans and presidents, of acquisition and reference librarians as well as directors.

There always appear to be good excuses for the negative attitude toward cooperation. Pressure by others is one, for it is always easy to blame others. More important is an unwillingness to be completely convinced that cooperation is really as necessary as a few vociferous librarians have been asserting. Our presidents, we like to believe, are really good at raising money from private donors or from legislatures. Why should the library budget be severely curtailed when there are professors who have few students and when buildings are being constructed to house things in which we have not the slightest interest? If we try hard enough, we should be able to get what we want. Anyhow, our rival, a hundred miles away, is getting new money and we must not fall behind.

At this point it may be worth-while to give further attention to the question of need for cooperation. The growth of libraries has been considered; it has been enormous during the past three generations, but so has the growth of everything else about our institutions. Student-bodies are ten times what they were a few years ago. Faculty

salaries have risen. Building plants, endowments, and annual budgets have grown rapidly. Are libraries getting more than their share? The library's percentage of the total budget has not been going up. Moreover, if the faculty were assembled and, after being assured that their own salaries would not be affected by their answers, asked to express an opinion, would they not agree that the library ought to get more than it does? Perhaps it should.

If we decide that the library deserves more than it is getting, we might also conclude that cooperation, while theoretically admirable, is not really necessary—not, in any case, immediately. Might it not be better to wait at least another ten years, meanwhile devoting ourselves to getting for our libraries what we ought to have in order to carry on our basic work?

If we can demonstrate that the library is not getting its proper share of the institutional budget, let us fight to get it. Even then, however, cooperation may prove useful, for reasons that will be suggested later. But libraries should get their share, which ought to be determined when all the facts are known. What kind of a college or university is wanted by the trustees, the administrative officers, the faculty, and, for that matter, the students? If a better library is one of the features they want, and if the present one is making available funds go as far as they can, then a larger proportion of the total institutional budget ought to go into the library.

Here it seems necessary to mention some of the basic facts of library life that are too often overlooked. Libraries tend to grow at a more rapid rate than other parts of the institutions to which they are attached. This is because they add books and rarely subtract any—a practice that is not hard to defend and that could hardly be abandoned in any case without precipitating a revolt by the faculty. Students and professors come, but they eventually leave through one door or another; the books stay. In the long run, therefore, the books increase in numbers more rapidly than the students or professors. As already noted, this tendency will not be evident during the years immediately ahead, because an avalanche of students is about to hit us. But, in the long run, libraries will grow more rapidly than other parts of the institution, and this would probably continue to be true even if librarians could ever be persuaded that they had finally caught up with the backlog of materials that ought to have been acquired years ago but were not obtained for one reason or another. To be sure, many a librarian has declared that, once he had one million volumes—or two

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million, or some other number large enough to lie safely beyond his own term of office—he would be satisfied and would be willing thereafter to subtract a volume, for discard or consignment to storage, each time one is added.

A second fact of life is that, whether or not they ought to, unit costs tend to go up as libraries grow larger. In spite of their best efforts, librarians have not found it possible to apply mass-production techniques to an extent sufficient to compensate for the costs entailed by size. These include the increasing time required, as we grow larger, to make sure that the library does not already have a book recommended for acquisition, the more expensive cataloging required to distinguish the new acquisition from a million other volumes instead of one hundred thousand others, the extra distance that must be covered when getting it from the shelves when it is wanted and returning it afterward, and even the cost of teaching faculty and students how to use a very large and hence, inevitably, complex library.

Costs go up as size increases; moreover, as a library grows and gives better service, the demands upon it increase. The money spent for better service and better physical accommodations creates demands for still further expenditures. There seems to be no end to this process, and hence no end to the resources that ought to be at the library's disposal. More will always be wanted, but this is no argument against using cooperation to make what we have go as far as possible.

A third fact of life is that, as library collections grow larger, they are bound to include a constantly increasing proportion of infrequently used books. A business executive is likely to conclude that a law of diminishing returns is involved here, and that there is some point at which it will be more advantageous to spend money for purposes other than storage of additional books. They are nice to have, but it might be better for all concerned to have fewer books at hand and more books readily available elsewhere. The more books elsewhere can be provided only by means of cooperation.

The legal obstacles to cooperation of this kind have been emphasized in some quarters. Are these unsurmountable, or are they for the most part excuses for procrastination—obstacles imagined by those who want to find that cooperation is impracticable?

There are real problems. They are complicated, as legal matters are likely to be. Some libraries operate under charters that preclude some types of cooperation, and there may be instances of tax-supported

institutions that cannot use funds derived from taxes for any enterprise located outside the state or even the city to which they belong. This is not the place for a legal discussion of such problems, even if the writer were qualified to undertake one, but three points may be worth making:

First, the members of the Midwest Inter-Library Center come from at least eight different states, and most of them are tax-supported, yet it appears that each member has been legally able to contribute to the Center's support.

Second, it should be remembered that, if some types of interlibrary cooperation are now illegal for some libraries, laws have been changed in the past and changes are possible in the future if the demand for them is strong enough.

Third, if legal obstacles prevent cooperation that seems to be desirable and is wanted by libraries, then funds from one of the foundations should be solicited to finance a study of these obstacles. It should be possible to make a convincing case for such a grant.

Financial problems are doubtless going to be harder to handle than legal ones. If it is difficult for the library to obtain adequate support from its own institution, it may well be more difficult yet to obtain appropriations to support an enterprise that is not directly under the control of those who make the appropriations. Trustees are naturally interested in how the funds that they control are used, and they cannot directly control the expenditures of a cooperative organization in which others have a share of the management. This will always be a problem, and it follows that cooperation must always, and repeatedly, be ready to demonstrate its utility and economy.

On the other hand, if convincing proof of the monetary advantages of cooperation can be provided, it ought to be possible to tap new sources of income. Foundations are likely to take an interest in projects that attempt to solve new problems or to investigate new methods for solving old problems. Anything that promises to make one dollar do the work of two is appealing. Interlibrary cooperation ought to attract the foundations' "venture capital."

There will have to be fairly general agreement on the long-term objectives of cooperation if foundation funds are to be obtained for it on more than a small scale and if libraries are to give it the backing that will be essential to its success. Small libraries as well as large will be involved, for projects such as the Hampshire Inter-Library Center should not be overlooked, and most of the participants in the

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various bibliographical centers are relatively small. Nothing definitive in the way of formulating objectives can be attempted in this article, but it seems desirable to suggest at least a few of the national requirements in library resources that deserve a place among the objectives of interlibrary cooperation. Four points may be suggested.

First, copies of all worth-while information that has been printed ought to be readily available to research scholars, to industry, and, indeed, to any individual who can use it. The easiest way to do this, so far as we know, is to place at least one copy of each book that contains such information in a library that is willing to make it available when needed by interlibrary loan or photographic reproduction. In many cases, if not most, the demand will warrant acquisition and recording of the book by more than a single American library.

Second, even if a sufficient number of copies of each book are in the country, research needs will not be met unless satisfactory bibliographical control is achieved; this includes making the record readily available to those who need it.

Third, the prevention of needless duplication of infrequently used books will reduce costs of acquisition in at least two ways—fewer copies of each title will be purchased, and the price of those that are purchased will not be forced up by competition between buyers. Too often, in the past, libraries have bid against one another for volumes that were destined to stand on the shelves unused for decades at a time.

Finally, the underlying objective and *raison d'être* of cooperation is to increase the nation's total library resources without correspondingly increasing library expenditures. The country is not spending too much on its libraries, and cooperative achievements will by no means justify a reduction in such expenditures. Rather, cooperation will enable libraries to give more satisfactory service, whatever their financial resources, than would be possible without it.