



Public Relations of State and Federal Libraries

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THERE IS SOME INCONSISTENCY, real or apparent, between the reports of surveys of citizen opinion that show that people like the library as an institution, whether they use it or not, and the rather widely held conviction among librarians themselves that they are among the world's poorest publicists. Libraries undoubtedly share in the traditional respect people generally give to symbols of culture, and their own public relations and service programs cannot be said to be alone responsible for this favorable attitude. Also, while library publicity is admittedly often of poor quality, we are coming to recognize that it is only one aspect of public relations. In the light of this recognition, and the fact that poor publicity is often worse than none, it is perhaps just as well that library publicity has generally up to the present been low in quantity. This is not to say that good publicity is not needed for all types of libraries, state and federal libraries included. However, public relations cannot be promoted by publicity alone, or, indeed, by all kinds of popular pamphlets. It remains primarily a matter of regular, face-to-face relationships with those persons who are in strategic positions to be of aid to the library and to promote its services.

Both publicity and public relations programs have been generally associated with extroverted personalities. Alice Bryan recorded for the Public Library Inquiry in 1952 that while personality inventories showed most measured qualities of public librarians to be near the general norms for many people in similar academic and white collar service occupations, their median scores were somewhat below established norms for persons with comparable general education with regard to aggressive leadership and self-confidence. This is in terms of averages, not uniformities, and all who understand the operations

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of libraries know that the range of activities in a good library system has in it room for the range of personalities one would expect to find in an institution that deals with literary, scientific, and artistic materials and with people interested in such materials.

If Miss Bryan's profile of public librarians is accurate for librarians generally, it is probably true that they are not attracted to nor are they naturally adapted to public relations activities of the kinds which they may believe to be engaged in by the "socially undesirable characters" mentioned by C. D. MacDougall in the first chapter of this issue. There is need for recognition that the good and competent performance of many professional and other library tasks by library workers who are less extroverted—more introverted people, in other words—is in itself the soundest possible base for excellent library public relations.

The need is also acute for librarians at administrative levels to understand, accept, and act upon the fact that public relations is an important and inescapable function of library management. In short, the objectives of all libraries, local, state, and federal, require that certain library posts be filled by people having highly developed management skills including that of public relations.

For librarians to accept this more fully, and to overcome any natural distaste for public relations activities, it may be useful to emphasize MacDougall's implication, page 240, that much of the adverse criticism regarding public relations really pertains to certain increasingly discredited activities of the business and political system of which public relations and publicity have been a part, rather than to the tool itself. This does not in any way condone certain of the practices for which, according to ethical and religious concepts, some aspects of the economic and political system and the promotion that has helped these practices to flourish are properly condemned. For libraries, too, and the materials they contain, can be made to serve undesirable ends.

In discussing the assumptions with which the Public Library Inquiry began its nationwide survey, R. D. Leigh states in *The Public Library in the United States*, "If we had been living and working within a totalitarian or feudal society, some of our assumptions would have been different. We were not oblivious to the fact that the public library is in no sense a peculiarly democratic instrument. Indeed, our survey of recent public library developments throughout the world indicated that fascist and communist countries have been most active in promoting public library growth within their borders. But their

libraries do not operate under assumptions such as have guided library developments in democratic countries.”

Even before Miss Bryan's profile of public librarians, librarians have long seemed rather firmly convinced that they lack the basic qualities regarded as necessary for carrying on public relations programs. There is much public apathy toward libraries that leads to the belief that this is true. Yet, leading career advisers and public relations specialists state that the three essential requirements for a successful career in public relations are: knowledge of the humanities, of patterns of human behavior, and of the techniques of communication. Most professional librarians majored for their undergraduate degrees in subjects included in the humanities. Thus, the basic formal education of many librarians has provided at least one and sometimes more of the three prerequisites. Librarians live each day amid the books that tell what is known and being discovered about patterns of human behavior, and about techniques of communication. Books in the humanities are also easily available.

Much of what will be said here is meant to apply in general both to state and federal libraries, but with considerably more emphasis to state libraries because of the writer's greater familiarity with them.

State and federal libraries are public libraries; in fact, state libraries are, where most fully developed, and in all cases should be, the axis of the public library systems that surround them. Yet, the most fully developed of them supplement the public and other local libraries they serve with such a broad range of the more technical, unusual, and specialized materials, information, and services that these state and federal libraries more nearly resemble large university or large special research libraries, except that they have more diversified clientele. They serve more numerous and more different kinds of "publics" than any other type of library. Thus, their public relations are inherently more complex.

State and federal libraries serve their purposes most effectively when their relations are good with (1) the general public, (2) the state or federal government generally, but particularly including the members and staffs of Congress or the state legislature, budget and finance departments, and, in the case of departmental libraries, the special departments of which the libraries are part, (3) local libraries, particularly but not exclusively the public libraries throughout the states, (4) state and national library associations, (5) local officials and organizations of local officials, (6) other state and federally supported

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libraries, (7) organizations of state or federal employees, and groups whose memberships are often made up largely of state, local, and federal government officials and employees, such as local chapters of management and public administration societies, (8) civic, professional, scientific, and business organizations, (9) communications organizations, press, radio, and television.

As examples of the above, Foster Mohrhardt, director, U.S. Department of Agriculture Library, has pointed out that good relations with the American Medical Association are important for the National Library of Medicine, and they are equally important for the Veterans Administration Library. The Department of Agriculture Library must have good relations with associations of land grant college workers, agriculturists, biologists, and chemists. The Department of the Interior Library must have good relations with petroleum groups and geologists.

One basic difference between state and federal libraries is that in many states the state library encompasses many of the subject reference and research responsibilities which at the national level are performed by individual subject or departmental libraries.

Not only the chief state and federal librarians but the field and consultant staff members are the centers of any real public relations programs. There is no escaping the fact that public relations are likely to occupy a great deal of time and effort in after-office hours of the chief officers of any library. This means going to many meetings and having many personal contacts and professional conferences.

State and federal libraries have, as do other libraries, many individual patrons, but because they serve such wide areas and large numbers of people, it may be said that major targets of their public relations necessarily are groups, in and outside of government, and in and outside of the library profession. This in no way minimizes the importance of their relations with individuals.

Federal libraries have relations with groups which, in addition to the federal government and its particular branches the libraries are charged to serve, are the counterparts of the publics of state libraries. Several of the federal libraries have even more complex group relationships, which reach out not only to libraries and other groups and individuals throughout the United States but to the libraries and cultural, educational, and scientific development of other countries. The Library of Congress, together with the National Library of Medicine and the United States Department of Agriculture Library, consti-

tute what may be called our national libraries. The National Library of Medicine acts as the world's repository of medical information and historically serves not only this country but the world. The same is true of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Library. The publications of these libraries, particularly the indexes and abstracts provided by them, indicate their international responsibilities.

Military libraries form another important and widespread category of federal libraries. The writer is indebted to W. B. Coon, Sixth U.S. Army librarian, Presidio of San Francisco, for comments regarding the public relations programs of military libraries. Coon's own library, the Sixth U.S. Army Reference Library, serves as a headquarters reference resource and a reference materials supply center for all libraries in the command, somewhat as state libraries supplement the resources of local public libraries.

Military libraries fall into three general categories: the academic specialized libraries at the major service schools such as the National War College and the Infantry School; numerous technical libraries such as the medical libraries in major hospitals and legal libraries at many posts; and, finally, the general libraries, comparable to public libraries, at all military installations. These latter may include branches, bookmobiles, and other extension outlets. The academic libraries are similar to civilian college or university libraries, and the technical libraries are similar to special libraries. Their public relations programs appear to be somewhat similar to those of their civilian counterparts.

In the military hierarchy, general libraries usually come under Special Services, or similar organizational elements such as Morale Services or Personnel Services. They have organizational equality with other activities serving the voluntary user, but they provide not only for off-duty needs of military personnel but for their job-connected needs as well. Public relations has been of much concern in these libraries. Although there is no regulation in the Army, for example, that prescribes library public relations, it is significant that over 10 per cent of the instructional portion of the Army's official Library Operational Guide is devoted to public relations and publicity. Publicity is regarded as essential for military general libraries for many reasons including the rapid rate of turn-over of military personnel at any given post, a turn-over completely unlike anything most other kinds of libraries experience. Thus, public relations and publicity are not regarded as extras but rather as part of the over-all library

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operation, and time is budgeted for them just as for materials selection.

Although there are no military librarians with the sole duty of public relations work, nearly all staff members participate knowingly and on scheduled time in publicity and public relations activities. Evidence of the quality of their efforts is seen in the several awards won by military libraries in the annual John Cotton Dana Library Publicity Awards Contests. The Army has for five years sponsored an annual library publicity contest of its own, which has helped to make publicity a normal activity in Army libraries. Military libraries participated actively in the recent observance of National Library Week.

Military libraries overseas have done a good job in bringing understanding and information both to military personnel and foreign nationals. This has been done despite the fact that the mission of these libraries, unlike that of United States Information Service libraries, does not specifically include dealing with foreign nationals. These military libraries have sponsored lecture programs, travel films, tours, children's programs which included representatives from the local civilian communities, and open houses to which the civilian community was invited.

Perhaps a major contribution of military libraries to library public relations in general has been their emphasis on making libraries inviting and friendly, normal places. They pioneered in dispelling the old, forbidding "hush-hush" atmosphere that kept many people out of libraries. Normal conversation and smoking are accepted as matters of fact in military libraries. These libraries have also probably played an important part in breaking down the fiction that librarians are severe and slightly sour spinsters with aversion to any sound louder than a whisper. Millions of men in uniform have seen attractive young librarians positively identified by their distinctive blue uniforms with library service patches. The ultimate effect of this kind of public relations is difficult to estimate.

United States Information Service libraries in overseas locations comprise another major segment of federal libraries. As would be inevitable in any program so closely connected with United States foreign policy, opinion regarding the U.S.I.S. libraries varies both at home and abroad. Also, like other systems of libraries, some are stronger than others. To all who believe in the power of accurate information to improve understanding between peoples and nations of the world, and in view of the need for such understanding, these li-

braries perform an essential service. That their missions may at certain times, in certain places, and to certain people, seem to be that of biased propaganda, is probably inescapable in the complexities and stresses of international relations. Perhaps it can be taken as a sort of tribute to the belief of people in the power of books and ideas that these libraries have occasionally been attacked and destroyed, unfortunate as these occurrences have been.

In November 1952, the *New York Times* reported on a survey of American informational activities abroad by twenty-four foreign correspondents covering forty-four nations. They were critical of most media, including the Voice of America, but hardly an ill word was uttered about any of the U.S.I.S. libraries. Numerous reports since that date stress that next to exchanges of persons between nations, overseas libraries are the strongest part of any information program. These libraries combine the services given by public and special libraries in America. Around their basic reference collections is built a series of collections on the thinking and experience of America in fields of particular importance to the host country. Their special adaptation of library collections to user need, plus the high quality of carefully selected librarians, has made these libraries good cultural ambassadors for the United States.

Our overseas libraries have provided in many countries what may be the only examples the people there have seen of libraries designed for general, free, public use, with easy access to publications, and the friendly assistance of informed librarians. Although criticized by some investigators, the inclusion in the collections of materials critical of the United States greatly enhances acceptance of the whole United States information program, and serves to convince the people of the host country that the libraries are not there for propaganda purposes. Their very neutrality lends them authority.

American information librarians often work on committees of local librarians abroad and thus make further contributions to library development in other countries. It has been in many countries a revolutionary thing to see our libraries with open shelves and lending books without charge. Most public libraries in Germany, for instance, have charged a few pfennigs (one pfennig is about $\frac{1}{4}$ cent in U.S. currency) for each book loaned. Some shelve books by size in closed stacks to make the maximum possible use of every foot of scarce space. In some cases, the German librarians have felt that the American libraries are setting an impossibly high standard which German li-

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libraries cannot reach, causing German libraries to be compared unfavorably by the German public.

Comprehensive state libraries are probably more deeply embedded into the governmental structures of which they are integral parts, both with respect to controls and services, than other public libraries. In this respect, also, they resemble university, college, and school libraries in being integrated into the structure of their parent organizations. On the other hand, some state and federal government departmental libraries, as contrasted to central state libraries and the Library of Congress and a few other federal and state-supported libraries, often lack needed integration into the total department structure. They are at times appendages for which the department has real need but they are lost in the complexities of the organization and cannot function well because they do not have proper planning or supervision.

It is often difficult for the distant users of state and federal libraries to make their needs known directly to those who have authority for budget and policy approval. This is particularly true of libraries which serve whole states or regions composed of groups of states. Budget and policy approval rests with professional governmental administrators who are remote from the libraries and individuals who depend upon the state and federal libraries for library materials and services for which these libraries are their chief or only source. Thus, often the librarian alone, in the absence of any effective way for library users to make their needs known, proposes and defends the budget and program of the library. For example, one large state library is still provided with a book budget that permits purchasing only one copy of any book, a policy established when the state's population was less than one million people, although the population of the state has grown to over fourteen million. This is largely due to the lack of any established means by which the supplementary book needs of the libraries of the state and the individual users can be expressed directly by the users to those with budget authority at the time decisions are being made about budget and policy.

The officials and employees of the state and federal governments form a large, important, and diversified segment, but only a segment, of the clientele of each. State and federal governments are becoming increasingly complex, and their influence on the lives of every man, woman, and child in the states and nation is great. The need of government personnel for reliable and comprehensive information is unlimited, and the provision or lack of such information is far-reaching

in effect. Those needs as well as the needs of libraries and individual users at points distant from the seat of government would be better served by some means of direct expression to budget and legislative authorities, in addition to the government librarians' requests.

There are often state and federal departmental libraries on specialized subjects, but despite their existence, the central state libraries and the Library of Congress carry chief responsibilities for services to state and federal governments taken as a whole. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Library has special responsibilities for all of the land grant institutions in addition to its department-wide services. Some federal libraries have regional branches as do some state libraries but federal libraries have no direct administrative controls over state or local libraries other than their branches, just as no state library has administrative control over any local library.

The better the working relationships, that is, the greater and easier the flow of needed informational materials between federal, state, and local libraries of all types, the better the library needs of all the people can be met. These are partnership relations, and are most productive when completely free of any tinge of paternalism and of fears of controls being exercised by one level over another. Since there is no means for the libraries at either federal or state level to compel any action, both state and local libraries have all to gain and nothing to lose from the fullest possible participation in the library system. Such participation makes the total library service of the country at the same time more complete, effective, and economical.

Libraries at all levels have a long way to go before this productive participation in a nationwide library system is fully realized. Thus, none of the libraries is realizing the greatest possible benefit from a complete use of public relations possibilities. This kind of working relationship has nothing to do with direct administrative control, even where state and federal financial grants may be involved. If any library at any level chooses not to participate, it may refrain from doing so, even at the cost of the quality of its service.

Recognition of mutual interdependence, and freedom from fear of the level above is usually greater the larger and stronger the individual local or state library. Some of this feeling of security from possible encroachments of control from above, on the part of larger, stronger libraries, may stem from the fact that many state libraries have been so undernourished financially that their staff members and services have not been accorded much respect from the best local

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libraries. ("Miss So-and-So does the best she can with what she has, but she has never had anything with which to work.") The Library Services Act is helping to strengthen state libraries, and in such ways that local libraries, both large and small, can see the values to them of having working partnership relations with state libraries. This is because the strengthened state libraries are at the same time strengthening local libraries through programs under the Library Services Act, helping libraries to help themselves toward modern minimum library standards.

It is probably inescapable, natural, and even wholesome, salutary, and in the American democratic tradition that smaller libraries guard their independence rather jealously, even though there is no imaginable means by which their independence could be violated against their will. When that independence takes the form of strong local pride, and includes the exercise of strong initiative for maximum local library effort, the local library can reach higher effectiveness and gain in the feeling of security against encroachment from "outside." More libraries are realizing that not even the largest libraries in the country can hold in their own collections all the materials that will ever be needed by their users, and that all need to call upon the resources of other libraries, in order to meet the needs of all readers.

On the other hand, when independence is defensively asserted, and is not accompanied by sound efforts to maintain a good standard of local service, the local library users and taxpayers are the losers. The needless assertion and misdirected energies could better be channeled into improvement of the local library.

The relations of state to local libraries are sometimes impaired by the perhaps unconscious transfer of fears and resentments felt by small businesses against big business as represented by chain stores, large corporations, and the taxing and regulatory powers of state and federal government. Similar fears are said to exist among local school authorities with relation to state and federal school agencies. It is difficult to make clear that library service, voluntarily sought, and library materials presenting all points of view and advocating none, selected by library users from a cooperative system of libraries, differ greatly from the economic competition between large and small business, the taxing and regulatory powers of governments, and the system of compulsory public education. With reference to the latter, libraries at all levels sometimes suffer from being categorized with schools as educational agencies. While libraries have lifelong educational ob-

jectives, their form, functions, and methods are entirely different from those of the more formal, compulsory public school system with its necessary emphasis on classroom instruction lasting usually just through the period of human adolescence.

It would be surprising considering the traditional and ingrained wariness with which different levels of government in the United States view especially the level above, if the Library of Congress did not "lean over" to allay the fears of other government libraries that they may be "swallowed" or overshadowed. Although there are no fears on the part of state libraries, of which the writer is aware, that federal libraries will "swallow" them or usurp their functions, there is an absence of as close working relationships between federal and state libraries as could be developed with profit to both. The creation within the American Library Association, in its recent reorganization, of the new division, the American Association of State Libraries, provides a vehicle through which state and federal libraries can begin working more closely together. It would seem only natural that state libraries would have to take the initiative in seeking this closer relation, since the higher governmental level is usually acutely self-conscious that initiative on its part is often interpreted as aggressiveness meant to do some kind of usually undefined harm to the level below.

The responsibilities assigned to the Library Services Branch, U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, by the 1956 Library Services Act have required some expansion of the Branch to enable it to work on specific library extension programs with state library agencies. The public library extension agency of each state qualifying for federal grants receives assistance in the development and application of plans and programs that are financed by such grants. Public relations with state libraries and the library profession as a whole are a concern of the Library Services Branch. Two recent evidences of this concern are the appointment of the Advisory Committee on the Library Services program, and co-sponsorship with the American Association of State Libraries of the Institute on State Plans under the Library Services Act on January 27, 1958.

There is one area in all government libraries where public relations could be considerably improved. This is in the relationship between federal libraries and the libraries of states, counties, and municipalities. The national libraries are said to feel that they must usually

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give an answer to any request from a taxpayer anywhere in the country. For example, if someone writes to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Library and wants to know the names of farm organizations in California, that Library would probably supply the individual with names of organizations. Although this is a highly desirable kind of service from the standpoint of the individual, it does bypass the local or state library in the state or locality from which the inquiry comes. If national libraries referred requests that can be handled by state or local libraries directly to those libraries it would enable them to establish continuing relationships with the individual who needs service. This practice is followed by the California State Library and several other state libraries when requests come directly to them from individuals in communities with library service. Thus, most lending outside the seat of government is done through local libraries. People living in communities without library service may, of course, receive direct service upon application to the state library. This direct service in no way substitutes for good local library service.

State libraries often have to carry water on both shoulders in relations with local libraries some of which feel that state libraries do not do enough to help them, and others which fear that the state may do too much. Even the strongest and best-supported state libraries cannot and should not do for local libraries the things which they are able to do for themselves. It is enough for state and federal libraries to perform to the fullest those services which they alone can best perform. It is not always easy to identify the things which will be done better on a permanent basis by the local library than if attempted by the state library. In general, state library services other than supplementary book and reference services, should be those of an in-service training nature, advisory and consultant work, demonstrations and experiments, and management and organization studies which will result in strengthened local services and more capable local personnel.

It will not be possible for state libraries to escape all misunderstandings and misinterpretations of motives, either for declining to give services, the local need for which will recur again and again, unless local personnel can be trained or obtained to keep them up, such as weeding, cataloging or recataloging of book collections, nor for seeming to promote and push programs that would enable localities to give better services in the future, primarily by their own efforts. The latter type of program and promotion, although needed in all

states, will almost surely subject the state library to occasional charges of empire-building.

Only one report was found of a recent professional survey of the public relations practices of a state library agency, the West Virginia Library Commission, with recommendations for specific steps toward improvement. Five state libraries, those of Nevada, New Hampshire, Michigan, Mississippi, and Oregon, are reported to be using a small portion of federal funds received from Library Services Act appropriations for public relations. Many state and federal agencies are unable to employ public relations officers unless specifically authorized by their legislatures to do so.

Both state and federal libraries depend upon the quality of their services, the federal to the state and local libraries, the state to local libraries, for acceptable and effective working relationships. Therefore, the relations between federal, state, and local libraries rest, as they properly should, on cooperation and on leadership by consent.

These are some typical activities of state libraries which, because they render valued assistance, result in improved public relations for libraries generally, although not always for the state library itself, if they are well done and done in cooperation with others: planning for adequate library service for all residents of a state, including assistance in organizing and extending local library service; supplementary book, periodical, and film service; expert consultant, advisory, and survey services; institutes and workshops for local library personnel; development and establishment of library standards; administration of certification systems; administration of state and federal grants-in-aid; library demonstration and experimental programs; collection, compilation, and publication of statistics.

State libraries will do well to keep constantly in mind that although leadership and the highest possible quality of services to local libraries are essential, statewide library programs depend primarily for their force, vitality, and widest implementation on the strength, initiative, persistence, and professional awareness of state library associations, including associations of library trustees and friends of libraries. In fact, some of the best accomplishments of state libraries come about when others—individuals or groups—such as a long-range planning committee of a state library association, a legislative committee or legislative body, a governor, a trustees' group, after long consideration and study take up a course of action or an idea that may have originated with the state library, carry it through, receive all the credit,

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and the state library's part is forgotten. Although everyone and every institution enjoys receiving credit, much good can be accomplished for libraries and their public relations if no one cares especially who gets the credit.