



Governing Authorities of Today

KARL O. BURG

HOW DO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES of libraries rate today? What differences exist in government between autonomous and institution-sponsored libraries? What is the composition of the controlling bodies? Has it changed from that of yesterday? What are their viewpoints? Are these different from what prevailed in years back? What are their competence and understanding compared to those of yesterday? Do they represent their clientele? Do they have a sense of responsibility? Are they intimate with the purposes and activities of their libraries? Are they conversant with administrative principles as applicable to libraries of their particular type?

In order to answer some of these questions it is necessary to examine each kind of library in turn—the institution-sponsored one as exemplified in college, university, and special libraries within a corporate structure; and the various types of autonomous libraries, such as those of cities, counties, and regions, and independent research libraries. Much that appears has roots going too far back for it to qualify wholly as current, but it is at least partly the outcome of trends and to that extent deserves a place in the 1959 record.

The unprecedented increase in college and university students and the corresponding pressures brought on these institutions create many problems for college and university librarians. Both are faced with the need for more books, more staff, more space, and departmental libraries to back up the new emphases in education. Both must re-examine their operations in these terms and present their needs to their governing bodies. The machinery for doing so differs to some extent in the two cases, but the problem is the same.

The college library seems to lend itself quite clearly to a division of labor through a balanced participation by a trustees committee, the president of the college, the faculty—through a faculty library committee—and the librarian. The distribution of functions rests in some

Mr. Burg is Librarian, Champaign, Illinois, Public Library.

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measure upon statute, but for the most part it either follows custom or conforms to a sensible and effective division of the responsibilities involved. The board of trustees, being charged with the conduct of the college as a whole, is the body to supply funds, to adopt policies, to confirm appointments, and to act as final arbiter in whatever matters may need to be referred to it. The librarian prepares a program to develop and effectuate policies, to direct operations, to select personnel, and with the aid of that personnel to carry out the functions of the library. Contact between the librarian and trustees may be through a committee of trustees devoted to the library or, commonly, through the president, who serves as a superior officer for the librarian as well as for the faculty. If a faculty committee exists it is advisory. It is made up of colleagues of the librarian and could not appropriately seek to direct his work, since he and the members of the faculty obtain their appointments from the same source.

The college librarian prepares and justifies the budget for his library. Although the president of the college may approve or reduce the estimates, the librarian appears in a majority of cases to be favorably situated for getting his budget passed by the trustees, and especially so where there is a committee for the library within the board.

The university library is legally bound by the constitutional provisions, charters, articles of incorporation, and general and special laws applicable to the university as a whole, as well as by judicial interpretations of these instruments. A few state university libraries are specifically provided for in legislative enactments spelling out the basis of support, powers, status, and responsibilities of the director of the library, and the various activities of units of the library. A look at several university organization charts shows that the librarian reports directly to the president of the university, who represents the library before the board of trustees, just as he does for other units. There are some trustee library committees, here and there, who meet with the librarian to work out policy, budget, personnel, and future projects—a few Ivy League universities have these. The usual pattern, however, is the president-director relationship.

The librarian depends on the president to argue his need for funds, in pace with the growth of the university. If the president is not library-minded and soft-pedals the request for money, however, the library director is stopped from submitting his requirements to the board. In the few cases where a trustee library committee exists the librarian is able to convey his message to the whole board through it. No instance

has been found of a university librarian taking his case directly to the board and presenting the library's situation there in order to get favorable budgetary action.¹

Mercurial changes occurring in every phase of the educational field make it natural to assume that today's trustees of American private and public educational institutions will have been drawn from enlightened alumni groups in the case of private colleges, and from similarly qualified citizens and alumni in public colleges. Today's trustees can be expected to be experienced in techniques of gathering funds for their respective institutions, whether private or public. They are conversant with administrative principles, having applied these in other organizations before joining other practiced hands on their boards. Composition of the controlling bodies is not as conservative as in the past. Members of the boards of private colleges try to induce alumni to contribute generously to meet the challenge of today's programs. State college and university trustees may do all in their power to extract from their state legislatures raises in the annual appropriations to meet the costs for a first class education—not forgetting libraries.

Next, a look at today's special library. An authentic definition of it has been a "special collection, serving a special clientele, and using special methods for the purpose."² It is represented by libraries serving businesses, government agencies, large industries, and general research in humanities or in science and technology. The library in business and industry can be a part of research, sales, or manufacturing divisions, and sometimes all three.

The head of a special library is selected because he possesses subject knowledge that enables him to work directly in the field he serves and has in addition a familiarity with library techniques. He is autonomous in the operation of his segment of the corporate or company structure. Once the library is established funds are supplied according to the results produced. The librarian reports to one of the key executives, in the echelon of command to which the library's activity most applies. Large corporations are often lavish in their financial outlay for libraries. The librarian has *carte blanche* in the purchase of materials to build the special collection, so long as they contribute to the purposes of the firm. Small companies, and those in highly specialized fields, may assemble strong collections, but confine their selection of materials to the limited compass of their operations.

The corporate or company board of directors is made up of highly

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educated and trained men representing stockholders as a matter of course, and as far as concern for the library goes the interests likewise of higher officers and employees. This controlling body is aware of the value of the library, and that the service of the library is rendered at a cost low in comparison with other outlays in its business or industry.

There are special libraries devoted to the advancement of science, technology, or medicine that are not expected to show a monetary profit. Endowed, they seek further human knowledge in the above named fields with social and scientific contributions. Special libraries in the humanities and social sciences, on the other hand, attempt to help in overtaking cultural lags and catching up with technological progress.

The governing bodies of these private or semi-public endowed or partially endowed special libraries probably have undergone less change than those of libraries of other sorts. They commonly are self-perpetuating, and in order to carry out avowed aims they continue to be careful whom they name to sit with them upon removal of a member by resignation or death. What is affecting them particularly now is their serious financial problem. Returns from investments are low, and few large personal fortunes are in sight to provide new endowments or to assist in other ways in maintaining the services. A current example is the John Crerar Library in Chicago. It may turn out that municipalities, counties, and states will be asked to take over and sustain the operation of such libraries. This might be after the manner of the consolidating of private collections into the New York Public Library a half century back, although reasons other than fiscal ones were factors there.

The most noticeable developments related to governing bodies in recent years seem to have taken place in the public library field. Rapid growth of cities in the postwar years has contributed to this, and in the general overhauling of municipal affairs the library has come in for a fair share of attention. Where the public has awakened to the need for better library resources changes have been made in the composition of the boards and in their approach to library problems.

Even as late as ten years ago it was common to find the usual public library board composed of social leaders and the old leaders of community opinion. They were active on other local bodies—civic, religious, and commercial. In a rare case a board member was able to con-

tribute all of his talents to the benefit of the library. In most cases he was active in too many directorates and gave too little to all, including that of the library. Many library boards had inert and disinterested trustees—ultra-conservative, penurious with what little funds the library got from its appropriating authorities, and hesitant to ask for more lest added taxes fall upon themselves as property-owners, business proprietors, and manufacturers.

Today's boards more adequately represent a cross-section of the community. The members belong to community pressure groups such as taxpayer's bodies, parent and teacher associations, adult education groups, and labor and management people—all making themselves heard and felt on governmental issues and operations, including library service. Men still outnumber women as trustees. White Caucasians predominate but there are signs of a broader representation by members of racial, and comparably also of religious minorities, on big city boards in the north, northeast, mid-west and Pacific coast states. Representatives of labor are appearing just as they are appearing on other civic boards. The usual age of trustees today is 45 to 60 whereas ten years or so ago it was 55 to 65. Occupationally lawyers still are more numerous than any others, followed by businessmen and manufacturers, with miscellaneous vocations such as those of teachers, small shop-keepers, plumbers, and housewives in third position; and with persons engaged in financial occupations such as those of banking, savings and loan associations, and accounting making up the rest. Although they may need tutelage from time to time, incumbents generally are more alert to the aims, plans, and potential of libraries than once was customary. As representative and public-spirited citizens they still may tend to spread their energies thinly over various civic enterprises, but nevertheless, they are apt to be conscious of their responsibilities, reasonably able, and conversant in some measure with the problems of administration.

For the most part, power of appointment still rests with the appropriating authorities, such as municipal, county, or school district governing bodies. There are a few elected boards. In the majority of American cities and towns the mayor and councilmen appoint the board members. Where the city-manager-council form of government exists the city manager appoints the board member with the approval of the council.³

With the portrayal of governing bodies as shown, have there been

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happenings which bear significantly upon it? For public libraries at least, some seem to merit mention. Two may be cited.

One of the dramatic changes appearing today is the impact of the city manager upon the library where the manager-council form of government exists. The trend toward this plan of government has implications for the library which cannot be ignored. The objects of the city manager, while laudatory, are sometimes in conflict with the interests of the library, and the means by which he carries out his program can be detrimental.

For example, in attempting to coordinate the departments, a city manager may persuade various independent board units of government, such as those of the library, parks, police and fire departments, and streets and sanitation divisions, on the over-all efficiency and economy of controlling all city functions centrally. He has succeeded in many instances. Once that occurs the librarian becomes a department head and dependent upon the manager's program. The library board signs away its existence, and as a sop it is designated as "advisory." In some instances it has become disinterested, since it has lost power to aid in library development, and fades away leaving the lonely librarian to fend for himself. The library ceases to be autonomous and becomes in effect institution-sponsored, subject to the manager's plans for all city departments. If the manager is not library-minded and there is no vocal outcry by library users, en masse or by way of their elected councilmen, the library will gradually be neglected as the city manager hews away at its funds to suit his over-all budgetary plans.

The city manager, like the proverbial camel that gets his nose under the flap of the tent, may soon be completely inside the library, taking over other responsibilities carried ordinarily by the librarian. He sets up personnel classification systems and civil service is instituted. Then when the librarian states his personnel needs—clerical, custodial, and professional, the manager seines the labor market and tries to come up with qualified people. In time he finds one, two, or three qualified candidates for a particular position. Of these three, screened by the manager's office as qualified, the librarian can pick the one that suits him. As a result the librarian has no actual choice, that having been taken out of his hands by the manager.⁴

Although one of the essentials in library administration is that the librarian be able freely to appoint, transfer, demote, or remove personnel for just causes, subject to approval by the board, he can not do these things when he becomes entangled in red tape, and is hamp-

ered by civil service rules and regulations. He is obligated to carry "dead-wood" personnel until these individuals decide to move on through their own initiative. To make matters worse a manager prefers a stabilized working force, and may be disturbed by a high turnover of personnel because of processing and severance costs and its effect upon his record in office.

Library administration requires that library purchasing be strictly a managerial function, although not a city manager's. Such buying is seriously hampered by inclusion in an over-all city purchasing plan, since libraries have needs that are not met adequately by the uniform buying practices likely to be advocated by the city manager. Free access to the book markets, printing firms, and makers of machines and equipment adapted to library use is impeded by the restrictions of the purchasing agent's office.

For example, a particular brand of typewriter is needed to do a certain library job. The purchasing agent cannot find the price he deems reasonable and advises the librarian to accept a standard typewriter offered on a lower bid. The librarian yields lest he lose the opportunity to get a typewriter at all. Once he has compromised he will be asked to do so on other items. The purchase of books raises the bugaboo of consolidating buying from a limited number of jobbers to simplify bookkeeping. This may simplify accounting for the central purchasing office, but not for the library. It results in red tape and slow delivery, frequently insuring that today's best sellers will be received too late to satisfy library patrons. The situation becomes ridiculous when rules require that requests go to one principal jobber for titles the librarian knows can only be bought directly from the publisher.

In one manager-city the librarian had not only to report to the manager but to meet regularly with the city auditor to work out his proposed budget. The conferences involved advice from the auditor on what would be propitious, to aid the city manager's plans, in presenting the budget to the city council.

It would appear that a librarian in a city-manager situation, having been relieved of his former duties, could devote most of his time to purely professional work. He really finds he ought to have a desk at the city hall near the manager and his aides, in order to clear a thousand and one matters that arise in the operation of his department.

Occasionally a librarian has the rare experience of working with a library-minded city manager, who desires the library to be of as much

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service as the parks and recreational departments and who aids in getting a fair share of the budget for the library. Librarians who have been so fortunate may not agree regarding the potential perils of the system.

Now a look at what is going on in county, regional, and state libraries, which serve both city and rural areas. A report from the Idaho State Library Board given at an annual trustee institute in Oregon in 1957 is an excellent example of what an active state organization can accomplish.

The report demonstrates how the trustees of one state library met decreased appropriations by building up political pressure on both the Republic and Democratic party organizations. Library support naturally is bound up with politics and state legislators determine whether a state library is to be robust or to starve. If a state library is weak, a result is that leadership is lacking. So in Idaho legislators were made aware of plans for support through the effort of active trustee groups in backing up the Friends of the Library Council of the state. Backing the play were the League of Women Voters, the Parent and Teacher Congress, the state education association, labor and patriotic organizations, state and county party committeemen, and the precinct captains.

Under the leadership of the state library board a member of the Friends of the Library Council in each county contacted candidates for the offices of mayor, county commissioner, state representative, and senate. These persons were apprised of the local, county, and state library needs, and the citizens who represented the Friends of the Library Council learned how the candidates felt about the library service issue. In turn they told the candidates what they expected in the line of governmental support.

By sheer luck the workers for the Friends of the Library Council at the state capital called upon the wives of two legislators, then persuaded them to act as advisors in their home counties. These key wives mapped out a political course of action for the Council and followed through with personal contacts. They happened also to be the presidents of the two largest Republican and Democratic clubs in the state.

The state had a Republican House and a Democratic Senate. To achieve the goal of increased state library appropriations the library board had to have friends on both sides of the aisle as well as each side of the capitol rotunda. A happy result was evidenced in almost

equal support from the two parties—the margin of victory was narrow, actually—in the appropriation committees and later on the floor of the legislature.

Having won their opening round, state-wide practice of art in politics began. A nucleus of Friends of the Library Council in each county is now receiving guidance from the extension department of the state library. The advisers, the legislator's wives, and others are serving as the axle of the wheel in each county, and the spokes are the representatives of organizations who will carry back to their groups plans made at the Council. The Friends of the Library Council now plans to keep in touch with every state senator and representative, conscious that the future growth and progress of their libraries depend upon politics. The example of what can be done by an active state trustee's group could well serve as a guide in other states facing similar problems.⁵

County libraries, as a type of public library, have made great strides in the trend toward multiple county and regional library growth. Trustee action has enabled some libraries to join, to expand, and to service areas too poor to stand alone. Action in this field has at times been slowed by unwillingness of local units to give up their sovereignty to a larger agency, but the trend is hopeful. State library demonstration programs are breaking down such barriers.

Today's governing authorities, in all types of libraries, are aware of and working hard on the problems that beset their particular libraries. That is made evident by the many new library buildings, and additions to present plans, springing up in cities, towns, rural areas, and on campuses all over the country. Their competence and understanding have been broadened and sharpened, through contact with fellow-trustees, and through greater participation in state and national library associations. They are becoming intimate with the purposes and activities of their particular libraries. Working with and receiving impetus from their librarians, individual boards are acting decisively on programs to strengthen library service in their communities. The future looks bright.

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