



Introduction

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WHEN THE PRESENT ISSUE EDITOR became interested a while back in studying certain fringe responsibilities of library administrators, it soon appeared that some other aspects of library administration might deserve renewed attention. A plan for this was approved by the Publications Board governing *Library Trends*, and this issue is the result. It has been made possible by the generous aid of the several collaborators, whose papers have claimed substantial time and effort on their part and should prove useful to the library profession.

The aim has not been to achieve a finished treatment, but to bring out phases of present concern in directing libraries, especially where they have attained considerable size. For example, it has seemed profitable to consider how the administration of libraries is related to that of other institutions, what it presently embraces, how generally its principles are invoked in practice, whether the accepted sharing of responsibility for it is ultimate, what forms of organization it indicates, and the direction in which it is tending. On such matters the accompanying papers furnish expressions which appear to possess weight, even if not finality.

In setting up the issue the hope was to minimize distinctions among libraries of the several kinds and sizes and to view library administration as indivisible. That is, the concern is with principles, and hence universals, before applications. This approach is prominent in a number of discussions. True, several articles reflect largely experience and interest in libraries of particular types, coming from authors who have spent their professional lives mainly in a single sort of environment and could not be expected to be equally familiar with others. The value of such papers need not be restricted to their own fields, however, since

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so far as library administration is integral what is relevant in one sector must be translatable to others.

To regard this issue as limited to current trends in a strict sense is less than precise. Its concern with the future has been mentioned, and the present departs so gradually from the past as to offer little more than a fresh page in a continuing record. Furthermore, developments in library administration largely are dispersed, and often identifiable only after some lag. To portray them with confidence often would require extended investigation. Doubtless for such reasons one of the contributors declares that while changes are taking place in library administration, there appear little plan and no clear tendencies. What the participants in the number could be asked to provide is excerpts from the thinking and observation discernible among the heads of libraries.

The sections making up the number are rich in their range, and even more so in the reiterations which render certain matters pre-eminent. Some have to do with practice, and others with fundamental ideas, needs, prospects, and possibilities. This introduction can do little beyond indicating their direction.

The conditions most easy to pin-point are those relating to organization, methods, and status. Centralized administration seems on the increase, as affecting both structure and operation. Departmental plans are undergoing evolution, in pace with the growth of libraries and with a view to compact control. Participation in management by staffs is becoming conventional, and that by laymen increasingly favored. And among public libraries where government through city managers prevails, encroachment upon the authority of head librarians, and even more upon that of library boards, has been working mischief in some cases and rousing apprehension in others. Although so far this cloud may be no larger than a man's hand, it seems to merit the attention two of the authors have accorded it.

Plainly library administration can not be considered from now on as a tight, self-contained pre-occupation of a few interested persons. Executives and governing bodies seem to be realizing actively that their action is shaped largely by others, and accordingly that awareness of what is being thought and done in their environment must be intimate. Unhindered rapport and two-way commerce are imperative therefore, in relation to constituents, community, peers, clientele, and associates, and among the parties to administration. Aside from knowing the commonplace needs, the opportunities and possibilities must be

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sensed, ways and means explored by conference and perhaps through trial-balloons, and avenues for collaboration discovered. As part of the process understanding and appreciation are to be fostered. Contributors to the number have wrapped up these ideas in the term "communication," which can be useful as they particularize it, however well-worn it may be otherwise.

Sensitiveness to opinion and reactions brings stress to a library and its heads, of course, and the necessity for decisions. Is the institution to be "all things to all people," or is it to limit and sharpen its aims? What guide shall it follow when, amid financial cut-backs, it must choose between shortening the quantity of service and diluting the quality? How far shall it take the initiative, attempt pressures, employ political devices, when it descries open doors or is alerted to perils? The contingencies here are numerous and may be perplexing, but no author suggests that antennae be lowered in order to evade them.

Beyond the conditions above rehearsed, such trends as can be imagined grow speculative. The very concern about them in the minds of contributors, however, may attest that some are in the making. It must have meaning, for example, to find even a few leaders recognizing that the attitude of librarians to administration has been hamperingly empirical; that their professional literature on the subject has been scant and immature; that research so far has imparted little to its history and rationale; that the administration of libraries does not differ materially from that of other organizations; and that librarians could profit from the knowledge and experience gained and the practice tested in other fields where administration is requisite. Remedies for the shortcomings thus implied would seem to invite attention.

But what specifically can be hoped for? One of the authors has pointed his paper to this, and notes in the articles of others are pertinent.

With the present linked closely to the past, as has been recalled, the future seems likely to embody a good deal of the present, and forecasting therefore to be relatively free from hazard. Contributors to the issue apparently anticipate that out of current exertions some gains will emerge. These might include prompt re-appraisal of the position of libraries as changes in their milieu call for it; more tenable canons and patterns of organization; sharper attuning to the waves of opinion amid which libraries operate; nicer awareness of the breadth of their responsibilities; heightened skill in the duties imposed by altering conditions; improved preparation to breed that skill; the sloughing

off by administrators of tasks that impede their efficiency; and, perhaps most important of all, detached study of administrative problems, with eagerness to look over fences and seize upon the wealth of guidance in other pastures. There can be no assurance that all this will happen, but plenty of logic in believing it ought to come.

Perhaps as a preliminary, perhaps along the way, a sound definition of library administration could unfold, to replace the loose notions that have prevailed. Beginning with the truism that administration essentially means "getting things done through people," it might make clear what a library head ought to be at. Any such statement of course would need to be elemental, and apposite in whatever situation. It could be a governor everywhere, even in those major institutions which have been forced by sheer bigness to insure order in their conduct. Possibly indeed it is a prerequisite to the adoption of correct principles and means. Certainly the issues in library administration can not be talked about intelligently without agreement on what it comprehends. And very likely the production of competent administrators, upon which the remaking of libraries and the warrant for a library profession hinge, will drag until the responsibilities they face are made clear and cogent.