



# Departments in Public Libraries

GERTRUDE E. GSCHEIDLE

IT SEEMS UNNECESSARY in this paper to review in any detail the early developments of departmentation in public libraries. The three major areas of library activities, i.e., public service, the acquisition and preparation of materials, and the auxiliary or business functions, were recognized early in American library history. The division of these major activities into departments as libraries grew in size, for example; the emergence in public service of departments based on age group (adult and children's departments); departments based on function (reference and circulation departments); the separation of order work and cataloging in the technical processes; the establishment of building maintenance and financial management as departmental units; have been adequately described by K. D. Metcalf,<sup>1</sup> E. W. and John McDiarmid,<sup>2</sup> L. F. Ranlett,<sup>3</sup> and others.

Departmental organization as a tool or device of administration is essentially a function of size. It was not until the early decades of the twentieth century, when large book collections developed, volume of use expanded, and extensive extension systems came into existence, that the basic principles of scientific management, as set forth by such authorities in administration as L. H. Gulick and L. F. Urwick,<sup>4</sup> and H. Fayol,<sup>5</sup> were studied with interest by librarians and were focused on the problems of library organization.

Out of the pressure of size, and the application of the principles of organization to the problems of library administration, experiments in departmentation developed and new patterns of organization were created. Two examples are the emergence of subject departmentation for adult service as described by Althea Warren,<sup>6</sup> and the combining of a group of similar departments into a division with a divisional head as described by Donald Coney.<sup>7</sup> Such new patterns have over the years won general acceptance, and their existence in the organizational structure of large public libraries is now widespread.

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As is characteristic of the course of organizational development, the early trends were all divisional in nature, i.e., the breaking off of functions or activities from the whole and establishing them as separate departments. When a considerable number of departments were thus created, administrative attention and concern moved from dividing to coordinating—that is, binding the separate parts together to establish a cohesive organizational framework through which the objectives of the institution could be efficiently and effectively achieved. This trend is apparent in the increase of major administrative divisions in large public libraries, and in the growing number of libraries which now have staff members with the title of “coordinator” for broad areas of services or activities.

In order to analyze the prevailing patterns of departmental organization, to trace the course of their development, and to isolate apparent trends, eighteen public libraries, each serving populations in excess of 500,000, were asked to participate by providing the following:

1. The present organization chart.
2. Organization charts for the past two decades.
3. Comments on the merits and demerits of the present plan, and on any problems which exist in its operation.
4. Indications of any changes in organization contemplated for the near future.

Sixteen of the eighteen libraries responded, and the material submitted is included in the following analysis. The sixteen libraries are those of the cities of Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Queens Borough, St. Louis, and Washington, D. C.

No effort was made to sample the departmental structure of small and medium-sized libraries. Since the evolution of departmental organization is essentially a function of size, as previously pointed out, all libraries, small, medium, and large, pursue the same evolutionary course. The departmental development of the small and medium-sized library tends to stop at the point appropriate to its size. New trends and developments occur in the larger institutions when such changes are impelled by increasing size, complexity, and diversity of functions.

A first point of interest is the amount of organizational change which has taken place in the last decade and a half, roughly since 1945. Does this period constitute a plateau where organizational patterns

### *Departments in Public Libraries*

were static, or is it one in which considerable development has been taking place? The organization charts of twelve of the sixteen libraries, and the accompanying comments of the chief librarians, indicate that there has been considerable change. In four of the sixteen libraries, the organizational framework has been relatively static except for such alterations as occur normally in any library when a new type of material or collection is added, or when a change in personnel at the department head level occurs. It is of further interest to note that in the twelve libraries where considerable organizational activity appeared either a new head librarian took charge or there was some development in building, through remodeling, new construction, or planned construction.

What has been the motivation for the new features? An analysis of the organization charts indicates that the major changes have been of two types, both designed to tighten administrative control and increase coordination.

The first type of organizational change has been the creation of major administrative divisions under the direction of an administrative officer at the second or third level. The number and type vary greatly from one library to another, and a clear pattern is not easily discernible.

Only one library (the smallest in the group) has no major administrative divisions of any kind. The number of such divisions, as indicated in the organization charts of the remaining fifteen libraries, ranges from one to five.

The following table shows the frequency with which the most common types of administrative divisions occur:

Branches or Extension	10
Central Library Public Services	7
Administrative Services	6
(Business, building maintenance, and some technical processes)	
Technical Processes	6
(Two include lending)	
Reference	4
(Central library, or central library and branches)	
Circulation or Home Reading	4
(Central library and branches)	

Work with Children  
(Central library and branches)

3

Business management, personnel management, public relations, and building maintenance are functions most frequently found as separate departments outside the divisional organization, although in some libraries the heads of these areas are coordinate with the heads of divisions.

The second type of organizational change has been the creation of positions with the title "coordinator." It would appear from the placement of these positions on the organization charts that they involve staff officers in some instances and line officers in others, but in all cases they are responsible for developing and unifying broad areas of service or activities. Ten of the sixteen libraries now show such positions on their organization charts. The area and frequency for which coordinative positions are shown are as follows:

Children's Service	7
Adult Service	6
Young Adult Service	6
Central Library Service	2
Senior Adult Service	1
Cataloging	1
Order Work	1

What effect has the creation of major administrative divisions and the establishment of coordinative positions had on the span of control of the chief librarian? The following is the range of this factor (total number of persons reporting to the chief librarian) as indicated in the organization charts of the sixteen public libraries:

<i>Range of Span</i>	<i>Number of Libraries</i>
3-5	4
6-10	4
11-15	6
Over 15 (18)	2

In 1943, E. W. and John McDiarmid<sup>8</sup> reported the span of control in thirty-two large public libraries. In twenty-seven of the thirty-two libraries, from fifteen to sixty-four branches and departments reported directly to the chief administrator. One definite development in administrative organization is therefore clearly the decrease in span of

### *Departments in Public Libraries*

control for top administrators through the creation of major divisions and/or coordinative positions under the direction of top-level personnel.

Subject departmentation for adult service is now a generally accepted type of organization in large public libraries. The organization charts indicate that all sixteen libraries have some subject departments and that ten of the sixteen libraries have from five to nine major subject departments. Any prevailing trends in reference to subject departmentation were indicated in the comments of chief librarians rather than in the organization charts. Current thinking seemingly is directed toward fewer subject departments covering broader subject areas, closer integration of subject divisions, and devices (such as reclassification) to overcome the fact that standard classification plans do not bring materials together in terms of reader needs and use, hence result in some confusion and frustration on the part of readers and/or considerable duplication of books. In this connection, one chief librarian<sup>9</sup> commented:

We would not want more subject departments if we were planning a new building.

Subject departmentalization has, I think, been carried too far in many cities. . . . subject departments with their extra cost and inconvenience to the general reader are justified only when (a) there is a specialized body of knowledge with which the general librarian cannot deal intelligently, and, just as important, (b) there is local demand for expert service in the field.

Pertinent comments on the integration of subject departments are included in several articles by H. N. Peterson<sup>10, 11, 12</sup> in relation to the reorganization of the District of Columbia Public Library. If any trend can be cited in reference to subject departmentation, and this may be pure conjecture, it would seem to be toward fewer departments based upon broad subject areas built around a careful analysis of reader interest and use, rather than on a fixed classification plan.

As noted above, six of the sixteen libraries have consolidated all technical processes into one administrative division. Any trends in reference to this practice can also be discerned only through the comments included in the correspondence. One Chief Librarian<sup>9</sup> said—“Book purchasing and cataloging call for entirely different bodies of knowledge and skills. I see no gain in combining the two departments under ‘Processing’ except in libraries so large that an additional ad-

ministrator is required to relieve the director." Another administrator<sup>13</sup> commented as follows on this type of organization—"Formerly we had a Director of Processing Services, which included Book Selection, Cataloging, Bindery. We found, however, that we had either a Cataloger or a Book Selection person, usually a cataloging specialist. So we did away with the position and put the Bindery under the Business Director."

Five of the sixteen libraries now have established regional branches but in only one do the regional librarians have complete administrative control of the extension system. In the others, responsibility for the administration of branches rests with a supervisor of branches, chief of extension, or assistant librarian, under whose general direction the regional librarians function.

As already stated, in seven of the sixteen libraries the planning and development of children's work are carried on through a coordinative position. In three of the sixteen, a children's department supervises children's work throughout the system. In one, children's work is administered by four supervisors of work with children, one for each regional district and one for the central library. In the remaining libraries the supervision of work with children is carried on within a major administrative division. Eleven of the sixteen make some provision for specialized services for young adults, usually through the position of coordinator.

Is there a typical or generally accepted plan of organization for large public libraries? A study of the organization charts indicates that there are many similarities and as many diversities. Certain types of administrative features, such as major administrative divisions, coordinative positions, and regional branches, have had considerable acceptance and appear in many organization plans, but no one organization scheme incorporates all of them in precisely the same way. The development of organization is an evolutionary process. In this connection E. Peterson and E. G. Plowman<sup>14</sup> say:

Just as the organization chart of one business differs from that of another, so does the organization of an individual concern differ from time to time. Hence, it is difficult to draw an accurate organization chart of even a medium-sized business. Organization details change almost daily. Much of the actual organization of the moment results from give-and-take within the executive group and from the management problems which are uppermost. . . .

If management were completely scientific, it would be possible to

### *Departments in Public Libraries*

outline the one best organization for a given business at a given time. . . . the organization of one concern would tend to conform more and more closely to a general pattern, which would be found to prevail in the particular field or class of institutions of which it was a part.

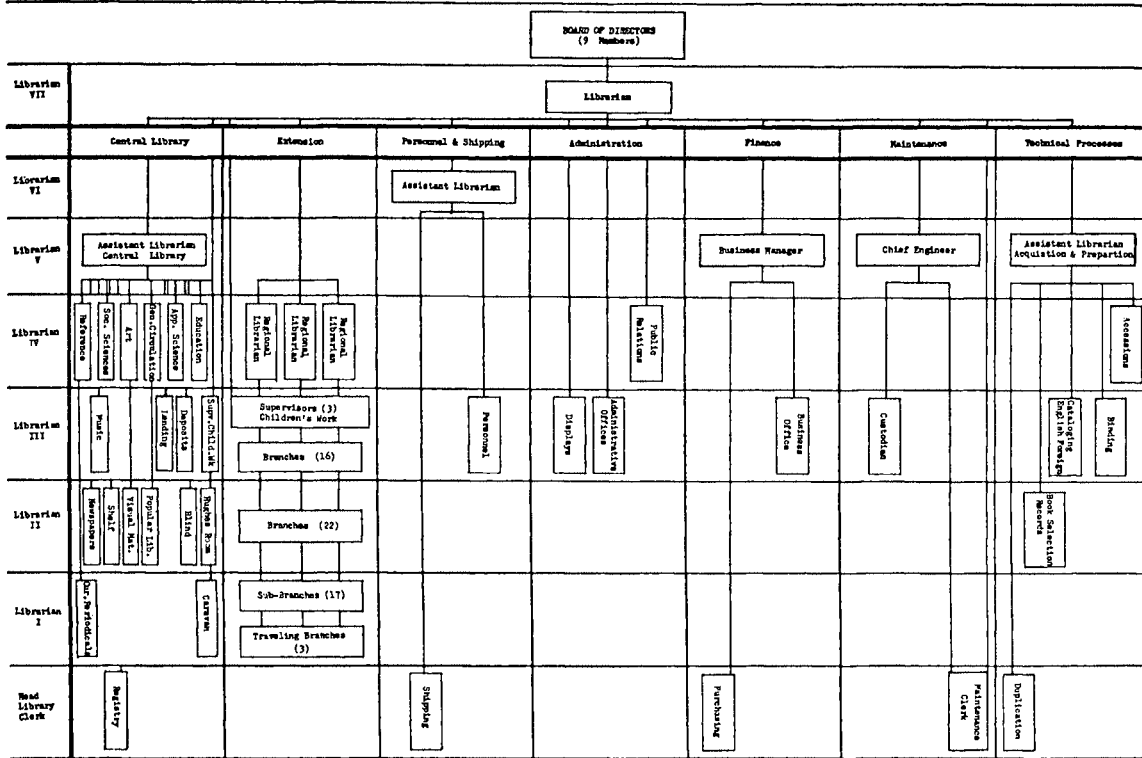
There is such a characteristic pattern of departmental organization for every type of business, at least in broad and basic outline. A certain typical arrangement of departmentation has evolved out of experience and has been generally accepted. It is perpetuated by the transfer of trained executives from one business enterprise to another within the field. It evolves gradually through experimental organizational modification by executives who are, at the moment, regarded as leaders of the industry or business.

In this connection it may be noted that certain characteristics of organization in large public libraries can be traced through the movement of chief administrators from one library system to another.

In the process of evolving an organization observance of scientific principles of management is one of the aims, but in actual practice, this is tempered by administrative feasibility, which brings into play such factors as the personality and characteristics of the chief administrator; the traditions, background, and prevailing scheme of organization of the institution; the size, capacities and personalities of the staff; and the needs of the clientele the library serves. An interesting study in the ways in which organizational changes take place in a large library system is presented in the *Ten Year Report of the New York Public Library*, published in 1957.<sup>15</sup>

It would be desirable to reproduce all of the organization charts of the sixteen public library systems gathered in the study. However, many of them are not adaptable to reproduction. Therefore, five were selected, those of Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and New York. They illustrate many of the organizational features cited above, and present a cross-section of present administrative organization in large public libraries.

# ORGANIZATION CHART THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

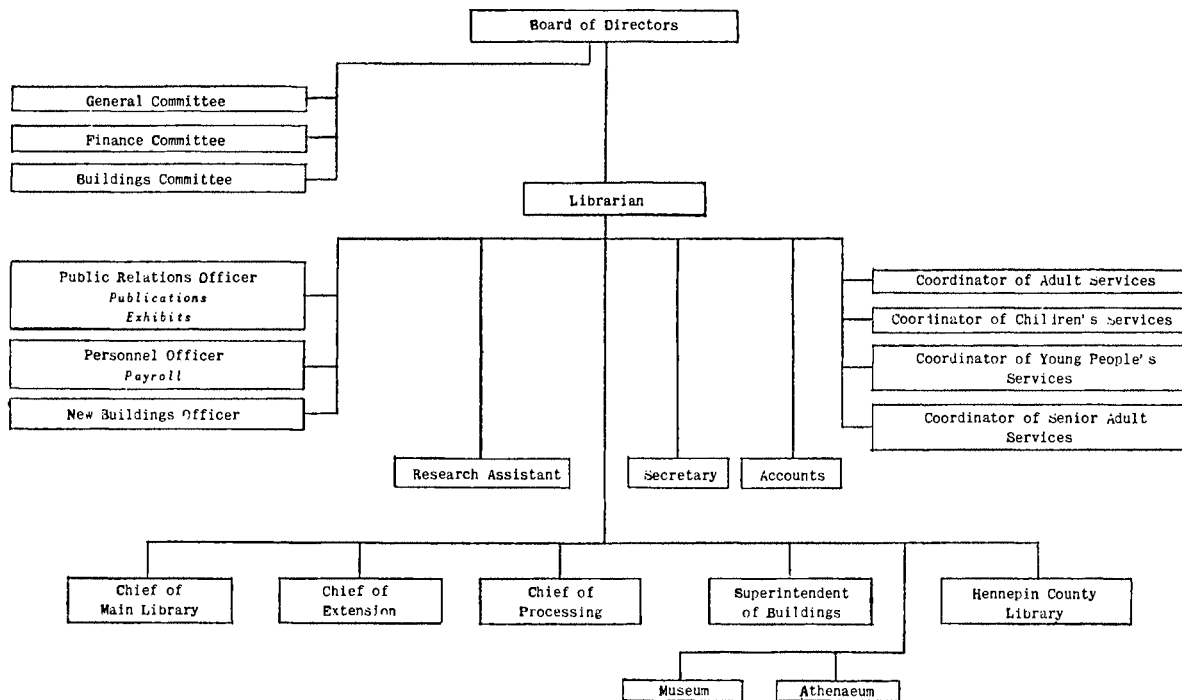


[444]

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**Minneapolis Public Library**  
**NEW ORGANIZATION PATTERN EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 1958**

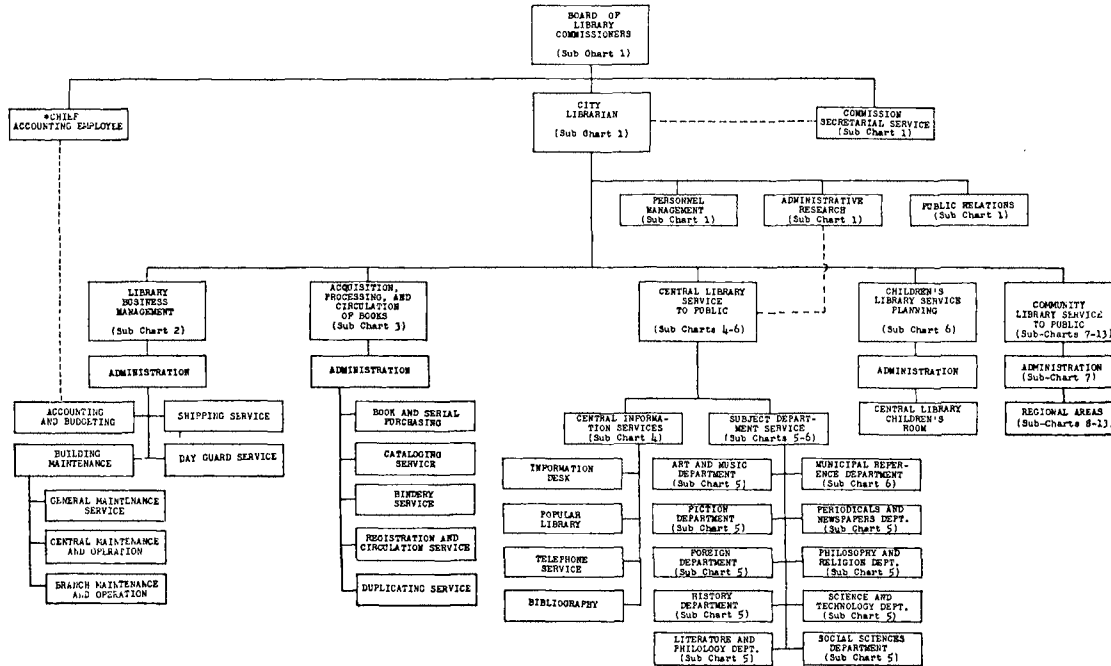


*Departments in Public Libraries*

[ 445 ]

City of Los Angeles Library Department  
SUMMARY ORGANIZATION CHART, MARCH 1957

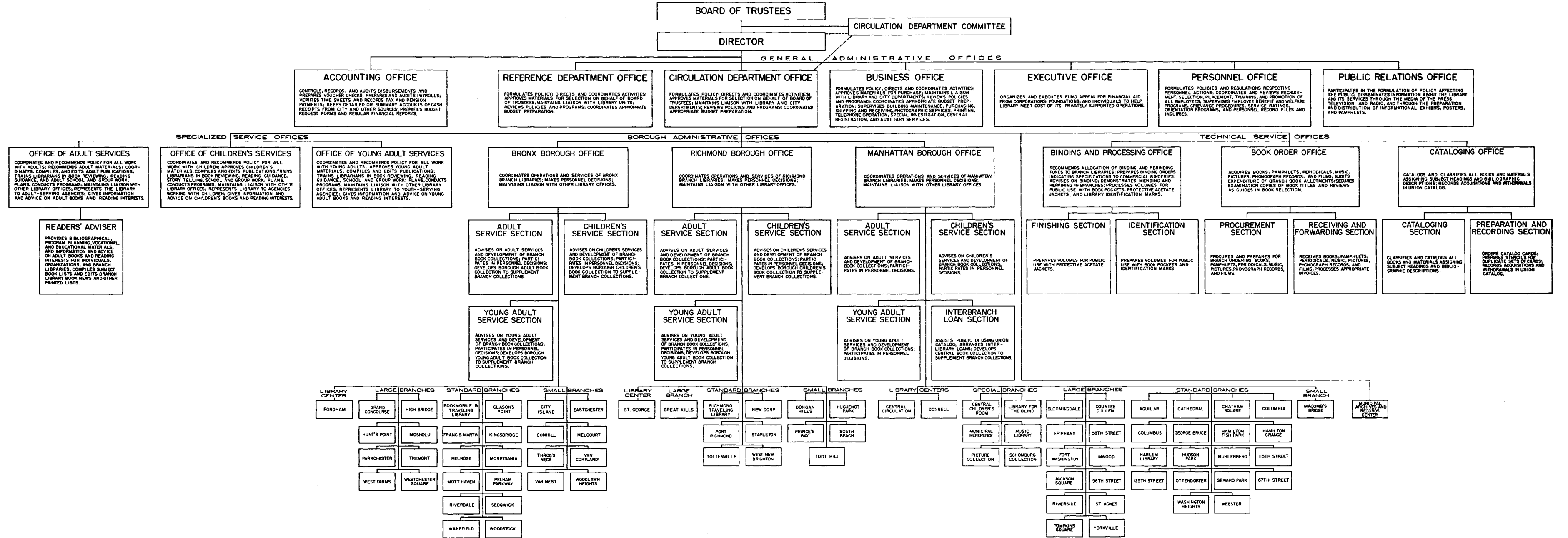
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\*Position required by Charter;  
duties performed by Principal  
Accountant  
(Sub Chart 2)

GERTRUDE E. GSCHIEDLE

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION CHART



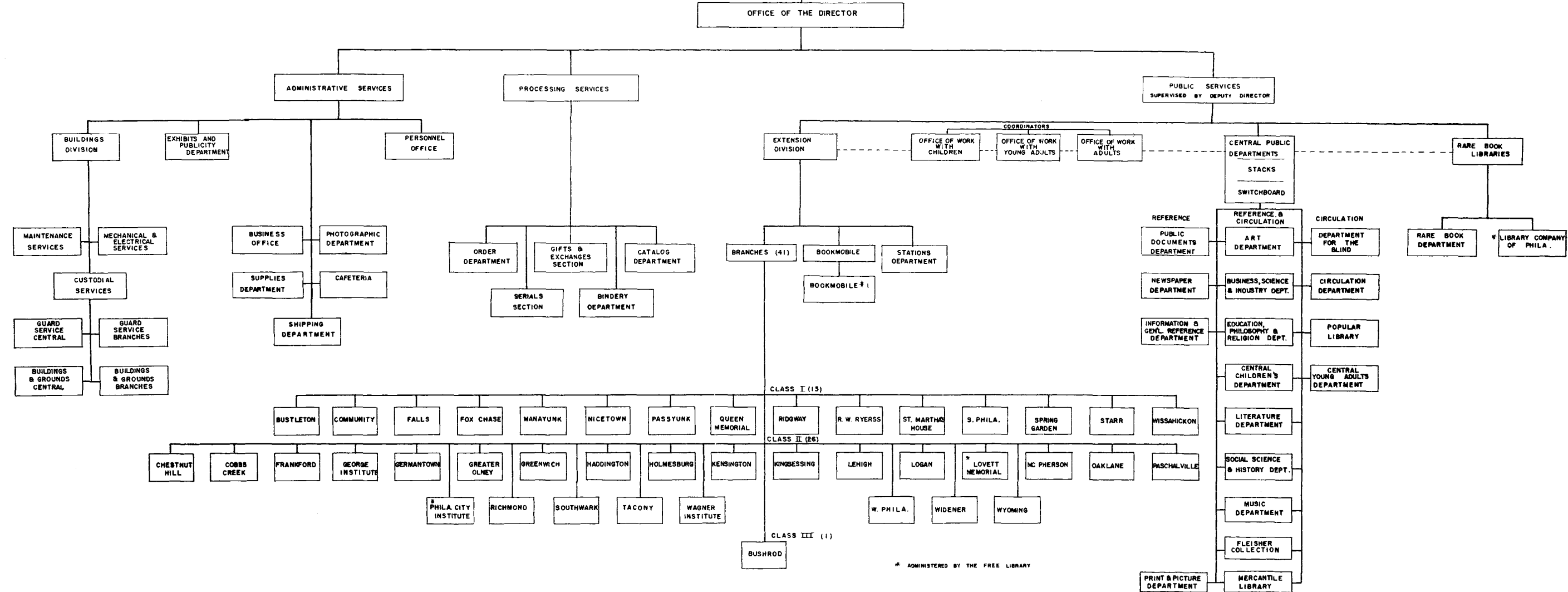
# THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA

## ORGANIZATION CHART

OCTOBER 26, 1953

FREE LIBRARY BOARDS	
BOARD OF DIRECTORS 17 CHARTER 1891	BOARD OF TRUSTEES 23
14 MEMBERS ELECTED FOR THREE YEAR TERM ONE THIRD BEING ELECTED EACH YEAR 3 EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS - THE MAYOR PRESIDENT OF CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION THIS BOARD IS SELF-PERPETUATING	LOCAL ORDINANCES 1894, 1895 STATE LAWS 1895, 1903, 1917, AND 1927 18 LIFE MEMBERS 1 EX-OFFICIO MEMBER COMMISSIONER OF THE BUREAU OF RECREATION FOUR MEMBERS APPOINTED BY THE MAYOR

SUMMARY OF STAFF	1953	1954
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR	10	10
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES	190	190
PROCESSING SERVICES	66	66
PUBLIC SERVICES	424	430
TOTAL	690	696



\* ADMINISTERED BY THE FREE LIBRARY

## Departments in Public Libraries

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