



## Personnel and Bookmobile Service

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PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOKMOBILE SERVICE is dependent to a large extent on the personnel given the responsibility for providing this specialized portion of the library's work. In very few other places in the library's personnel picture is it as important that the salesmanship of the librarian be as alert and as constant as it is in this service. With the very limited book collection, with a clientele that automatically creates pressure of time on the staff, with difficult working conditions as a normal part of their lot, they must bring a feeling of warmth and joy to their work which the physical facilities can do little to help. They must somehow provide a physical embodiment of the idea that the books they have are only the beginning of untold dimensions of knowledge and information and of creative leisure. They must be able to work successfully and almost instantaneously with the tremendous range in age and reading level among their patrons.

In more cases than not, the librarian will be working with young readers, whether the bookmobile has stopped at a community station or near a school facility. But, within seconds his book knowledge may be called upon to sweep from Wanda Gag to Spinoza, and his response to the readers' need must be as perceptive in the latter as in the former. This places a tremendous responsibility on the bookmobile staff and on the people who are responsible for planning for the integration of this service with the other parts of library service.

Again and again experience with bookmobiles indicates that the circulation for home use from a fully staffed vehicle is at least equivalent to that of a medium-sized branch in a normal city system. In Minneapolis, for example, circulation from bookmobiles will run between 110,000 and 150,000 volumes per year, while the medium-sized branches will loan approximately the same number of books during the same period. Yet the normal personnel for a bookmobile

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to provide this service is one, or in times of emergency two, librarians, one or two clerks, and a driver-clerk. They will be called upon to handle an average circulation load of about 275 books in an average stop of two and a half hours and to maintain a standard of response equivalent to that of a branch with a staff of seven to ten. Therefore, in the selection of the personnel for the bookmobile service, the normal criteria include previous experience in the library and a proven ability to handle information and book requests capably.

There are other attributes which are of tremendous importance in the selection and organization of the bookmobile staff. It is necessary for the staff of four or perhaps five to work closely and intimately under trying conditions, both winter and summer, in spite of noise, hubbub and movement, and to enjoy it enough to be on speaking terms with one another at the close of the day. Personality traits of the individual are of tremendous importance.

Another characteristic important in the bookmobile staff is flexibility. The hallmark of modern librarianship seems to be change. Bookmobiles are subject to sudden and dramatic schedule changes, and the staff must be ready to join in their stride with other crews, or change vehicles on short notice, or man an emergency station wagon replacing a disabled bookmobile. Many libraries now are using four crews to man three bookmobiles, or three crews to man two bookmobiles in order to extend the road time of these vehicles. This is an excellent system but requires a very flexible approach to librarianship on the part of the total crew involved in the bookmobile service.

There is a changing emphasis in bookmobile service throughout the country which is resulting from a number of major shifts in the service pattern for library materials. School libraries are maturing rapidly, and this is to be applauded. With collections having a definite purpose, it is no longer necessary for libraries to equate the providing of a book with the provision of library service. Materials are becoming less expensive in relation to other parts of library operations so that where a few years ago it was enough to provide a missionary-kind of library service from public library bookmobiles to school facilities, library collections for school use now may be expected to reflect the real needs of the school program. As has been noted, school libraries are growing stronger and stronger, and public libraries in their mobile service are devoting more and more of their energies to public library service for the community as a

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whole. This is to be encouraged by both public library and school authorities. Therefore, it is no accident that the school stops for public library bookmobiles are becoming less frequent, that community stops grow in number, and that adult service librarians are joining their colleagues in the children's service in providing this mobile extension of branch service.

But, if ever library service loses its missionary zeal, it would be a sad day for our culture and the future of our education for freedom. One of the strongest evidences of the exploding growth of the American public library is that which is embodied in the wonderful spirit of its bookmobile librarians.