



# Introduction

MARGARET KNOX GOGGIN

“TODAY, WE SHALL APPROACH the field of Library Science from the side of readers.”<sup>1</sup> This sentence, borrowed from S. R. Ranganathan, seems most appropriate to begin an issue of *Library Trends* on reference service, for it is, indeed, “from the side of readers” that reference librarians work.

Traditionally, reference work was considered primarily as the answering of reference questions from a selected group of volumes designated as “reference books.” Today, the reference librarian still retains his question-answering duties, but with the entire library collection and extra-library sources as his world. In addition, the scope of the reference function has widened to include a variety of associated activities: the bibliographic function, the instructional role, the guidance activities, the promotional aspects, the appraisal and selection of materials and, finally, the supervision or management of the reference department. All these are included in the term “reference service.”<sup>2-3</sup>

Current trends in reference appear to be the results of three explosions: population, publication, and learning. All three are here today in truly dynamic force with warning signals indicating an even greater impact in the future.

It is the population explosion which has brought an overflow number of students into our public schools. Spilling out beyond the library facilities of the school systems to the public libraries, school children form a major class of patrons in the public libraries of today, according to Katharine G. Harris. Everett T. Moore points out the growing trend for separate undergraduate and graduate libraries to accommodate the numbers of students in universities.

Along with the masses of people, there is the mass of library materials—books, periodicals, reports, documents, non-book materials.

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Realizing that one reference librarian can no longer encompass the world of learning and interpret the entire output of the world's publishing houses to a varied and growing clientele, librarians have developed divisional reading rooms in university libraries and subject departments in public libraries. Subject specialists have been recruited for reference work in these specialized service areas. In addition, special libraries have been established in increasing numbers to handle specialized needs and interests.

Moore discusses the development of specialization in university libraries not only in the organization of reference service but also in the organization of materials such as documents and research reports. In the special library, Mary Edna Anders notes, there is a growing need for ever more specialized indexes, data files, and abstracting services.

Within this age of the publication explosion, reference librarians have greater responsibility for the development of the entire collection, a responsibility which requires subject specialization among the staff in order that wise selections be made. Librarians, faced with the problems of evaluation and selection, are finding reviewing media inadequate for their needs, according to Margaret Knox Goggin and Lillian Seaberg. While the number of publications is increasing rapidly, there are fewer reviews of reference books, even among the costly subscription books, and reviews tend to be uncritical.

To handle the mass of possible reference material, the librarian performing the reference function must look forward to some type of automation. Claire Schultz presents a graphic description of the use of the peek-a-boo card and machine retrieval systems available for the reference function, and looks to the future as MEDLARS points the way for automating reference work through specially designed computer systems.

The learning explosion—the impact of the age of science and the competition for college entrance, for college performance, and for world eminence in space and non-space achievements—appears to be a major factor in the increase in the extensive and intensive use of all library facilities. Anders attributes the rapid growth of special libraries to the mushrooming of research activities with the attendant billions of dollars available for scientific and technological studies.

The search for knowledge on all levels has made necessary library service beyond the ability of the local community's resources. For book and informational needs, regional reference service appears to

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be a new and significant answer. Warren Haas describes the regional reference systems of today and calls for critical evaluation of their operations.

Related to regional reference service, and another area of reference work affected by all three "explosions," is interlibrary loans. Michael M. Reynolds traces the history of lending among libraries, highlighting the problems of increased dependence on the large research library, the expanded use of research libraries by business and industry, and the needs of every community, in today's knowledge-centered culture, for books beyond the community's powers to provide.

"Reference service is so greatly a matter of variables and intangibles that attempts to evaluate the department and its operations are rather baffling." <sup>4</sup> Samuel Rothstein tackles this problem of measurement and evaluation about which so much has been written but so little attempted. His conclusion should jolt reference librarians to action, for he warns that "reference libraries, in failing to provide the means for accurate judgment on their place and contribution in library service, run the serious risk of having their work undervalued or ignored."

## *References*

1. Ranganathan, S. R. *Preface to Library Science*. Delhi, India, University of Delhi, 1948, p. 44.
2. Shores, Louis. *Basic Reference Sources*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1954, pp. 2-21.
3. Wheeler, Joseph L. and Goldhor, Herbert. *Practical Administration of Public Libraries*. New York and Evanston, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 317.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 334.