



## Reference Service in Public Libraries

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARY reference service in the United States in this century is a logical outgrowth of the intellectual ferment that has taken place in this country, the tremendous expansion of the fields of knowledge, and the basic democratic conviction that everyone has the right of access to all knowledge. Thus librarians have changed from custodians of books, to people dedicated to making the information in these books available to all. The emergence of the public library as the information center for the community is the logical development of this change. More people in our society have more need for information than ever before—more adults are continuing their education throughout their lifetime, they have more specialized skills and more leisure time, and through radio and television are stimulated to more interest in current affairs. These people are turning to the public library for specialized reference service, and the information they need is not only in books, periodicals, documents, films, and recordings, but in microform and in computers. The responsibility that this places on library staffs is a heavy one and one that has developed in a short span of time.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, this newer concept of librarianship was beginning to take shape. William Poole at the Boston Athenaeum was producing his index to periodicals to make information more available, and Justin Winsor at the Boston Public Library was responsible for the first annotated catalog of an American library to help the ordinary reader choose the books he wanted. Samuel S. Green at the Worcester Free Public Library in 1876 wrote his now famous article for the *Library Journal* on the desirableness of establishing personal intercourse and relations between librarians and readers in public libraries, in which he stressed the fact that the librarian should give personal attention to the patron's needs. "When

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scholars and persons of high social position come to a library, they have confidence enough, in regard to the cordiality of their reception, to make known their wishes without timidity or reserve. Modest men in the humbler walks of life, and well-trained boys and girls, need encouragement before they become ready to say freely what they want.”<sup>1</sup> William Fletcher, writing in 1894 in *Public Libraries in America* said, “Every public library should be a library of reference. . . . Important as it may be in many communities, the supplying of books for home-reading must not be regarded as the only function of the library.”<sup>2</sup> By 1893 specialized reference workers had been appointed in Boston, Providence, Milwaukee, Detroit, Newark, Chicago, St. Louis, and Brooklyn.

During this period, too, the need was recognized for reference rooms to house the growing reference collections, and most of the medium-sized and larger libraries built at the end of the century provided such a room separate from the general reading rooms. The policy of free access to reference books was also established during this period. William Fletcher wrote, “. . . there is a great advantage in the open shelves, in that readers having free access to these books become better acquainted with them, and . . . acquire that facility in consulting reference books which is essential to success in any literary work.”<sup>3</sup>

Library literature of the period before 1900 reflects many of the problems and ideas familiar to us today. In 1881, the constant pressure by readers to take reference books home was noted by the Chicago Public Library authorities and they were taking a strong stand against it. In 1890 a method of recording use of reference books was reported in the *Library Journal*—“On the top edge of each volume is laid a small narrow ticket . . .” which was to be dropped into a locked box in front of the case when the book was used.<sup>4</sup>

In 1891, “reference work” appeared for the first time in the index to the *Library Journal*; W. A. Bardwell describing reference work at the Brooklyn Public Library, said that the *New York World* issued a series of 100 prize questions. “The search was exhaustive, and the attendants were nearly exhausted before it ended.”<sup>5</sup> Is this the first record of a quiz question problem? W. E. Foster, at a meeting of the Massachusetts Library Club in 1894, discussed the information desk at the Providence Public Library, located so “. . . that it necessarily catches the eye of every reader on entering. . . .”<sup>6</sup> Again, the foresighted Samuel Green in speeches and articles laid down the principles for

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interlibrary loan in reference work so that everybody needing information could get it.<sup>7</sup>

Charles Davidson, Inspector of the University of the State of New York, in a speech at the American Library Association Conference of 1898 at Chautauqua, New York, outlined a plan of regional reference service as we conceive of it today. "There should be such connection between our large libraries and the small ones that the investigator in a small town may turn to his librarian, have his question passed on, and receive from the large library the full bibliography bearing upon his subject. To this should be added also an exchange of books far broader and more liberal than obtains at present. . . . it is not true that the same student working in a little library in a small town can command all works in any library in the country. This should be possible and practicable."<sup>8</sup> Thus it is apparent that by the end of the century many of the concepts of public library reference service had emerged.

After the turn of the century reference service in metropolitan libraries expanded in a rather straightforward course. Library administrators gave the work departmental status; they added steadily to their reference staffs; they brought at least limited reference service to branch libraries; and they extended their assistance to mail and telephone inquiries. Samuel Rothstein pointed out that the reference staff of the Detroit Public Library doubled in twelve years from three in 1902 to six in 1914, which he felt was typical of other large libraries.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, in many small communities with small library staffs only the most elementary reference service is being given at the present time. Even the first essential of having special reference staffs has not been achieved widely. Janice Glover reported in the *Library Journal* in 1955 on a questionnaire sent to the state library agency in 48 states asking how many public libraries in their state had separate reference departments staffed by one or more full time reference librarians.<sup>10</sup> The replies ranged from none in Nevada, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming, to an estimated 40 in Michigan; California reported 34; Massachusetts, 27; New York, 20; Ohio, 23 (estimated); Pennsylvania, 20; and Wisconsin, 21. A checking in the latest (1962) *American Library Directory* for communities which list reference departments, reveals that there apparently has been little change. Wyoming listed one, a county library, but none were listed for Vermont, North Dakota, or Nevada. The earlier estimate for Michigan seems high since only 29 out of a total of 326 public libraries

show special reference departments in the current directory. As would be expected, many more libraries show special children's service than reference. Glover further reported that a comparatively few had departmentalized reference service. She says there was "almost a hostility" toward promoting more departmentalized reference collections, and she concluded that "there seems little hope at present for growth of the separate reference department in public libraries."<sup>11</sup>

The nationwide survey of *Reference Service in American Public Libraries Serving Populations of 10,000 or more*,<sup>12</sup> conducted by the Reference Section of the Public Libraries Division of A.L.A. in 1956 and partially financed by the H. W. Wilson Company, shows some of the limitations of the reference service being provided. In this survey the replies of libraries serving less than 10,000 people were omitted, although 73 per cent of the libraries in the U.S. fall in this figure. However, since these small libraries serve only 10 per cent of the population, the survey results represent reference service being given to 90 per cent of the American public. The totals probably indicate better service than was actually provided since a larger proportion of large libraries reported than of small. The results show that some information and reference service is provided by almost all public libraries regardless of size and that 58.5 per cent are providing research (this term is undefined but ". . . may include assistance given to students in the preparation of term papers"<sup>13</sup>) in this proportion: small, 48.6 per cent; medium, 61.5 per cent; and large, 75.5 per cent.

*The Biennial Survey of Education, 1954-56*, which is the last one of this series published, sought to obtain statistics on reference use for its *Statistics of Public Libraries: 1955-56*. Replies to its request to "include all transactions in which library resources for reference, research, and advisory service have been made available through direct assistance of a staff member"<sup>14</sup> were received from only 1,461 libraries or 23.4 per cent of the 6,249 reporting. The largest number was reported for public library systems serving populations of 100,000 and over and was 72.8 per cent of the total 19,355,000 reference questions answered.<sup>15</sup>

The Reference Survey found that in the small libraries 68 per cent of the reference work is centered in the circulation department, and in three-fourths of them reference service is directly the responsibility of the chief librarian. Only 8 per cent have a head of reference. In the medium-sized libraries, one-half have reference departments, and 40

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per cent give reference service in branch libraries. In half of these libraries reference service is under the head librarian while 38.8 per cent have a reference department head.

In the large libraries 75 per cent provide reference service through reference departments and branch libraries. However, only 25 per cent reported special subject departments. In 63 per cent of these libraries the reference responsibility rests with the head of the reference department, and in only 17.4 per cent is it left to the head librarian.<sup>16</sup>

While these statistics point up the limitations of reference work in the smaller libraries, the ten year survey, 1946-1956, made by Sarah R. Reed of public library reference services in twenty-five libraries,<sup>17</sup> all but one over 100,000 in population points up the definite organizational trends that have developed. Prominent among these is the increase in subject departmentalization in the medium and large public libraries. The merits of this type of organization in which the reference and circulation functions are combined in several subject departments have been widely discussed in library literature. By now it is generally accepted as the type of organization which gives the most adequate service by providing for greater competence in book selection and familiarity with the tools that are being handled. It was first conceived in 1900 by W. E. Foster in the Providence Public Library when he created an Art Department and an Industrial Department in the new building to serve the needs of the art and tool industries in that city. It was later demonstrated by William Howard Brett in Cleveland in 1913 when that library moved into rental quarters. Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore followed soon after. Detroit recognized Fine Arts, Music and Drama, Technology, and the Burton Historical Collection as separate departments when it opened its Main Library building in 1921. The useful arts and the fine arts were easily identifiable subject groups which lent themselves readily to segregation and served the special needs of patrons. In each library which has moved into this type of organization, the pattern has been somewhat different. Los Angeles abandoned its general reference department in 1927, and the general reference books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and bibliographies are in the Literature and Philosophy Department. Enoch Pratt, Cleveland, and Detroit have maintained strong general reference departments, although in each the scope is somewhat different.

The dangers inherent in this system have been well recognized

because of the overlapping of fields of knowledge, and this is probably even more true today than it was when the system was first devised. A. L. Smyth, Information Officer of the Manchester, England, Public Library, writing in 1960, says, departmental libraries are "... a mixed blessing for the research worker."<sup>18</sup> He points out the dangers of separating knowledge into water-tight compartments, of having separate subject catalogs, and having books with many subject aspects allocated on the "whim of a classifier." He says that today the archaeologist is expected to have a knowledge of radio-geology, radio-chemistry, and television techniques. It requires constant vigilance to ensure that the patron is provided with material on all aspects of his subject and that he is not shunted from one department to another. Harry N. Peterson has described the precautions taken by the Washington, D.C., Public Library to overcome these and other problems of departmentalization.<sup>19</sup> Each library has met the problems in its own way, and the different groupings of subjects in the large libraries show the difficulties of finding any completely logical arrangement. Shall the arts all be together or shall the performing arts be separate; shall education be with religion or with social science; does business belong with technology or economics; where does biography go? In the end, the decisions have to be arbitrary and the patron has to be carefully guided by directories and by staff at information desks. The new subject alignment in Detroit will be as follows: Philosophy, Religion and Education; Business and Finance; Sociology and Economics; Technology and Science; Fine Arts; Music and the Performing Arts; Language and Literature; History and Travel; General Information and Biography.

The division of the library into subject departments to strengthen its reference function brings with it organizational problems that have been solved in various ways. The common pattern is for each department to have its own chief and professional and clerical staff. The chief may be responsible to the director or to a subordinate administrator who reports to the director. Rose Phelps in her 1947 study of the organization of the Los Angeles, Boston, and St. Louis reference services,<sup>20</sup> found that in Los Angeles there was no supervisory officer for the subject departments, but in 1948 a librarian-bibliographer was appointed to assist in bibliographic subject integration. Since then a Director of Subject Departments has been added. In Boston there is a Chief Librarian in charge of the Reference Division; he is responsible to the Director. St. Louis showed no supervisor of central library departments, but recent reorganization is

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increasing the number of departments and making them responsible to a supervisor of reference. Reed, in her survey, noted that a coordinator of reference service to integrate the work of the various subject departments is more and more to be found.<sup>21</sup> In Brooklyn in 1949, the reference service was organized under the coordinator of reference work who was to supervise not only the reference work in the Central Library but also in the branches. Regularly scheduled meetings of reference assistants in all agencies are held, and a basic list of reference books for branches is maintained. In Cleveland, Baltimore, and Philadelphia there is a librarian in charge of the Main Library who is responsible for the subject departments. In Detroit the position of Director of Reference Services was established in 1945 with responsibility for the ten subject departments at the Main Library and the Municipal Reference Library, but with no jurisdiction over the branch reference work. Other patterns are developing as more and more medium-sized libraries are moving into new buildings and changing their organizational arrangements.

Telephone service is another of the expanding public library reference developments noted by Sarah Reed in her 1946-1956 survey. Florence Gifford, formerly Head of the General Reference Department at the Cleveland Public Library, wrote in 1943, "Few large libraries, even, set up any special service for their telephone public and many of them are apparently attempting to discourage it by definite and rigid limitations."<sup>22</sup> She predicted, however, that the rubber shortage and gas rationing during World War II would force people to turn to telephone service and that libraries should recognize the importance of this service to busy people. This has proved all too true.

Telephone reference service is, of course, more extensively used in the large cities than in the small cities. The Reference Survey points out that telephone service decreases slightly with the size of the library, but that only 6.2 per cent of public libraries do not answer telephone questions.<sup>23</sup> In metropolitan areas it is a natural result of the decentralization of population, transportation difficulties, lack of parking facilities, etc. It is the pattern followed by business and industry in all their transactions and is bound to continue to increase.<sup>24</sup> The problem for libraries is to provide for it realistically so that it interferes as little as possible with service to those who do come to the library. This has been done by setting up special telephone desks equipped with ready reference books, clipping files, and card indexes of various kinds to siphon off the quick, direct questions from the other departments. Cleveland and Detroit pioneered in setting up such

a desk in the Reference Department during World War II. In 1953, Brooklyn set up a Telephone Reference Service in a separate room with a book collection which duplicates some books of other departments as well as having current clippings and special indexes. It has its own staff of three librarians. St. Louis, Philadelphia, and other large libraries have now followed suit. In the new Technology and Science Department in Detroit, a separate telephone desk will also be maintained to handle requests from business and industry.

A tremendous growth in this service is reported in metropolitan areas. Cleveland with twenty-five trunk lines and Detroit with eighteen, report that about half of all requests for information come by telephone. New Orleans reported a 209 per cent increase in telephone questions from 1945-1955. In Philadelphia the ready-reference telephone service showed an increase from 38,677 in 1955 when the service was instituted, to 69,998 in 1960. The New York Public Library's *Ten Year Report* for 1946-56 comments on the fact ". . . that telephone service holds up despite decline in on-the-spot reference use. . . ." <sup>25, 26</sup>

Reed noted in her survey that most libraries find it necessary to place some restrictions on telephone service in order to make the most efficient use of the telephone. The most frequently cited limitations involve quiz, puzzle, or contest questions; reading of lengthy or detailed information; medical, legal, or consumer information; and children working on class assignments.<sup>26</sup> The same restrictions are mentioned in the Reference Survey.

There is no escaping the fact that the telephone is a means for rapidly getting information which would cost the reader a fair amount of time if he were in the library himself. It does throw a greater burden on the library staff and some restrictions are necessary so that it does not overbalance other kinds of service.

As might be expected, the type of staff doing reference work varies with the size of the library. The Reference Survey found that one-third of the small libraries have a full time professional and 14.4 per cent have a part time professional assigned to reference work. However, 23.8 per cent have full time non-professionals doing reference work. Of the medium-sized public libraries only 37.4 per cent have a full time professional in reference and 15.9 per cent have full time non-professionals doing this work. The large libraries, of course, have many full time professional librarians doing reference work. Detroit, for instance, has sixty-eight professional positions assigned to the Main Library subject departments.

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The size and utilization of the staff for reference use is related to the type of questions asked. Several rather extensive surveys and studies have been reported in the last thirty years. Edith Guerrier reported on a survey taken October 14-19, 1935, in nine library systems—Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Providence, Seattle, Tampa, and Washington, D.C.—that the major part of “reference work” was of the fact finding or information type.<sup>27</sup> She concluded that it would be possible for a general assistant with library school or college education who had a “retentive memory and a fact finding instinct” to answer 83 per cent of the questions. Eight per cent of the other questions might be classed as research and 9 per cent as readers’ advisor.

Six years later Dorothy Cole gathered data from thirteen libraries on characteristics of reference work and made a very thorough analysis of the questions asked. She found that 93 per cent of the questions fell into four types: (1) fact type—55 per cent, (2) how-to-do type—10 per cent, (3) supporting evidence type (Do colonies pay?)—8 per cent, and (4) general information of a subject type (information on cosmetics)—20 per cent.<sup>28</sup> She also found that 72 per cent of the questions were related to events in the present century and that 69 per cent of the questions in public libraries fell within the fields of social sciences, useful arts, and history.

In 1947 Mabel L. Conat reported on a survey of reference use made at the Detroit Public Library in one month. The survey showed that the average amount of time spent per question was 8.4 minutes at the Main Library and 5.2 minutes in the branches. Questions which required over one hour to answer amounted to 1.57 per cent of the questions asked at Main Library and .02 per cent of branch library questions. The types of material used was also analyzed with the following results.<sup>29</sup>

<i>Types of Materials</i>	<i>Main Library</i>	<i>Branches</i>
Reference books . . . . .	32.22%	20.20%
Circulating books . . . . .	18.57	68.78
Periodicals . . . . .	9.55	4.24
Documents . . . . .	9.36	.65
Pamphlets . . . . .	6.20	6.03
Clippings . . . . .	5.48	1.04
Pictures . . . . .	2.66	1.81
Departmental information files . . . . .	15.87	.51

Since at Main Library less than a third of the questions were answered from reference books, this points up the importance of subject departmentalization where all types of material relating to a subject are in one location.

The results of all these surveys point to the preponderance of quick reference questions, and there is no reason to think that the results would be any different if the surveys were taken today. The large percentage of quick reference questions in public library service is one result of a philosophy of service which has been widely accepted by public libraries. It means that they have taken on the role of information centers as opposed to teaching centers. John Cotton Dana, a proponent of the latter concept, felt that the prime duty of the reference worker in the public library was not to answer questions but to instruct the patron in the use of material so that he could find his own answers. Many others agreed with this "conservative" theory of reference work, as Samuel Rothstein calls it.<sup>30</sup> But the increasing demands of patrons for information, the desire of public libraries to render a popular service, and the enthusiasm of the growing body of trained reference librarians has led to the acceptance of the idea of supplying direct answers to questions from whatever sources in which they may be found. This means not only using reference books but every type of library material and community resource.

Although the percentage of quick reference questions to research questions has probably not changed much in the average library in the last 20 years, the emphasis has shifted to new fields. Since World War II the explosion of knowledge in the fields of science and technology has greatly increased the reference requests in these areas as well as in the fields of sociology, economics, and international relations. Even though this is true, the greatest percentage increase in reference questions in the Detroit Public Library in the last 10 years has been in the Language and Literature Department rather than Technology or Social Sciences because of the increased student use.

The clientele of the public library is an important determining factor in the type of reference service that is given. In 1891, W. A. Bardwell of the Brooklyn Library said, "The reference-room is used largely by newspaper reporters, by authors, by teachers and students, by members of debating societies, and by people doing literary work which requires frequent reference to dates, quotations, etc."<sup>31</sup> The Survey of Reference Service in 1955 listed the types of clientele provided with reference service in the following order: high school

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students, club women, teachers, college students, businessmen, other libraries, and factory workers. Other groups most frequently named included artists, city officials, clergy, laborers, lawyers, housewives, and writers. The Survey concludes “. . . that needs related to formal instruction, and those of women’s organizations and business concerns occupy a great deal of a reference department’s time. People with well-defined informational needs related to their work or community activity are more likely to turn to the public library for help than are the average citizens—or the professional people whose needs require specialized literature beyond the capacity of most public libraries to supply.”<sup>32</sup>

The great change from 1891 to the present time is from almost purely literary demands to those related to educational, vocational, and business needs. There is no doubt that in the larger cities, at least, the demands of business and industry have become increasingly heavy since World War II. They put heavy demands on the libraries to purchase and assimilate the tremendous amount of research material being published every day. Conat noted in the 1947 Detroit Public Library Survey that questions from business and industry required about 60 per cent higher expenditure of time than the general average. She also noted that the questions asked by the business firms were not limited in subject scope or in departments consulted. One automotive company consulted eleven different agencies for help.<sup>33</sup> In 1960 a survey of organizational use of the Detroit Public Library during one month showed the same results. One motor company consulted nine departments at the Main Library. This, of course, points up the fact that corporations expect their executives to have far broader interests than those of their own specialties, and they turn to public libraries to supply these needs. Those with the largest special libraries of their own make the heaviest demands on the nearby public libraries.

Public libraries are, therefore, required to make some sort of cooperative arrangements to meet these demands. Many cities provide special privilege cards for business organizations permitting limited borrowing of reference books, bound periodicals, and government documents not normally loaned. Detroit has a list of over 400 organizations which are granted a four day borrowing privilege on special materials.

The financing of these special services and the purchase of the expensive materials needed by business and industry constitute a problem for public libraries all over the country. It is, of course,

aggravated by the fact that many of the demands come from beyond the tax support area of the library. Studies are being made and solutions are being sought for means by which realistic support can be provided by business and industry for reference service of this type. A. L. Smyth notes in England that cooperative organizations for supplying information to industry based on the local public library exist at Sheffield, Liverpool, Hull, Newcastle, and West London.<sup>34</sup>

The most phenomenal growth in reference service demands in the last ten years has, of course, been the student use. Unlike service to business and industry, which is a problem of particular concern to the large and medium-sized libraries, the student problem is felt at every level of public library service. This is a result not only of the increased enrollment of students in high schools and colleges, but of the new methods of teaching with emphasis on independent study which places great dependence on the public library. The change from dormitory-centered colleges to the day-student concept has also forced the college student to seek help from whatever library is nearest his home.

Since this problem has received so much attention from the library profession, there is no need to labor the points here except to refer to a few basic facts. The Reference Survey found that heavy student demands on reference service are being felt by 84 per cent of the public libraries of the country while 97.5 per cent of these communities have a high school library available. This is explained by the fact that in most of these communities the public library collection is more extensive than the high school library and remains open for longer hours.<sup>35</sup>

An interesting comparison may be made in the two surveys of reference service in the Detroit Public Library. The 1947 Survey showed that at the Main Library 25.5 per cent of the reference questions were related to student assignments. Of these, 62 per cent were college and 33 per cent were elementary and high school.<sup>36</sup> In the April 1962 survey at the Detroit Main Library, it was found that 60 per cent of the patrons were students, and of these 62 per cent were college and 38 per cent were elementary and high school students. This growth in student use can be documented by public libraries all over the country. Manchester, England, reflects a similar situation in its 1954 census of users of the Public Library which showed that 53 per cent of its users were full time students, and of these 70 per cent were university students.<sup>37</sup>

For the metropolitan library, the problem is further complicated by

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the fact that students swarm in on Saturdays and vacation periods from communities in a wide radius and make heavy demands, without any provision being made for financial support for the reference use of the library. This influx of students requires special planning in libraries all over the country. The Brooklyn Public Library reports that, beginning in 1961, sixteen agencies have been designated as Reference Centers and are rapidly building extensive reference collections to absorb some of the heavy student pressure from the Main Library.<sup>38</sup>

The increased demands for reference service to serve the needs of students and business and industry, whether it is by telephone or in person in large or small cities, requires a sharp look at ways in which these needs can be met. It comes at a time when most libraries are faced with a shortage of professionally-trained librarians. What can be done to spread the staff we have and to utilize it to the best advantage?

In the first place it is necessary to divide the professional from the clerical work. Public libraries have been slower than college and university libraries to do this. It not only is necessary but desirable in order to make more satisfactory and stimulating work situations for the professional staff. Much checking in of materials, indexing to the extent that it is necessary at all, clipping and the preparation of pamphlet file material, and answering routine reference questions such as those from city directories are now frequently done by clerical or pre-professional assistants. This is also an area in which automation will develop most profitably in libraries. In John Pfeiffer's book, *The Thinking Machine*, he says, "Many of the operations required in library indexing, cross-indexing, and filing and retrieving information are sheer routines, mental assembly-line work. . . . Computers are being used increasingly to help prepare indexes at speeds far exceeding the capabilities of human workers."<sup>39</sup> The full implications of automation in reference work are being discussed in another chapter of *Library Trends*.

It has also become necessary to re-evaluate reference service. As it becomes more costly in materials and staff, we are forced to give up some of our ideals of complete service to patrons and to return to the "conservative" theory of reference work where we help the patrons to help themselves. Department heads at the Detroit Main Library say that we do less and less reference work in depth, but much of the work is instructional. With better indexes and tools to use in the

subject fields, the librarian can perform a real service to the patron if he can demonstrate to him how to do his own research. More people who come to the library today are capable of doing their own searching and are glad to do it under staff guidance.

The facts, of course, are that as the quantity of people served has increased, library budgets in most cases have not kept pace and professional staff is not available even where there is money. While we agree in theory with Samuel Rothstein that ". . . we should look for ways to work at greater range and depth, to do always more not less,"<sup>40</sup> we still have to learn to do the best we can with what we have.

The problem of support for libraries which are expected to give reference service to areas beyond their tax boundaries leads inevitably to the concept of larger areas of service. This is developing in many ways in different parts of the country, but requires state support to make it entirely effective. Legislative provisions for support have been provided in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maryland. The New York State proposal, for developing reference and research service by providing a fund based on \$10 per student in higher educational institutions and \$5 for each professional person as recorded in the census, has not yet been passed, but it is the most realistic proposal that has yet been evolved. In New York the state-aid to libraries appropriations do, however, make it possible to establish regional reference service such as that developed in Nassau County on Long Island. This provides for a headquarters reference collection particularly strong in science and technology and five special subject centers chosen for their strength in certain fields.<sup>41</sup> Wisconsin and California are establishing regional reference centers, which will be described in another chapter of this issue of *Library Trends*. Denver has organized a four-county cooperative reference service centered in the Denver Public Library,<sup>42</sup> and Metropolitan Toronto is experimenting with regional reference centers. Massachusetts established its first regional library at Fitchburg in 1962 under the 1960 state aid law. Twenty libraries form the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Library System which will supply reference service from the headquarters library.<sup>43</sup> In 1962 the establishment of the first of five regional libraries was announced in Philadelphia to help meet the reference needs of the area.<sup>44</sup> Michigan introduced in the legislature last year a bill providing a new state-aid formula which, if passed and implemented by an appropriation, would provide about \$500,000 in state-

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aid for Detroit to help pay for the reference service which it is now supplying to the metropolitan area.

As these plans develop all over the country, it means that the small public library will not have to be dependent on its own resources to render service to its patrons. Through a network it will be able to have access to a stronger regional library and beyond that to a larger resource library. It will eliminate much unnecessary duplication of purchases and will demonstrate to patrons in small communities the real value of reference service to individuals and to business organizations.

Greater cooperation between libraries is a natural extension of the idea of larger areas of service. It points to a division of responsibility in fields of specialization within a county, such as Nassau or within a region or state. Those libraries which have developed strong reference collections in certain subject areas should be encouraged to strengthen them, and other libraries should not duplicate them but develop in other areas. This means consultation between libraries in the purchase of major reference materials in order to enrich the total resources of a region.

In a relatively short span of years from Samuel Green's first plea in 1876 for personal service to library patrons, much has happened to the world and to libraries. Samuel Rothstein says, "When reference service and particularly an information service became established as a regular part of American library practice, it really constituted a new dimension in librarianship; we began to deal in knowledge and not just volumes."<sup>45</sup> This "new dimension" has made the public library a vital, necessary part of the community, closely geared to whatever is going on in the world. The challenge for the future is to provide adequate support for reference service so that materials and trained staff are ready to provide information when it is needed. Through the organization of larger areas of service, the resources of the great will become available to the small and every library will be able to take its place as the information center for its community.

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