Introduction

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For almost one hundred years the means of extending library service in metropolitan areas has been through the development of branch outlets. In general these units have been considered as miniature main libraries conveniently located for easy access by all residents of the neighborhood and offering a varied range of services. Because of this structure, a substantial portion of the budget of any consolidated system is allocated to branch library operations for staff, for library materials and for building maintenance. It is also safe to assume that a great deal of administrative time as well is devoted to the many aspects of this phase of the library program.

Despite the acknowledged growth and importance of the branch library structure, it is equally clear that professional literature dealing with branch administration is almost totally lacking. Lowell Martin in 1940 published his paper on "The Purpose and Administrative Organization of Branch Systems in Large Urban Libraries," but this article is almost the only one devoted solely to branch organization. Wheeler and Goldhor in Practical Administration of Public Libraries include one chapter and some additional pages on various topics connected with branch library work. Roberta Bowler, who edited Local Public Library Administration, gives the subject little more space. It is only through examining the Library Literature Index that one finds any substantial number of references to branch library operations. These articles, however, only treat small segments of the entire range of subject matter. In short, there seems to be a decided lack of careful analysis of branch libraries, their scope and function.

In an effort to present a reasonably comprehensive examination of the development of branch libraries and their current status, the Publication Board of Library Trends has authorized this issue on Current Trends in Branch Libraries. This publication should prove of consider-
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able value to library school students, to administrators of public libraries, to persons newly-charged with responsibility for branch administration, and to governmental officials and community groups who need to know the role of the branch library in the metropolitan complex of services.

In the opening paragraph of his article tracing the branch library movement through its various developmental stages, Milton Byam confirms the lack of recognition which has become apparent to the editor of this issue of Library Trends, by saying: "The history of branch libraries must be distilled from the history of the public library. . . ." Building on this historical presentation, Eastlick and Shea-rouse present some over-all policies and philosophy to serve as guidelines for administrators in their decisions affecting programs of branch service. The organization of the branch department, its relationship to other central library departments, the role of age level coordinators, and staff/line relationships are also explored.

Carroll discusses the problems of site selection and the appropriate sizes of buildings for different communities. Community surveys and standards for space allocation are also reviewed. Jones shifts the scene to the branch building itself, discussing the objectives of branch library service against a backdrop of the multiple functions, services and special programming activities assumed by branch libraries for all age levels. The problems of evaluating the effectiveness of a branch service program are discussed.

The problems involved in selecting and training staff for branch library work are reviewed by Hamill, who suggests some considerations helpful in determining staffing patterns. Staff development through in-service training programs and other methods is detailed. The foundation upon which the service program rests—the book collection—is thoroughly described by Bloss in terms of its purpose, its size, and the available budget appropriation.

An examination of a segment of the branch service program—work with young adults, as revealed in the findings of a questionnaire prepared by Bulman—demonstrates the specialized services now expected from the local library outlet.

The new types of cooperative systems which are evolving to meet the needs of communities adjoining major metropolitan areas are discussed in considerable depth by Kaiser. Finally, Greenaway examines today's programs of branch library service in the light of tomorrow's patterns and promises.
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New federal legislation, new state aid programs, and increased local support are bringing large amounts of money into the library scene. The effectiveness with which the library profession uses these funds will depend upon a thorough knowledge of the service functions which need to be strengthened, overhauled, expanded, and initiated. It is hoped that by focusing attention on the branch aspect of public library administration, a clearer picture will emerge of the role of the branch library in a comprehensive program of library service in the years ahead.

References