



# Audio-visual Materials in the Public Library

WILLIAM PETERS

“AUDIO-VISUAL” IS AN UMBRELLA TERM covering practically all non-print materials which find their way into a library. Whether or not the circulating hand-tool collection maintained by the Grosse Pointe, Michigan, Public Library would qualify as an audio-visual item is questionable. But certainly files, map collections, filmstrips, films, audio tapes, radio and television programs and facilities, slide collections, recordings, and copying, microfilm, and teaching machines do.

Some of the resources named stir no controversy among even the most bookish of librarians. No one writes articles entitled “Do Maps Belong in Libraries?” As for picture files, they were part of library collections when young Tom Edison was “fooling around” with the motion picture machine. Today, even the smallest of libraries will provide at least one vertical file full of pictorial resources.

A library must have copying machines. They save the books. Why rip a page from a book when, for from ten to twenty-five cents, a machine will make a personal copy? On a good day, if the machine has been located properly, a library might even make a few cents' profit. The question is not, “Should a library have a copying machine?” It is, “How many machines should the library have?” Such a question applies to the selection of all A-V materials and facilities appropriate to a library, for the problems of so equipping a public library are mainly those of organizing, staffing, funding, administering, and servicing. There exists a considerable body of literature on organizing, furnishing, and staffing new media facilities in school libraries,<sup>1</sup> but, unfortunately, very little has been written pertaining to the public library. Therefore, the author has sought to supply as many concrete examples of organizational, staff, and equipment arrangements as possible.

At a recent conference, several experts in the audio-visual field

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William Peters is Chief, Educational Film Department, Detroit Public Library.

considered the problems of providing *audio* materials for all types of libraries, and emphasized that, "The key problem to be encountered in planning library listening facilities . . . concerns administrative planning and the judgments which must be made regarding purposes and the modes of use to which a library's facilities for listening will be put."<sup>2</sup> The main panel speaker listed four questions which a librarian should consider before selecting audio equipment. These same four questions could apply as well to selecting visual equipment:

What are the goals and responsibilities of the library?

What kinds of individuals and groups compose the library's clientele?

What are their needs and interests in books?

And what are their needs and interests in recorded materials as such?

After asking himself these basic questions, the librarian must then go on to decide whether facilities should be centralized or decentralized; whether they are intended for individual or group activity; what equipment, facilities, and furnishings will meet the library's objectives best; what staff should supervise the materials; whether the materials are for circulation, reference, instruction, appreciation; and whether such service will involve production and reproduction as well as simple distribution.<sup>3</sup>

Keeping these questions and considerations in mind, there follows a brief summary of the chief characteristics, values, basic costs, and optimum administrative arrangements which apply to various types of A-V services, with particular emphasis on recordings and films.

*Microfilm.* Microfilm is considered a necessary evil by many librarians. "Necessary" because the mass of printed material being acquired by public libraries is so large that, if it is retained in its present form, the size of library buildings must be doubled, tripled, even quadrupled within the next twenty-five to fifty years. Judicious weeding might reduce the problem, but microfilming periodicals, newspapers, and some books will do the same job and still preserve the material. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, some library schools may be offering a course such as Library Science 7292—Weeding Microfilm Collections.

Microfilm, while obviously necessary, is still an "evil" because it cannot be read by holding it up to the light and because threading

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most microfilm readers is a nuisance, repairing microfilm can be difficult, and buying microfilm can cut into a book budget.

Today, it is just barely possible that there exists a librarian who defends the proposition that microfilm has no place in the public library; however, few patrons would debate such a proposition.

*Recordings.* Another type of audio-visual material which has become almost—not quite, but almost—a traditional item in the public library is the phonograph record. Recordings of music seem more acceptable than those of the spoken voice. Why, no one knows, since there are certainly more talkers than there are singers. Perhaps it has something to do with the location of recording collections since many of them have been made a part of the holdings of a music department, at least in large libraries. Libraries both large and small have record collections. Most of these collections circulate, usually for a traditional fee of five cents a day per record. Some libraries, notably the Detroit Public Library, have built up sizable collections from fees collected.

Recently, in the Illinois public library system, thirty-four libraries of all sizes were sent a questionnaire concerning their record collections.<sup>4</sup> Thirty responded, of which two had established record collections with 78rpm. recordings before World War II, five had begun collections in the post-war 1940's, and the rest in the 1950's with the advent of the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm. hi-fidelity recording. While fourteen of the libraries reported that they circulated recordings to the same clientele to which they circulated books, nine indicated that the record collection had brought in new users. However, administrative costs are higher than those for the book collection. A recent time-and-motion study proved that it takes the average librarian four times as long to discharge a recording as it takes him to discharge a book.

The librarian should also take into consideration the need for a staff member with a special musical background. While the quality of the recordings is sometimes questionable—some would-be patrons prefer not to risk damage to their expensive hi-fi equipment by playing records borrowed from a library—with cleaning and care, many recordings can be played 50-150 times without noticeable wear. However, they can warp or break, and, in the larger libraries, the days of the circulating record collection may be numbered because of problems caused by damage. In its place will be "reference" collections kept within the library. Records will be played on demand by library patrons on turntables operated by library personnel; or orig-

inal records may be taped, if copyright laws permit, and the tapes played for listeners on request. Original tapes will be issued in the same fashion.

The phonograph record has almost won its battle of acceptance as a legitimate part of a public library's holdings. Everyone will benefit when the rent-a-record era ends.

*Slides.* Even today, public libraries still shy away from the 35 mm. 2" x 2" slide. Few libraries maintain large slide collections, although slides are inexpensive and readily available for purchase. Recently a new audio slide device became available to libraries: a 2" x 2" slide "the back sides of which are coated with iron oxide similar to that used for tape-recording. . . . When the slide is projected, both the audio and the visual are reproduced. This development allows slides to be resequenced without disturbing the audio presentation."<sup>5</sup> It is evident that the slide medium deserves more attention.

*Other New Devices.* At the 1965 Library Equipment Institute, one panel member discussed several new audio devices which could be used in a public library. A tape reproducer, which employs a much more narrow tape than that now used, is capable of playing for fifteen hours without a stop when it is fully loaded. The Re-Kard uses a file card, "the back of which is treated with magnetic oxide for recording sound. Any kind of graphic data, either photographic or written, can be recorded on the front of the card. In use, the device reproduces the sound on the reverse side so that the [user] has access to both graphic and audio material." With the new remote-controlled recorders, requests for audio listening can be filled by dialing a code number from any terminal station or carrel.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it has been found that:

Tapes can now be programmed just as books can. This possibility gives latitude to the . . . librarian in providing self-instruction services using dual-track machines with a master track that cannot be erased and a student track that can be used for practice. The applications of recorded audio are almost unlimited. Terminals for listening facilities can be installed in the apron of a conventional library table. At any given time these supplementary facilities can be pressed into service as needed.<sup>6</sup>

*Programmed Learning Aids and Teaching Machines.* The introduction of programmed learning aids and teaching machines into public libraries has begun in a very cautious way. In Fair Lawn, New Jersey, the public library will lend six patrons TMI-Grolier teaching machines

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with programmed texts. The public library in East Meadow, Long Island, New York, maintains a special collection called the "Self-Learning Center." In addition to teaching machines, the Center will lend textbooks and phonograph records to qualified borrowers. The White Plains, New York, Public Library circulates Encyclopaedia Britannica Press courses which have been programmed in textbook form. In general, public libraries which are closely allied with school service units are more receptive to teaching machines and programmed texts than are libraries which seek to remain independent of schools. In this field, too, innovations have been taking place. For instance,

One of the newer teaching machines has the capability of using programmed audio and visual materials for review, for listening to, and then for duplication in the [user's] voice so that it can be compared with the master model when played back. The machine offers the option of true or false, multiple choice, and other types of questions, depending upon how it is programmed. In effect, this is a self-instruction device and can be used for individual study.<sup>7</sup>

*Films.* A relative newcomer in the audio-visual field is the 8mm. film. Long considered an amateur product suitable chiefly for home use, its eligibility as a serious information medium is a subject which generates much discussion among public librarians. The 8mm. film assumes many formats. The "single-concept film" is the name used most frequently. Synonymous terms are "film loops," "one-idea films," "brief films," and "film clips" (which may also be produced on 16mm. film) to name a few. "Single-concept films" are normally short (three to five minutes in length), silent motion pictures which present a single idea or concept. The films are usually mounted in cartridges as continuous loops and may be shown with specially designed cartridge-loading projectors. Teachers are enthusiastic about the "single-concept film," because it is easy to use; no threading of film, no reels, no sprockets, and no rewinding. Furthermore the cartridges protect the film from handling and dust.<sup>8</sup>

In a public library the significance of 8mm. probably lies in its adaptability to independent study. As more and more loop films are produced and cover broader ranges of content, libraries will have to consider them as possible circulating items. Another 8mm. film format is "Super-8." "Super" refers to the enlarged area of the picture frame, approximately 50 percent larger than regular 8mm. film. "Super-8" film has made possible the production of release prints of good

quality using sound tracks dubbed from 16mm. and 35mm. originals. The "M-8" format was developed by John Maurer. The viewing area of "M-8" is 20 percent larger than regular 8mm. Both optical and magnetic sound can be handled on "M-8" films.

A few public libraries maintain collections of 8mm. silent films. In some cases librarians will acquire an 8mm. film because they cannot afford to purchase the 16mm. version. But libraries having large collections of 16mm. films are also stocking some in 8mm. With some five and a half million 8mm. silent projectors in use today, the demand for 8mm. film is increasing. Early experiments in development of sound for 8mm. films employed magnetic tracks; now, however, optical sound tracks are also available. But at present it is difficult to predict just which formats will emerge as standard for 8mm. Probably it is safe to say that 8mm. sound films will be more acceptable to public libraries than will silent film. When format standardization has been achieved, more libraries will consider 8mm. films seriously.

The medium which has commanded most attention in the audio-visual field for the past two decades is the 16mm. sound film. Although a few library film collections had been established before the end of World War II, the late 1940's and early 1950's were pioneering years during which the American Library Association concerned itself actively with development of the educational film, as important library material. In 1947, the American Library Association received a grant of \$42,000 from the Carnegie Corporation to establish a Film Advisory Service at ALA Headquarters in Chicago. Patricia Blair (Cory) was appointed Film Consultant. She traveled extensively about the country assisting libraries in setting up film service programs similar to the one she herself had established in 1942 as head of the Cleveland Public Library Film Bureau. Many large- and medium-sized public libraries across the country were thus encouraged to establish circulating film collections. Gifts, loans, and deposits received from government as well as commercial sponsors helped many libraries start developing film collections.

In Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the Public Library began to circulate motion pictures as early as 1947. At that time, it had purchased only one 20-minute film and had received one film on deposit. Hannah Hyatt, the former film librarian, in describing the launching of the collection related that, "With one projector and a yearly budget of \$500 for materials, we started the slow climb—buying one film a year

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for the collection, procuring an occasional gift from a local organization, renting the rest." Fitchburg, with a population of 45,000 had a typical library of medium-size, "typical" in that it was financially unable to support, on its own, the type of film service required by patrons. Even larger libraries could not support film collections to the degree required; collections grew very slowly.

In 1948-49, a second Carnegie grant initiated a new phase of educational film development when two cooperative film circuits were established. The circuits were decided upon as "a financially feasible way" in which small city and county libraries could distribute films to community groups located in rural areas where the tax base was inadequate to support independent services. One demonstration circuit centered around the Cleveland Public Library System and another around the Missouri State Library. Both proved successful and set a pattern for library cooperation in film distribution which has continued through the years.

Film or audio-visual departments should not be regarded as separate entities in themselves, but as integral parts of the whole library. As such, they must share advantages of the present movement toward "library systems." A long-standing excuse used by some libraries to explain their lack of a film collection—"We can't afford films"—is now being overcome with the development of larger library units of service. Several states have made statewide film availability a primary goal.

New York State, a pioneer in the creation of library systems, now has twenty-two regional units. Only 2 percent of New York's libraries are non-affiliated. More than half of the twenty-two regional systems distribute films and other A-V materials from their headquarters library. Each center has its own collection and does all processing of audio-visual materials for the libraries in its region. Backstopping regional services is the film collection maintained by the Library Development Division of the New York State Library. Requests for single films or for film programs which are not available at the regional level may be referred to the Library Development Division.

When the State of Massachusetts established its Regional Library Program, film service was included from the start. Today, Massachusetts has three regional library systems: the Eastern Regional System with headquarters in Boston, the Central Regional System with Worcester as headquarters, and the Western Regional System with Springfield as the headquarters office. The plan of film service has been

developed to utilize all existing collections and, in two instances, to relocate them so that they could be housed in a headquarters library. Requests for films are forwarded to the regional centers by local libraries. Some sixty-eight public libraries are members of the Central Regional System. Films are mailed to the requesting library where patrons may go to pick them up. There is no charge to either patrons or local libraries. Films not available at the Regional Library may be obtained from the Film Cooperative in Boston or from the Massachusetts Department of Education. Massachusetts does not yet employ a state A-V consultant as does New York State, but the regional consultants in Massachusetts cooperate with each other informally.

In Illinois seven film programs were established and have now been operating for some time. Development of library systems within the state has resulted in dissolution of three of the seven film cooperatives which formerly made films available to the total library system developed to serve their areas. Today the plan is to establish film service in each developing library system as well as to maintain a collection of rare or more expensive items at the State Library, items which local or regional units might not be able to afford.

In Michigan, the work of creating library systems is progressing rapidly. Plans are well under way to create a statewide film network which will assure all community groups within the state free access to films. Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, and other states are also finding ways to provide film service to rural as well as urban regions. It should be noted, however, that very few states could afford to embark upon such programs were it not for the Federal funds received through state libraries under terms of the Library Services and Construction Act. As public demand has increased and more money has become available for support of augmented library service through release of Federal and state funds, public libraries have become more conscious of the values of non-print materials. But public libraries as such are not likely to develop into instructional materials centers; this is the responsibility of school libraries where specialized personnel can be employed to ensure the proper instructional use of all materials. It is hoped, however, that all types of libraries will recognize the value of A-V resources and will eventually come to realize that simply having and lending recordings or filmstrips is not enough.

An important and largely overlooked aspect of A-V service is proper and effective use of media. Audio-visual specialists must not be re-



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garded as the only professionals involved in providing A-V service. All librarians must become involved. In too many libraries audio-visual personnel are separate and apart from the balance of library staff. Too few librarians feel responsibility even for knowing the difference between films and filmstrips, let alone for helping to plan new A-V programs or service activities for the community.

To sum up, despite many problems, both physical and philosophical, that remain to be overcome, the future of A-V materials service offered by public libraries is bright. There is, of course, no one perfect way to build or maintain A-V collections. The types of material to be acquired and the sizes of collections must be determined by local conditions and by changes in technology. Above all, libraries must be responsive to the needs and desires of patrons. As public institutions they can do no less.

Maurice B. Mitchell, former president of Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, reminds us that:

In the span of our own lifetime, man wrought another great communications revolution. He devised radio to throw his voice around the world, jumping the highest mountains and spanning the widest seas. He developed photography and the motion picture. Photography had come painfully on pieces of wet glass and tin, then on paper to preserve with the magic of the camera the sights which lay beyond the horizons of people's eyes. Man learned to make these sights move. He learned to match the sights with sounds he could record. Finally, he learned to throw both across the skies in a split second with the magic of television. Man had recovered the sight of his eyes, the use of his voice, and the hearing of his ears, to any horizons he cared to view. He opened the doors to a new era in education.<sup>9</sup>

One phrase which sums up the advances made in providing audio-visual services in the public library is, "Little by little and bit by bit." If libraries and librarians are to be—and they must be—full partners with all A-V agencies in this new era, the phrase should be revised to "More and more, faster and better."

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