Introduction

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ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECTS of editing an issue of Library Trends on young adult service is that even thirty-five years ago the subject would not have been thought important enough to discuss at length—if it was thought of at all. The increased attention focused on people in their teens is one of the phenomena of our day and most of it did not begin until shortly after World War II.

The fact that in many libraries at least one-half of the patrons not classified as children are between the ages of 14 and 18 negates any theory that special service to teenagers is unnecessary. What type of service each library affords must certainly vary. Some places stress the collection, others, the librarian, and still others, activities oriented toward this age group. Whatever the service includes, and ideally it should include all three, it has become mandatory that libraries focus a great deal of attention on this large portion of their clientele.

Oddly enough, it seems that the first developments of library service to teenagers were provoked by the fact that adults did not want teenagers in adult reading rooms. This was true of the first room for teenagers in the Detroit Public Library system. However, instead of a high school room being built onto the library, an adult room was added and the high school students took over the old adult reading room. (I am happy to report that I had the pleasure of dismantling this separate room for teenagers in 1953.)

In planning this issue it occurred to me that discussing service to the young adult is actually discussing good library service from every angle except geriatrics (and probably even the interrelationship with the aged has some relevance). Perhaps no other field of library service has created so much controversy as service to this age group, but then

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at no other time in our history have there been so many knowledgeable young people as there are today.

Although this issue was not intended to focus on the history of young adult service, one of the things which interested me most as I went through the manuscripts was the fact that most authors felt compelled to preface their articles with a brief résumé of the progress of young adult service. The singular thing about these opening paragraphs is that each brings out something entirely different; it is the very diversity in the beginning of library service to young adults which makes its history such a fascinating one.

Stimulating controversy occurred when the American Library Association, directing attention to this age group, was determining a change of name for the division which serves teenagers. It is true that many church groups and social groups still think of the young adult as the person between 21 and 30 years of age, but since the term "youth" has now been actually down-graded to represent the people between kindergarten and junior high, it seemed reasonable to bestowed a more dignified title upon today’s teenager (particularly since the terms "delinquent," "far out," "flower children," "hippies," etc. have so often been indiscriminately applied to this age bracket). Experience proves that the more dignified term, "young adult," does help to motivate the youth to achieve an adult attitude. The term "young adults"—at least in the library world—now represents a group roughly in the 14- to 20-year-old age group.

Our reason for asking an educator particularly concerned with adolescence to write the first chapter was to establish the identity of our clientele before starting to think about how they can best be served. Armin Grams really knows teenagers—he has two of his own—and has worked with parents and adolescents alike for many years. His article was written to set the stage for the fascinating world we enter when working with young people.

As early as 1960, Edwin Castagna wrote an excellent article on young adult service in which he stated:

1. Young people of high school age are among our steadiest and heaviest users. It has been said that library use reaches its peak at about age 16 or 17.
2. The use of public libraries by young people tends to fall off sharply as they leave school.
3. Young adults create two kinds of problems by their great numbers and intensive use of the library: a) they rush in often with
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ever extremely difficult questions that require extensive reference and readers' aid, and make heavy demands on the time of the staff; and b) being American youth, uninhibited, gay, and gregarious as healthy young people should be, they generally present a discipline problem which appears to some people to be susceptible of solution at least partly through their segregation or by dealing with them through specialized facilities and staff. Margaret Mead says young people in the United States are like a separate tribe with its own rules and taboos, a kind of subculture. If this is true, then doesn't it make sense for us to try to deal with them in a special way? 1

It seemed logical then to invite Edwin Castagna as the director of a large, highly respected library to give his current opinion of the staff status of the young adult librarian. Certainly his article, based on his own survey, does show that no matter what place the young adult librarian occupies in the library organization chart, it is in most instances an important one; he finds further that most systems indicate an upward trend in services and attitudes.

It is indeed interesting to note from the various chapters how library emphasis on the young adult seems to be changing from the combination of the child/young adult to that of young adult/adult. Perhaps one of the factors which has deterred administrators from increasing the importance and the prestige of young adult service in their libraries has been the earlier trend which chose the young adult specialist from the ranks of children's librarians and then set up a separate budget and department. Nearly all librarians recognize that the children's service is so important to every library that there is no question as to its place in the library organization. By the same token so many of the early adult coordinators seemed to feel that the most important step toward establishing young adult service was to develop a separate bailiwick. Perhaps if librarians would spend more time thinking of new ways to attract and hold the young adult reader instead of worrying about where his authority lies, progress might be even greater in this field.

The emphasis on the young adult librarian is near the beginning of this issue, for a well-qualified dedicated librarian to serve young adults, a librarian who can serve as a key to the whole collection or the service, is of prime importance. If this person is indeed interested in young people he will utilize the book collection most effectively and at the same time provide those services and extra activities
which will best inspire the young people to read. Certainly Jane Manthorne’s article should inspire many people to accept this responsibility.

Lucile Hatch’s article on the training of the young adult librarian brings to light the inadequacies of preparation for this area of work. In many library schools there is the tendency to combine the children’s and young adult courses, a natural trend but not a realistic one in these modern times. Her article also indicates the paucity of literature on service to this age group and should alert all of us in the field to write and to make sure that more attention is focused here.

Since the whole conception of dispensing ideas and information is based on books and literature, it seems especially important that we have a chapter on book selection. Katherine Jeffery has had long experience in this field and her survey affords some very intriguing information. As no article on book selection is complete without some discussion of the sensitive areas, it seems to me that she has made some excellent points. Again one cannot help but notice that the criteria which she has outlined would be suitable for a description of good book selection in general.

Also important is where and how the collection is placed; Florence Sanborn’s comments are especially helpful to those who are attempting to determine both the extent and location of such a collection. Naturally, each library must determine the place for its own young adult collection, but there are many helpful suggestions in this article.

The school libraries also play an important part in our work with young adults. In the first place, they are provided with a captive audience for whom the entire collection can be appropriately geared, especially at the secondary school level. Faith Murdoch was asked to write the article on the relationship of the school librarian to the young adult librarian, not only because of her excellent supervision of the Detroit Public School libraries, but because of her continued cooperation with the public library. I am sure that such cooperation exists in many cities but we can honestly say that without this cooperation in Detroit, most of our school-oriented projects would be failures. In return the Detroit Public Library offers booklists, school visits, and book talks about the new books which we in the public library field are in a position to receive before most school libraries.

Creating almost as much controversy as whether or not there should be special departments for young adults is the question of
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special activities for this group. Emma Cohn’s article removes the question and offers instead a challenge. Hopefully, the day has come when the librarian will no longer shake his or her head and say “we are librarians and not social workers”; although we are not trained social workers, the trend of the time is certainly such that we must extend ourselves more in the field of human relations, if we expect books and library materials to intrigue the young readers.

Just at this time libraries are fortunate in having some excellent programs financed by Federal funds. Never before in library history has there been such an opportunity to provide service above and beyond the conventional type. Such fascinating projects as High John in Baltimore County, the Brooklyn programs, and a number of programs in California, as well as other states, would not have been possible without special grants.

Ruth Thompson’s article on service to young adults in Canada is very important to us both because of the proximity of the country and the similarity of our clientele. Although Canadians have made some recent changes, their philosophy remains very similar to that in the United States and I am sure their thoughts will be of interest here.

One of the most exciting aspects of any type of library service is the new concept of systems. Certainly Esther Helfand is well-qualified to discuss this aspect of our work and perhaps herein lies the best prospect for the establishment for young adult service. If a small library cannot afford a specialist, certainly a trained young adult regional librarian can be of great service in selecting books, planning programs, and conducting in-service training for the other staff members.

This issue was necessarily planned far in advance of publication and therefore is not as timely as we would like it to be. Young adult librarians have, in Florence Sanborn’s words, “caught the fever of the happenings” and are “with it.” A few years ago librarians might have hesitated to have films and discussions on narcotics, judo, or sex—now we know that we must live with the times. If these are topics of interest—in fact have always been—why not make the library the place to come to for information and discussion in these areas? There are leadership responsibilities in all areas of interest to young adults which an older generation must indeed accept, for in Lord Chesterfield’s words, “The young leading the young is like the blind leading the blind; they will both fall in the ditch.”

We have not attempted in this issue to cover every aspect of service
to young adults nor to establish standards but have rather hoped by our evaluations of different types of service to create a broader view and to stress the importance of establishing in this age level the habit of lifetime reading. It is during these years that the individual can read faster and absorb more than at any other time in his life and though he may bring more understanding and logic to his reading in later years, if he has not learned the enjoyment of reading for pleasure as well as for information this experience will mean very little. One thing we cannot forget, whether or not we are imbued with this missionary spirit which most young adult librarians are accused of having, whether we carry a cross for the teenager or not, we are supposed to be concerned with the readers of the future. If these people who are the citizens of a very imminent tomorrow are not inspired to read during these very important years, we are ignoring our audience of the future. More than that, we are practically assuring ourselves that there will be no audience of tomorrow, for without question in this day of pervasive media (be they McLuhan’s “hot or cold”) librarians are going to have to be fired with missionary zeal and enthusiasm.

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