The Young Adult Collection
and Its Location

FLORENCE M. SANBORN

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS ARTICLE, seventy representative libraries in the United States replied to a questionnaire sent by the author. The answers to the fifteen questions asked and the general comments were varied, but some patterns of service relative to today's young adult book collections and their locations did emerge. It would be almost impossible, however, to define or standardize a "collection" and its location, for each must adapt to the changes in society and the provisions of budget and space. H. C. Campbell, in Metropolitan Public Library Planning Throughout the World, states that "For decades librarians have pondered the transformation in reading interests and library use that takes place as the young child reaches adolescence, and many studies have been made of the varied patterns of teenage and young adult use of the public library. Most of these have pointed out that too often the library is pursuing objectives different from the interests of the citizens in the community." ¹

One difference is in the interpretation of the terms teen-age and young adult. Librarians as a whole in the United States use the terms interchangeably but citizens, educators, commentators, writers (even some librarians including Campbell) often refer to the teenaged as those from 13 to 19 and young adults as those in their twenties. Is it any wonder then that the library public is not always sure just for whom the young adult book collection is intended—a thirteen-year-old or a young married couple? Isn't there an implied ambiguity and solicitousness in the term "young adult" and hasn't this been a deterrent to the use of the collection? Obviously librarians need to inform their public who young adult are, and why specific books are selected for them.

Florence M. Sanborn is Coordinator of Young Adult Services, Los Angeles Public Library.
Too often these collections are thought to be limited and ends in themselves. Librarians must show that these collections are a means to an end in reading desirability: that they are the most readable books of quality in the library's adult collection and that they possess intrinsic ingredients which hopefully will appeal to youth. The titles included are ever-changing and diversified, rarely permanent and invariable.

As interests of young people change, so do their reasons for using the public library. The clamor for an education in this increasingly specialized world has brought about a revolution in reading preferences. Generally speaking, young people are now coming to the public library first for information needed in a school assignment (today the most popular is narcotic drugs), second for leisure reading material and third (which some day may be first) for related activities. Today young people are more concerned with finding out about this mixed-up world and reasons for living in it than with enjoying a humorous or high adventure story. However, it is not really easy to ascertain exactly whether young people are reading for school or personal interest. To what is the recent popularity of Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* attributable? Interest in the meaning of life and love, or fulfillment of a school assignment?

The questionnaire brought out quite clearly that young adult book collections now contain both recreational and school-related materials. This supported the opinion of Learned T. Bulman, who stated after he studied the results of his questionnaire to librarians several years ago in *Library Trends*, "many [librarians] said that they need or are buying more adult fiction and nonfiction to supplement their young adult holdings. The writer suspects that more of this material than librarians care to admit is actually assignment-oriented." But one must consider further whether with the improvement of many school libraries, the public library's collection will be needed much longer for school assignments.

The size of a young adult book collection depends upon many factors, such as the space available, the staff, the budget, the kind and number of teenagers to serve, and the emphasis on the importance of the collection in relation to the activity program. The median number of young adult titles in the main or central libraries to which the questionnaire was sent was 5,000. One library was experimenting with forty titles in wide duplication as its entire Y.A. collection. Most large library systems cannot estimate the number of volumes because
many are adult titles in duplicate. However, in planning the size of the collection for good service to teenagers, the number of young people in the community should be estimated. The New York State Library Association\(^3\) proposes that with a teen-age (13-17 inclusive) population 10 percent of the whole, 250 to 500 teenagers with 1.5 books per capita, should have 375 to 625 books and 2½ to 4½ shelving sections with 53 to 90 linear feet of shelving. The report stresses that these are simply guides to space allocations, a quantitative framework for the flexible nature of young adult services. It is this author’s opinion that if one were to enlarge upon the flexible nature of young adult services, it would be feasible to argue that the number of titles is not as important as a wide duplication of the most pertinent, and the activities which promote them.

Will the Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966, meet the needs of some 30,000,000 teenagers when it recommends that at least five percent of annual additions be materials of specific interest to them? Within the standard of “at least two to four volumes per capita and at least two volumes per capita in areas serving 1,000,000 population”\(^4\) will libraries remember to ascertain the number of teenagers? Why shouldn’t at least 10 percent of the total annual funds for books and materials be the estimate?

The search for an education by young people has forced a notable number of libraries to locate the small and medium-sized young adult book collection (or a display of part of it) near or adjacent to the adult reference department. This practice may be more prevalent in small libraries which have only one librarian at a time on duty to cover all kinds of requests. He can encourage recreational reading by having an inviting young adult section in close proximity to school material. As long ago as 1960, the Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults in Public Libraries, in the Young Adult Services in the Public Library handbook, noted that, “Where staff shortages exist, a section for young adults adjacent to the reference section can be satisfactorily staffed by one librarian servicing both collections. Many young people who come only for reference help can be introduced to recreational reading by an alert librarian within arm’s reach of a young adult collection.”\(^5\) And in 1966, a committee in the New York Library Association for the Criteria and Guidelines in Planning for Young Adult Services in Public Library Building Programs recommends, “In those instances where the Young Adult librarian is sharing responsibility for reference work, it may be particularly de-
The Young Adult Collection and Its Location

sirable to place the Young Adult Collection in close proximity to the reference section.6 Even a large regional branch of the Los Angeles Public Library has achieved rapport with teenagers and an increased use of the collection by having young adult display sections adjacent to the reference desk. These sections house a small part of the entire collection, which is interfiled with the adult collection.

Traditionally, young adult book collections have been found between the children’s and adult areas, but few librarians gave this preference. Today, such locations may be by-passed by teenagers who do not want to climb such obvious steps to maturity. Heavily favored by larger library systems were areas separated from the adult (rather than the children’s) by low stacks. The effect here is a natural diffusion of adult and young adult services.

The plans for the new Boston Public Library, scheduled for completion in 1970, call for 6,400 square feet on the mezzanine level for a Y.A. area with glass on three sides.

Eleanor Kidder of the Seattle Public Library believes that “The lounge concept is ten years behind the times. Straight chairs and tables with plenty of working surface are a prime requisite, not easy chairs. Needed are bulletin boards, wall holders for lists in covers (subject, college preparatory, etc.) and effective holders for lists for distribution. The whole set-up and service should be business-like, obviously arranged and easy to use.”7 While there are varying opinions of the lounge concept, repeatedly, librarians urged the presence of a librarian in the Y.A. area to see to it that books are found easily. They emphasized that it is not only the book collections but how the librarians use it that makes it functional.

While the trend in recent years has been away from separate rooms in large city public libraries, twenty-three of the seventy libraries receiving the questionnaire had separate rooms and generally did not comment negatively upon them; philosophies vary on this. The forthcoming Guidebook on Young Adult Services now being prepared by a committee of the Young Adult Services Division of ALA will undoubtedly show the changes since 1960 in the thinking of librarians on this point. In 1960, the ALA Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults in Public Libraries stated that “A separate room has been found to be a real asset in libraries, as a distinct, specially trained staff and carefully selected collection of books provide quicker and better service to the young person.”8 In 1964, The Young Adult Roundtable, in the Standards for Young
Adult Services in California Public Libraries, showed an uneasiness in this succinct sentence: "A separate room is not recommended except perhaps in extremely large library buildings." \(^9\) Wheeler and Goldhor in Practical Administration of Public Libraries state, "Many large city libraries have a separate room for young adults (though in recent buildings this idea is unusual), or a fairly large area of the general adult reading room. . . ." \(^10\)

In a recently published booklet which the Public Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations has published on Library Service to Young Adults, twenty-four of the twenty-eight countries responding to its survey said that "there are young adult corners or groups of shelves in the adult sections of their public libraries. Only one reply seemed to indicate that young people are served exclusively in separate sections." \(^11\)

Separate rooms conspicuously absent in new building plans may be replaced with meeting rooms designed for activities which would lead to reading—book discussions, film programs, idea forums, dramatic presentations, bands, or folksings. Tomorrow's library, if it is to survive vitally, must exchange ideas as well as books. This is substantiated on the international scene when Cohn and Olsson comment that, "you can get along very well without the separate collections; you cannot get along so well without the special service to young people." \(^12\)

Books in today's young adult collection are shelved either by reader interest or straight classification dependent upon the size and use of the collection and the presence of a young adult librarian in close supervision. Reader interest shelving is employed more often in small libraries than in large libraries, although the Detroit Public Library, the St. Louis Public Library, and the Queens Borough Public Library are the notable exceptions. The Nathan Straus Library in New York City has a non-circulating collection arranged according to reader interest. Catchy subject headings used in the reader interest method encourage browsing but are more impractical in locating books than is the straight classification shelving because the subject must be ascertained before the book can be located. A closer supervision of shelving is needed unless an exceedingly workable method can be devised. The appearance of the collection in straight classification order is less exciting and enticing, but special shelves and bulletin boards for current activities can relieve the monotony.

Preference for the paperback, especially by young people, has
The Young Adult Collection and Its Location

changed the appearance of the young adult section. Revolving or free-standing racks of paperbacks located prominently near the young adult section were widely preferred by the librarians surveyed over interfiling or shelving—except in the case of very large collections. An entire young adult collection in paperback is not inconceivable. Paperbacks make possible the housing of a wide range of titles within a small space. Their varied uses and availability seem to have drawn teenagers back to the public libraries, boosted some sagging circulations and helped to narrow the gaps recently opening between public libraries and their service to youth, caused by a diminishing need for the public library to supply high school research material. Almost without exception the seventy librarians replying to the questionnaire were highly in favor of paperbacks as a part of the young adult collection, but some pointed sadly to a lingering resistance to them by administrators.

Many different gimmicks are employed by libraries to identify the books which are in young adult collections. Some are black dots, white dots, orange rectangles, yellow rectangles, triangles and stripes. Some are Y's, Y.A.'s, Y.P.'s and other letters. There are almost as many methods as libraries! The "Y" seemed to be most frequently used, however. It is most often put on the spine, pocket and card of the book. A number of librarians support the philosophy that a "Y" on the spine—or anywhere for that matter—may deter young adults and adults as well from choosing the book. Patrons normally understand why the "Y" is there if they learn from the librarian the meaning of it. Nevertheless, the more inconspicuous "Y" on the pocket and card and not on the spine should be ample. This is more consistent with the principle that these books are indeed an integral part of the adult collection.

One successful method of marking books with a symbol other than "Y" is used in the Detroit Public Library, where the books selected for young adult use are marked with a small hyphen (-) at the left of the call number or in the case of fiction, the author. This mark appears on the book pocket, the book spine, and all the catalog cards. These books may then be used as a "floating collection" and may be transferred from the adult shelves to the young adult shelves whenever the young adult librarian wishes to refurbish her collection. This method also serves to alert the assistant who is not familiar with those books selected for young adults and proves to be a guideline for the young people themselves. There is, of course, a basic collection
also, and these books may be designated in any way the agency
wishes.

Libraries and bookstores no longer have a monopoly on the distri-
bution of books. Neighborhood markets, stores and shops have racks
of paperbacks and bins of hard covers. They even use the old library
"read-in-your-spare-time" slogans. To compete and attract young
people, libraries must provide book collections and materials con-
current with youth’s interests, locate them expeditiously, and promul-
gate their ideas.

References

1. Campbell, H. C. Metropolitan Public Library Planning Throughout the
World. (International Series of Monographs in Library and Information Science,
2. Bulman, Learned T. “Young Adult Work in Branch Libraries,” Library
Trends, 14:436, April 1966.
3. New York State Library Association. Children’s and Young Adult Services
Section. Criteria and Guidelines in Planning for Young Adult Services in Public
Library Building Programs. New York, New York Library Association, 1966,
p. 10.
4. Standards Committee . . . of the Public Library Association. American
cago, ALA, 1966, p. 42.
5. Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults in Public Libraries.
Public Library Association. American Library Association. Young Adult Services
in the Public Library. Chicago, ALA, 1960, p. 15.
8. Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults, op. cit., p. 16.
9. California Library Association. Young Adult Librarians’ Roundtable. “Stand-
ards for Young Adult Service in California Public Libraries,” 1964, p. 3.
10. Wheeler, Joseph L. and Goldhor, Herbert. Practical Administration of
Library Service to Young Adults. Edited by Emma Cohn and Brita Olsson.
12. Ibid., p. 12.