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# Aspects of Main Library Administration and Management

JOHN F. ANDERSON

MISCELLANEOUS PROBLEMS of main library administration and management are gaining the attention of today's urban library administrator. Some do not have clear or easy solutions since they are a part of a large and involved issue. In turn, some of the main library problems are themselves interrelated with the local library operation. For years library administration had a passion for classical bureaucratic uniformity in service to all users, sometimes regardless of special need. With any rigid system of uniformity it becomes difficult to separate the parts from the whole. While the thoughts in this article purposely do not have continuity, they all relate to issues which affect the future of main library operation.

Any accurate description of a main library in urban America would have to include a list of services and functions which are housed in this large building but which are not directly a part of its public service function. Some of these operations are seldom evaluated in light of their relation to management of the building. Perhaps it is these auxiliary or total system operations, rather than other attributes, that make main libraries unique.

A listing of centralized operations in main libraries would reveal a considerable variety of functions, but certainly the most common would be the offices of the library administration and spaces for the technical services operation (purchasing, cataloging, processing, binding), for the building and equipment maintenance functions, for the storage of vehicles, and large storage areas for books and equipment. Growing numbers of main libraries provide headquarters for a multi-unit library system. Some even run museums, planetariums, and gift shops.

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John F. Anderson is City Librarian, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, California.

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Most urban libraries began with the main library as the only library building and it is natural that the total library operation be included in that building. A detailed history of main libraries would probably show few deviations from centralization of miscellaneous functions in the structure. It appears that there has been little questioning as to whether this traditional arrangement is best or whether there are alternatives which offer some advantages.

County libraries have long provided an example of how quite large library systems can be operated without a main library and have their administrative and support operations housed in separate facilities or within general government structures. It is probable, however, that these operations are out of necessity and not desire for a separation. But some similar examples are being proposed for urban libraries and at least two have existed for several years.

The Tucson Public Library moved its administrative offices to a new city hall in 1967. The idea was first suggested by a young city budget officer and it was developed with two motives: (1) the need for more adequate space not available in an old main library building, and (2) the desire to continue and enhance a growing partnership with the other city government departments. Response by library administrators ranged from curiosity to dismay that the administration had moved from "its natural environment." Success depends upon several factors, but proximity to other departments which have daily operational relations with the library and being close to city management certainly can be advantageous.

Librarians often have claimed to be little understood in city hall. Some administrators are reluctant to mix with city officials either through a general lack of interest in governmental affairs or because they lack training in public administration which might help them relate to this organization. If urban public libraries are to gain a higher priority level in government, their administrators will have to spend a major part of their time in the offices of governing officials. Visibility and proximity help ward off being ignored.

It may be that a combination of new forces will alter the concept of centralization of system functions into a main library. These forces may be the designation of regional library responsibilities calling for added space in an already overcrowded building or the insistence by city management officials that administrative functions be consolidated. The argument of "traditional environment" will not be effective any more than the thought that a superintendent of schools and his staff

must be housed in the largest high school. The present and future environment of urban library administrators is in the daily governmental processes, and if most of the action is in city hall, then proximity may be an important factor.

The separation of technical services departments from the main library has come either through lack of space or use of regional centralized processing. Lowell Martin's study of the Chicago Public Library suggests that technical services might efficiently operate in less expensive space than at the main library and might also provide the opportunity to employ non-professional staff from low income neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup>

The Dallas Public Library is planning a new main library and in its planning studies it is considering the use of two buildings: one for public service and the other to house administrative and supportive functions that will service the Dallas system as well as other library systems surrounding this city. The public service building would be on expensive downtown property, and the service building on less expensive ground.<sup>2</sup>

Communication lines are a constant problem. Separation of overall administrative services from a main library presents an added burden on this network, but no more so than the already existing problem of communication between branches and the main library. Most libraries attempt to break down the differences that build up in staff attitude and communication by rotating staff on short-term assignments or by orientation sessions and system-wide meetings. Communication lines are shorter between the library administration and main library staff when they are both in the same building, and daily physical presence is a reminder to the administrators of the actual importance of the main library and its staff.

The large urban library often operates a dual library system with emphasis upon reference and research at the main library and popular reading and information services in the extension agencies. The library administrator is left with a difficult task when the urban scene presents the dual challenge of more effective outreach to non-users and a vastly improved reference and research facility for an increasingly technical society. The pressure of limited funds with a larger block of urban core voters asking for relevant programming will help promote the concept that the main library be financed by other than the local government.

There are other forces that are bringing the use of main library financing to a head. An increasing percentage of main library users are from outside the library's taxing jurisdiction. Such central cities as De-

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troit, Chicago, Cleveland, and others have one-quarter to one-half their use from outside their tax boundaries. As state library agencies, with the help of federal funds, promote use of the large main libraries as regional resource centers, interlibrary loan increases and so do demands upon main library staff and resources. In these cases there is ample justification for outside support, and a number of states such as Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois give special allocations for this service. Others, such as California with its reference network projects in Los Angeles and San Francisco, are running demonstration projects.

The best key to financing a main library has yet to be found. Formulas on per capita support, unit costs, or percentage use all have admitted flaws since little has been done with cost accounting in library service. The "humanities factor" frustrates recent attempts to apply Program Performance Budget System (PPBS) techniques since no one knows, for instance, what is a reasonable cost for a reference question—perhaps the biggest and costliest service given by a main library. Libraries give walk-in service to all comers, hence the problems of accurate tabulation and assessment.

Financing the main library is not entirely an outside matter—there are conflicts on allocation within the system. The relative importance of main library and branch library programs complicate allocation of staff and materials budgets. Most systems continue modification of unknown formulas from previous years with little knowledge as to actual cost benefit factors in service from the main library or extension agencies.

Emerson Greenaway recently repeated his contention that main libraries in large urban centers be separated and totally financed by the federal government. He says that "these libraries should become part of a federal system with close cooperation and ties with existing federal and national libraries" and should be "available to all who wish to use them, regardless of place of residence."<sup>3</sup> In addition he suggests that the branch libraries be operated by the state library.

In the same spirit, trustees of urban libraries in 1971 organized into the Urban Library Trustees Council with the avowed purpose of seeking federal legislation that would directly benefit urban libraries. The Detroit Public Library has asked the state to finance its main library as a major library resource for the state. To date Hawaii is the only state which totally finances its public library system and it has integrated the organization with public schools and the normal state library function.

Before the library profession makes organizational decisions regard-

ing separation of main libraries for only reference and research it should know about main library clientele. Most libraries lack reliable knowledge about library users and the expectations of users and non-users. During 1970 one of the most extensive market surveys on a main library was conducted by the Arthur D. Little firm for the San Francisco Public Library.<sup>4</sup> This broad-based study had as its target the recommendation of suitable main library facilities for San Francisco. Despite staff and administrative emphasis upon the reference and research function of the main library and despite the handicaps of a building which discourages browsing and easy use (and at that time had no popular library), it was found that recreational reading, browsing and "passing the time of day" are significant areas of activity of the main library. A majority of users (over 65 percent) are within a family income bracket below \$10,000, and a considerable number of senior citizens use the facility.

The San Francisco study used a 5,800-person system-wide self-administered questionnaire and a 400-person interview-administered questionnaire at the main library. While the study had several missions concerned with recommending adequate physical facilities, its survey portion was designed to test expectancies by users and non-users.

Some findings pointed out that the main library serves an active population which needs specialized services for the middle productive years (two-thirds of the users are between the ages of 18 and 41). The majority of users are male, heads of households, are in the professional-managerial group (56.6 percent) and college graduates (60 percent).<sup>5</sup> With the exception of students (and college students are most likely to be found in the main library), main library use is predominantly personal for individuals of all ages (45.1 percent).<sup>6</sup> Recreational reading is the object of 28.9 percent (compared to 30.9 percent at branches), and people seem to prefer the main library because it has the largest book collection.<sup>7</sup>

When asked for priorities for spending additional tax dollars, respondents in San Francisco listed more new materials (62 percent) as first choice, followed by improved operations, additional staff, and lastly, a new main library. This ranking with facilities at a low priority level would appear to support the findings by Carol Kronus in a study of public libraries by the University of Illinois Library Research Center in 1968. A probability sample of 2,031 Illinois adults were asked two questions about their voting support on raising tax rates for libraries. Kronus states that "one of the most striking findings is the reluctance of the

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community to support tax increases for new or larger buildings in contrast to their support for better service."<sup>8</sup>

The San Francisco study summarizes user expectancies thusly, "The users of the library are practical and serious in their hopes for improvement. They want to be able to do specific type of study and research in an atmosphere that facilitates study. They want its resources, especially non-book materials, to be more readily available; and they are less concerned about such conveniences as food service and elimination of stair climbing and elevator use."<sup>9</sup>

An attempt was made to reach the non-user in the San Francisco survey, since 91 percent of persons over 60 years of age do not use the library, nor do 92 percent of persons in the blue collar, service, and sales and clerical categories.<sup>10</sup> The study indicated that the main library failed to act effectively as a branch library for its own neighborhood, even though a considerable portion of its use was casual. This may well be the dilemma for the staff of many main libraries—how to carry out a divided program of city- or area-wide reference and research and serve the neighborhood, particularly the non-user.

Some of the citations provided on the San Francisco study would indicate that main libraries serve a variety of active clientele who use the facility for multiple purposes. While goals may indicate emphasis upon reference and research, the use pattern may indicate heavy reliance upon the lighter recreational aspects.

A question for the future may be whether the main library should be separated from the local system or whether instead a more concerted effort should be made to tie the branch library network more closely to the main library. In his 1960 survey of the Toronto metropolitan libraries, Ralph Shaw indicated that "a moderately serious user would find more material by using one of the independent main libraries in the metropolitan area than he would by using any branch of the Toronto Public Library."<sup>11</sup>

The Arthur D. Little study of the San Francisco Public Library notes that "one of the most important problems that every major public library faces is that of extending the strength of the central library's collections and services to the branches."<sup>12</sup> Relatively little has been done to utilize modern communication equipment to tie these systems together. In fact, a frequent complaint is the lack of adequate telephone lines for intersystem communication. If city library systems are serious about providing convenient access to all their resources, then modern electronic gear will be needed. "Telefacsimile can have a substantial

impact, particularly on reference services in branches. It tends to open up the possibilities of the reference department at central acting in the capacity of both a wholesaler and a retailer. It will also upgrade the level of reference service offered at branches. Closed circuit television and other developments in related fields are opening the possibility of extending their central services to the branches."<sup>12</sup> These devices are expensive and as yet not in high volume usage. The San Francisco Public Library through its federally funded Bay Area Reference Center (BARC) is utilizing telefacsimile and teletypewritten exchange (TWX) equipment with each of the area reference centers located in the regional library systems it services. In a similar project called Southern California Answering Network (SCAN), Los Angeles tied in its regional branches with TWX, as did San Francisco with its five largest branches.

The lack of effective use of electronic equipment between branches and the main library leads to another concern in the development of interlibrary cooperation. If main libraries are to become regional reference and referral centers, how are they to handle staff assigned to this task? There appear to be three major approaches: (1) use an augmented staff at the main library to fulfill this role with no particular differentiation of duties, (2) assign additional staff to the subject departments and have these specialists perform the necessary work, or (3) create a separate staff or department using generalist reference librarians who can use all the library's resources (and specialized staff) to answer questions.

San Francisco, in its aforementioned BARC program, has taken the third approach through the conviction that its special staff is less bound by departmental and institutional limitations. It is hoped they will more easily think of non-system resources that will get the job done and in the process build new information linkages. The systems librarian may be a new breed that does not concentrate upon subject expertise but develops a special technique for acquiring information. Los Angeles has assigned SCAN staff to the subject departments and they feel the operation is working very well. There appears to be no clear-cut evaluation on this matter, since much depends upon personnel involved and the general approach by the institutions.

The separation of reference center staff can create problems within the main library. The lack of assignment to public desk duty, the chance to experiment, the different work schedule, and the possibility of more exciting work (and sometimes more publicity), all tend to cre-

ate resentment. However, freedom from regular public desk routine can more readily allow for innovation and may stimulate new arrangements to be worked out with other resources.

In any meeting of urban public library administrators, the topic will usually swing to the increasing problem of security at the main library. No one seems to have an answer to containing the rise in mutilation and theft of books and the increase in anti-social behavior in the building. There seem to be no reliable figures as to the total problem or its rate of increase.

Administrators for years have felt that the absence of uniformed guards was in the spirit of the free public library. As problems have increased, libraries have added turnstiles, door guards, monitors, electronic/magnetic devices, observation mirrors, security alarms, and a host of paraphernalia designed to thwart the dishonest. Each has some effectiveness, but the problem appears larger.

Perhaps the urban library is facing a societal problem. Along with the usual portion of dishonest citizens, we now face the specter that many young people have accepted an attitude that it is moral to steal from a public institution. In 1971 the book *Steal This Book* states: "To steal from a brother or sister is evil! To not steal from institutions that are pillars of the Pig Empire is equally immoral."<sup>13</sup> The public library is listed as a place for free books—and it does not mean free loan. The library administrator faces the dilemma of how to keep costly books and other library material fully available in the true spirit of intellectual freedom and still end up having any of the material available or in good condition with such exposure. Library guards and investigative officers are becoming commonplace. The placement of security guards is not only an expense but adds a repressive tone. In Seattle the public address system in the main library carries an announcement every hour warning women to watch their purses.<sup>14</sup> While efforts continue to contain the problem, the economic strain on library budgets may force revisions in service policies which could become more restrictive in a time when intellectual freedom becomes more important than ever.

The main library will continue to have a special set of administrative problems, all entangled with the larger concepts of service within the community and the network. Whether the urban main library will grow apart from its traditional branch-main pattern will depend upon the joint pressures of community use, the shortage of local funds, and the relative value of the reference-research function.

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