

always been clear in recent years? Basically there has been a reluctance to establish such priorities, coupled with the twentieth century tradition of public library service which incorporates an "all things for all people" utopianism, with good will on the part of librarians individually and the profession generally.

Moreover, with regard to the collections, many librarians have adhered to that firmly established book selection principle which says that each collection should meet the needs of its particular community. These librarians felt that the "nature" of such collections could not be determined arbitrarily outside the framework of the individual community. As the country, like the world, has become smaller, however, as the population has become more transient, and as general social priorities have become clearer, there seems to be a growing realization that, in spite of some natural differences in varied urban populations, the scope of the urban main libraries may now have more similarities than differences.

Finally, the lack of confidence on the part of librarians to make decisions which will affect so many, to provide one service at the expense of others, to buy one type of book over another or even to defend previously made choices when challenged is a cause for the confused role. Only when librarians accept responsibility for such decisions and are accorded the right to make them by their clientele will (as an observer outside the profession has suggested) librarianship come of age and be regarded with the same respect as the more firmly established professions.¹

It is easy to be nostalgic for a period when the public library's mission seemed clear, that period when its primary responsibility seemed to be as an agency for continuing education. It was a mission, interestingly enough, outlined for libraries in the nineteenth century. In 1852, the trustees of the Boston Public Library made clear that the principal objective of the public library was to supplement the city's system of public education after the formal education had ceased.² So nearly unanimous was this philosophy that many of the urban libraries developed their collections with such a purpose in mind, their librarians being bookmen of a high order. When America was asked to accommodate large numbers of immigrants into the mainstream, those public libraries, molded into such an educational cast, were effective devices in attaining this end. Not until later did many public libraries begin to be diverted from their original goals. The question of the public library's role in the recreational arena, a role that assumed great impor-

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tance later and that extended its tentacles into the whole book selection and collection building process, assisted in clouding the issue. It was a role which at one time may not have been totally insignificant. Obviously as times change, so do society's needs.

The 1960s and 1970s brought awakenings to the United States on many levels and to many institutions concerning important priorities. Staggering social problems confront the country, and few of its established institutions are being spared the mirror held up to reflect the strengths and weaknesses which may determine their future. The public library has not been spared this scrutiny. Eventually, public libraries, like the country as a whole, may regard this period as a watershed in their development. Decisions made and priorities established in these years may well determine the future existence of that institution.

As suggested before, there is evidence of signs of accord among a number of librarians, a growing consensus on the nature of the public library and, in turn, its collections. After 120 years we seem to be coming full swing. Evidence in library literature suggests that the educational/informational role of the library, with its reference and research potential, is once again being regarded by many as the most important contribution that the public library can make to society at all levels—economic and social.

The idea of the urban main library as simply a large general library is giving way to one with collections of special interest and depth. In the past, few of the largest public libraries held such collections. Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles were chief among these, in addition to New York. For too many of the other large cities, the main library collections were more in the nature of expanded branch collections—more copies of popular titles, and a wider range of new titles, determined largely by budget. A "hit-or-miss" approach seemed to characterize other libraries' acquisition processes, with extensive collection building of research materials as a minor consideration. Collection building as opposed to current selection, in fact, did not attract much attention, if the library literature is any indication. Even the major books on public library administration gave scant attention to the subject. Of late, however, much interest in the specific nature of the urban main library collection is expressed. Emerson Greenaway, for example, in a symposium conducted by the *Wilson Library Bulletin* in 1964 voiced the opinion that the future of the urban main library was as a research library, perhaps with an inter-

mediate central collection for other purposes.³ In considering the future of general adult reading, Peter Jennison has predicted that by 1980 central city libraries will be primarily research centers.⁴ Philip McNiff seems to concur. "The great public library," he says, "must do more than provide first-class general library service for the community at large. . . . The urban library of the future will tend more and more to undertake programs and services similar to those presently operated by national and university research libraries."⁵

Some important recent surveys of public libraries are helping additionally to define the nature of the main library collections. Lowell Martin, in his important survey of the Chicago Public Library, apparently agrees with the research concept. "*The central collection of the Chicago Public Library*," he recommends, "*should be rapidly built up into a resource at the advanced collegiate and specialized levels, equal to the demands of a major city and metropolitan center. . . . [and] should assume responsibility for research resources in a few selected fields not covered elsewhere in the Chicago area.*"⁶

Lee Ash, a notable bookman, in his model collection survey of Toronto Public Library's Central Library supported the hypothesis of that library's administration "that the Toronto Public Library must take responsibility to provide publicly accessible reference and information materials, including nonbook research materials, such as would be used to support study through the first level of graduate education, the Master's Degree in some fields and even beyond in other fields."⁷

In his 1967 survey of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center, Harold Hamill placed considerable emphasis on the inadequacies of that library's main library collection. With additional concern for the research potential of the urban main library, Hamill said: "At the present time, with the exception of the business and technology collections, the Memphis library system has not achieved in its main library the strength and depth that it should offer a great American city."⁸ Hamill recommended the development of the main library collection as a major immediate goal, a recommendation adopted by that library as a primary objective in the 1970s.

The movement away from the concept of the urban main library as simply a large general library has been the result of a number of factors. Subject departmentalization of most of the urban main libraries since World War II has contributed to the idea of special collections in subject areas. The "student problem," so talked about in the 1960s is another factor, a "problem" which often arose from the inadequacy of

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the resources. These students and other urban groups are looking increasingly to their libraries for stronger resources and not finding them. Mary Lee Bundy's library user survey in Maryland indicated wide-scale client disappointment with the level of Maryland's public library resources, including that of such an established collection as the Enoch Pratt Free Library's central library.⁹

It has, moreover, been discovered that in an urban community where it is well developed, the main library, doubling as a research library, serves a number of functions. Lowell Martin calls it the "flagship of the library enterprise."¹⁰ Not only may it provide citizens throughout the city with materials in depth, but it may serve also as an area resource. In New York State the principal urban main libraries are playing essential roles in the state-wide network operated from the New York State Library. In Toronto the main library of the Toronto Public Library was taken over by the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board in 1968 and is now the public reference and research library for the entire metropolitan area. A main library's reinforcement of its own branches, moreover, is significant. Those who have criticized the metropolitan public library branches as being weaker than independent libraries serving comparable populations forget that such branches are in theory bolstered by the large main library—a strong element in the systems concept.

On the other hand, the nature of the large main library collection should be much more than simply a larger version of the popular collection of a branch. Except for some of the largest public libraries, the distinction between the main library collection and the branches, except in size, has been slight. The New York Public Library, notably and historically, has made a clear distinction between the Forty-second Street research collections and the circulation department with headquarters at the Donnell Branch. In its acquisition policy the Detroit Public Library has suggested two distinct areas—the home reading services and the reference-research services—the latter being largely the province of the main library. The distinction has not always been as clear in other large libraries.

What are the forces that militate against urban main libraries assuming a larger role in their communities? As suggested earlier, one of the most potent forces is the librarians themselves. Some librarians lack clear commitment, are still primarily concerned with serving their present limited audience and with satisfying a popular demand that is sometimes smaller than estimated, but which has often assumed greater than actual proportions in the minds of the librarians. "If the public library

remains a middle-class institution, serving only the leisure interests of a small portion of the adult population," Allie Beth Martin recently warned, "then it is probably already on the path to its ultimate extinction."¹² That larger, and let us acknowledge, more important audience that any large urban library has as its potential—scholars, advanced students, independent researchers, those who require special resources for their business, professional, institutional, or governmental activities, as well as the information seekers at whatever economic or educational level—is sometimes minimally served.

A second major problem, sometimes related to the first, is the absence in some public libraries of librarians with the skills to develop collections of depth. As Lee Ash has observed:

Neither Toronto's nor many other public librarians are as a rule historically or antiquarian-minded. Their concern has traditionally been to develop abilities to anticipate the public's needs today and tomorrow, and to serve the public with the best of current fare.

.....
 Unfortunately . . . they seldom can be turned into book-oriented people interested in and familiar with the specialized literature of the past and current trends in specific fields; this is true no matter what the stereotype picture of librarians as bookish people may be.¹³

While it is not even certain that their university counterparts have such abilities, university librarians do have faculties with whom to interact, faculties who may make suggestions as to the collections' direction and who may give expert advice on the building of collections in their field of specialization.

A final very fundamental problem in the past has been the lack of overall institutional objectives. Anyone who feels that an intelligent identification of the nature of the urban library collection can be made without an understanding of the library's purpose will be misguided. Those who might be in the process of building a library collection, without first understanding what the collection is for, are merely squandering money which might better be spent on other urban priorities. In addition to providing overall direction to the institution, the objectives lay the groundwork for that cornerstone without which any collection building will suffer—the acquisition policy.

Few excellent public library acquisition policies exist to serve as models, unfortunately, although there has been much exhortation in the literature to establish such policy. To many librarians a selection policy means a statement that censorship is to be avoided, rather than a

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blueprint for development of library resources. Even Enoch Pratt's widely respected selection policy lacks some of the precision desired for a library developing its collections. Los Angeles's guide to the resources and organization of its central library¹⁴ can be of assistance in defining the purpose of individual subject departments of the main library and their collections. A combination of the best features of these aids with those of a policy as precise as that of a research library like the University of Illinois¹⁵ might be useful models for those originating a meaningful policy. The latter gives subjects numerical ratings of from one to five indicating the extent of collecting in those areas. It does not give narrative guidelines, however.

As with any vital policy, the acquisition policy of an urban library in the process of strengthening its holdings should be reviewed frequently in order to determine where progress has been made and when and if emphasis can be lessened in certain areas, depending on strength and usefulness of the collection.

Before formulating the acquisition policy it is essential, of course, to determine the status of the present collection. Like the acquisition policy itself, evaluation must be continuous in order to have an acquisition program that is alive and vital. Again, if one accepts the lack of evidence in library literature as an indication of non-action, then such intensive collection evaluation is not currently being practiced in public libraries. One notable exception is that undertaken at Toronto for Lee Ash in preparation for the aforementioned survey. A partial explanation for the lack of such evaluations in public libraries may be that public libraries, unlike school and college libraries, have no accreditation standards or accrediting bodies. In schools and colleges, numbers of students, curricula, faculty, etc., may be measured and at least quantitative guidelines may be suggested. Because of the differences in objectives of public libraries, however, each library may establish its own standards.

Collections may be evaluated in a number of ways. An excellent bibliography on the subject was published in 1971¹⁶ and a conference was held at Hofstra University on the subject in the spring of that year. Though not necessarily the most effective device, the checking of collections against bibliographies is one most commonly used. More often than not this kind of collection evaluation becomes one of checking the standard lists and bibliographies by the library's own staff. Reliance on such standard lists has built-in problems. The library that basks in the sunlight of its large percentage holdings from such a standard list may

be living in a world of delusion. Aside from the decision as to which lists are so-called "standard," the lists, as many have pointed out, have inherent biases and a limited timeliness.

A more reliable method of list checking is the consulting of special bibliographies chosen by subject specialists with regard to the needs of the particular library. Additionally, the checking of bibliographies attached to scholarly theses or state-of-the-art reviews can be a meaningful method of measuring subject strength. Such checking, of course, would suggest that those libraries that did so would be committed to considerable activity in the out-of-print and reprint market. Lowell Martin directed criticism at the lack of effort in this area in Chicago's Central Library.¹⁷ Lee Ash has suggested a close alliance of large libraries with antiquarian bookmen.¹⁸

Those large public libraries committed to retrospective collection building find themselves confronted with problems similar to those of other types of large libraries—dilemmas over the use of microforms, out-of-print searching, reprint publication, and other such questions. Several of these areas have received considerable coverage in the literature. Even reprint publication, which has provided some of the most perplexing selection problems in the last five years, has begun to receive attention.¹⁹ Librarians who have responsibility for building retrospective collections should familiarize themselves with the experiences of others in order to avoid the pitfalls.

No urban main library can or should acquire everything; its tax base will not permit it. It is unlikely that the public paying the bill will be content with endless duplication among types of libraries. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to build strong research collections in certain libraries, or where their use will be minimal. As much as possible urban research libraries should attempt to make their collections complement each other. A few years ago, Robert Grazier indicated various cooperative practices among different types of libraries in a community.²⁰ An excellent example of such cooperation between a university library and a large public library is the Joint Acquisitions Committee of the Detroit Public Library and Wayne State University.²¹ The urban public library, because it crosses so many lines, can serve effectively as the leader in its library community in cooperative acquisitions.

Whereas the development of reference and research collections with depth accompanied by concern for retrospective collection building must be the primary objective for urban main libraries, the continuing responsibility for current selection should be given due attention. The

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two activities should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Quality selection among the current publications remains an important overall public library responsibility, as suggested by Leigh in the *Public Library Inquiry* in 1951: "The direction of public library policy seems clear. Its distinctive function is to emphasize quality and reliability in current purchases rather than popularity as such; to make available the less accessible materials . . . to keep open a broad highway of free access to the more daring, more provocative, often unpopular current ideas, proposals, and criticisms, as well as the more generally approved materials."²² The main library's leadership in achieving such an objective in any library system cannot be overemphasized. The role of the main library in quality, current selection is of utmost significance, especially in those systems where the selections made by main library subject staffs form the basis for branch selection.

Leigh's recommendation of quality and reliability over demand in current selection suggests a tension present in public library book selection in the twentieth century. In her study of censorship in California which had broad selection ramifications, Marjorie Fiske found the public librarians divided into two groups, those committed to collections of high quality and those responsive chiefly to what they considered popular demand.²³ Those committed to the former share the impatience of one book selector who believes that "demand should not be the only reason for purchasing a book . . . that somewhere before they become book selectors, librarians . . . convince themselves that they have the responsibility of improving the public's taste instead of reflecting it."²⁴

Some librarians have attempted to satisfy the popular demand inexpensively by such means as rental collections, paperbacks, and other methods. For Toronto's Central Library Ash suggested a bookstore through which some titles may be purchased.²⁵ Such devices may become a necessity for those who, in selecting priorities, must place recreational service low on their list. Innovative methods, moreover, will free the libraries from duplicating materials to satisfy the crazes and fashions in subject matter which, according to Castagna,²⁶ seem to give urban librarians cause for concern in their selection. The attempt to satisfy such fads by duplication seems most often to cause main libraries to fail to provide more specialized materials, if the collection surveys are correct. University press publications, British and foreign-language materials, for example—major resources for current scholarship in various fields—have been particular victims of neglect in many

main libraries. Librarians selecting materials for adults fail to realize that they hold considerable influence over publishers in their selection. Children's librarians have long been aware of their power, and, accordingly, have had considerable influence in their area.

The responsibility for acquiring materials in varying format should be obvious. Increased publication in microprint as well as the growing variety of audiovisual materials calls for more criteria and guidelines for selection as well as standardization in format quality. The development of serial holdings, always an important resource for the research collection, will also undoubtedly call for decisions regarding paper or microform copy.

To develop important collections for urban main libraries will require money and time. Those embarking on this course, ironically, find themselves doing so in a critical inflationary period and in a time of serious economic crisis for the cities. Even those libraries, such as New York, Boston, and Pittsburgh, with well established collections, find that the continued commitment to strong main library collection building is an expensive operation. The choice between emphasis on branches and main libraries will have to be made by many urban libraries. There seems to be varying emphasis among cities at present. Dallas, for example, with a rather modest main library collection, budgets over three times as much for branch library materials as for the main library; Denver, with an already strong main library collection, budgets almost 25 percent more for its main library; and Memphis, with strong branch holdings built up in the 1960s, currently budgets approximately 40 percent more for its main library collection.

Replies to a questionnaire by the authors are organized as Table 1 and provide a picture of certain characteristics of selected main library collections such as the size of book, periodical, and audiovisual holdings, as well as amounts currently expended for main library collections. It would not be in order, nor is it the authors' intention, to compare the strength of libraries or to make valid interpretations of the statistics because too many variables and other factors which might affect the picture exist, i.e., methods of counting and extent of duplication. The table may, however, suggest simple relations between present collection sizes and main library budgets. Of the libraries surveyed, for example, the median collection size, excluding New York, which is unusually high, is 785,151 volumes. The median book budget size for main libraries, excluding the highest (New York) and the lowest (Louisville), is \$235,853. A noteworthy observation becomes evident

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when book budgets and book collection sizes are compared. While most generally larger libraries with established collections naturally have larger book budgets, there are notable exceptions. Denver, Memphis, San Francisco and Toronto, all with main library book collections under 1 million volumes, are expending larger sums in order to build up their collections than are, for example, Milwaukee and Baltimore, which have large established collections. The evident need felt by the aforementioned smaller libraries to build larger collections, coupled with the budget squeeze felt in many major cities, might explain these disproportionate expenditures.

Several other observations might be noted from the survey as summarized in Table 1. The need for developing audiovisual collections is, surprisingly, not felt by several of the libraries surveyed. Houston, Milwaukee, San Diego and San Francisco have no film collections at their main library. Houston does have an audiovisual budget for the current year. Louisville, however, a library traditionally strong in audiovisual service, with the smallest book budget and next to smallest book collection, has the largest film collection and an audiovisual budget one-half the size of the total book budget, reflecting a stronger emphasis on audiovisual service. The median film collection for the libraries surveyed is 1,650 films and the median audiovisual budget is \$32,500. All libraries surveyed maintained phonograph collections with the median phonograph collection being 13,802. The results of the survey undoubtedly indicate varying objectives and priorities that have been established by the libraries surveyed.

In summary, this paper has attempted to demonstrate the necessity of greater scope for urban main libraries; it has suggested objectives based on the educational and informational needs of potential as well as current users; and it has pointed to the need for dynamic acquisition policies which will take into consideration collection strengths and weaknesses and will apply systematic collection-building principles.

Institutions sometimes enjoy long periods of stability where the chief responsibility of their leaders is to follow the previously established patterns. In other times the most compelling need is to turn the institution in new directions. Those who now have the leadership of the urban public libraries are in the latter position. They must accept the responsibility for directing the urban main library to its priority role of a major resource for information and research in our urban communities. The need is there, but it will call for no small commitment to satisfy it. In assuming this responsibility, such leaders may very well move the

TABLE I
COLLECTION SIZES AND BUDGETS FOR MAIN LIBRARIES IN SELECTED CITIES

Public Libraries Surveyed	Size of Book Collection	Size of Film Collection	Size of Phonographic Record Collection	Size of Book Budget	Size of Audiovisual Budget	Size of Periodical Budget
Baltimore, Md.	1,132,065*	2,921	27,921	\$182,423	\$56,608	\$ 60,150
Boston, Mass.	2,608,326	2,897	22,104	\$564,457	\$40,000	\$150,000
Brooklyn, N. Y.	1,128,018	1,394	13,802	\$179,290	\$43,000	\$ 31,000
Chicago, Ill.	1,125,209	1,217	21,717	\$560,538	\$63,360	\$ 40,530
Cincinnati, Ohio	1,891,953	2,079	14,828	\$320,000	\$30,000	\$ 82,500
Cleveland, Ohio	2,550,365	3,016	23,665	\$393,697	\$51,500†	not reported
Dallas, Texas	454,215	2,669	9,269	\$137,000	\$35,500	\$ 41,000
Denver, Colorado	799,768	501	7,430	\$343,988	\$21,140	\$ 52,056
Detroit, Michigan	1,943,775	1,705	36,380	\$526,000	\$11,000	\$ 42,500
Houston, Texas	408,581	none	6,810	\$206,000	\$ 2,350	\$ 30,000
Indianapolis, Ind.	350,000	1,300	5,100	\$127,500	\$45,000	\$ 17,074
Kansas City, Mo.	784,812	1,261	9,859	\$246,500	\$18,500	\$ 35,000

Los Angeles, Cal.	1,439,996	2,200	20,152	\$296,000	\$47,150	\$ 50,000
Louisville, Ky.	391,966	4,500	3,000	\$ 49,000	\$20,500	not reported
Memphis, Tenn.	402,575†	510	6,636	\$273,000‡	\$45,000	\$ 42,000
Milwaukee, Wis.	1,023,371	none	34,867	\$124,170	none	\$ 57,000
Minneapolis, Minn.	785,151	1,986	30,000	\$226,706	\$40,269	\$ 23,405
New York, N. Y.	3,667,763	1,594	222,959	←—————\$1,571,821—————→		
St. Louis, Mo.	856,444	1,865	25,256	\$163,939	\$ 8,476	\$ 36,087
San Diego, Cal.	595,047	none	12,109	\$149,585	none	\$ 40,162
San Francisco, Cal.	724,002§	none	6,500	\$330,475§	none	\$ 80,000
Seattle, Wash.	725,656	1,287	12,813	\$149,430	\$10,187	\$ 28,171
Toronto, Ont., Canada	621,668	2,600	10,097	\$455,000	\$53,000	\$ 75,000
Washington, D. C.	537,320	2,582	22,251	\$135,029	\$26,132	\$ 29,419

* Including George Peabody Library.
 † Includes microfilm budget.
 ‡ Including Business-Technology Library.
 § Not including Business Library.

urban public library to its best days yet and to an era of indispensability in society's progress.

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