



Introduction

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THIS ISSUE OF *Library Trends* is the direct outgrowth of the work of the ALA Committee on Library Service to an Aging Population, a committee whose inception and accomplishments are referred to throughout these papers, and detailed by Javelin. The need for such an issue was first discussed by the committee at about the same time it formulated "The Library's Responsibility to the Aging" statement which appears in the Javelin paper. Both the statement and plans for this issue were designed to follow up on the ALA surveys of 1957 and 1959,¹ which also had been planned and evaluated with the help and advice of this committee.

How much benefit this issue derives from the lapse of years between inception and publication is for the reader to judge, but one striking fact must be pointed out—the issue comes on the heels of several key events—the 1971 White House Conference on Aging, the 1972 completion of Kanner's thesis, "The Impact of Gerontological Concepts on Principles of Librarianship,"² and the two-phase *National Survey of Library Services to the Aging*,^{3,4} which took place in 1971-1972. The interaction of these events and their significance to the field of library service to the aging is evident in all of these papers. One other publication which may well have as much influence as the foregoing on the future development of such services also is cited—*A Strategy for Public Library Change*. As Romani points out, the fact that a major study of the future direction of public library service includes among its recommendations the development of "service to meet the needs of the disadvantaged, the handicapped and the institutionalized, minorities, and the aging,"⁵ holds much promise.

No definition of "aging" was prescribed for the authors of these papers, but it is evident that the services and programs discussed, follow-

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ing the definition set up by the *National Survey*,⁶ are designed largely for the population 65 and over. It is also clear that these writers recognize that using the chronological base, though a convenient and entrenched practice, is essentially an arbitrary choice. The philosophy that underlies their work is better expressed in the definition offered by Clark Tibbitts, "the survival of a growing number of people who have completed the traditional adult roles of making a living and child rearing."⁷

Any discussion of library services for older people should be undertaken with the pertinent facts on the basic characteristics of this age group in mind, and here we too are forced to deal with the figures for those 65 years and over. Since the 1971 White House Conference on Aging and the changes recorded by the 1970 decennial census have served to focus attention on these facts, they have been cited in more or less fullness and with such frequency that a complete presentation here seems unnecessary. A useful summary and some of the implications for library service which may be drawn from these facts appear in the *National Survey*, and form the basis for the following.⁸

In 1970, there were 20,050,000 Americans aged 65 years and over. It is estimated that our aging population will reach 25 million by 1985—a 25 percent increase—and 28 million by the year 2000. This age group is increasing faster than the total population, and now constitutes 9.9 percent of the nation's people. From 1960 to 1970, while the entire United States population increased 13 percent, there was a 21 percent increase among those 65 years and over. In the same decade, those over 75 years old increased at triple the rate of the 65-74 segment of the population.

Persons 65 years and over are found most heavily concentrated in the metropolitan areas, where three out of five are members of this age group, with more living in the central city than in the suburbs. The proportion of women has increased significantly since 1950, now constituting 58 percent of the aging population, while forming 51 percent of the total population. This dominance is more pronounced among those 75 years and over. The proportion of Negroes is disproportionately small; in 1970, their percentage in the total population was 11.2 percent, but only 7.8 percent were in the group 65 years and over. Similarly, the life expectancy for Negroes is markedly lower than that for the total population.

The aging are characterized by low educational attainment, low lev-

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els of employment and income, and living arrangements in which there is more than one person in the household. Of those 65 and older, 60 percent have eight years or less of education. However, since the proportion of those in the 14-64 year old group having only this amount of education has dropped to about one-quarter of the total population, we can look forward to a continuing rise in the educational attainment of those moving into the older age group. In 1900, this group formed 4 percent of the labor force and 4 percent of the total population; now it has dropped to 3.8 percent of the labor force while it has grown to 9.9 percent of the total population. The implications for increased leisure time and reduced income among the aging are obvious; the figures here too bear this out, with the median income of the older person being significantly lower. Slightly less than half are married and living with their spouses; 80 percent of those widowed are females. 1969 statistics show that nearly 66 percent of all elderly women are not living with a spouse, as a result of the longer life expectancy of women and the tendency for men to marry women younger than themselves. The majority of those 65 years and over live in a family setting, but there are 25 percent who live alone or with a nonrelative, and 5 percent live in institutions. Of those not institutionalized, about 81 percent have no chronic physical limitation in mobility.

The *National Survey* emphasizes that, as would be expected from any age group composed of more than 20 million individuals, uniformity is not apparent, and as Romani points out, there are "innumerable variables." The research team draws the conclusion that library interest and potential use by the aging can be expected to increase in proportion to rising educational attainments, with older people making greater demands for both quality and quantity of service of all types and showing improved receptivity for programs designed for the aging.

A further conclusion is that the nonemployed status of most older Americans presents libraries with unique opportunities to serve their intellectual and recreational interests, but the researchers warn that anticipated competition for the leisure time of aging persons will require that libraries make their programs for the aging more attractive by improving program content and by employing greater imagination in program concept and execution. The need for a central reference facility for organizing and making available the ever more abundant and complex information for and concerning the aging is stressed, as are the information needs of gerontologists, social workers and others concerned with the aging. With lower income, less costly activities must be

sought; libraries, which provide one of the least expensive activities available to the individual citizen, need to remind these potential customers that their services are available without charge.

The foregoing conclusions will not come as a surprise to any adult services librarian who has made even a cursory study of the library's potential clientele and its needs, but are significant here as the work of an objective study team skilled in analysis but without training in librarianship or prior commitment to a philosophy of library service. The statistics do not, except by inference, deal with many key factors—sociological, economic and psychological—which should be considered in any discussion of the characteristics of the aging population. Germane also is Kastenbaum's warning, quoted by Casey, "We cannot formulate a final and definitive description of the personality of the older person."

Equally important to an understanding of these papers is a knowledge of the concepts of social gerontology which, whether consciously or unconsciously, underlie the services and programs they consider. These have been summarized by Kanner as follows:

1. The basic needs of older people remain the same as those of other individuals but the resources for satisfying them are greatly diminished in later life.
2. The value systems of an industrial society can adversely affect older persons. The emphasis on youth in our social environment, and the importance of work in establishing an individual's status are examples of values which contribute to second class citizenship for this growing portion of the population.
3. We are presently in a transitional period in which it is evident that cultural values can and do change. Lowered status has come with increasing numbers but with public enlightenment, and social action, the status of older citizens may improve.
4. Older people vary widely in their personal goals for "successful aging," reflecting not only individual life styles, but cultural and social influences.
5. Innate differences in individuals do not diminish in importance with aging. Therefore, we must be extremely careful when generalizing about the physical capacity, health, employment capability, or mental functioning of older people.
6. Physical and environmental factors continue to influence individual and group behavior of older persons.
7. Aging must not be classified as a form of emotional or physical illness. Physiological decline, however, is a concomitant of the aging process, and must be taken into account in designing services and programs for the elderly.
8. Social and psychological growth may take place concurrently with declining physical capacities.

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9. Patterns of personality organization and response tend to stabilize by middle age. They are susceptible to change, but radical alterations in personality should not be expected.
10. The potentialities of older people can be developed in many directions if there is effective freedom of choice and opportunity to pursue it.⁹

In the highly useful outline which follows the above, Kanner sets up five categories—Perspectives on the Societal Context of Aging, Social Life Space, Physical Life Space, Aging and Public Policy, Education for Later Maturity—and proceeds to relate them closely and logically to the statement of library purposes developed by the Public Library Inquiry in 1949.¹⁰ His rationale here should be of value not only in training librarians for specialization in services to the aging, but could provide stimulation and impetus for programming in the field.

Particularly relevant to library objectives is one further concept first formulated by Havighurst¹¹—that of developmental tasks. This concept states that maturation consists of a series of stages through which each individual passes; in each stage he must learn certain skills and accomplish certain tasks of living with some degree of success before he moves into the next one. That this is fully as true of the later years is something each generation learns for itself (e.g., one must learn to be a grandparent), but which is frequently not well recognized. Adapting to changed social roles, often mentioned as a primary need of the aging, falls within this concept. The role of the library in providing information and materials for the successful accomplishment of such learning is implicit in many of the programs cited in this issue.

It is clear that these papers have been influenced and enriched by Kanner's thesis and the *National Survey*. There are other common and pervasive elements. Certainly the 1971 White House Conference on Aging, while it did not have the seminal effect of the 1961 conference, emerges as a potential benchmark, seeming as it does to have resulted in a renewed concern for the aging as a responsibility of the library. The full extent to which federal funds have stimulated and facilitated the development of programs of service was not conclusively established by the *National Survey*,¹² but references to such programs abound here. In a period of federal fiscal austerity, further documentation of the effective application of such funds may be crucial to wider availability of training and demonstration programs, for example. In addition to the research described by Long, other areas for further research are implicit or identified—further information on creative educative programs, the use of bibliotherapy, and how physical barriers are

being reduced (and it is evident that they are).¹³ In particular, means for the identification of the aging individual as a potential user and the need for much more specific understanding of his interests and needs as distinct from those of other age groups come to the fore as areas for research.

There are, as well, significant areas which receive little or no mention in these papers. Some of this is by design; this is particularly true of education for aging, which was excluded in order to hold the subject matter within manageable proportions. It should be noted that Kanner identifies the middle-aged as among the target group of services for the aging, "since education for aging must take place during this period of the life span."¹⁴ This is another area which richly deserves further investigation and publication.

References to library standards are sparse, although *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966* includes "the senior citizen and the retired" in the listing of the individuals and groups with special needs which are (or should be) served by the library system, and details the services which these individuals and groups require: "ease of access, new techniques of service, specialized materials, staff with special competence, and financial support within or in addition to the annual budget."¹⁵ The importance of this specification as an influence on programming is difficult to overestimate. Other statements of standards bearing on services to the aging pertain to groups of which the elderly form a sizeable proportion, such as those in correctional, custodial or health care institutions,¹⁶ or those who are blind or visually handicapped.¹⁷

Other gaps in this issue are due to difficulties in developing papers on two topics, for which plans had to be abandoned. It was hoped that more material could be included on the roles and responsibilities of the various types of libraries. The roles and responsibilities of the public library are referred to often and are epitomized in the statement "The Library's Responsibility to the Aging" referred to earlier (although this statement was conceived as applying to all types of libraries). Services for patients in health care institutions are akin to, and frequently part of public library service, as Reed points out, but relating the current programs of university and college libraries, with the exception of the community college, to this responsibility statement is a somewhat unproductive task.

Relationships between the community library and community agen-

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cies and organizations serving the aging are scarcely touched upon. This can be attributed in part to lack of reporting in the literature; these relationships seldom exist as the sole examples of interaction between a library and its community groups, and may instead be part of a broader picture. In the second phase of the *National Survey*, a question was included which dealt with such relationships. Of the 858 public libraries responding, 438, or about 51 percent, reported that they maintained relationships with one or more community agencies serving the aging.¹⁸ This appears to be a minimal estimate of current practice. Also missing from the papers in this issue is coverage of the ways in which libraries and their staffs can exert leadership in meeting a wide range of the needs of older people. We may look forward to development along these lines as information and referral services based in libraries become more generally available.

Casey comments that Kanner's research on the frequency with which articles on library service to the aging appeared between 1946 and 1969 led him to conclude that "after a flurry of interest and activity in the late 1950s, there was a decline after 1961, with emphasis being placed instead on service to the urban disadvantaged and ethnic minorities." From the evidence of the fact that the Kanner thesis, the *National Survey*, and this issue of *Library Trends* have all been undertaken within the past three years, her hope that this decline in concern is only temporary is becoming a reality. Together these publications constitute a cluster of benchmarks. Library service to the aging has not so much declined as it has been submerged in concern with the pressing needs of groups in which the elderly may be found in large numbers—many of them the very people whom the library has not previously been able to find and identify. Fresh approaches, a new flexibility in the choice and use of materials, and a new awareness of the need for specialized training in service to the older person—all these point to the development of services which will be more firmly based in the library's total program, and which eventually will be recognized as the responsibility of all types of libraries. Romani, quoting Eklund, identifies one of the older person's greatest needs as "a search for purpose in life." A primary goal of those concerned for the aging should be to see that libraries are recognized as a major source for help in this search, and that access to reading and to those library materials which can be so vital to the well-being of the older person is within the reach of all the community's elderly people.

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