



## *Introduction*

HOWARD W. WINGER

THIS COLLECTION of papers on American library history was planned to help commemorate the one hundred years of development that has occurred since the founding of the American Library Association, the publication of the report on libraries by the U.S. Bureau of Education, the origin of the *Library Journal*, the publication of Dewey's decimal classification, the publication of Cutter's rules for a dictionary catalog, and the signal acceleration of American scholarship marked by the founding of Johns Hopkins University—all events of 1876.

The organization of this collection has aimed at a comprehensive view of what American librarians and libraries were thinking and doing. The problem of such an organization is the problem of any attempt at historical summary: among events that are complex and have different degrees of acceleration, what do you choose? Furthermore, since summary accounts depend on previous work, the bibliography of American library history becomes a part of the problem. A very large number of original histories about American libraries have been written, some for the period under review, but no general history has been written which an editor can consult for an outline. American library histories in large part are a collection of special studies carried out by too few students in pursuit of an academic goal, and left to hang on the vine. They include histories of particular libraries, of a kind of library in a particular time and place, of particular aspects of service and of the profession, of biographies of outstanding librarians, etc. John Colson has enumerated twenty-six such categories, to which he adds "and other."<sup>1</sup>

One cannot say, of course, that the specialized studies that have been completed failed to affect the organization of this volume. For one thing, many of the historians responsible for the production of previous histories were enlisted to contribute papers. However, since

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their earlier research was appropriately concentrated on narrower questions, they had to recast their thoughts on a broader scale, because the plan of organization adopted for this volume aims at a straightforward account of events without a rigorous development of hypotheses.

The first section deals with the setting, including a paper on the writing of library history, in order to acknowledge historiographical trends which the editor tried to ignore in his major outline. The spread of libraries, the growth of collections, the system of statistical reporting, and the development of library buildings follow as integral aspects of the setting.

The second section deals with the library profession, including education, associations, the library press, the generalized characteristics of the librarians, and some points of contact between librarians in the new world and the old.

The third section includes four papers on the development of various aspects of bibliographic organization. The comparatively heavy emphasis given in this section reflects the editor's view that bibliographic organization is the quintessential task of the librarian and that the revolutionary changes now underway have a basis in the developments of the past century.

The final section attempts to recount developments in aspects of library service for different kinds of users—children and young people, the college and university users, the general adult public, and the specialized users in nonacademic settings. These are large topics to handle, and some readers may regret the lack of planning for special papers on reference, extension, service to the handicapped, incorporation of media, types of institutions and other aspects that have a long history of development. These are important, even massive topics, but they did not fit into the organization adopted.

The reader will notice the lack of paper on the development of financial support for libraries, a crucial aspect of the physical setting. This is a complex question, involving legislation, appropriations, expenditures of a wide range of public and private bodies, and large and small philanthropy. One can reasonably hypothesize that support has increased both absolutely and relatively during the past one hundred years. For this, the support of public libraries from 1960 to 1975 is instructive. Per capita support for public library systems serving populations of 100,000 to 150,000 (1960) and populations of 100,000 to 199,000 (1975) multiplied 4.3 times<sup>2</sup> for an annual compounded rate of 9.5 percent, higher than the annual rate of inflation.

## *Introduction*

Yet these larger funds were adequate to support neither the task appointed nor the task envisioned. Herman Fussler has painted a graphic picture of increasing support and simultaneously increasing needs in research libraries of the present day: "Despite rapid increases in expenditures, the typical research library is visibly hard pressed, and is not presently in a strong position to respond, either qualitatively or quantitatively, to additional burdens or new demands."<sup>3</sup>

Part of this feeling of inadequacy comes from the pressures of a society that is increasingly dependent on information and on librarians' efforts to respond to new needs. One may beat the inflation of the dollar, but to this must be added the cost of greatly accelerated production of records and society's increased dependence on greater access to them. Not only do materials increase in price, but more and wider varieties of materials are demanded. Not only have the salaries of librarians increased, but more librarians are needed. Librarianship, to the delight of most who labor at it with love, remains a labor-intensive enterprise, and it is difficult, considering expanding needs, to foresee a time when libraries, like automobile companies, can meet production requirements with reduced numbers of workers. It is a glory as well as a frustration of librarianship that vision exceeds reality. This characteristic epitomizes the last century and, it is hoped, will direct the next.

Before concluding, one more comment must be made about the irregular progress of developments. Although the subject of this volume is one hundred years of library history, events did not occur and ideas did not surface at regular intervals on a yearly basis. Some authors found it desirable to begin earlier than 1876; others began their serious accounts at a later date. All, of course, devote more attention to some years than others. Sometimes these emphases are contingent on the availability of records. Such is the nature of history.

Finally, a personal word from the editor seems appropriate. My thanks go to all the contributors who labored with such diligence and such skill to deliver their papers at the appointed time, and my admiration goes to Arlynn Robertson and the *Library Trends* staff for their skill and care in preparing the manuscripts for the press and seeing them through it.

## **References**

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HOWARD W. WINGER

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3. Fussler, Herman H. *Research Libraries and Technology*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 22.