

Trends in Public Library Buildings

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WARNING: TRENDS, LIKE BEAUTY, may be in the eye of the beholder rather than a demonstrable fact. Therefore, the trends discussed here are those the writer perceives from his own vantage point, rather than conclusions rooted in a comprehensive survey of current public library construction such as Harry N. Peterson made to support his article "Developments in the Planning of Main Library Buildings," published in *Library Trends* in April 1972. Instead, evidence, such as it is, has been derived from participation in numerous building projects and discussions with peers. Whether the trends described here are of more than passing significance we leave open for the reader—or history—to decide. Let us begin with a few general observations about trends in public library buildings. Then we can look at what appear to be more specific trends and their causes.

Building Activity

Public library building activity has gone through a period of ups and downs since *Library Journal* began recording the number of projects reported in its annual survey published in the December 1 issue each year. This record is shown in table 1. Unfortunately, the record does not go back into the decades of the 1950s and 1960s when building activity seemed to be even higher. Nonetheless, the table clearly indicates the swings in numbers of projects. To some extent these must be related to general economic conditions. A case might also be made for

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the impact of LSCA Title II funds which has certainly sparked the hope for many library projects. In some instances construction may have been triggered when available funds became sufficient for remodeling and/or expansion but not enough for a new building—especially when site costs have to be considered. What other forces may be at work and whether there is a natural cyclical rhythm will be left to others to decide.

TABLE 1
RECORD OF PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING PROJECTS, 1968-1985

<i>Year</i>	<i>New Buildings</i>	<i>Additions & Remodeled</i>	<i>Total</i>
1968	191	68	259
1969	214	84	298
1970	191	85	276
1971	148	60	208
1972	139	52	191
1973	96	47	143
1974	121	74	195
1975	125	87	212
1976	187	90	277
1977	142	69	211
1978	135	83	218
1979	168	112	280
1980	94	63	157
1981	74	59	133
1982	92	76	168
1983	54	42	96
1984	48	63	111
1985	96	109	205
Totals	2315	1323	3638

Source: Compiled from data in the annual "Architecture" issue of *Library Journal*. The data has been taken from the summary table appearing in recent years as a five or six year cost summary. These tables are not entirely consistent year to year due, perhaps, to corrections or other modifications.

Whether the sudden rise for 1985 data from the depressed figures of the early 1980s will be sustained remains for future statistics to prove. The fact that there is a major backlog of demand for adequate public library facilities has been well documented in recent years with such figures instrumental in reinstating LSCA Title II funding. Surveys such as that made by Richard Hall in 1981 and reported in various places including the *ALA Yearbook 1982*,¹ place this pent up demand at more than 2900 projects for the years 1981-85 with a construction cost of

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\$2,337,628,040. At the current rate of construction, the potential number of public library building projects is being increased annually, rather than lessened.

Financing Public Library Buildings

Not too long ago, most public library building projects were funded from local tax sources through referenda or other means. The trend for the last decade or more has been away from this single source. For one thing, legislation fixing tax limits has been passed in many states which makes financing by referenda difficult or impossible. Creative financing, with all the variations such innovative efforts produce, is increasingly employed. Reading through the reports on "Buildings" in the *ALA Yearbook*² for the past decade reveals that numerous ways have been found by communities to fund library building projects. And still the search goes on.

Perhaps no single factor has had greater impact on making library building dreams come true in many communities than the availability of LSCA Title II funds. After a lapse of several years, the Title II funds were reinstated in 1983 as one means of combating unemployment in construction across the country. Though funds were limited and provided in most states on a matching basis, the stimulation was immediate. Since the initial entitlement of \$50 million, succeeding years have seen the funding reduced to \$25 million³—but still sufficient an incentive to encourage active planning for library facilities in many communities which would otherwise have had little or no hope.

There has also been a gradual trend toward the provision of library building funds at the state level. Though still a part of only a few state budgets, more states are added to the list annually. Further, the results in these states has been such that in several instances funding has been steadily increased. Barring severe economic disruption, this trend may continue with profound effect on the rate of public library construction. Parenthetically, the introduction of state funds has been accompanied by renewed interest in programming and planning procedures. To manage the surge in construction, state library agencies dispensing state funds for library buildings have formulated regulations and employed staff to make certain that specific guidelines and standards are followed. This will also have a long-term effect—it is hoped a beneficial one—on the quality of new public library buildings in those states.

The Post-Carnegie Design

Perhaps the most easily observed and universal direction in public library architecture is the continuation of the post-Carnegie library building trend away from a ubiquitous, easily identified styling for public library buildings. Whereas the Carnegie library building, with its half-story basement and broad exterior staircase, was once synonymous with the public library building in hundreds of towns and cities across the country, contemporary public library structures come in all shapes, sizes, and designs.

In contrast to the familiar library building of the Carnegie era, many of today's public library buildings share with other types of structures the architectural vogues of the day including atriums, water features, and skylighted areas. Nor does there appear to be any visible force present or on the horizon to reverse this trend to an increasing diversity in architectural styling. In part, this may be due to the fact that no national standards or guidelines have been formulated to take the place of "Notes on Library Buildings" that James Bertram, Andrew Carnegie's indefatigable private secretary, wrote to guide a generation of librarians and architects in library building design.⁴

Whether today's architectural styles are more satisfactory than those of yesterday may be open to some question. Most new public library buildings claim to be "inviting" and efficient. However, since these terms are applied to such a variety of styles, it seems unlikely that all have attained these goals equally. A broad survey of user opinion on public library buildings might be indicative of the elements most appreciated. Of course many library users are familiar with only the one or two public library buildings they frequent and have a limited basis for comparison. Even a post-occupancy building survey of librarians and architects might be illuminating, provided such a study were to be initiated after enough time had passed to allow for reality to set in and mistakes to surface. At this point the merits of architectural design must be based on the evaluation of individual library buildings rather than on the genre.

Locating Public Library Buildings

To begin with, is there a recognizable trend in the locating of public library buildings? Has Joseph Wheeler's admonition been followed to place public library buildings in areas of high foot traffic or prime commercial use?

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The importance of foot traffic for main public library buildings seems to have been replaced almost universally by the need for off-street parking. Few public library building projects are proposed today without some provision for parking. In fact, convenient vehicular access and parking stands high on the list of priorities for selecting a public library building site. For many library users, this may, indeed, be the most significant factor affecting their use of a public library facility. However, foot traffic remains important when locating a branch library in or near a shopping center or a main library in a downtown area.

The issue of location, especially for main library buildings, has been compounded by factors such as traffic, parking, competition for commercial property, and the limited availability of suitable commercial locations in many communities. A few libraries have succeeded in acquiring a commercial site by becoming a part of an urban renewal project. However, this is far from a trend. Making public library buildings part of a civic center complex continues to be the siting determinant for some public libraries. Again, librarians lack evidence as to the effect—good or bad—that such locations may have on library usage.

During Joseph Wheeler's career, most downtown areas were retail centers and placing the public library building in the midst of stores which attracted a large portion of the population for shopping seemed to make sense. However, with the movement of retail businesses into suburban shopping centers, downtown is more likely to be either dying or converted to office use—and much less a magnet drawing the general population to the urban center. In other words, the logic for Wheeler's premise appears to have changed. Locating the main public library building is no longer the relatively simple chore of finding a suitable downtown site. More important today, it seems, is finding a location which is convenient for access by automobile.

When an entirely new site must be acquired, the choice is likely then to go to a location that is on the fringe of the business area where sufficient land for building and parking can be purchased for whatever is deemed to be a suitable price. Finding such a location which also provides easy access to automobile traffic and high visibility appears to have emerged as primary site selection criteria in many situations. If there is a trend in public library location, perhaps this is it.

Perhaps it should be noted that the development of the suburban shopping center has had somewhat the opposite effect on the location of branch library buildings. Whether housed in separate structures or in storefronts within the shopping center, many libraries find that the neighborhood shopping center is a choice site for branches. In a way,

Wheeler's advice on location seems to still have validity for branches if not for the main library buildings.

Expansion and Remodeling of Existing Buildings

One of the most pronounced trends in recent years is that of expanding existing library buildings rather than constructing new facilities—especially main libraries. Looking at the preceding table it is interesting to note that in spite of the variation in numbers of total projects, there has been a gradual swing toward the expansion and remodeling of existing buildings. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, expansion and remodeling projects generally numbered less than 30 percent of the projects reported. This ratio grew over the last decade, and for the past two years remodeling and expansion have accounted for slightly more than 50 percent of the projects.

A number of reasons can be offered for this trend. Many of the buildings in question were designed in the 1950s or 1960s with provision for expansion. Having run out of space, they are now exercising this option. With building costs now several times that of the original structure, this is an attractive course to follow, especially if there was foresight to acquire the necessary property needed for expansion and for any additional parking.

Building costs alone are dictating the choice in some instances where space needs can be met—at least temporarily—with an addition and remodeling that represents a fraction of the cost of an entirely new building. Occasionally this alternative is selected because an equivalent site is unavailable—or moving the library to another location might provoke public outcry. Whatever the reasons, it is almost certain that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.

Conversion of Other Structures to Public Library Use

A definite trend has emerged in the past few years to conserve existing buildings by converting them to new uses. Public libraries in serious need of space are often deemed good candidates to rescue such structures from oblivion. Buildings converted to public library use represent a wide variety of previous occupants ranging from post offices to schools, garages, banks, and retail stores.⁵ Some of these conversions have resulted in reasonably effective quarters for public library service. However, the cost is not always much less than that for an entirely new structure. This is especially true where the existing structure must

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undergo major change to meet current building codes. Still, by taking advantage of the opportunity to better their situations, some public libraries are enjoying buildings that may be somewhat larger and better suited to their needs than their former quarters. As the number of structures available in many communities for such conversion increases, and as the cost of new construction continues to rise, it is expected that public libraries will more frequently face the prospect of converting a building that was designed originally for an entirely different purpose.

The Size of Public Library Buildings

Perhaps one of the more significant trends that seems to be emerging in recent years is related to the size of the public library building. Whether a main library or branch, the new structure is apt to be somewhat larger in terms of square foot per capita than its predecessor. This in spite of the continued presence of the "Wheeler-Githens Formula" and the .55 square feet per capita rule of thumb that has been so influential over the years. Many public library buildings now range from .75 square feet to more than 1 square foot per capita.

Obviously, there are many reasons for an increase in this ratio of space to population. Book collections grow faster than before as the publishing output increases to cover all the facets of life affected by the continuing knowledge explosion. And make no mistake, books and other printed matter are still the public library's primary commodity and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Microform has had a limited effect on reducing space needs and in many libraries constitutes a separate resource supplementing rather than replacing printed copy. New media and the equipment to utilize these nonprint formats are taking up additional space. Automated systems have shuffled work flow and procedures but have not reduced overall staffing requirements in most libraries. To the contrary, automation has resulted in larger and more complex workstations with sophisticated space and environmental requirements.

Public libraries tend also to provide a more relaxed environment in their new buildings by emphasizing individual seating and lounge furniture rather than the regimented study tables of yore. Such arrangements require more space. Further, public library buildings frequently include meeting rooms ranging from a simple conference room with seats for a few people to multipurpose and theater type rooms that seat several hundred for library programs.

Additional space is required also for equipment that is a product of today's technology—copy machines, personal computers, and video-cassette players, for instance. (Incidentally, we have yet to see what the optical disc in all of its applications will do to space requirements. While there are still advocates of “the bookless library,” it seems doubtful that such a thing will become a reality within the next several decades.) As the evolution in media and communications technology continues, the trend toward larger per capita allotments of space is apt to continue.

Public Library Architecture

Turning to public library architecture itself, what trends can be detected there? As noted in a preceding section, there is no single, distinguishable architectural style emerging for public library buildings, even in cities and counties where a number of branches have been constructed over a short span of years. Instead, there is the continuation of a great variety in public library architecture. This has resulted in buildings ranging from very good to extremely bad—with far too many of mediocre quality. Only a few public library agencies have experimented with a standard functional layout. Most seem content to rely on the architect's ingenuity in designing each structure.

While architectural styling sometimes is in response to the library building's neighbors and to the community it serves, all too often the designer's goal seems to have been the creation of a modern architectural “statement” (more commonly known as a monument). Such buildings are apt to incorporate the design fads of the moment which all too quickly become the wearisome and redundant clichés of tomorrow; glass block seems “in” this season, for example. Sometimes this styling is the result of a desire to be among the first in a given locality to employ new materials or structural systems, forcing the library functions to adapt as best they can.

Flexible Space

Then there is the long-desired trend toward flexible space. For several decades now librarians have been admonishing architects to create buildings designed for the future with large, open, and flexible spaces. Use of a modular structural system combined with a minimum of walls, especially load bearing walls, seemed to guarantee achieving this goal. What has happened?

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In the early post-World War II era, Angus Snead MacDonald along with others,⁶ argued for greater use of modular design in library buildings. The module, or "bay" was a major point of conversation wherever library buildings were discussed. This is no longer the case. In the intervening years, the modular building has become commonplace. The trend in this direction is now a reality for all but the smallest library buildings. However, this is more likely due to the fact that modular construction has become the keystone to efficient construction methods rather than a result of urging on the part of librarians.

The structural module has increased only slightly in size as the years pass. Based on the three foot shelving section, modules are usually dimensioned to accept ranges of shelving without wasting space. However, structural factors and the cost of structural members seem to limit how large a module can be while remaining cost effective. Bay dimensions in the twenty to thirty foot range seem fairly standard; larger modules usually require a premium to be paid in construction costs. Any further breakthrough in modular design awaits development of new construction materials and methods that make a longer span economically feasible.

The trend toward greater flexibility has resulted in fewer load bearing walls in public library buildings. However, this has not resulted in space entirely free of barriers. Stairwells, elevator and duct shafts, if not properly located, may limit the freedom to rearrange library functions. Although larger modules reduce the amount of space lost to columns, librarians occasionally find this benefit diminished by oversized columns designed for architectural enhancement rather than limited to supporting the building.

Meanwhile, the word *flexibility* has taken on new meaning as public libraries attempt to provide appropriate space for nonprint media and replace manual operations with automated systems.⁷ Today flexibility means more than the ability to rearrange the contents of the library and to shift functions from one space to another to keep up with collection and user growth.

Flexibility is more apt to be defined as the capability of rearranging space so as to add new services, equipment, and collections in keeping with technological advancement. Thus the trend is seen toward public library buildings that have enhanced electrical and communications capacities with easy access to wiring for terminals and other equipment. Various systems for providing this capability are being used—each with its pros and cons. The substantial costs of these systems are contributing, incidentally, to the rising costs of public library buildings—a trend

that is not likely to be reversed barring a wholesale reduction in construction costs. A look at any issue of a major architectural periodical will show a variety of systems that public libraries might use ranging from underfloor conduit systems to flat wiring concealed under carpet tile. There is no clear front-runner at this time.

Lighting

Few aspects of library buildings are more important than lighting. This has been dogma for many decades as any reader of the literature on library architecture can attest. Yet neither the standards for library lighting nor the methodology have been stabilized. Candlepower per square foot had risen gradually until the energy crisis of the 1970s prompted the lighting engineers to substantially lower standards. Libraries had graduated from the bare bulb and pendant lighting to more sophisticated systems with greater output. The fluorescent tube had largely replaced the incandescent lamp. In the 1960s the luminous ceiling that provided a general distribution of light at a common footcandle level regardless of the task beneath was frequently employed.

Now public library buildings, like other structures, are subjected to the whims and fashions of lighting that include many of the previous types plus HID (High Intensity Discharge) lights which employ various elements such as sodium and mercury. Incidentally, because of its dispersion characteristics, HID lighting requires higher ceilings. This requirement, in turn, has had an impact on structure and the heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system. It is sometimes questionable whether the economies claimed for HID are offset by the higher structural and HVAC costs. Many library installations now blend incandescent, fluorescent, and HID lighting with each type serving a designated purpose. There is even a resurgent interest in using neon for certain purposes, though not for illumination.

In the guise of energy efficiency, lighting levels have been lowered by half or more in the past few years by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America which sets lighting standards.⁸ General reading rooms, for instance, were once thought to require 100 footcandles; they are now said to need 50 footcandles, or even less in some instances. Workrooms and offices have had similar downward revisions in lighting.

One of the more interesting developments has been task lighting to provide illumination appropriate for a given job supplemented by low levels of general or ambient lighting. Among other things, task lighting

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has been incorporated into many of the office furniture systems and forms an integral part of the workstation concept. While there are alternatives, the trend toward task lighting, at least for offices and workrooms, seems well established.

More controversial are the attempts to adapt task lighting to bookstacks. (This is not a new idea, by the way—merely one that seemed unnecessary when general lighting at the ceiling level could be elevated sufficiently.) One of the reasons librarians have given in the past for increasing levels of illumination is to avoid the uneven lighting in bookstacks and especially on the bottom shelves.

Architects, interior designers, and lighting engineers have devised a variety of task light solutions for the stacks. Generally speaking, the results have proven good except for two or three major drawbacks.

1. Task lighting of stacks usually requires some sort of structure to be attached to the top of each range of shelving. This reduces the flexibility needed in some libraries to relocate shelving and/or to respace aisle widths.
2. The structure used to attach stack lighting to the ranges of shelving tends to be either unsightly or so overwhelming in its design that it dominates the area.
3. Electrical power for each stack range must be channeled through the floor or from the ceiling. In either case, flexibility in rearranging shelving is inhibited and costly.

Because of these drawbacks, it remains to be seen whether task lighting in stacks will become a general trend—or just another fashion that runs its course.

Windows seem to have taken on a new importance in many library buildings. This seems to stem more from human need to see in and out than to enhance lighting—though claims for the latter are frequently heard. The admonition of yesteryear to preserve walls for wall shelving and to eliminate windows except for those above wall shelving height seems to carry less weight nowadays. Many buildings feature large areas of glass now made possible by varieties of glazing which reduce glare and noise. Clerestory windows appear frequently in today's public library building because of their ability to provide light to interior spaces without interfering with interior functions.

Perhaps the trend toward a greater use of skylights is one of the most evident fashions in current design. The values of the well-placed and carefully installed skylight are many and obvious. Unfortunately, not all are properly engineered with results ranging from glare and heat penetration to persistent leakage.

From the skylight and window to the atrium is but one step, admittedly a large one. This symbol of current architectural design has found use in public library buildings as well as in other types of structures. Letting light in is one of its vaunted qualities; controlling that light source is one of its headaches. While the atrium and all of its ambience is likely to persist for some time, it may be too early to call this feature a trend in library design.

Power

The public library building has proven to be an almost insatiable customer for electrical power. Virtually every improvement in the delivery of contemporary library service seems to call for more equipment. Making even an educated guess as to what the power requirements may be ten or twenty years hence taxes library building planners. Meanwhile, electrical engineers are at work devising new ways to deliver power including various kinds of electrical grids beneath the floor, flat wire, power poles from the ceiling, and other solutions. While many librarians enter the building planning stage with the assumption that a system is needed which can be tapped into wherever, whenever, and whatever the need, they are often stunned by the prohibitive costs associated with this kind of flexibility.

The alternative, which may be considered a trend, is careful planning to determine the areas most likely to be changed or expanded for staff and for such activities as circulation, bibliographic access, microform readers, use of nonprint materials, copy machines, online reference services, and other operations requiring power. The problem becomes much more manageable when bookstack area, which will probably constitute a third or more of the building, and reader space, which may amount to another 25 to 30 percent of the interior, have been eliminated. This kind of planning usually includes space for additional, future electrical panels as well as empty conduits stretching into all parts of the building.

Automation

Perhaps the move toward automating library operations, services, and resources is the most obvious trend in the contemporary public library. Regardless of size, main libraries and branches alike are apt to have a computer of some sort and, increasingly, are involved with automated systems for cataloging, circulation, and other routines.

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Technical service operations have been most heavily impacted by the growth of automated bibliographic utilities which have revolutionized acquisitions and cataloging procedures. The equipment required for such automated operations makes new demands on space and environment as well as power supply and telephone lines. Looking at the potential for automation, it is probable that the public library is scarcely over the threshold of adapting this new instrument.

The computer terminal, regardless of its purpose in the library, requires power and its screen must be shielded from glare. Many terminals require access to dedicated telephone lines as well. Librarians must determine whether terminals for staff use will be clustered or provided at each workstation—the trend seems to be toward the latter. Most terminals to be really useful need to be tied to a printer. With the introduction of relatively inexpensive and versatile printers, there is a trend to provide a higher ratio of printers to terminals than was first thought justified. This development means more space must be available at each workstation. Despite all of its advantages, the computer has not entirely replaced the typewriter in every work situation. Therefore, there is a tendency to assume that many workers will continue to require immediate access to both typewriter and terminal—a further expansion of staff space needs.

The advent of the public access terminal as a replacement for the card catalog is having a further effect on space and space planning. For those libraries which must retain their card catalogs until conversion is complete, extra space will be required with terminals eventually taking their place in the card catalog area. Additionally, the flexibility of online public access systems makes it possible for terminals to be placed wherever they can be useful to public and staff. This trend is apt to be much more evident in the years ahead as online systems become the rule rather than the exception.

The use of automated databases for reference and automated indexes for bibliographic searching has resulted in more space being required for reference services and for index access. In some libraries, database searching has been considered a somewhat private exercise requiring a separate enclosed space either adjacent to the reference area or in the staff work area. Whether or not this remains the rule may be questioned as some libraries begin experimenting with direct database access by the public rather than through the librarian intermediary.

Public libraries are also adding stand-alone personal computers—PCs—for public use. This has proven to be a very popular service requiring more PCs in many libraries than originally thought necessary. These PCs may run software supplied by the library or by the user.

To be effective, the PCs must be connected to printers. Facility planning for PCs requires attention to supervision, acoustics, and lighting.

For the library with its own mainframe, a sophisticated space must be provided for the central processing unit (CPU) and the staff that is responsible for its maintenance. Such rooms are new to public libraries and involve an investment in environmental control systems as well as additional space. Libraries which have shared mainframes with other agencies seem to be happier when this equipment is housed in the library building thus allowing full control.

Telephone

The continuing evolution in communications technology has resulted in a greater demand for telephone lines in public libraries. This trend toward more phone lines has been hastened by computers and facsimile transmission as well as increased use of telephone for traditional library services. Where one telephone once served the entire staff workroom, it is more common now to see a multiplicity of phones. In planning library buildings, it is generally recognized that it is much cheaper to provide for future telephone service at many spots rather than to incur the expense of such installations at a later date. Provision of telephone service has been further complicated by the recent divestiture which, among other things, has prompted new telephone systems that libraries may purchase and operate for themselves rather than rent from a utility company. Usually the public library will follow the lead of its governing body in this matter and no distinguishable trend has emerged.

Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning and Energy Conservation

As with lighting, the energy crisis of the 1970s affected heating, ventilating, and air conditioning because of its enormous consumption of power. The result was the development of more efficient HVAC equipment and the lowering of HVAC requirements by more careful selection of building materials, architectural design, and reduction in lighting requirements. New codes now govern energy utilization.

Energy conservation efforts have given rise to greater consideration of both active and passive solar energy systems.¹⁰ This has been influential in the design of a number of library buildings as a check of reports on library construction for the past decade will show. However, solar

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energy systems have hardly become universal and the current reduction in fuel costs seems to have lessened the major motivating factor for such systems.

While still anathema to many mechanical engineers, the use of operable windows has increased, especially in staff areas. No matter how much more efficient HVAC equipment may have become, it would be too soon to say that a trend toward HVAC systems that please a majority of the people—let alone all—has yet to be established. The wide variation in personal perception of what is cold or hot, what is drafty or stuffy remains despite improved HVAC equipment.

Fire Protection

Fire protection through use of sprinkler systems is still feared by many skeptical librarians unconvinced about the fail-safe improvements claimed for sprinklers. Nonetheless, it is becoming a reality in many library buildings because of more stringent building code requirements. These requirements are the result of increasing concern, of fire marshalls and building officials, with the threat of fire to libraries. Recent fires, including the two that have devastated the Los Angeles Public Library, have focused even greater attention on the potential danger and risk of loss to fire.

In most situations, the requirements are so mandatory that protesting them is futile and may be interpreted as lacking in good judgment. Better it seems to understand the variety of systems available and their individual merits so that the system with the least risk to collections can be selected. Fortunately, sprinkler systems continue to undergo significant improvement and offer many safeguards not present in earlier versions. Incidentally, the hope of some librarians that halon or some other gaseous suppressant might replace water has not materialized. Halon systems, particularly, are best used in small spaces with closed environments such as computer rooms and rare book storage areas.

Security Systems

Vandalism and other forms of crime are causing librarians to look at various security systems for protection. This trend is still too young to be described in much detail. However, when a new library is being planned or an existing structure expanded and remodeled, the added cost for most security systems is negligible.

Fire alarm systems with a combination of heat and smoke detectors are perhaps the most common form of security. Many of these are wired

directly to the responding fire station to avoid wasting precious moments in notification. Motion detection and other types of systems are being installed in some libraries to call guards or police when intruders break into the building. With the increase in incidence of life threatening situations for library staff, some libraries are installing silent alarms and other systems at public desks and at other vantage points. The public library building can no longer be considered to be immune from the fire bug, vandal, thief, or terrorist and the installation of appropriate security systems appears to be a trend whose time may have come.

Workstations

Comments in preceding paragraphs have alluded to the changes that are occurring in library operations which are altering the workstations for library employees. Most obvious is the incorporation of the computer terminal. A wide variety of specially designed workstation components are available from office furniture manufacturers to house this equipment in an efficient way. As a result, there is a trend to use these special pieces in addition to or in place of the traditional desk and typing station. These workstations tend to take more space than their predecessors, so the percentage of space devoted to staff will have to increase.

Circulation desks, reference desks, and other public service desks must also be designed for automated equipment. The acceptance of this fact will undoubtedly establish a new trend in the design of these desks.

Interior Design and Furnishings

The interiors of public library buildings seem less predictable than formerly. There appears to be a trend toward improved interior design in many libraries. Libraries often appear to provide a better atmosphere with more attention given to the needs of users. Furniture design has changed, not only that offered by the traditional library furniture manufacturers but also furniture supplied by other firms and adapted to library use. The result is greater comfort and better appearance. Incidentally, carpeting has become almost universal in its application, providing better acoustics as well as other advantages such as color and texture, lower cost of maintenance.

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Signage

Within the last decade it seems, librarians have become more aware of the need for good signage. While the hand lettered sign has not yet disappeared from public library buildings, there is a gratifying trend toward improved signage and graphics. The inclusion of programs on signage at state, regional, and national library conferences is evidence that librarians have an increasing interest in providing signs which are attractive, well-worded, and properly located to assist readers.

Branches

While most of the trends discussed earlier are equally applicable to branch libraries, certain trends in branch libraries deserve special mention. Like main public library buildings, branch libraries are growing larger as they attempt to accommodate more materials, users, and equipment. The 2000 to 3000 foot branch which was common following World War II no longer seems adequate in many situations. In urban areas especially, branch libraries are more often in the range of 5000 to 7000 square feet with larger branches of 10,000 to 15,000 or more square feet not uncommon. Larger service areas and collections of greater size and complexity seem to be more cost effective in many cases. From available evidence, it does not appear that the trend toward larger and more widely spaced branch library buildings has yet been reversed even though there are proponents of such a change.

Branch location, like the location of main libraries, is affected by many factors. However, the overriding consideration still seems to be placing the branch for maximum accessibility to the potential group of users. As noted before, such sites often are the same as those chosen for shopping centers. Therefore, it is no surprise that numbers of branch libraries in urban areas are located in storefront buildings in neighborhood shopping centers or on premises adjacent thereto. As long as branch libraries in such locations are superior in their performance to libraries located elsewhere, such a trend is apt to continue.

Space needs of some branch libraries have been further affected by the fact that they attempt to offer a cross section of the collections and services provided at the main library. In part this is due to the resistance of users to accept the branch library as merely a collection of popular reading matter. Instead they have grown to expect the branch library to offer a diversified collection—if not a comprehensive one—covering many subjects and containing a variety of formats and the equipment for their use. Thus in a growing number of branches, collections of

audiovisual materials are being provided as well as access to personal computer terminals.

Although there are no statistics to offer as proof, observation would seem to indicate that more branch library buildings are including meeting room space for library programming. Both small conference rooms and larger multipurpose rooms are provided in some cases. Sometimes these spaces are constructed as part of the library's strategy to cope with expansion in the future.

Conclusion

That there are trends in public library buildings seems evident. Unfortunately, space does not permit discussion of the many possible topics which may be of interest, if not concern, for the reader. However, it is hoped that this brief review will alert librarians and others as to the direction that seems to be taking place in the planning and design of the contemporary public library building. Many of the trends discussed here are positive and bode well for the future. A few may be considered as a warning that the librarian planning a new or expanded library building may encounter stumbling blocks on the way to the perfect public library building. In any case, like dipping the cup into the running stream, the trends discussed here will change with the passage of time as new events and forces beyond today's horizon play their role.

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