The Library Building Tomorrow

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The World We Will (May?) Live In

The typical American family will be gone by the year 2000. The traditional family—married couple with children—will constitute but 25 percent of the family types by that time. The average household will be 2.5 persons then, down from 2.7 people today. The fastest-growing household type is expected to be nonfamilies, defined as a person living alone or persons living together without being married.¹

Forty-five million jobs will be impacted by home and office automation by the year 2000. There will be but one worker for every two retirees. Machines will shove aside bank tellers, assembly-line workers, lumberjacks.²

Knowledge information processing systems (KIPS) which rely on the merger of new software and hardware will duplicate expert thought processes that lead to correct answers by weighing all the alternatives to a problem. This form of artificial intelligence is a national priority of the Japanese, with a goal of developing and marketing on a major scale these systems by the late 1990s.³

There will be thousands, perhaps millions, of persons without work, or at least without work in the industries that they have known for generations. Automation and foreign competition may have permanently displaced this country’s steelworkers, lumberjacks, farmers, and


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automakers. The trauma that we will face as a society will be significant as we strive to work creatively and in a human manner with these persons, persons who by-and-large only want the opportunity to work and produce for themselves and their families (if they are among that 25 percent).

There will be a host of technological changes. Ken Dowlin, writing about the future in *Public Library Quarterly*, ventures eight educated guesses.  

1. General purpose, interactive visual communications systems will be in place in most homes in this country by the year 2020 and will be a major competitor to the postal service.
2. The terminal will replace the telephone book.
3. Entertainment technology will continue to set the pace or level of the technology in the home.
4. Reference books will fade from the scene.
5. Most bookstores will stock only the bestsellers.
6. Homes will have computer printers that will allow you to retrieve information in print form without leaving home.
7. A form of electronic book will be commonplace. It will be portable, inexpensive, reloadable, and store large amounts of data. Libraries may transfer content to these electronic books over telecommunications lines instead of checking out books.
8. Libraries that do not use information technology to meet the needs of their user population will be relegated to the backwaters of their community.

**The Role of Government**

Government at all levels—federal, state, local—is struggling to come to terms with a difficult condition: the demand for an ever greater level of services in a time of declining revenues and resources available to the public sector for providing those services. Public officials who regard this condition as temporary are unaware of how strong is the public constituency for lower taxes. This irresistible force meeting this immovable object will have the eventual effect of redefining the very role of government. More today, and increasingly in the future, government will come to see its charge as not the provision of services, but as seeing that services are provided. It must be pointed out, however, that there are a good number of taxpayers who recognize the importance of libraries and are willing to pay for their continuation. As this article is being written, voters in the Atlanta suburban counties of DeKalb and
Cobb overwhelmingly approved bond issues for more library facilities. Central Arkansas voters (in and around Little Rock) passed a millage issue for that library system as did voters in the Eastern Oklahoma Library District and in all of the major tax district libraries in Colorado. On a nonlibrary issue, the voters in California firmly voted down Proposition 61, an idea which would have put a cap on the salaries of publicly funded officials—both elected and appointed—throughout the state.

This redefinition will likely take many forms: privatization, user fees, the selling or granting of public assets and franchises (often to the public employees now doing the work), closer cooperation with the private sector, and reduced regulation. A smaller government sector means a smaller government, fewer public employees, and lower taxes. It will also mean that those remaining government services will have to be managed more like private-sector, profit-making businesses.

A difficulty with publicly provided services is that they are free, their cost in taxes too indirect to influence behavior. When a resource is given away, it is overused and abused. The free market mechanism called *price*, is the more efficient allocator and distributor of resources. This includes even the basic economic and social resources needed to enhance the general welfare—water, power, transport, waste disposal, police, etc. In truth, when “everyone” owns a resource through public agencies, no one owns it, and it becomes either neglected or abused. Without a profit motive, the public sector can become inefficient, uncompetitive, open to favoritism, and inviting politicization.

Our highly complex, rapidly changing, technologized society must be tempered by “human” concerns that require fewer and simpler laws and regulations, not more, for the response to change should be adaptation, not denial. This will require more flexibility of us all. A new relationship between the public and private sectors is emerging. It will be a compromise between the complete separation of the nineteenth century and the pronounced intervention of the twentieth. Again, the role of the government will shift from one of providing services to one of seeing that needed and desired services are being provided.

Privatization, or the provision of services by private industry usually provided by government, is the most promising and fastest growing method of this redefinition of government. Many city and county governments find it is often cheaper and more efficient to contract out their responsibilities. And it is always more rational—it certainly makes more sense, for example, for a public court system to encourage litigants
to settle their disputes through alternative means (mediation, arbitration, rent-a-judge) than to overwhelm its own capacity. This development also promotes business and private sector employment.

It is at the local level that privatization has made the most progress in this country. There is not a single city service that is not being contracted out to a private firm somewhere, from traffic and crime control to landscaping, dogcatching, and firefighting, from the management of public works, cemeteries, parks, museums, tennis courts, swimming pools, and cultural centers, to even the actual administration of cities themselves.

The function of government in the future will be built around the belief that less is more. The current challenge for government is how to get from here to there. A major reeducation and reorientation in thinking is required on both the part of the public sector and on that of the private sector.

Will There be a Future for the Library?

Any look into the future of the library—academic, public, school, special—should first look backward a few years to see if the library is still in place. There has been much written the past several years about the demise of the library, especially the public library. The prophets of demise have already relegated the library as we have and do know it to the architectural scrap heap of society. At best the library will be a repository for seldom needed books and other "artifacts" of the last 200 or so years. Computers, databases, electronic publishing, etc. will singlehandedly or in concert serve to displace the library as a meaningful element of our society. Perhaps—but I doubt it.

Last fall F. Wilfrid Lancaster, the "paperless society" prophet, revised his prophecy. Ten years previous he forecast the replacement of print on paper by electronic publication. Since that forecast has not materialized (goodness, there is more paper now than ever and more print publishing than ever before), the prophet took stock of changes of the past ten years. Lancaster believes that his original forecast is on target, although he qualifies it now by stating that: "The replacement of print on paper is not inevitable." Society could, he writes, "choose to reject the transition." That means you and I and millions of other human beings could determine its own destiny.

Another gloomy library forecast, especially for the public library, was penned by Carlton Rochell. He suggests that the office-in-the-home theory will be commonplace by 2001—working, shopping, reading the
mail (electronic of course), viewing a movie—in short, almost any need met without ever setting foot outside the house. This development, certainly possible today from a technological point of view, will result in Lancaster's paperless society since print publishing will experience ever rising prices, resulting in fewer and fewer print produced journals, to be replaced by databases full of journals, with those remaining journals priced strictly according to the marketplace. Since there will be no need to house journals, then there may be no need for libraries—or at least library buildings. Rochell thinks that academic libraries may gain something from this development, but the poor public library will likely fade from the picture. Why? Because the principal office-in-the-home "owner" will be middle-class and a staple of the public library. Without a need to go to the library for information, this class of society will perceive no need to support the library, and without middle-class support, the public library may cease to exist—at least that is the conclusion one can draw from this peek into the future.

Allen Veaner speaks of "disturbing changes" that are developing much faster than anyone would have predicted. The online public catalog, electronic publishing, distributed processing, and the aggressive energy of the private sector into service areas heretofore the domain of the library, are the principal changes that Veaner believes will change the role of librarians if not libraries. Certainly the librarian's role is different than it was five or ten years ago—it will no doubt be much different in another five to ten years. A need for less library building space is envisioned by Irene Hoadley, director of libraries at Texas A&M University. Hoadley believes that the increased transfer of information into nonprint formats, especially commercial databases, will result in use becoming more distributed and decentralized, and therefore "there will be less need for users to come to a physical facility."

Librarians are people—real, live, human beings. So are the patrons (or, if you prefer, customers/clients/users/etc.). It is the human factor—the people who make up our society—that libraries are about. The human factor is the real future of libraries, librarians, librarianship.

**People Serving People**

While the future of libraries will be characterized by the continuing infusion of technology into all aspects of librarianship, there is a paradox: librarianship is made more important by technology and not less so. After all, the purpose of technology is to reduce or eliminate
unwanted, unnecessary human contact for the very purpose of increasing the efficacy of the wanted and necessary human contact.

Since libraries are, in essence, people serving people, not just institutions serving people or other institutions, libraries and librarians should be in close touch with what is happening among the people they employ and the people they serve in society. And what is happening is change in demographics, in life-styles, in work styles, in values and attitudes, in motivations, and incentives.

We have become postindustrial societies and economies—working in information, communication, or “knowledge” industries in services, or working in the professional, technical, or managerial fields. What most characterizes a postindustrial society are diversity and choice. And people are availing themselves of those diverse choices in the way they work, live, play, and shop.

Demographics

In postindustrial societies, employment opportunities for women are much greater, and values, attitudes, and life-style preferences more oriented to the individual. As a result, there is more cohabitation, later marriages, fewer children, and smaller families.

Among the consequences of falling fertility are rising average and median ages and, therefore, an aging population and work force. We are becoming middle-aged societies and will remain so—75 percent of consumers and workers in the year 2000 are already in the marketplace and the work place. A middle-aged society is politically, socially, economically, and culturally dominated by a middle-aged population; but we are redefining what middle age means. Increasingly, because of two-income households, working women, higher disposable income, and the “youth” of the 1960s and the 1970s becoming the “mainstream” of adult society in the 1980s and the 1990s, our perception of middle age will move away from “settled, comfortable, and conformist” to “adventurous and diverse.”

Life-Style/Work Style

The patterns of modern life are changing. Traditional distinctions are blurring between:

—what we define as work, leisure, or learning activities;
—what we consider the proper male or female role;
—what we view as buying, maintenance, or investment expenditures; and
—what we regard as legitimate management or staff responsibilities.

Project, for example, an image for the year 2000 that is common today but will be more so in the future—someone sitting in front of a computer or video screen. Where are they? They may be at home but working on their firm's latest project. Or they may be at work but playing the latest video game. They may be at the library, a school, a factory, in a bedroom, at an office, in a hotel room.

What age or sex are they? The person may be a young boy taking a tutorial (again, in a classroom, at a library, or home), an older woman checking the status of her financial portfolio, a middle-age man in some store checking a price list, or a repair woman consulting an expert system before starting a job.

Technology does not cause such distinctions to blur but does accelerate the process. As can be seen, however imbedded technology becomes in our lives, it is still just a tool meant to enhance the capabilities and possibilities of humans.

Libraries' response to these changes will determine their level of success as providers of information and services and as employers. There is great opportunity in these changes. With good planning, sharp marketing, accurate costing (and pricing too in some instances), and the correct mix of people and technology, libraries will become indispensable as informational intermediaries—both needed and wanted—to fit the various life-styles and work styles of the future.

Values and Attitudes

How best to characterize postindustrial values and attitudes? They are inner-directed—that is, not so influenced by society's traditional standards but by one's own inner standards (or ideally, some combination of both); and post-materialistic, not that material things are any less desirable, but that they are not enough by themselves without, for example, work that is meaningful and fulfilling, or committed human relationships.
The Future Information Marketplace

What does this mean for libraries in the future? It means that the marketplace for information and related services will be characterized by:

1. market segmentation along nontraditional division; households, life-styles, ethnicity, per capita income, technological competency, values, and attitudes;
2. well-informed citizens who want, presented with their options and choices, to make their own decisions. Not loyal to any one institution. Willing to be educated (as to the benefit of new services, for example) but not willing to be tolerated or dictated to. A demand for quality, convenience, direct and honest services;
3. diversity; more women, more ethnics, more seniors, and more affluents.

Successful library service in the past was based, to a degree, on convenience. Successful library service in the future will also be based on convenience—to a much larger degree. However, the definition of convenience has changed. Geographic location and wide distribution are no longer sufficient. Convenience is now also measured in speed, accessibility, acceptability (as in life-style compatibility), and high quality, flexible service.

Survivors and Thrivers

Which types of informational institutions will survive and which will thrive in this environment? Many, for there are many market niches to be filled—large, small, regionally based, nationally based, product based, and locally based.

The key will not be the size or even the location but the innovation in providing particular services geared to specific markets. These will be offered via a broad range of delivery systems with many available twenty-four hours a day.

Effect on Staff and Management

What does this mean for the employer-employee relationship? Just as citizens are fragmenting into new and ever finer segments, so too are staff. Therefore, the personnel practices, policies, and relations of libraries must become as individualized as the services.
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The role of management is changing from that of authorization to one of collaboration. Workers are coming to be viewed as human capital and as vital a resource as any technology and perhaps as the single most important component in any “business” strategy.

Managers must finally move their long-neglected people to center stage. Generous investment in basic training and constant skill upgrading are becoming “musts,” not options. The old organization was deeply hierarchical. The new organization is much flatter and composed of smaller units dominated by line operations. People with diverse skills, not specialists, are needed.

As for the new work force itself, it is true that security is not the motivator it was in the past, nor is money the incentive it was in the past, nor is fear of dismissal the threat it was in the past. But the work ethic is not dead—people will give great effort to an organization they believe in, or in which they “belong” (share a common bond with coworkers). The workplace of the future, therefore, is likely to be characterized by flexible schedules, decentralization of authority, cafeteria-style benefits, “corporate culture,” recognition of merit, and a spirit of equality.

The Importance of Education and Training

In the future, libraries will have to take greater care to ensure the hiring and development of the type of personnel that will succeed in the new environment. For too many years in the past, library service was a wait and serve operation. But the personality traits of individuals successful in a wait and serve environment are significantly different from the traits required in a more aggressive and competitive environment.

Informational services are of the “third wave,” knowledge-intensive, human-resource based, dependent upon information, communication, and technology. An upgrading of employee skill is essential.

Knowledge is the new strategic resource. Libraries will need to commit to the constant education, training, retraining, and learning of their work force. The future requires a staff more highly skilled, motivated, flexible, technologically competent, and with greater depth of knowledge of the services offered by the institution. To attract and keep such staff requires incentives, suitable reward, and an invigorating work environment.
The Challenge

Today the challenge to librarians and libraries is one of change, complexity, and choice. That change is now constant and fundamental—markets, workers, technologies, vendors, and citizens are all subject to upheaval. The interaction of these various economic, social, and political forces ensures that complexity is now a permanent condition as well.

But the future will not just happen to librarians and libraries. Through choices of what one does, where one wants to go, what one wants to become, and what markets one wants to serve, librarians and libraries can help to shape and create their own futures.

Librarians and libraries must be aware of how external environments are changing around them and develop the ability to perceive the opportunities in change (as well as the threats). Besides the willingness to change they also need the insight to strengthen what deserves to be retained. No one can predict precisely what will happen in the future; but librarians and libraries can endeavor to become responsive to change, not merely reactive.

What About the Public Library?

Don Sager, now at Milwaukee Public Library, prepared a research report for OCLC a few years back. He concluded his report as follows:

The facts still indicate that the institution continues to grow and effectively serve the needs of its community. While it is difficult to easily measure the real cost and total impact of the public library upon American society, there can be little doubt that any institution that experiences over 8.5 million user visits a week, loans nearly a billion items each year, and has a total aggregate income of more than $1.6 billion has achieved some stature and utility.

As impressive as those numbers are, and Sager's optimism notwithstanding, it is important to think about the future of the public library. In preparing this article, three viewpoints attracted me. Lowell Martin, in delivering the 1982 Bowker Memorial Lecture, envisions two possible roles for the public library. One role is the new concept of information center, the second role of the older, more traditional concept of cultural-educational-recreational resource center. Martin doubts that the public library will be "the" information center. Rather, libraries and "librarians must shift from the prevailing stance of acquire, open the door, and wait, and move to a policy of dissemination."
Another view was put forward by the late J. Roby Kidd, University of Toronto. Kidd's crystal ball produced three options for libraries over the next several years. The first, and most familiar, results in the library being primarily a collection, housing all of the materials for learning—books, software and other media, including electronic media. The library would become an "emporium for the software of learning, and as such should be an exceedingly valuable resource for the community." Kidd's second option produces a public library that not only collects and maintains resources, but an institution that provides learning processes for many kinds of learning—self-directed and distance principally (see pages 535-37 of his article for definitions). Additional resources (read money) will be needed if this option is to be exercised. The final option involves choice and partial services. This option takes the position that a library will not have the resources to do everything and that it might have to specialize in the clientele to be served or the character of service that it would offer. Geography, or a "family" of knowledge and skills could all be examples of choice that the library will make.

The third point of view regarding the future of the public library comes from Marilyn Gell Mason. She makes nine forecasts, stating that they "are not exhaustive in scope but are limited to the kinds of change we can expect if technological trends, economic constraints, and political conditions continue as some variation of the present without a major break or cataclysmic change." Here are four of Mason's forecasts which I believe have relevance to the library building of the future: (1) within ten years over half of the service provided to library users will be to individuals who never come into the library; (2) public libraries will develop an information infrastructure to provide access to a growing and changing flow of information; (3) this infrastructure will include more, smaller library branches; and (4) book circulation will continue to be an important part of library services.

The views of Martin, Kidd, and Mason reflect, in my judgment, a positive future for the library, especially the public library. Contrary to Rochell and others who predict the end of public libraries, I will take bets that if any library type ceases to exist it will be the academic library, which will have been preceded in extinction by the school library. The major problems that this country faces in relation to the taxpayer wanting a better return on investment is with education and their libraries—not the public library.
Technology

Technology has, is, and will continue to affect how libraries and librarians go about their business. Technology will therefore, of course, affect our future library buildings. They must be designed for change, for the accommodation of all sorts of electronic gear, and for the human ease of using the technology. Let me repeat that—the human ease of using the technology. The library of the future will continue to be used by real people, people who will come to the library because it is there that they will find other people, information, excitement, things familiar, and things new. A futurist I am not—a believer in the library I am. There will be libraries in our future—thousands of them—scattered across the landscape as we have known them for the past seventy-five years or so. They will not look a great deal different than the more "modern" buildings of today, at least not from the outside. Within, the changes will not be very dramatic because they will evolve slowly as we adapt to the changes around us.

Technology, especially the hardware that makes much of it available for use, must be maintained at considerable annual expense—and then replaced every few years so that it, the hardware, will not be cast aside by the manufacturer and therefore unable to be repaired as well. System upgrading costs must also be met. These real problems make the challenge of building for tomorrow more taxing (no pun intended)—and more exciting.

Defining the Mission

It will become increasingly important for librarians to define and articulate their role and that of their institution. Samuels and Watts's research indicates that while there are three perceived roles of the public library (educational, information dissemination, book provision) as expressed in the literature, the writing on the subject is scarce. We need to do a better job of informing our public who we are and what we are about. If we don’t, then Dubberly’s conclusion, when talking about libraries and their mission statements, may be on the mark: "You could be constructing...the wrong building and not even know it."

Planning for the Library Building

The public library has a rich history as one of the most diverse and economically effective institutions organized and designed to provide citizens of all ages and educational levels with access to knowledge and
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information. Today the public library is experiencing dramatic change produced by an avalanche of books, microforms, microdots, computers, and new communications technology ranging from lasers to satellite relays in what has been coined "telematics." The changes have called into question the role and organization of libraries and their materials including how they should be planned and housed.

As libraries prepare to assume a new and expanded role in the information age, their building forms and the internal packaging of their services and resources must be flexible and responsive to change. The marriage of the computer (with home computers becoming as common as television sets) and communications technology (two-way cable, video text, databases, robotics) will impact on the mission and operation of libraries.

More of the clerical, technical, and labor-intensive library functions such as circulation control, acquiring/cataloging/processing library materials, and bibliographic and literature searches are now wholly or partially automated in libraries of all sizes through computer systems that store and access the library's records. While some planners acknowledge that the library's traditional service role is caught in the maelstrom of change generated by advances in computer technology, the full effects will not be felt for some time.

Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) will be ubiquitous by the mid-1990s. Not only will it allow voice and data to be sent faster, cheaper, and more clearly than ever before, it will also connect virtually all communications devices—telephones, personal computers, and facsimile and video equipment—through one public network. Essentially, this blending of networks means that users will need only one access line or one network from their home or business, instead of separate ones for voice, data, and full-motion video. It also means they can use more than one device at the same time—for instance, allowing people to share computer data while discussing it by telephone. The biggest change—the one that makes ISDN possible—is that for the first time the public network will be digital from end to end, from telephone to telephone. With digital connections, the wider bandwidths will allow more data to be sent faster, and the elimination of analog should reduce traffic jams created when voice signals are converted for digital transmission. Although a complete digital system is at least ten years away, when it does come online the possibilities will be limitless. A fully developed network will not only allow high-speed data and video services (including the long-discussed but still unperfected picture-phone) but also totally new services as yet unknown.
Printed sources of information—books, periodicals, newspapers—will continue to remain basic to libraries and library service. However, the new technologies are adding expanded service dimensions for the public library of today. Libraries—large and small—are experiencing:

1. The advent of the microcomputer with online services for circulation and information management systems.
2. The emergence of a growing array of cooperative and specialized databases in economics, accounting, law, political science, education, chemistry, etc.
3. The conversion of more library materials and information to microform, videodisks, etc., as networking links libraries with schools, offices, homes, and other information databases.
4. Increased use of telefacsimile transmission and electronic mail to transmit information.
5. The important role for public libraries to continue to serve the "information rich" through the provision of the new technology and through the conventional formats such as books and audiovisual resources while continuing to serve the "information poor."
6. The need for more specialized librarians and information specialists to acquaint users with the new bibliographic search tools and document delivery systems.
7. The return of adults to the college and vocational classrooms, and subsequently to their public libraries, for related information.

These technological and related societal changes are impacting the design and planning for the library buildings of tomorrow. These changes include:

1. Increased emphasis on modular planning to ensure maximum flexibility for the library interior.
2. The need for more floor grids, raceways, and conduits for a variety of lines including electrical, coaxial cables, and other transmission lines.
3. A related need for more electrical outlets and flexible electrical service needs such as "flat wiring power" for selected areas of the building.
4. Greater attention to ergonomics (the relationship of users and staff to furnishings), including seating, terminal stations, and electronic media equipment to achieve the most effective work environment for maximum efficiency and productivity.
5. More effective temperature and humidity controls, sensing devices and filters to preserve the diversity of library formats—books, audiovisual materials, computer tapes, and related electronic equipment.
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6. In-library television production and programming.
7. The inclusion of more furnishings such as individual carrels and enclosures—including electronically equipped units—to accommodate the increasing numbers of adults reentering and/or continuing their education.
8. Increased utilization of compact shelving, with near twice the capacity of conventional library shelving, to house lesser-used materials in order to free floor space for new future functions in the library.
9. Added dimensions for multipurpose meeting rooms that can also be used, for example, as mini-television production studios as needed for library programming, education and information transmission service needs.
10. Heightened attention to energy conservation and “life-cycle costing” in the design and construction of the facility and for cost-effective maintenance.
11. Planned incorporation of more sophisticated fire, smoke, heat, and intrusion systems and electronic library materials theft prevention systems.

Today’s library planners, architects, and interior designers are given two important charges: design a library building that is responsive to the changing role of libraries produced by these technological and societal influences; and, at the same time, design a facility to accommodate the ongoing traditional service functions. The latter includes a commitment to provide access to a broad range of educational and recreational information and materials for users from preschool children to students through the community college, technical school and graduate school levels, and continue to serve the needs of the elderly, the handicapped, the non-English speaking, and others.

The library in the eighties is a broad based, learning, educational service institution which incorporates many alternatives for delivering and interpreting information services to all age levels. Libraries have long assumed the role of conserving and preserving our cultural heritage. Today, that role is dramatically expanded as libraries are expected to bridge the gap between our print-oriented educational system and our emerging electronic society. Librarians can respond affirmatively to this key question, provided that the new library buildings are carefully planned to easily accommodate and support future changes in services.
A Facility for the Contemporary Public Library

The contemporary public library is the most diverse and economically effective institution in the community to provide citizens of all ages and educational levels with ready access to knowledge and information. The public library also serves to document our social and cultural past, promote our technological progress, and to provide broad, unstructured intellectual stimulation that anticipates the future.

The public library plays a special role in introducing preschool children to the joys of reading and broadening their intellectual horizons through special programming, educational toys, games, and electronic media to cultivate learning and intellectual development.

The public library's services and materials complement all of the other necessary educational institutions in the community from preschools, community colleges, technical schools, to higher education. And the public library is the only educational resource that freely serves all citizens. Students of all ages who have a portion of their information needs met by their respective school or institutional libraries depend on the public library for expanded collections, extensive magazine, pamphlet, and audiovisual holdings.

In addition to supporting and sustaining formal education, the library provides support directly and through cooperative programs with other community agencies for continuing self-education, life-long learning, and adaptation to career changes triggered by changes in the work and marketplace. The public library is also the one place in the community where all types of information and programming, representing all points of view—popular and unpopular, orthodox and unorthodox—are organized and available for public use.

Accordingly, the public library facility must be designed to house, service, and support all of these ongoing, albeit traditional, services for its citizens. Too, the library facility must provide the necessary flexibility to respond to new and emerging library and information services.

Our rapidly changing technology environment and the transition to a knowledge-based society is providing many new interfaces with telecommunications and computerization that impact on the library. These changes are providing increased availability and access to information far beyond the printed page for library users. The provision of this new technological information is also stimulating increased use of traditional library materials, including books. Books will continue to serve an important function in libraries, but contemporary libraries are
also in the information business, the education business, the recreation business, and the entertainment business.

The design and physical arrangement for the library must accommodate a diverse range of services as suggested by the following uses:

- a solitary reader in a comfortable reading nook;
- an alcove with children absorbed with education minicomputers;
- adult reading and discussion group in a meeting room;
- a group of preschool children enjoying a puppet show in the adjoining meeting room;
- scores of high school students using indexes for back issues of periodicals;
- a business person in an enclosed study carrel working on a project while communicating with his office by a "loaner" phone;
- members of the historical society researching local history files;
- readers browsing the new books section and the new videocassette section;
- adults arriving at the library for an extension course in investment banking;
- library patrons picking up books on interlibrary loan;
- patrons at service desks needing to locate manufacturers of hot air balloons and seeking assistance from the reference librarian on subjects via a bibliographic database; and
- library staff arranging the multipurpose room for a lecture series scheduled in the evening.

The public library of tomorrow will be an important cultural and educational institution in the community, and its design should reflect the dignity associated with these functions.

There you have it. One person's view of the future of the library and building that will go with it. It is important to bear in mind that the building design and arrangement must reflect the service program of the institution. As "form follows function" in good architecture, so must library building design follow program of service.

But wait, something is missing. What will this library of tomorrow look like? Will it be all bells and whistles? Will there be people there? What about the staff? Will we know it to be a library building? Linda Crismond, director of the ninety-one branch Los Angeles County Public Library System—with assistance from this writer—drew a picture of the year 2000 library.
A Future Community Library

The first thing that you notice as you enter is the number of people present—people all over the place—adults and children gaining knowledge, improving their skills, and enjoying the pleasure and thrill of learning. Looking beyond the people, you are struck by the layout of the furniture and equipment. You may think you are in a bookstore, for the graphics are clear and the terms used are not those of the librarian but of the customer: information, new books, check-out.

You next note that there are computer terminals all about. Some are at counters, others at desks. Some have printers, others only screens. Some are in private areas, where searching can be done quietly and without scrutiny of others; most are out in the open. All are silent, with no clattering or beeping. They are used for private individual projects, to access the library’s collection, to communicate with research databases, and to link with other library collections across the country.

The staff, you note with interest, are dressed smartly. If you were not in a library, you might think you had stumbled into a corporate boardroom. The image they project leaves us with a good feeling, a feeling of confidence, a strong sense of professionalism.

Those are the tangibles you are aware of, those and the presence of a lot of small (two-, three-, and four-person) spaces for study and conferencing. There is open seating of all types, and there are many more small group spaces than we have been accustomed to. But what of the intangibles? What kind of service is being provided?

The customers are, in many instances, self-reliant. Having grown up with the computer, most do not need staff assistance to help them use the terminal or locate materials. The check-out process is, for many, self charging. Yes, there are clerks at the charge desk, but they are not needed for every transaction.

What are the librarians doing? They are assisting the customers with books, tapes, and films as always. Even though the age of the computer has produced many more self-reliant persons, there are still a great number of users seeking and needing assistance.

If you continue your stay, you will notice that several of the small study spaces created from modular office equipment are being used. If you eavesdrop you will overhear one group discussing their investments. The Thursday Afternoon Investment Club is meeting and using library materials to help them reach their buy-sell decisions. Another group is practicing their French. It seems that a trip to Paris is upcoming in two or three weeks (the company that employs the group now
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provides three months of vacation every year, half with pay, half without pay.

A third group is reading a play, an obvious first reading, preparing to stage a production in the library’s 150-seat meeting room. The play will be a fund-raiser for the Friends of the Library. The last space is full of computers and related equipment, and computer-literacy class is underway. It seems that not everybody gets through school with all of the computer knowledge they need or want to have.

This 15,000 square foot library has a collection, you are informed, of about 50,000 books, subscriptions to 300 journals (with a fifteen-year backrun on optical disc), and “subscription” to most of the online databases. There is, of course, a wide array of video and audiocassettes and discs, listening and viewing stations aplenty, a host of duplicating machines (all coin-operated or with debit cards), and a large, electronic community bulletin board which has message space for library, community, and commercial events. The community bulletin board is supported by a fee—$5 per line, five-line minimum, one-week maximum run. The space, you discover, is always sold out and has a two-month waiting period. Good “merchants” know that the real movers and shakers in the community are frequent library users.

As you turn to leave, you become aware that you have just been in a true learning environment, a true community center. You are aware that here, in this one small building, you could access the whole of man’s knowledge, and that no one would question you as to why or what you were doing or wanted, and it is such a good feeling.

References


