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The Special Library and Some of its Problems*

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Ten years ago the special library of the type to be discussed in this paper was almost non-existent. Indeed, we might go farther and say, that prior to 1909 the special library was a negligible factor in both the library and the business world. Today there are more than four hundred libraries of this kind in the country and their number is steadily increasing. Their interests are represented by an enterprising organization, the Special Libraries Association, which is affiliated with the American Library Association and by a very live sort of publication known as "Special Libraries." The field, though still small, is rapidly developing. To librarians in the making, it should be an attractive one as offering a very possible opportunity for the use of their abilities and training.

What is the special library, and how has it come about? What particular needs does it meet? What are the distinctive features that make it "special"? How does it differ from the general library? What are

the methods employed, the kind of service rendered? What are some of the principal varieties of special libraries, and what have they to offer in the way of professional opportunities to the ambitious? These are some of the questions to be considered in discussing the special library and its problems.

First as to terminology: what kind of libraries may legitimately be called special? There is some difference in usage here. From one point of view any library that limits its scope to a particular subject or group of related subjects is specialized. So each department of a large general library is a small special library. So, too, is every private collection that follows a definite line of interests. Libraries of this type are not new. Almost from the start public libraries in the great cities have commenced to build up special collections; works about Dante, Shakespeare, Americana, incunabula, and so on. Then there are the departmental libraries of large colleges and universities. Again there are separate, independent libraries, devoted to a particular field.

*Lecture given before Simmons College Library School students, February 24, 1915.

From the subject side these are special libraries. For the most part, however, they differ from the general library only in scope. Their methods and service are similar; and the type of material they handle is apt to be pretty much the same, although far more detailed along one particular line. Subject matter alone does not make a library special in the sense in which we are using the term. What then does constitute a special library?

Let us turn to some of the definitions which the leaders in the special library movement have coined. These collected opinions of experts may serve to give us an insight into the nature, scope and functions of this new type of library institution.

SOME DEFINITIONS OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARY.

Dr. C. C. Williamson of the New York public library.

"A special library is an efficient, up-to-date, reasonable, complete collection of the literature on a particular subject, including not only books, but clippings, pamphlets, articles, reports, etc., all so completely indexed and classified that the latest and best data are available without the difficulties and delays that are more or less inevitable in a large general library."

Mr. Arthur D. Little, Boston Chemist.

"The special library should have for its business to collect completely and classify in a way to make instantly available every scrap of information bearing upon the materials, methods, products and requirements of the industry concerned."

Mr. A. G. S. Josephson, The Index office, Chicago,

Discussing "What is a special library?" at the meeting of the Special Libraries Association held at Ottawa, Canada, June 27, 1912, says:—

"The special library covers a single definite subject or related group of subjects. Special methods are used in its administration. Documentation will be largely employed. The methods of cataloging and classifying will also be somewhat different from those in use in a general library. The classification must be much closer and in cataloging less attention need be given to the bibliographical description than to the contents. Not only in methods does the special library differ from the general, but its material is to a very large extent different. It must have books, it is true, and pamphlets and periodicals, though right here does the difference begin, because, while the general library must keep the whole pamphlet, the special library will keep only what it needs. Furthermore, the special library is to a much larger extent than the general dependent upon material that has not yet reached printed form, manuscripts, letters, notes of all kinds, photographs, drawings,

tabulated material, all this and many other different means of information will be collected and arranged for future use in special libraries."

Mr. W. P. Cutler, Librarian of the Engineering societies,

Gives the following epigrammatic definition: "The special library is one that serves the people who are *doing* things, while a reference library is one which serves people who are *thinking* things."

M. S. Dudgeon, Secretary Wisconsin free library commission.

"The special library is a utilitarian establishment calculated to serve the worker too busy to take time for scholarly investigation. The special librarian becomes, in fact, a bureau of investigation. In a special library the material of most vital importance is not in books, often it is not even in print. The special library is a clearing-house of live ideas, of live problems. The general reference library depends largely upon the past, the special library deals primarily with the present and future, it deals only incidentally with the past. The function of the special library is to deliver to the busy worker, ready for his use, the records of other men's thoughts and work and experience, in order that there may be no duplication of experimental effort and no repetition of errors. In order to accomplish this function, the material in the library or qualifications of the librarian and the nature of the work done must be different from those of a general reference library"

Mr. John Cotton Dana, Librarian, Newark public library,

In discussing the valuation of the special library asks "What is the special library?" and answers: "Special libraries are the first and as yet the only print-administering institutions which professedly recognize the change in library methods that the vast and swiftly mounting bulk of print is demanding, realize how ephemeral and at the same time how exceedingly useful for the day and hour is much of the present output of things-intended-to-be-read; and frankly adopt the new library creed as to print management, of careful selection, immediate use, and ready rejection when usefulness is past."

Mr. Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Secretary of the Commission of practical training for public service of the American political science association,

In a paper on "The special library and public efficiency" discusses the special library as "a collection of reliable, important and adequate records, being interpreted as anything which contains information; a book, a clipping, a tabulation, a model."

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that the most distinctive feature of the special library is not so much its subject matter as its service. Before everything

else, it is an information bureau. The main function of the general library is to make books available. The function of the special library is to make information available. The stock-in-trade of the general library is represented by bound volumes of print. That of the special library is much oftener represented by pamphlets, manuscripts, clippings, and filing case material; while the most important part of its equipment may not be printed matter at all, but human brains. The librarian of an engineering society, when asked what he considered the most valuable reference book replied at once, "The telephone directory." The response aptly illustrates the kind of information service which it is the business of the special library to supply, as an essential duty of the special library is to know the individuals and organizations that are experts on subjects related to its own interests, and keep in touch with them.

Of libraries that are special, not simply because of their subject matter, but because of the service they render, we may mention three divisions. the municipal reference library, the legislative reference library, and the business or corporation library. There is much similarity between the municipal and legislative reference library. Both have to do with public affairs information, and their subject matter is in many respects the same. The municipal reference library is, as its name implies, chiefly concerned with collecting information about cities and civic interests, particularly those of the municipality in which it is located. City charters, ordinances, reports of city departments, commissions and committees and of special investigations, make up the principal subject matter of such a library.

An important function of the municipal reference library is to assist in drafting ordinances. For this purpose the charters and ordinances of other cities and reports as to their effectiveness are secured. Digests and compilations of such information as this are made for the use of city councilmen and other city officials. How does the commission form of city administration work in different states of the country? is an illustration of the kind of information such a library should be prepared to furnish.

There are today a dozen libraries of this kind in several of the larger cities. In some instances they are branches of the public library, in others they have been established independently. A growing interest in this sort of work is attested by the municipal reference course offered by the Library school of the New York public library. This is a graduate course open to candidates who have completed the work in recognized library schools.

The legislative reference library has a broader field. Laws of the different states, both proposed and enacted, federal legislation and the laws of other countries, as well as the reports of state and federal commis-

sions, federal decisions, vetoes, test cases, represent the matter with which this kind of library works. As it is intended primarily as an aid to legislators, it is frequently associated with the state library. The first library of this sort was established in New York in 1890. Thirty-four states now have such institutions, and it probably will not be long before every state is so equipped.

Expert service in interpreting material, and making briefs and abstracts is provided. An important feature is the bill drafting department which is engaged in drawing up proposed legislation in concise, legal form. A course of training for this kind of library work is offered by the Wisconsin free library commission and the University of Wisconsin Library school. The field is an excellent one for men and women of special ability. But in the nature of things it is definitely limited.

It is the business library, however, the information service department of the large corporation, the manufacturing, or mercantile establishment, that is our subject for chief consideration. This is the most recent library development and represents an innovation in both the business world and the library field. Just when and how the first library of this kind started, it would be difficult to say. Miss Loomis in an interesting paper on "Libraries that pay," in the Independent for June 26, 1913, tells how one special library came to be organized by a business firm. The firm in question lost a valuable contract because they did not have available information which would have enabled them to make a bid rock bid. As a result of this rather costly lesson, they established a service bureau to keep them in touch with matters pertaining to the industry.

I fancy, however, that the greater number of such libraries have developed gradually. Heads of departments collected material of interest, then came to feel the advantage of having it brought together in one place available for all. Then the question of caring for it arose, and someone from the clerical force was put in charge. Finally, with the accumulation of material the need for expert service made itself felt, and a genuine library was evolved. Mr. George Lee, Librarian of Stone and Webster's, has an interesting outline in *Special Libraries* for April, 1914, showing the development of the special library in the commercial firm. It is suggestive also in indicating the changing attitude of the special library to the methods of the general library.

How do libraries of this type differ most conspicuously from the general library? Mention has already been made of the difference in scope and material. Whereas the latter attempts to cover the broad field of human knowledge, the special library for the most part limits its subject matter to one quite definite line of interest:—Engl-

neering work; electric wiring and lighting, traction service; factory architecture; or retail selling. At first sight there seems in the make-up of the business library a disproportionate amount of manuscript and pamphlet material. In some instances the entire collection may be represented by this sort of equipment. The rows of vertical files and transfer cases in which such a collection is kept, give the appearance of a business office rather than the conventional kind of a library. The atmosphere, too, smacks largely of the business office. The telephone occupies a prominent place as one of the most valuable reference tools. One of the definitions previously given sums up points of difference in a nutshell: "The general library is for the men that are *thinking* things, the special library is for the men that are *doing* things."

Popular conception pictures the library as a quiet, spacious, book-lined apartment, where the scholar may pour over weighty volumes, or the leisurely reader may while away a pleasant hour or so. The business library transforms this picture into a crowded office on the tenth floor of a large commercial building, with every inch of space utilized, and an alert attendant answering calls over the wire.

Particularly striking is the difference in type of service rendered. The public library is apt to be passive in its attitude. The business library is active, aggressive even. The public library brings together large collections of books, and devotes its time to caring for them with much elaborateness of detail while waiting with open doors for patrons to come and avail themselves of its treasures. The business library gets its material in shape for use in the quickest possible time and sallies forth for its patrons, button-holes them with the news: "I have information that is worth dollars and cents to you, come and see," and if its patrons prove obdurate, the library is no whit discouraged, but follows the time-honored example of Mahomet and the mountain. And as in nine cases out of every ten the business man believes he is too busy to go to the library, the library simplifies matters by going to him. This is done by keeping in touch with the interests of the managerial force, directors and heads of departments, and sending them information and material that is known will be of use to them.

Press notices mention plans for establishing a similar industry in a near-by city. News of this competitor is at once sent to the manager. A consular report explains how in a European country waste products from such factories are utilized. The publication or an abstract of it is forwarded to the department chiefly concerned with this question. How the current magazines are routed through the departments is illustrated in an article in *System* for July, 1914. In some libraries the following method is employed: A list of the periodicals taken

by the library is sent to the various department heads with the request that they indicate the ones they would like to see as issued. An attendant then carries the magazines around and the following day collects and redistributes them. A director wishing to see a magazine for a longer time checks the tag attached to it with his name and it is returned to him after it has gone the rounds.

The fact that the special library is a business proposition and must make good or show cause for its existence explains many of the characteristic methods. It may not boast a credit entry on the cash books, but it must prove itself an asset through the value of its service. To do this it must be alert to anticipate the needs of its patrons.

As speed is an essential factor in business, the library must equip itself for prompt service. No time can be given to unnecessary details; cataloguing and other technical processes must be reduced to their simplest form. Full names of authors and various possible spellings go disregarded. The yawning gap after the middle initial is allowed to yawn, and dates of birth and death are left unverified. Much of the imprint matter is omitted, as exact size, various paginations, and series entry. Time is money, and the business man frowns on all such time-consuming trifles.

By the use of the vertical file much of the cataloguing itself is done away with. For with guide cards arranged alphabetically by subject and numerous cross references, the file becomes its own catalogue, and by the addition of dummy cards, uniform in size with the guides, it may include the charging system also. This method is employed in the Youth's Companion Library which is represented almost entirely by filing case material.

Space is another matter that conditions both methods and material in the business library. Rent and overhead costs are charged against the library, and in the business sections rents are extremely high. The library must contract itself into the smallest possible quarters and utilize every inch to the best advantage. A common complaint from public libraries is lack of adequate stack room. Could they see the meagre floor space allotted the majority of business libraries they might well regard their own domiciles as palatial.

This physical restriction plays a large part in determining the attitude of the business library toward its possessions. Only material of vital importance and timely interest may be given house room. Much discriminating must be used in selection and rejection of printed matter. If a certain article in a magazine is of value, that is kept, and the rest of the periodical discarded. As soon as any part of the collection has passed its usefulness it must be weeded out. The business library cannot afford to harbor dead material.

A feature of the business library that makes effective service possible with a very limited amount of material is its dependence upon communication with other organizations and individuals for much of its most valuable data. What are the United States regulations regarding the use of a certain substance in the manufacture of food products? The business librarian at once gets into telephone connection with the local representative of the federal health department and secures the desired information at first hand. The public library is much more apt to depend upon its own resources. And if it has not the desired information available it is very sorry, but that is all there is about it. The business library regards it as a part of its job to keep in touch with information sources of probable interest to the business, and make the best possible use of them. So important is this acquaintance with information sources that to a large extent it may be said the business library is the librarian himself.

What special demands does the business library make? What opportunities does it offer? What are its advantages and disadvantages? And how does it compare professionally with the general library? These are questions that to the prospective librarian are of chief concern.

First as to requirements. Business ability, initiative, adaptability, willingness to assume responsibility, count for much more than technical training. A college man or woman with the qualifications just enumerated would generally be preferred to the library school graduate, although the advantage of library training is coming to be recognized. The field is a fairly good one. A special library organizer reports that ordinarily there are more calls from business firms than applicants to fill them. Also that there is a greater demand for women than for men. The reason, however, is hardly flattering. It is the sorry, but well known one, that women will accept a lower salary than men. The same authority feels that the financial rewards and chances for advancement in this field are much better for men than for women. The man librarian can make business acquaintances for the firm, he can do work that a woman would not be asked to, and can meet other men on a business footing.

In general the rewards in the business world are higher than in professional or semi-professional circles, and the same applies to the business librarian who makes good. Personally I am inclined to think that business executives consider service rather than sex, and that in so far as the woman librarian proves herself of financial value to the firm, her work will receive recognition.

Those whose ties or interest bind them to the East should give particular attention to the special library. For while the best field for the general library work is in the West or Middle West, the opposite holds true

of the business library for the very practical reason that nearly all of the business libraries are confined to the Atlantic seaboard.

So far the business library field seems particularly attractive. It offers opportunity and recognition to the person with ability, initiative, and original ideas. It gives freedom and chance for individuality in place of the often mechanical routine of the public library. The large library has come to be systematized much as the modern factory. The work for each individual is definitely planned. There is, as in the factory, the division of labor that disassociates the worker from the work as a whole. Except for the librarian in chief, there is little chance for constructive, original work. And even the librarian himself may oftentimes be hampered by a non-progressive board of trustees.

Are there no drawbacks in connection with the business library? A very serious, indeed to many, a prohibitive disadvantage of this work arises from the very nature of business itself. And that is its sensitive response to general financial conditions. Business library positions are unstable because business itself is unstable, and is subject to periodic depressions and panics. The general library in the time of industrial stagnation goes on as a matter of course. Lucky is the business library that suffers nothing more than a sharp retrenchment. In many instances, however, it is lopped off remorselessly as the readiest way of cutting down expenses. This goes to show that the business library is still in an experimental stage. A large number of firms still regard it as a pleasing luxury to be cherished during prosperous times and promptly dispensed with in adverse ones.

Even here, however, there is compensation, for while the library may be discarded, the librarian who has proved himself of value is likely to be retained in another position as assistant secretary, advertising manager or publicity agent according as his talents show a bent. This might be cited as another advantage of work in a business library, that it opens the way for advancement in other lines of business, while the routine of the regular library lends to rigidity and makes difficult vocational shifting.

After all, the important thing in choosing one's work, and the thing that really makes for success in it, is not the stability or instability of the position, venturous spirits challenge change, nor financial reward nor advancement, but opportunity for growth and happiness. It is a very great truth that Stevenson presents in that wonderful story of the Lantern Bearers, that it is our joy in doing a thing that makes that thing worth while and that "to miss the joy is to miss all." In a very real sense the criterion of our success is in our happiness in our work, irrespective of its tangible rewards.

The Man and the Book*

By R. H. Johnston, Librarian, Bureau of Railway Economics,
Washington, D. C.

Public librarians are inclined to be touchy if it is implied that the public library system is not in close touch with the man of affairs. The existence of special libraries is, to some at least, a standing statement that this is not the case. Personally I see no reason why limitations due to endowment and equipment should not be frankly acknowledged so that the scope of the various existing agencies for public education shall not overlap. I take it that the President of this Association feels that this is the case in making the subject of this session: The Library's opportunity as seen by the economist and the man of affairs.

It goes practically without saying that an institution supported by public funds can go only to a degree in assisting the individual. I take it that the public library would not think of devoting the entire time of its force for days or weeks to an individual reader. The special library in almost all cases is prepared to spend all of its time in exactly this way, provided the reader is one of the supporters of the special library.

It is natural also that a public library, interested as it is in all phases of knowledge, should not be able to devote as skillful attention to any particular subject of interest as a library engaged in the investigation and collection of material in that specific subject.

It is not to be expected either that the public library as a public institution will feel at liberty to assemble this material either in favor of or against any subject of political or economic significance. In Dr. Spofford's words, the public library will not "guarantee its wares." On the other hand the special library will have no hesitancy in arranging its literature for or against the regulation of the jitney.

But between these two extremes there are various things that the public library can do for the business man which are beyond the province and powers of the small or special library.

For one thing the public librarian is in excellent position to see the gaps at present existing in printed literature. When the Union Pacific railroad company made an effort to secure a well-grounded system on which to promote its employees, it introduced an Educational bureau. But when that Bureau sought for the proper text books that would give the railroad man the economic and social principles which would illuminate his technical work and imbue

him with the impulse for further and sounder knowledge, it was found that there were plenty of practical treatises and plenty of economic treatises, but no treatises in which theory and practice were properly placed in juxtaposition. I understand too that one of the large corporations in the United States is at the present time facing a similar problem. In the case of the Union Pacific railroad books were actually written, for the most part by university men sufficiently long removed from the academic atmosphere and not too long drilled in the technique of railroads. The public librarian is in a position through his acquaintance with writers and publishers to suggest the preparation of works that will fill such gaps, or can at least draw attention to them.

The public library is also in a better position to collect material of a primarily local bearing which may later develop into importance from a national standpoint. In the present federal valuation of railways there is necessary a quite elaborate delving into the ancient history of the roads. To determine "original cost" of the New York Central railroad it is necessary to obtain the records of the ten or more individual companies which before 1853 operated between New York and Buffalo. Most of the records of construction, cost of stations and right of way are scattered in the various towns along this four hundred odd miles, probably in garrets or cellars, from whence it can be drawn by the public librarian who knows the old citizens of the town and their interests. Much could be done to assist both the government and the companies if the public libraries could produce this material. Somewhere about 1827 an experiment was made by Judge Wright, then engineer of the Delaware and Hudson railroad, with a single rail railroad from the terminus of the canal to the coal fields of the company. The experiment of course was due to the high duty on iron rails, but the incident may have a bearing on the original cost of the road. I have been unable to discover any account, official or other, of this experiment. Some public library in New York state may have that or may know Judge Wright's descendants and be able to locate some such report.

Probably the most important subject before the business man today is export trade. I do not know of any library except the Philadelphia commercial museum into which a business man can walk and obtain a direct answer to his inquiry: What are the methods of such and such a firm in securing trade with Brazil? Of course, the business

*Presented at a joint meeting of the New York state library association and the Special libraries association, Haines Falls, N. Y., Sept. 29, 1915.

man is not usually able to read anything but English. A bibliography is to him of no assistance—of the many lists issued by the Bureau of railway economics none go to the supporters of the Bureau. In his own organization he asks and expects to get direct answer on any topic relating to his business. If he has a librarian that librarian will have digested this class of information. But, failing this, is there no method by which the public library can answer this business man's question? My answer is that the public library should keep in touch with the various special libraries so that failing through the handicap of organization or endowment it would still have the means to meet the question of the business man. This does not, however, relieve the librarian of the public library situated in an industrial center from having made special effort to have secured such information for citizens of that town.

It is well for the public library to remember on the one hand that libraries were first established for the use of students accustomed to the use of books and that the

public library methods are still tinged with this use. On the other hand the business man is impatient of anything but results. He does not want "all the literature on the subject." He will not pursue the search himself—he is an executive—and if he sends a member of his firm other than the librarian there will still remain the difficulties of the catalog, the difficulties of languages, the weighing of authorities, which make the work most laborious. The Daily commerce reports are finding great favor with business men at the present time because they give succinct facts of value to the man of affairs. While libraries are adopting more generally the practice of notifying their patrons of the appearance of books and articles of special interest to them, this practice could be extended most profitably by the public libraries in their relations with the business men of their towns. This will not bring him to the library, but he doesn't want to go to the library, and there is no real reason beyond those of statistical origin why the work of the library should be performed within its own doors.

List of References on Traffic Control in Cities

(Compiled under the direction of H. H. B. Meyer, Chief Bibliographer, Library of Congress, with the cooperation of the State Libraries, State Legislative Reference Departments and Municipal Reference Libraries. Contributions were received from the following: Alabama, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Chicago Municipal Reference Library, Chicago Public Library, Milwaukee Municipal Reference Library, St. Louis Public Library.)

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AS OTHERS SEE US.

The library as an aid to efficiency is not exactly the kind of library some of us delight in. The library of our dreams is likely to resemble, in one respect at least, the ideal university as defined by Lowell. He used to say a true university is a place where nothing useful is taught; and it is pleasant to imagine a library as a collection of books containing nothing useful. Nevertheless, if books must be turned to other purposes than those of pure delight, one can bear the thought of their promoting the prosperity and happiness of some of the hundreds of thousands who daily have access to the thickly sprinkled public libraries of our broad land. And there are now many other collections of books, not quite so public, maintained by the great business houses of our large cities as instruments for the perfecting of the efficiency of those whom they employ. The growing importance of these collections has only recently been revealed by the new and enterprising periodical, "Special Libraries," and there are other kindred publications that call occasional attention to the utilitarian aspect of the library. For instance, the June issue of the "Wisconsin Library Bulletin" has an "eye-opener" in the shape of a sketch of "Libraries in Business," by Miss Pearl I. Field, of the Chicago Public

Library, who is officially connected with the business libraries of the city, so far as they maintain relations with the public library, whose head, be it added, has shown himself energetic in the establishment of such special book-collections in commercial houses.— [The Dial, July 15, 1915.]

INTERNATIONAL PEACE.

In response to a request from the President of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition that the Special libraries association, with other organizations participating in the Exposition, join in the program for the closing day, by sending to him a brief sentiment symbolizing the idea of what the Panama-Pacific International Exposition has accomplished or will accomplish for human betterment and world progress, our retiring Secretary, Mr. Marion, sent the following communication:

Boston, November 27, 1915.

Mr Charles C. Moore, President,

The Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, Cal.

My Dear Mr. Moore: While my successor as Secretary of this Association has already taken office, still as retiring Secretary, under whose term of office all arrangements for the Special Libraries Exhibit at San Francisco were made, I am taking the liberty of replying to your request of November 11.

May we not hope that the initials "P. P. I. E." which have stood for the wonderful success spelled in the words "Panama-Pacific International Exposition" may come, in the not too distant future, to be universally recognized as standing for "Perpetual Peace Internationally Extended," the hope and aim of all our labor, the thought embodied at San Francisco, the ultimate goal of all human endeavor.

It is with this hope that I send greetings to all the members of this Association, and express the wish that the stimulus given to world progress in 1915 may be kept alive and fostered faithfully until the Tercentenary of the Landing of the Pilgrims, in 1920, when we shall commemorate the beginning of all that has culminated today in Panama-Pacific.

Very sincerely yours,

GUY E. MARION.