

DECATUR PUBLIC LIBRARY

CITY LIBRARIAN'S ANNUAL REPORT - FISCAL 1971/1972

By far the most significant activities in the library during the past year are related directly to a book fund which more closely approaches adequacy than at any other time in the history of the library. With \$118,000 available in the budget including transferred funds, it was possible to certify for payment during the year more than \$90,000 in invoices for materials received. In addition, the library ordered nearly \$4,000 worth of materials to be paid for by the Rolling Prairie System as in-kind compensation for excessive borrowing by non-residents within the system. An additional \$4,500 in federal funds also was made available during the year for purchase of books to be on permanent loan from the Rolling Prairie System. As in past years, a sizeable number of books ordered were not received before the end of the fiscal year and will need to be carried over to fiscal 1972. In all, the staff selected over \$100,000 worth of materials during the year as compared with approximately \$55,000 worth in the preceding year. The effects of this effort are far reaching and will be referred to several times during this report as I discuss collections, services and staff of the library.

The second item of potential great significance was the replacement order by the Board near the end of the year for two trailer-type mobile libraries.

But first I would like to present the basic statistical situation as a framework in which other aspects of this report can be developed.

First, the circulation. During the year the library circulated 458,124 items from its collections. In 1970/1971 circulation totaled

489,269 items. In both years, of course, book circulation accounted preponderantly for loans, but some of the less talked about and numerically less important items showed a circulation gain out of proportion to their numbers and point the way to an unsatisfied demand. Framed prints, for example, increased in circulation by about 100%; phono disc circulation increased by nearly 20%. Circulation divided into that generated by the Central Library and by the Extension Division continues to show the same woeful trend of the recent past. The Central Library shows a modest increase and the Extension Division a very sizeable decline. The decline in the Extension Division reflects an adverse staffing situation which I will discuss in the appropriate section of this report, and which I hope will be partially improved, at the least, when the new mobile libraries are placed into service. Normally, I think, a more substantial gain in circulation might have been expected in the Central Library. But circulation gains, as recent history demonstrates, is to a large extent a function of staff attention to the matter, specifically staff service to the public and staff attention to the need for duplication, and under the burden of the expanded acquisitions program attention to both of these facets of service suffered. Children's Department circulation, where the acquisitions program was relatively in line with past years, consequently experienced an 11% increase.

Registration of borrowers showed a marginal gain compared with a year ago. This gain contrasts with the slight loss in circulation, but calls to mind a similar but reverse registration picture for the four year period 1966-1970 when dramatic circulation gains were being made. One is led to the conclusion that the relationship of registration to circulation is complex and does not admit to a one-to-one correlation. Statistics from

the Circulation Department continue to show the trend commented on in annual reports in the recent past. The rate of overdue materials for which notices have been required increased by more than 20%. The rate ~~per ten thousand circulations~~ ^{overdue} for this fiscal was .034. In absolute numbers of items, the ^{percentage} figure was 15,395.

In Technical Services the main characteristic of fiscal 1971/1972 was the significant increase in both the number and kinds of material ordered and handled. The number of books received was almost double that received in the previous year. In addition, the acquisition of cassettes, 8 mm films and framed prints posed unusual problems in terms of cataloging and processing which involved both staff orientation to these problems and finding acceptable inexpensive solutions to these problems. A step forward in a decades-old problem was made possible by the Library's participation in the High Impact Experiment of the Emergency Employment Act. Under this funding, the library has initiated a systematic review of the physical condition of its collections with the objective of upgrading the physical maintenance of library materials to a level consistent with the desired quality of library service.

The Order Department reports a substantial increase in average cost of books for all public service division and departments of the library ranging from a low of \$.19 increase per book for Central Young Adult Books to a high of \$1.74 increase per book for Central Adult departments. At the same time one notes a drop in the average discount in the Children's, Home Reading and Reference departments, reflecting a greater number of acquisitions of technical and reference books, both categories of material which generally carry a low discount or none at all. Alternatively, the library's cost per subscription/year for periodicals has declined marginally, although the national index shows a substantial increase in magazine prices. This

apparent anomaly can be explained by the number of additional subscriptions for "shelter" and general interest magazines: these magazines, while showing as a group marked increase in price, nonetheless are priced a good deal lower than technical, scholarly and specialized journals, and the additional subscriptions to general interest periodicals has had the effect of depressing the overall average cost of these materials.

The Book Preparation Binding and Mending Unit began a program in July, 1971, of binding paperback material intramurally rather than sending this material to the Library Binder. Since that time it has bound 547 paperbacks at a considerable saving to the library. It costs \$1.50 for special binding by our commercial binder, whereas it costs about .35¢, excluding labor to bind our own. I find, moreover, the intra-mural work more aesthetically pleasing.

The Book Preparation Unit also manufactures for its own use binders to hold cassettes. The cost of production is modest and the binder replaces a commercially prepared one that retails for \$1.75 each.

The Preparation Unit has also increased the number of periodicals processed for circulation from 1,829 issues in 1970/1971 to 3,681 issues during the past fiscal year.

I am attaching herewith a tabular reduction of monthly activities in Technical Services.

As noted above, the most significant aspect of central adult services occurred in connection with the development of the library's collections. The book allocation for central adult collections for this fiscal year was \$84,000 compared with \$38,000 in the previous year. Of this sum, \$74,000 was expended or encumbered for these particular collections compared with \$37,000 the previous year. This infusion of additional funds in collection development has enabled the library to initiate major new emphases in our

acquisitions program. Some of these new emphases deserve particular mention. For several years the library has been attempting to develop collections of material value to people seeking commercial, vocational and other economic advancement. To this end, the Library has pursued a modest program of acquisition in the fields of security investments, real estate, salesmanship, accounting, trades education, foremanship, etc. This small program has become considerably enlarged under the impetus of a greater book budget and we are able to buy both more inclusively and in greater depth in the above mentioned. In addition, the Library has begun updating its collections in the building, metals, and mechanical trades. A substantial start has also been made in developing collections geared to the needs of engineering, sales, packaging, and administrative needs of the major types of industries located in Decatur. These needs and the materials meeting these requirements are constantly in flux; consequently, in addressing these needs, the Library is making a long-term commitment to acquisitions and service in relatively expensive areas. Whether this commitment can be justified is a question which will be answered only after some experience is gained. The prospect, however, based on business and industrial use of our meager resources in the past, is positive and encouraging, and because of its potential economic importance the effort should be made to extend service in this direction.

During the past several years, as noted in prior reports, the Library has been engaged in a systematic and continuing effort to meet its obligation as the major cultural institution of the community of building collections that would suffice for the great task of transmitting that cultural heritage to succeeding generations. A considerable step in this direction was taken several years ago with the purchase of the Loeb Library

of classical literature. To this we have added, as funds were available, materials of sufficient importance to be listed in certain standard indexes. During the past year substantial progress was made in acquiring materials listed in the Essay Index, the Short Story Index and other bibliographic sources. At the same time these materials were marked, as were the bibliographies, in order to assert control over them in a manner relatively inexpensive compared with independent analytic indexing by library staff for inclusion in the public catalog. Other significant purchases during the year include the Annotated Illinois Statutes, Illinois Practice and Procedures, and the Northeastern Reporter which in conjunction with previously owned materials now provides the Decatur layman with the basic materials in the field of statutory law.

The enlarged acquisitions program, however, with its attendant increase in staff time devoted to book selection, searching bibliographies, checking current holdings, typing order cards, marking indexes, etc., was not an unmixed blessing, regarded in short perspective. Less time could be devoted to public service, to analysis of current circulation and new book duplication. In the latter weeks and months of the fiscal year there was the additional strain of systematic screening the collection for the maintenance program funded under the Emergency Employment Act. These exigencies undoubtedly had a markably depressing effect upon the year's circulation and service statistics. Thus while central adult circulation shows a small increase, it is less than I would have anticipated, had more staff time been available to service current public service needs: Reader Service statistics actually show a decline from last year.

Among other Adult Services for the past year I would also cite three poetry readings co-sponsored by Theatre 7, four annotated booklists were

prepared, the Young Adult Assistant made herself available as a staff speaker in the high schools and also served as library sponsor of Students Against Narcotic Drugs (STAND). Use of the Library Auditorium by community groups amounted to 167 meetings attended by 4,090 persons. An Art Show was sponsored by the library during National Library Week: the exhibition of paintings and sculpture by Preston Jackson, residence artist at Millikin University, was well attended and received much favorable comment. Although nominally an activity of Adult Services, the planning, layout and publicity for this exhibition was carried out by Mr. Larrick, Staff Artist. The Friends of the Library provided hostesses for the exhibition.

The Children's Department during the year initiated and continued a number of activities designed to amplify its service to the youth of Decatur and to enrich their library experience. Among the continuing programs were readers advisory service, class visits, the Summer Reading Club and new booklists. New or rather newly re-instituted programs included story hours and film programs. New for the first time in the Decatur Public Library - and the first such program I know of anywhere - was a story-telling course for interested adults.

During the year more than 15,000 readers guidance and other reader service requests were handled. 129 classes involving 2,944 students visited the library to hear short stories, and jacket talks, and were helped in the selection of materials. 18 non-school groups, mostly Girl Scouts, with a total attendance of 240 visited the Children's Department.

Children's collections were improved by the special allotment of extra funds to develop better reference resources for junior high school students.

The Extension Division continues as the sick member of the Library system with circulation declining again this year. This pattern of declining use in the Extension Division is not, I believe, a necessary pattern. There is good reason for attributing to bad staffing and bad supervisory situation. For approximately the past eight years - since the retirement of the Extension Supervisor who built the Division (with the exception of Evans Branch) - all Extension agencies with one exception have been in a situation of continual decline.

Extension Division staff declined from a Supervisor, two professional librarians, two and one-half library assistants and four and a half clerks to a Supervisor, two library assistants and four clerks. Services declined, circulation fell. Convalescent service ceased. Hospital stations were no longer staffed. Dill Branch closed. Staff turnover increased. Management of reserve collections for the bookmobiles became more difficult as circulation dropped and these reserves grew. The trend became confirmed as cyclical elements predominated.

The one exception to this trend was the circulation of Bookmobile II in the period 1967-69. And it is this exception that I turn for substantiation that the pattern can be changed. During this period the staff for this unit was stable and there was sufficient supervisory time available on the part of the City Librarian to take advantage of this stability to direct and train the assistant in charge of this machine. The result was a reversal of circulation decline on this unit to such an extent that increases on this machine alone offset the losses sustained by all other Extension agencies combined.

With the resignation of this staff member, the situation reverted and with the retirement of the Extension Supervisor, the deterioration accelerated. Attempts to recruit a new supervisor were fruitless and eventually abandoned pending the formulation of long-term plans for the future of Extension work.

The decision to replace the current self-contained bookmobiles with two trailer-type mobile libraries has tended to clarify the future direction of extension service and a major effort in shoring up the staff resources can be instituted during the coming year. Ultimate success will depend immediately upon finding a competent and aggressive librarian to serve as Extension supervisor and in the long run will depend upon re-building authorized staff levels to their mid-1960's strength.

Exhibits in the Library were marked by novelty and flair and a high degree of professionalism and were well received and remarked by library patrons. In addition to numerous posters, signs, directives, bulletins and the like, the Staff Artist composed 31 entry window displays, 13 in-building circulating book displays, a semi-permanent display permitting rotating emphasis for the Franklin Street window, 7 booklist covers, and other special material displays. He also arranged the Jackson art exhibition, as noted above. In addition to the foregoing, he has arranged a number of fine displays on the Landmark Mall in a display case rented by Rolling Prairie Libraries.

Gifts. Among the notable gifts received by the library this year, special attention should be called to a \$300 collection of phonograph records donated by the Friends of the Library. Three dome-top display tables were given the Library on the occasion of the 1st anniversary in the new central building - one each by the Friends, by the Women's Auxiliary of the Macon County Medical Society, and by the Zonta Club of Decatur. A purchase award painting by John Rogers was donated to the Library by the Decatur Area Arts Council.

Finally I would like to acknowledge with gratitude and pleasure the dedication and loyalty of the staff who have marked this year, as they have in previous years of my association with them, by cheerful acceptance of a strenuous workload. The staff constitutes a major resource of this Library and more than any other resource has been the occasion of compliment from the Library's public.