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A Program for Change

Masse Bloomfield

I have been in the library business for over thirty years. I have now retired and have a few suggestions to make that will improve the library's image and service.

Let me start by saying my experience has been solely in special libraries. I started as a cataloger at the National Agriculture Library and finished as a library supervisor for Hughes Aircraft Company. I was never part of the social or political area of library associations by choice. Once I thought about being editor of a society journal. It was never offered so I didn't have to refuse it. Once I thought about becoming president of the local SLA chapter, but it is necessary to go to meetings and I haven't had the energy, mostly mental, to endure very many of those. But I have made my livelihood for much of my life working in libraries which gives me some experience in commenting on the American library scene.

I am not going to suggest any changes to library schools or to school libraries. These two areas of our profession are satisfying the needs of their users reasonably well. I wish the library schools did better at research but then they are functioning and the faculties do publish. Elementary, junior high and high school students don't need any more of a library than what the schools provide.

I see several areas of the American library world that can be improved. I am listing only four areas where I suggest change. These are:

1. Promotion of library skills at the college level.
2. Converting hard copy collections to microform.
3. Better use of current awareness tools for scientists and engineers.
4. A research program for an experimental public library.

These problems deal with academic, special and public libraries.

The first problem I want to mention concerns college and university libraries. In my estimation, the majority of these libraries fail to provide adequate library skills to the students attending the schools. The major purpose of a student going to an institution of higher learning is to get an education. What mankind knows

is written in books, periodicals or reports housed in libraries. The *primary* effort of the academic library should be directed toward teaching undergraduate and graduate students how to use a library. To show my interest in the subject, I have contributed a few published papers on this subject. In 1970, I turned out a booklet entitled *How to Use a Library*.¹ The booklet was what I would call a commercial failure and I think ignored by the profession as a whole. In a review of the booklet it was "definitely not recommended."² In another review, it was characterized as "each library . . . should have a copy . . . for the use of patrons."³ Since 1970, it has been revised several times. The booklet is now thirteen pages long, takes about ten minutes to read and will give an immediate insight into how to find books, periodical articles and reports in any American library. Once in a while, I gave new Hughes engineers tours of the library. We went through a twenty minute orientation which demonstrated to the engineer how to use a library and the services available. They all got the Hughes booklet on how to use a library.⁴ I am not sure that these Hughes engineers ever visited a library during their undergraduate years.

I see the university as having two major functions; first, to teach, and secondly, to do research. I see the university librarians spending much of their time on buildings and collections. I believe that university students are not taught how to assemble a bibliography. I have never felt that a special library should be in the business of teaching university graduates how to use a library, yet that is exactly what I have done.

What do I think the solution is to the problem of teaching university students on library skills? I think the solution can only come when the university requires every student to pass a test on how to find citations to books, periodical articles and reports. I know of only one university that does this. There must be more than one. But I want to see this as a graduation requirement everywhere. I think that the information needed to pass a standard library skills test could be given in less than three hours (180 minutes). The way I have demonstrated the organization of the library is to choose a subject

such as infrared and then actually point out books on that subject in the *Subject Guide to Books in Print* and card catalog; periodical articles in *Applied Science and Technology Index* and *Physics Abstracts*; and reports in *NTIS Government Reports* and *NASA STAR (Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports)*. I think that teaching library use skills is one of the most important skills university and college graduates should learn, but don't.

The second problem I want to mention is the problem of collections and buildings. I have gone on record that the library community needs to switch from hard copy to microforms.⁵ In that paper, I recommend establishing an organization that would produce microforms for all American libraries reducing the need to house immense collections that are seldom used. Certainly we can microfilm all the world's literature before 1945 or forty years ago, and house it in a fairly small room if we use photoreductions of 150 to 1.

Photoreductions or optic discs or magnetic tape or whatever medium is used to store older materials would be cost effective. The academic libraries would then stop investing in buildings for hard copy materials and begin to support some provision for the microreduction of the world's literature. I see American libraries doing little to move in this direction. Margaret Child in her 1985 review entitled "The Future of Cooperative Preservation Microfilming"⁶ reinforces what I proposed in 1971.

Academic libraries keep adding new buildings. I totalled up all the money spent for construction of buildings listed in the December 1984 issue of *Library Journal*.⁷ I found that these libraries were spending about \$170,000,000 during 1984 for the construction of new library facilities. These libraries could be spending that money on collections in microform and be saving space.

I question whether the collections at universities are really complete. What with items that are lost in the mail, thieves stealing items and students tearing out articles, it is next to impossible for any educational institution to have reasonably complete copies of materials they purchased. This ignores the library items they didn't purchase or collect. Microforms present a way to house complete collections.

It is my best opinion that the more material we place in microforms, the more complete our libraries are going to become. This does not mean hard copies will not serve a purpose. Microforms can be the basis for reducing the

need for additional space. More complete collections make for better service.

The next problem I want to discuss concerns the provision of current awareness to scientists and engineers. These people at small institutions can be serviced on an individual basis. That is, the scientist or engineer provides for his own current awareness by subscribing or reading five to ten journals. The small special library servicing these research people can support them by SDI and individualized materials, such as sending articles on topics the librarian knows will be helpful. Librarians in small special libraries know the research personnel in their organizations so well, that they usually are intimately involved in servicing their total literature needs.

The special library I worked in at Hughes had a clientele of over 10,000 scientists and en-



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gineers. I had a list of about fifty people who I sent discarded items to and about three people that I sent current items to. But what about the other 9,947 people? The solution I came up with was the tailored current awareness publication which I have discussed twice in print.⁸

In order to understand this problem a little better, I have divided large special libraries into those that are active and those that are passive. I feel that if a scientist has to come to the library, then that person is in trouble. It is my opinion that by providing current awareness publications, the scientist or engineer can determine what literature he needs. Usually after the initial literature search at the inception of a research project, the scientist needs only current awareness. An SDI program is fine but it is limited. SDI is a silver bullet kind of service, but we also need buckshot and artillery services. In my own

experience, I find that whatever research I have undertaken, my approach seems to be unique. To remain current, perusing several journals tend to be sufficient for me to keep up, as well as attending a conference or two. The active librarian will supply SDI printouts but also will provide a range of library current awareness publications.

In my articles,⁸ I describe four kinds of current awareness tools. They are:

1. An SDI service where about one item in ten will be of interest.
2. Four or five journal subscriptions where I feel that one out of ten articles will be of interest or the equal of an SDI program.
3. An intermediate current awareness or tailored publication such as the Hughes Aircraft Company *Microelectronics Bibliography* where perhaps one out of a hundred citations will be of interest.
4. The nominal list of monthly accessions where one out of a thousand citations will be of interest.

The solution to this problem as I see it, is for special librarians in large organizations to become more active. Thus the active special librarians in large organizations make an effort to have their current awareness publications delivered to the research scientist's desk. Then they provide a method where the scientist doesn't have to leave his desk to request items from these tools. The passive librarians wait for their clientele to come to the library for assistance. In my opinion the great majority of special librarians in large organizations are more passive than active. The use of tailored current awareness publications can provide a service that will be the basis for growth of the entire organization. Corporate growth is the real goal of all special librarians.

The last problem I want to discuss it not a problem in the usual sense. It is an experiment I would like to see undertaken. This experiment concerns the public library, and would be restricted to just one community initially. It has to do with those public libraries located where there are college or university libraries supported with public funds such as in Columbus, Ohio where Ohio State University is located or my home town, Canoga Park, California where I can walk to the Los Angeles Pierce College library.

For one community such as Columbus, Ohio, I say let's eliminate the public library as we now know it. First of all, we let the schools serve their students at all levels. The libraries located

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in the schools have to rearrange hours at the elementary, junior high and high school levels to accommodate their students, but it can be done with their present staffs and without overtime. Then we establish store front paperback exchange units; bring in a paperback book and take one away. No forms to fill out and no cards to carry. This service would cost rent and one person to monitor and organize (not catalog) the assorted collection. Arranging books by fiction and non-fiction, and then by author would be all the organization needed. This would not need a cataloger to index the collection. A paperback collection such as this would furnish the entertainment needs of the community for housewives, mystery readers, science fiction fans and others.

The people interested in serious subjects should have full access to the libraries at institutions of higher learning. Thus I think we can provide for the service of the public library yet still keep the function at a much lower cost than we are now funding.

There is one qualification. That is, there still has to be a place where local history is maintained. City Hall and the local newspaper files have a lot of this already on hand. It doesn't seem to me that it would take much doing to organize these files so that the public could have easy access to them.

This is not a solution to a problem, but an experiment in social science. Can we provide the services of a public library in a community at a greatly reduced cost? If we can, let's do it. If not, we kill the experiment and put everything back the way it was.

I have great doubts that what I have written here will be acted on. It may even be that I am wrong about how I look at the world. But I do hope to get some people to thinking about the place of the library in this country and what librarians ought to be doing. Automation or online data bases have not been mentioned yet, because they don't affect the profession directly. To date, automation has been used for house-keeping purposes when we consider computers located internal to the library. The use of the Dialog-type data bases are to me, another way of providing a bibliography. It has its place.

I expect the library profession to change as much in the next thirty-five years as it has in the last thirty-five years — which isn't all that much. But for something to happen in the next thirty-five years, the initial steps have to be taken now or very soon. Since I see little new happenings to libraries, I predict practically no change. The few things that I suggest in this

article wouldn't make the library world that much different in 2020 than it is now. Each year the library schools graduate new fresh librarians. Perhaps one of those people just starting out in the library world, may be able to affect more change in libraries than I have. Because I am now retired, I will only write about what I think should be done. It will take a more aggressive, intelligent, politically active person than me to affect the changes I think will help.

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