

Optimum Size of Libraries: A Symposium

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Systematic Weeding

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IN MY preliminary musing on this assignment, I wandered rather far afield. I thought of my father's various stories about fat people and their troubles, especially in trying to reduce.

I thought, too, of a story told me by the old assistant librarian at the University of Rochester Library, years ago. He had a long white beard, parted in the middle—and I was a freshman page in the college library. His story was about a man who learned all the characteristics of some 20,000 botanical specimens, but whenever he learned more new ones after that he forgot some of the old ones. The moral was that the mind is like a sponge—it can only soak up so much. It then occurred to me that maybe reading itself is becoming obsolete—what with movies, television, picture magazines, and even comic books.

My grandfather used to quote the saying, "A man of words and not of deeds, is like a garden full of weeds." Well, I am here to talk about weeds. I hope I shall provoke some of you to deeds.

The size of a library is a matter of simple arithmetic. The size at any time equals the number of books you have, plus those you buy or get given to you, less those you lose or throw out. Your size depends on how you control the income and the outgo. It is one of the great indictments of our modern civilization that we give so much attention to the accountant's balance sheet. We look at the out-of-pocket dollar cost and forget about the

hidden cost in dollars, time, and other less tangible but no less valuable assets.

When I was a college librarian the only check-up I ever had by a man who wanted to find out if we were giving due service, was to see whether we collected all the library fines. He wanted to make sure that we got every nickel. But he paid no attention to wasted minutes or possible inefficiencies in service.

When we buy books, we scrutinize the cost very carefully—books cost money. But when we keep useless books around, we think only of the cost of discarding them.

To apply the single formula of size plus income and less outgo, we must first define size. Size may be stated badly as so many volumes—a hundred thousand, fifty thousand, a million, or what will you.

But size is better defined in terms of the objectives of the library and the demands on it. What books do students and faculty want? You keep the ones they use, buy more, and throw out what is not used.

Now it is clear that there is a definite relationship between the age of a book and the likelihood that it will be used. It's like the Army—you have a line of new recruits walking in and a line of discharges and retired men walking out.

Some years ago, Lewis Stieg, when he was at Hamilton College Library, showed a definite relationship between the ages of books and the chances they would be used.¹ The age distribution of books in the Shaw and Mohrhardt lists of books for college and junior col-

¹ Stieg, Lewis, "Circulation Records and the Study of College-Library Use." *Library Quarterly* 12:94-108, January 1942.

lege libraries, shows the same kind of statistical curve. This curve is just as definite as life insurance mortality tables. You can tell how many people will die, but not which ones. We can see how many books will get out of date, but not always which ones.

The Shaw and Mohrhardt lists set out to define optimum collections. They just picked good college library books. But by statistical analysis we can find underlying characteristics that are generally applicable.

Let us generalize first by saying that the age curve of books in a college library should be like this family of curves—that is, the dates of publication should show a pattern, with recent titles predominating.²

In order to maintain the curve from year to year, you will have to weed out old titles, and the curve or table will tell you about how many. You can plot the actual curve against the ideal.

The difference is what needs to be weeded. If you have a big lump on your curve around 1910-1912, it is not that there are more good books that were published in those years—it is that the budget was generous in those years or that somebody gave you a lot of those books. The chances are you do not need them. They take up valuable space, and, worse still, they obscure the good books.³

It is possible to schedule weeding quite definitely—perhaps annually. Make it a goal to take out as many as you take in. Or periodically, every three to five years, go systematically through your stacks, bearing in mind that few undergraduates use books

² Gosnell, C. F. "Obsolescence of Books in College Libraries." *College and Research Libraries* 5:115-25, March 1944; and Gosnell, "Obsolete Library Books." *Scientific Monthly* 64:421-27, May 1947.

³ Gosnell, "Books of Exceptional Age." *College and Research Libraries* 9:33-40, January 1948.

over 30 years old. In many fields books over five to 10 years old are positively misleading.

It is likewise possible to define categories for weeding—old textbooks and anthologies, unless you are definitely collecting this sort of material. And remember that such special collections will show lumps on your curve.

In New York State we have put out a pamphlet on weeding, for public libraries.⁴ It has 10 pages listing groups of books that can be thrown away. Conversely, we tell all such libraries to hang on to their local history, or to send it to us in Albany. We are glad to get back files of newspapers and extra copies of out-of-print state publications to be redistributed to libraries that want them.

Incidentally, this is nothing new for Albany. In my few years there I have learned that Melvil Dewey and his associates thought of everything. They conceived of the State Library as a sort of regional depository and duplicate exchange 60 years ago. And they started a union catalog so ambitious that they called it a "universal" catalog.

I daresay that we are the most generous of all libraries in lending older, rare and more expensive material to other libraries. We sent out some 30,000 interlibrary loans last year, and paid outgoing postage on them too.

Weeding must be posited on accessibility to a central source that does keep the material that everybody else weeds. We try to do that in Albany.

Systematic weeding is one key to a good book collection of optimum size.

A librarian who buys and never weeds will have a library full of weeds.

⁴ New York State, Library Extension Division. *Care of the Book Collection. A Manual of Suggestions. Weeding, Mending, Binding, Discarding.* Albany, The University of the State of New York Press, 1949.

By BLANCHE PRICHARD McCRUM

Book Selection in Relation to the Optimum Size of a College Library¹

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BOOK selection for the college library, and therefore the optimum size of the resulting book collection, cannot be considered in

¹ Abridged.

a vacuum. Instead, this fundamental practice in the librarian's profession must be carried on under conditions created by different types of institutions as well as under the influence of trends both economic and educational as these wax and wane in this present world of time and place.

For example, the undergraduate library on a university campus legitimately may limit itself to the accumulation of a relatively small core collection of books most frequently required by most undergraduate students. Selection of such books may take place in the comfortable certainty that demands on the undergraduate library will be transferred to the main university library, when the time comes to write honors papers, seminar reports, senior theses, or to develop other specialized interests. Again, a progressive or experimental college, free of traditional patterns in its organization, may find it wise to use some adaptation of the long vacation of the English university for the purpose of sending students away to use the resources of large research libraries, with consequent relief for the home library. However, the typical American contribution to education, the independent four-year liberal arts college, is in a very different situation, since it must supply all or nearly all of the books required by teachers for teaching and by students for learning. It is, therefore, the more difficult book selection for the latter type of college library that will be considered in the following paragraphs.

By way of roughing in a background for that consideration, it may be well to remind ourselves that the four-year liberal arts college itself is at present subject to two opposing tensions: (a) rising costs, accompanied by an uncertain financial future; (b) new plans for improved curricula, now almost epidemic in the postwar world. Increased costs, accompanied by probable decline in large gifts, have resulted in larger charges for tuition. Endowment campaigns, some of them slow in bringing results, are in full swing. And still the matter of meeting each year's bills as they come is apt to remain for some time a subject of administrative prayer and fasting.

Library costs have followed the upward swing in the whole institution. It is probably conservative to estimate that books cost 35 per cent more than they cost 10 years ago. In the same period, salaries, particularly at the beginning level, have in some instances risen as much as 75 to 100 per cent. If a new library building becomes necessary the capital expenditure, out of all proportion to the endowment of the college, makes the whole project assume the character of a tragedy. No wonder that librarians are trying to streamline their libraries, for protection

against surgery which otherwise may be applied from without because of administrators' financial difficulties.

On the other hand, the opposite tension expressed in new curricular plans provides an unequalled opportunity for integrating the library with the teaching program. Independent reading for credit, interdepartmental majors, broadened honors work, increased emphasis on responsibility for self-education—all of these and various other elements in the new plans constitute a tide to be taken at its flood unless the risk of losing its force is to be run. What, then, has book selection to contribute to equalizing these opposing stresses, and at the same time to establishing the optimum size of the library?

First of all, I should like to suggest for your consideration the general notion that it is not the selection of the best books that results in swollen book collections. Rather what we have to fear is our mistakes in selection that bring in the mediocre, tepid, savorless, machine-made books, turned out in great numbers by the presses of the world and advertised persuasively on all sides. The pressure under which work has to be done now is also conducive to hasty, impressionistic selection unless constant vigilance is exercised. Probably, also, in spite of our best efforts to select wisely and critically, we suffer from the lingering results of our custodial responsibilities which have tended to make us feel that a book is a book is a book is a book, whether or not we are always so sure that a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Moreover, among the dangers that have dogged our footsteps are those that come from too much faith in total coverage, inclusive listings, nondiscriminating completeness, whereas more rigorous standards or evaluation might well have resulted in reduced numbers of volumes without damaging content. If such a result can still be achieved, we shall have found the jewel in the toad's head of our hard necessity for controlling costs and increasing excellence at the same time. To this hope we may well direct our best efforts as librarians, including in these endeavors our specialized bibliographical knowledge, our love of books for general reading, and our acquaintance with primary sources.

Specialized bibliographical knowledge seems to me to require continuing study on the part

of the whole professional staff in each subject field represented in the curriculum. Access to basic histories, to current works that include bibliographies in books by specialists, to scholarly reviews in journals as these appear, as well as constant consideration of the qualifications of writers can be worked into a pattern which in time, if followed faithfully, will result in real bibliographical scholarship. Nor does it seem overambitious to believe that the evaluation which emerges from the use of sound methods of bibliographical procedure will establish for us certainty concerning the really first-rate, indispensable, basic works, and definitive editions that must be secured. I have long been an admiring spectator of the art of such selection, and I recall particularly one occasion when a professor and a librarian were planning additions to library resources for support of a reading course never before offered in the college. At one stage of their investigation, the estimate was 500 titles; by mutual agreement 84 titles was considered ample when the job was done. An order librarian known to me can take a subject such as the history of the English language, explore the existing book stock, investigate the literature of the field, and come up with a few suggestions for such important purchases that the professor concerned accepts the list with entirely minor enlargement. During a recent investigation of the minimum collection required for giving a strong major in American literature a figure of some 1300 titles was reached by another librarian following the method which has been suggested.

Mr. Pargellis in an article very much to the point in this connection has said: "One of the best Lincoln scholars in the country tells me that [out of some 3500 to 4000 separate titles] there are about 70 good books on Lincoln." He adds: "I do not believe that a man need be a specialist in a field to know the good books. Anyone who knows something of the technique of scholarship can learn the tricks, acquire the feel, by which he can spot the phonies. . . . The nonspecialist may miss 5 or 10 per cent—but the scholars themselves agree on no more than 90 per cent— . . ."² The late Peyton Hurt stated: "A professional method can be developed

² Pargellis, Stanley. "Some Remarks on Bibliography." *College and Research Libraries* 7:207-209 July 1946.

which will enable him [the librarian] to specialize for library service in almost any field regardless of previous acquaintance with the subject matter . . ." and then he gave an outline of the method to be followed which would enable the librarian to become as well qualified in bibliographical scholarship as the teaching scholar in subject material in his own field.³ Miss Lucy E. Fay in an illuminating article has described her method of teaching students at Columbia University how to evaluate works in various fields and she has shown how the same ability may be developed in members of a whole staff through in-service training.⁴

Whether or not such book selection includes an organized survey of the whole collection within one given period (and for this time and occasion may often fail) still the same bibliographical approach to selection may be used in creating resources for a single course or in assisting one department of the college at a time to improve its holdings. The point to be stressed is our obligation as librarians "to conduct a continuous survey of the book needs of . . . [our] institution"⁵ and also that of placing a sufficiently high value "on the responsibility that the entire professional library personnel must . . . assume as co-workers, with their special subjects to keep up on. Here is a very fountain of youth in the midst of deadening routine."⁶

The second approach to book selection directed to building a useful book collection—that based on love of books for general reading—has as its objective the creation of an alive, stimulating, intriguing library fit to whet intellectual curiosity, stir imagination, and generate a love of reading which will last through life. In this connection we will agree, I believe, that serried ranks of basic works and proven classics need leavening by a mixture of more easily readable books. Granted that funds for this purpose should be used sparingly, it seems that, if conducted on a sufficiently high level, selection in this field

³ Hurt, Peyton. "Staff-Specialization: A Possible Substitute for Departmentalization." *A.L.A. Bulletin* 29:417-22, July 1935.

⁴ Fay, Lucy E. "A Program of In-Service Training in College and University Libraries." *College and Research Libraries* 8:214-17, July 1947.

⁵ Randall, William M., and Goodrich, Francis L. D. *Principles of College Library Administration*. 2d ed. Chicago, A.L.A. and University of Chicago Press, 1941, p. 61.

⁶ Munthe, Wilhelm. *American Librarianship from a European Angle*. Chicago, A.L.A., 1939, p. 118.

is exceedingly important. The student educated to read only what he is required to read may well become a repository of factual information unilluminated by understanding. Yet the student who is inspired by his studies to reach after ideas for himself and who finds waiting a collection that meets his needs seems to me to have a real chance to be "generally" educated. But books of the quality he needs do not happen; they are selected by cultivated librarians who understand what is required.

What appears to be called for in this connection is, again, the mobilization of the library staff, so that members of it become, according to their several interests, scouts for those books that "surprise by a fine excess" in science, religion, philosophy, world affairs, literature, art, and all the other aspects of humanistic culture. The number of such books is not enormous in any period. But the selection of those that qualify as worthy, and their provisions, in attractive editions at strategic points in the library, make a delight of the librarian's responsibility for filling in the gaps between the literatures of subject fields in which faculty selection operates most helpfully.

The selection of books that help students to know reading for what it is—one of the great sources of joy for human beings—seems particularly important in the world today when gasoline, motion pictures, radio, and television offer stimulation that constantly affects us all. It would be both presumptuous and futile to ignore the educational possibilities of these means for the movement of people and the communication of ideas. But it is well to remember that one of the characteristics of the Dark Ages was the widespread loss of the ability to read, and the decline in culture that accompanied that loss. Librarians are the keepers of the cultural heritage so far as it is preserved in books and they can have few more important responsibilities than to see to it that such books have a chance to be read.

You remember the inimitable story of Dr. Johnson's search for apples which he believed hidden by his brother on a top shelf in his father's shop. No apples were there, but Petrarch was. His curiosity was excited and he read on, casually, until "in this irregular manner . . . I had looked into a great many

books, which were not commonly known at the Universities, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors; so that when I came to Oxford, Dr. Adams, now master of Pembroke College, told me, I was the best qualified for the University that he had ever known come there." We may have no embryo Dr. Johnsons among our students, but we shall have failed all who have within them the capacity to become even moderately well read unless we have provided books that will do for them what Petrarch once did so well.

Time permits only the mention of one final equipment of the librarian who selects books for the college library: namely, acquaintance with primary sources. True, only universities are responsible for attempting to form complete collections in any field, or special collections better than any other in one field. But the teaching value of *selected* primary sources has been demonstrated over and over by professors who teach in colleges where these are supplied. Practicing always in predominately undergraduate colleges, I have been asked by members of the faculties I served for such sources as *De Bow's Review*, *Niles' Register*, the *Monumenta Germaniae*, *Les livres Jaunes*, *Curtius' Olympia*, and a selective depository of United States government documents. Doubtless others among us could amplify this list many times. But my personal experience is that such of these great sources as could be supplied were used not once a semester, or as curiosities for occasional examination, but week by week during a whole year or a whole semester.

It has been said of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes that he believed "No man could actually teach another anything. All a teacher could do was to let his students be partners in his work—impart as it were a ferment." In my experience, teachers who share with their students use of great sources that contain the original material, which, generation after student generation, is worked over for new results as the times require, are the teachers who start the ferment. To support their work and to build book collections that attract them to a college seem to me some of the highest privileges of the college librarian's calling. Now that microfilm has become an everyday matter, and microcards promise additional help to come, the expense

of source material in money and in space need not be shattering. Indeed, as long ago as 1942 we learned from Clarence Paine that the problem of newspaper files in a small college library might be reduced to a cost of \$5,050, from amounts ranging between \$10,125 and \$22,480, by the use of microfilm.⁷ Surely informed use of these money-saving reproductions should bring within the reach of colleges the basic sources that enrich their teaching.

It is my belief that money spent on source material serviceable to whole classes of students tends to bring rising returns. And one of the dangers I see in attempting to hold down book selection with an eye on optimum size is the temptation to be satisfied with cheaper, secondary sources. In spite of our boasted freedom from the textbook type of teaching, little improvement seems to be made over studying from one good textbook by being required to read over again similar material in three other textbooks. Moreover, it is possible that college librarians have been misled by thinking in university terms of the use of research material. Of course division of responsibility for buying in selected fields, along with the machinery for interlibrary loans and the formation of regional depository libraries, are proving necessities of great research libraries, unless they are to be completely overwhelmed. The individual scholar, even in some cases the graduate student, can move about or borrow for his individual needs. But undergraduates in the traditional four-year college are in a very different case. Their training in the use of basic sources is part of the education that fits them for public service or good citizenship that calls for application of such training whether or not they become scholars. It is hard to see how the proper habits of study and methods of attack on new problems can be acquired without the use of the basic sources that document the teaching in a good college.

In this connection I am indebted to Dr. Branscomb's discussion of the whole problem of research material in college libraries, from which I should like to quote by way of summary: ". . . the interests of students and the research interests of faculty members are

not nearly so far apart as is often supposed. If routine purchases can be directed into the basic literary and historical sources instead of the annual output of popular treatises, textbooks and discussions, so much of which is highly repetitious and quickly ceases to be of interest, the basis for research needs will have been laid and the tools for first rate teaching provided at the same time."⁸

While pondering over book selection for the American college in the atomic age, my mind has turned to a favorite passage in Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth* in which the author discusses the Greek state of mind in the seventh century, another period of extreme disorder in the world. Some good men saw the good way as turning to the left, others in the opposite direction, while the mass of the people were in such confusion that they approached the oracle at Delphi to secure the intervention of a god. But when the oracle spoke its gospel consisted of only four words: "Know yourself; be temperate." Our twentieth-century civilization also stands hesitating in the face of world events. And nothing is more certain than that colleges and the education they provide will share the ills as well as the benefits the future may bring. It seems to be a time for librarians to contribute to their institutions self-knowledge that implies dedication to the scholarly exercise of their own specialization as librarians: mastery of bibliographical methods, cultivation of good taste in reading, and continuing study of source material. May not such self-knowledge wisely result in temperance as we try out ideas relative to the optimum size of college libraries? The really dead wood must go, and joy go with it. But within covers that have gathered dust for years all unaware to us the living word may be waiting. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thought "old Chaucer" obsolete, his language rude, his wit outworn, but Chaucer has outlived his detractors. Let us use with care criteria derived from frequency of circulation, recency of publication, and a bright new look. One scholar's poison may be meat to his successor so far as books are concerned. Let us be temperate.

⁷ Paine, Clarence S. "Microfilm in the Small College Library." *College and Research Libraries*, 3:224-29, June 1942.

⁸ Branscomb, Harvie. *Teaching with Books: A Study of College Libraries*. Chicago, Association of American Colleges and A.L.A., 1940, p. 190-91.

The Optimum Size of the College Library

Mr. Webb is librarian, Union College.

IN THE past few weeks while I have been considering this subject, I have become rather more perturbed than less because I have spoken quite freely in the past on the subject saying that there was no reason for a college having more books than it could use. I still believe that, but as I pin myself down to the point, there is one thing that repeatedly forces itself into my mind. We have in our college a collection of over 90,000 volumes which were not used last year. Why are they not used? The answer is easy for a large part of the collection. We are an old college. We have been buying books since 1796 and we still have most of them. In the past we received as many gifts which were useless as did the next library; and like most of you, when the gift was from an important person and before the library was filled, we cataloged them and added them to our shelves. Some of the books received in this manner are good books; many are not. Hundreds were sample textbooks. Most of these should be and many have been discarded and sent to the pulping mills. Some, because they are good books or beautiful books, should be kept. They form part of a questionable collection, however. Then through the years, a multiplicity of professors have been ordering books to be purchased. Without any reflection on our faculties individually or as groups, we must admit that some professors are good book buyers, others never buy a book, and still others order books with little or no consideration. They are frequently the men who come in with a batch of order cards on Monday morning and you can tell very easily whether they read the *Sunday Times* or the *Sunday Tribune*. These books also are in the questionable category. In the same general classification are the books purchased by a professor on a special grant to promote his personal research. When that research is done and his reputation made, he moves from your college to some larger institution and you are left with several thousand dollars worth of good books which no one else will use.

These two groups must be handled more carefully than the first since you must bring into play all the criteria of book selection which Miss McCrum had in mind. The third group of books which causes worry are those which have been used intensively perhaps and are regarded as a necessity for the reserved shelves. As new books come out, as professors move on, as new ideas change the content of the course, these books, duplicated many times, are certainly ready for the discard.

Suppose that takes care of half of our library. I am only guessing at the proportion. The other half are books which have been purchased after considerable thought. They have been the best books in their field and perhaps they still are. Your curriculums have changed but those books make a rounded library, a collection that we all regard with respect.

If that were all that puzzled us I think we could attack the question of the optimum size of the college library with little hesitation. But that is the point at which I begin to worry. Here we have a library, a large part of which has been well selected and are good books.

When you have youngsters around you, the most frequent question you get and the most difficult for me to answer to youngsters or to you on this question is "why." It is not why we should discard books—an answer almost sufficient, at least in one direction, has been given by Fremont Rider. We just cannot handle the vast bulk of publication and it is not worth while to spend money to house books which are not going to be used. But the "why" question that bothers me is simply this: Why are these books not used? And I think the answer to that should have, and does have a great deal to do with the optimum size of a college library.

Before we can define the optimum size, not for a college but for *your* college or for *mine*, two individual and different questions, there are several things which we must decide, or probably have decided for us. In the first place, what is your curriculum and what will

it be five or 10 years from now? I can imagine a school which would need a very limited number of books. Let us suppose, without any disrespect, a theological school with a very strict sectarian viewpoint. What they teach now and what they teach in a few years from now are fairly well known and understood. They will not welcome change. Such a school could very well say to you: "These are the books we want and a certain number of hundreds or thousands will take care of our needs." At the other extreme is the school with an experimental attitude interested in life today and probably more interested in life tomorrow. They might quite as well say to you: "These are the books that we needed last year, possibly some can be used this year, and almost certainly none will be of any value whatever five years from now." Both of those are absurd extremes. I don't know any school which would really fit either one but it could be. Your curriculum is subject to the will of the faculty or desires of the trustees. Even those of us who sit on the curriculum committees are there, presumably, from a service viewpoint rather than to change the tide of education.

Implied in my description of these two extremities is another factor which helps determine what we can call an optimum size and which reaches into the middle ground of reality. I would say that the first school with the fixed curriculum was interested in training its students to perform their tasks with a perfection handed down by tradition. The second school, I could imagine, was one interested in education, in preparing its students to face the problems of life without worrying too much about what are currently known as facts.

The difference between training and education is one which should worry all educators and I think especially librarians should keep it in mind. I believe that the real meaning of education is the acquiring of an ability in perception. That is, to develop an individual viewpoint and opinion on the subject in hand. Training I regard as the acquiring of a degree of perfection so that an operation can be repeated almost exactly whenever the occasion demands. This is the ability which we admire in a typist, in a machinist or any craftsman. It is very necessary and in many

of our schools we do a most thorough job of training our engineers, our doctors, our teachers, and our librarians, but the problem of educating a student is an entirely different one. Education does not imply facing the same situation again and again. It implies that we will, in the future, be faced with a problem, one that we have never seen before. We will have to look for the facts, recognize them and in the light of all the evidence, come to our own conclusion as to what the situation means.

Now this has a very important effect on what kind of a library a teacher will need. Given a problem in ethics, politics, history or literature, we have two alternatives: first to accept the authoritarian viewpoint—that is, the opinion of the teachers or of the textbook; or if we have intellectual curiosity we can listen to the professor, we can read his book and can go to two or a dozen other books to find out what the same facts are with a different presentation. If we chose the first solution, we come back with the same impression that the author had. We have looked through the same window, from the same angle, and our eye received his impression. If we follow the second solution we have looked through the same window, of course, which, let us say, gives us the parameter of the problem, but we have looked at two or a dozen angles and our perception of the facts is multiplied by so many times. The demand for books is obvious in each case.

I do not intend to wander off into a discussion on educational methods but I think one or two cases will show you my meaning on this point. I would like to mention Lord Byron's reputation after Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote her famous diatribe and also remember the famous Voltaire quotation: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" which was put into Voltaire's mouth by Beatrice Hall. These are authorities speaking across the years and it required several angles of perception to arrive at the facts.

As it applies to college teaching, this difference between education and training boils down to the matter of textbook teaching as opposed to, shall we say, library teaching.

In the beginning or thereabouts, when the light of civilization consisted of a smoky fire in the mouth of a cave, the elders of the tribe

held forth for the benefit of the young men, repeating the legends and lore as they had heard them or as they remembered from their youth. Knowledge was existent before learning. It was authoritative. It came from the gods, and nothing further was to be sought for.

It was not until modern times that the questioning of authority became respectable and in some fields it is not respectable even now. The use of books as a general educational tool is not too ancient. A mere hundred years or so ago, the laws of Union College were definitely designed to prevent the students wasting their time reading books. I quote: "The library shall be open two hours each week when the students may enter, not more than two at a time, and borrow one folio or quarto or two octavos." The "great mind" of the professor was the important factor. We have in our college archives a photograph of Professor Whitehorne's classroom of the seventies. The students sat on benches ranged on the side of the room, the professor on a dais and in the center of the room one seat for the student who was reciting. The idea of the inquisitor and the victim is obvious. There was no question of anything except proving the amount one had learned since yesterday. But such teaching was considered of a high order at that time because the professor was recognized as a scholar and an authority. Try to imagine for a moment the reaction of your own legendary "great teacher" as I sometimes imagine the reaction of President Nott of Union College who taught "Kames" from 1804 to 1860, had my predecessor Professor Pearson recommended to some student a volume on Kames which disagreed with Dr. Nott's opinion. I wonder if those students ever read Kames or did they read only Eliphalet Nott on Kames?

The "great teacher" idea as known in the last century will not suffice for modern living. Mark Hopkins or Eliphalet Nott or whoever the great teacher may have been in your tradition could sit and expound the "word" to the complete satisfaction and perhaps edification of his students because his teaching was authority. No matter how humble the professor might be personally he was placed on a pinnacle before the students as embodying all the knowledge of his subject and as a learned gentleman he was perfectly willing to shift

his subject whenever it was necessary. At best the result could be a group of disciples all possessed of the "word" and able if so inclined to transmit it further.

But were they taught to learn? The learning process of true education results in the ability to recognize the core of a problem, appreciate the implication and judge the facts with discrimination.

Granting that they did learn, that they experimented and that they opened new fields, is it not only because the frontiers of knowledge were as open and as easy of access as were the frontiers of the West?

Another angle of attack on the optimum size is the matter of quality. It ties in very closely with the textbook idea, but there is a new danger if we do decide that we should cut down, for practical reasons, the size of college libraries. I have been on some inspection trips in the last few years and also I have been on busman's holidays and I have seen some libraries which are a bit off the beaten path. If we should ever say that so many books, 25,000, 30,000, or whatever, can be sufficient to provide service to a college, I fear that we will give considerable encouragement to those schools, fortunately not many in number, which are quite happy with the textbook and a collection of discards. I think there is real cause for worry and I certainly feel a professional shame when I see a library of less than 20,000 books, most of which you and I would throw out in a minute, servicing a college which offers not only a specialized bachelor's degree but the master's degree as well.

Another contributing factor is the general wealth of the college foundation. The library budget does, after all, decide what size library you will eventually have. There is no rhyme or reason, however, as I see it, in setting up a library budget based on the number of students of various categories or of the number of faculty with various weights for their academic preeminence. The basis, I believe, should be the wealth of the college. If a family can afford a fine home or luxurious food it is because they can budget sufficient funds out of their income, not because they have many children. Long experience has shown certain percentages should be devoted to the general categories of family expenses. In the same way many of us believe that a

certain percentage of college funds should be devoted to the library. We have been able to see that the good libraries, the ones which have a respected collection of books, the ones which habitually produce outstanding scholars have tended toward the larger expenditure in percentage of the college funds. I have my own opinion (at variance with the opinion of my president) as to what percentage this should be, but I do not wish to go into this in detail, only to indicate that it is one of the factors having a long-range effect.

I have tried to emphasize that this is an individual problem and I think the facts will always vary according to your own situation; so I hope you will pardon me if I refer rather definitely to my own library. I believe that it is better than the average exhibit, however, and I wish you to understand the facts before I venture on a purely personal verdict.

My first insight into this problem was at Tulane in 1929 when I instituted their first charging system and carded only those books which were circulated. What data I had at the time was included by Mr. Branscomb in his *Teaching with Books*. My impression at the time was that for circulation purposes 15,000 volumes plus periodicals and reference books were all that served a good college. I know that in my seven-year term the use of books not only increased but widened.

Among the colleges of Upper New York we have been considering the need and feasibility of a cooperative warehouse. Our library ran a test on a thousand volumes selected at random across the shelflist of books which have been in our annex for the past 10 years. These titles were checked against the catalog at Hamilton College and at Cornell University. Of the thousand volumes (2½ per cent of our warehouse-annex) 40 per cent are duplicated at Hamilton and 66 per cent at Cornell. Of the total 35 per cent are available at all three institutions. It is important to remember that all of these volumes have been in what we call our secondary collection. They were selected for warehousing in 1940 because they had not circulated in five years.

Since I was asked to make this talk, I have checked the circulation of our library for the past five years in three different classifications: the 570-590's, the 336's, and the 942's. These are all fairly active collections in our library but not, I believe, the most active. We exam-

ined altogether about 1700 volumes. Since it was done in late August, it includes neither those volumes which have been liberated by the faculty to augment their personal libraries nor the few volumes in regular circulation at that time. The total circulation over five years numbered 3000. Of this random sampling 1064 volumes have not circulated in five years. If anyone could prove to his own satisfaction that these classifications are average in use, it would mean that 60 per cent of our books are excess baggage and except for the standard classics which everyone must have to be respectable, 66,000 volumes could be discarded at Union.

That would be an astonishing proposal to our faculty. They are proud of our library but complain bitterly that they do not have more resources. Do they need more? Do they need the 50,000 they do not use?

I have noted that we have at least 90,000 volumes out of a total collection of 135,000 which did not circulate last year. I also made a projection from quite inconclusive but perhaps indicative data that 66,000 volumes were not used in the past five years. A third fact is that 35 per cent of our collection has been warehoused and practically unused (a circulation of not more than 200 volumes a year) for the past 15 years. I believe that the smallness of the active collection is due in part to four factors: (1) Larger periodical resources; (2) Teaching from current material such as pamphlets and government documents; and on the negative side: (3) A larger collection of reserved books of which 12 per cent were never used; (4) We have not recovered from the war and the military hangover of explicit directions, little student responsibility, and grade worship.

My conclusion, my verdict, if you will, drawn from 20 years' experience as well as from the facts which I have mentioned this morning, is that for the general curricular use of the library, a drastic cut can be made in size. My formula for that would be the total volumes minus bound periodicals, minus the total of two weeks circulation, minus the number of titles on reserve, multiplied by a factor of .6. This, I think, will give you the figure of volumes which are not of current use. However, if you want richness, if you want to guard against radical changes in curriculum, you must reduce the factor to .5 or

4. Of this unused portion, half or more of your library, I think one copy of every title and of important editions should be kept in a consolidated warehouse within eight hours distance. In addition there must be a constant weeding equal to at least four-tenths of your annual accessions.

Your college and my college are going concerns which must be accepted. The optimum size of our libraries depends fairly on the teaching technique. If you refer back some 10 years to Chancellor Branscomb's greatest contribution to our profession, and it was a really great contribution, you will find considerable discussion of the size of the college library, all tending to show how few different titles are used in many college libraries. My own belief is that universities in their college divisions are even worse offenders from the necessity of coordinating sections rigidly and going through the educational process on production line methods. The optimum size for the best

possible education will require many more books and many more librarians than the shopworn methods generally in use. The two libraries which I consider the most effective within the parameters of their colleges are both small, but their use of books by the students will put the most famous of our institutions to shame. The optimum size of the college library will depend on first the teachers, both number and quality, and second on the librarians, number, quality and diversification. To work with books as a teaching medium we must have library assistants on the floor who are the equal of their colleagues in the classroom in the knowledge of subject matter. This means an academic background supplemented, not replaced, by a professional training. We insist upon a master's degree in a subject field for our instructors. I believe that the same is necessary for the librarian, either cataloguer or reference librarian, plus, of course, professional training.

By RUTHERFORD D. ROGERS

Regional Depository Libraries and the Problem of Optimum Size of College and University Libraries

Mr. Rogers is librarian, the Grosvenor Library.

REDUCED to its essentials, the problem which confronts us is twofold: first, whether it is possible to control the size of college and university libraries and, second, if this question can be answered affirmatively, by what means this limitation shall be achieved and maintained. Undoubtedly many academic libraries can be limited in size or their growth controlled. However, there is no one decision, nor is there a single solution, which will fit all cases. Because of financial limitations, there are few libraries which should not exercise extreme care in book selection. Many librarians should take a retrospective view of their resources to determine if, in the light of current objectives, certain materials should be discarded. Still other librarians should maintain a continuing weeding process.

From the viewpoint of research on a

national or international scale, the regional depository library enters the picture as a vehicle for preserving rarer but little used items which should not be indiscriminately destroyed after the weeding process. On a more provincial level, the regional depository library provides the means for cooperative storage of little-used materials of research significance, such storage being predicated upon economy of cost and service to participating libraries. This, perhaps is a fair statement of the short-term purposes of regional depository centers. It is quite possible that long-term realities may considerably extend these original functions.

There may not be general agreement this morning with respect to the limitations which can be placed on a college library, but the college library which cannot be limited is more likely to be the exception than the rule, in my opinion. Whatever our decision may be, there is a part of the college community, perhaps 10 per cent of the faculty, which is engaged

in research. This group cannot be served through limited college library facilities, and this is a problem which must be solved by those who would limit college libraries.

Certainly the university library cannot be limited, if at all, as easily as the college library. As a matter of fact, from a theoretical standpoint it would be ideal if the university library could be complete in all major curricular fields, but there are practical limitations, primarily economic in character, which make it impossible for the university library even to approach this ideal. Therefore, the university librarian is faced with a dilemma: the desirability on the one hand of having a library which is unlimited in size and, on the other hand, being forced to accept a book collection falling far short of this goal. As a result, the university librarian has turned to collective action together with his colleagues in the public library field in an effort to gain completeness in research materials, which completeness is an impossibility for any independent library. Consequently, we have the Farmington Plan which, although it has definite limitations, particularly for university libraries, holds great promise for achieving its objectives, but I think that this promise will only be fully realized if Farmington planning is combined with certain other developments in library service. Among these collateral developments, the regional depository library appears to be the most important.

Presumably, we all know what a regional depository library is, but in order that we may be in complete agreement with respect to the details of this discussion, a brief definition may be useful. It is an institution to which participating libraries send materials, for the most part old and little used; these materials are assembled, duplicates are eliminated, and the remaining copies then become available to all participating libraries; the collection is shelved according to some simple classification scheme, probably by size, and the depository center is supported by participating libraries according to some formula, either in proportion to the amount of material sent to the center, the size of the budgets of the participating libraries, or otherwise.

Earlier in this paper, it was suggested that the future might see a considerable change in the character and functions of depository libraries. One can hardly analyze this new

development and the causes which are bringing it about without concluding that these centers will evolve from primarily warehouse undertakings, as they are now regarded, to major agencies in interlibrary loan. From there they will almost certainly develop into fully integrated libraries serving scholars directly.

Even in our extremely preliminary planning in Upper New York State it has become apparent that regional depository libraries cost a great deal of money. I am thinking not only of the cost of the building and its administration but of other considerations as well. I have surveyed the Grosvenor Library collection with a view to selecting those materials which might be sent to a depository center. This is a tough and exacting task, and one with which you might experiment in your own library. Few other methods will reveal so quickly the nature of the problems facing those interested in this idea. In addition to this difficult step, which is essentially one of weeding, it has been determined that it costs just about as much to transfer a book to a depository as it does to process it originally. This is true in part because we are not discarding the book but are transferring it to a remote point, changing its ownership and, at the same time, keeping a record of its location. To these costs, we must add the expense of transporting material to the depository center and processing it at that point. In view of these costs, the conclusion seems inescapable that eventually much material will go directly from the publisher to the depository center. All research libraries purchase materials which will not be used immediately upon receipt and which may never be used intensively. It seems reasonable to believe that eventually a fund will be established for the direct purchase of such materials by the depository center without the materials being duplicated and processed throughout the region.

Inasmuch as regional depository libraries are, or will become, very expensive, it is to be hoped that we will not make the same mistakes with them as we have, in some instances, with union catalogs. Union catalogs and regional depositories have certain things in common. They are major cooperative undertakings with long-range implications, and it is probable that the ultimate regional depository library will have as part of its bibliographical

apparatus a union catalog. Those of you who attended the university library meeting at this conference must have been staggered by the figures used to describe problems surrounding the national Union Catalog. I am not criticizing that undertaking, which I consider to be of the utmost importance, but it is indicative of the magnitude to which these projects can develop and how essential it is to plan them intelligently in advance. I hope that this association will take the leadership in planning depository libraries on a *national* basis. It seems to me that large regions are to be desired and, therefore, as a basis for discussion we might consider the establishment of not fewer than three nor more than approximately six.

It remains for us to decide what role college and university libraries shall play in establishing and maintaining a system of depository libraries. I have concluded that the average college library should not be a full-fledged member of such a regional pattern, primarily because the ordinary college library will not purchase the types of materials which would constitute a contribution to a depository center. There are exceptions to this statement particularly in view of valuable gift collections which college libraries have received and undoubtedly will continue to receive. These must be treated as a separate issue. Likewise, we must treat as a separate problem the needs of the small group in the college library community engaged in research. These people will need the services which a regional depository library can render, and I believe that these services should be available to the college on a nominal fee basis.

On the other hand, the university library should be a full-fledged member of a depository system. Pressure for membership is likely to be directly proportionate to size, and also because of size, the university library will have materials of significance to the depository. But of even greater importance is the stake which the university as a whole will have in such a system, as a consequence of which the librarian will want to be assured that his particular regional depository is acquiring those materials of interest to the university curricula.

It does not take a prophet to foresee that regional depository libraries can soon grow to a point where they will be too expensive for

participating libraries to support. It appears entirely appropriate and desirable for university and public research libraries to start depository centers, but even in the inception of such a program the participating institutions should look forward to other means of support. At the risk of disagreement with many people, I have concluded that the most logical source of funds is the Federal Government. In the first place, regional depositories will be serving practically all research libraries and many other libraries as well. Therefore, all of our population will indirectly benefit both culturally and economically. Furthermore, if large regions are established, regional boundaries may not coincide with state boundaries, in which event it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to work out a means of state support.

It is not improbable that anyone who speaks with enthusiasm on the subject of depository libraries will be subject to criticism. Fortunately, a number of people of considerable stature, both in and out of our profession, have independently come to general agreement with respect to the feasibility of this idea. Among them are President Eliot of Harvard, to whom the idea is attributed, and Professor Joeckel, who foresaw in the 1930's the early rise of depository centers. Those of you who heard President Ernest Cadman Colwell of the University of Chicago speak at the 1949 A.L.A. midwinter meeting or who have read his stimulating article in *College and Research Libraries*¹ have some conception of his vision with respect to the future effectiveness of depository centers. Finally, I would like to quote from the July 1949 issue of *College and Research Libraries*² a statement by a committee of the Association of Research Libraries, as follows: ". . . there was strong opinion in the committee that there must in due course be a network of great regional libraries established in this country which can hardly be created and maintained without federal subsidy."

I urge this association to take the leadership in investigating the regional depository library idea both as a solution to the problem of over-growth as well as a potentially significant factor in library service of the future.

¹ *College and Research Libraries* 10:195-98, July 1949.

² *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Revision of the "Shaw List"

Last summer the writer was asked by Wyman Parker, chairman of the A.C.R.L. College Libraries Section, to head a committee to study the need for revising the *List of Books for College Libraries* ("Shaw List") and to explore ways and means for such revision.

All librarians are earnestly asked to express their views to the committee. No questionnaire will be sent as it is felt that the voluntary response to this appeal will be a more valid measure of interest in the project.

The "Shaw List," so-called because it was compiled and edited by Charles B. Shaw, was published in 1931 by A.L.A. Publication was made possible through a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. At that time the Corporation was engaged in making a large scale distribution of funds to aid in the development and strengthening of college book resources. Because there was no reliable standard for evaluating college book holdings for guidance in making grants, the Corporation named an advisory group, headed by William Warner Bishop, to prepare a list that would serve as a standard. The list was prepared for the group by Mr. Shaw.

The "Shaw List" served its immediate purpose so admirably that, in the two decades following its publication, it became generally accepted as a basic and vital tool for measuring the quality of college library book collections and as a buying guide for building up weak collections. The original list numbered about 14,000 titles and a supplement, appearing in 1938, added nearly 8,000 titles. Appropriateness and usefulness for undergraduate student reference and study were the principal criteria for selection and the final list represented the combined judgment of a considerable number of distinguished scholars, educators and librarians.

It has become increasingly evident that the "Shaw List" is growing obsolete as an evaluating standard and buying guide. If continued

to be used for these purposes it must be brought up-to-date and a permanent policy for revision established; hence, the appointment of the "Shaw List" Revision Committee. Serving with the writer on this committee are Janet Agnew, Herbert Anstaett and Elkan Buchalter. These Pennsylvania librarians were chosen because of their nearness to Swarthmore College, where the original list was born, and because their geographic proximity makes committee meetings easy.

The U.S. Office of Education reports that there are more than 1800 small colleges in this country. It is to these small colleges that such a list is likely to prove most useful. The committee's first task, then, is to find out whether the librarians of these 1800 colleges do actually want such a list. If so, do they want a completely new "Shaw List," a supplement to the present list, or, perhaps, a quite different kind of list? For example, the new list, if needed, might be on the order of the H. W. Wilson Company's *Standard Catalogs* with monthly and annual cumulative supplements; it might be merely a checklist of the principal reference books and periodicals, like that published by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; or it might be completely revised every four or five years and supplemented by an A.C.R.L. monthly review publication on the order of *The Booklist*.

When the general sentiment with respect to these problems has been determined, the committee will, if necessary, explore ways and means for financing publication of the list, make recommendations for revision procedures, and furnish a list of candidates for the task of directing and editing the actual work of revision.

Let us have your opinions and your ideas, however conservative, reactionary, radical, revolutionary or impossible they may seem.—*Lee C. Brown, Pennsylvania Military College Library, Chester.*

Films in the Academic Library

(Continued from page 130)

tive superiors for increased funds and to buttress his request with sound arguments.

Centralization as a basic principle in the handling of educational films in the aca-

demie community is well established. If a good, separate agency has already been established, the librarian should probably do no

(Continued on page 166)