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AFTER nearly ten years of unique service in Paris, that animated nerve center of French intellectual life, the United States Information Service Library has realized a high professional place and a fine reputation for service among the reading public. This reputation has been gained in part by standard public library devices—the open shelf system of arranging books, attractive reading rooms, and generous lending privileges—but especially by a documentation and reference service carefully developed to meet French needs for information on the life and culture of the United States. In addition to this service the library makes available a free lending service of standard and current books, periodicals, and other materials. A third major area of service is that of extension loans by mail of French translations of American books. All of these services reach the provinces by means of five branches maintained in Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, and Strasbourg. The Paris library functions as a central agency for book acquisitions, gives supervision to organization and technical routines, and acts as a clearing house for such infor-

mation and materials which the branches are unable to provide.

## MODEST BEGINNING IN 1945

A unit of the new Government Information Service which succeeded the Office of War Information in 1945, the "documentation center" marked its official opening in February of that year. Its modest beginning was on the Place de l'Opéra in a little room seating exactly twenty-five persons and with a nucleus of between 400 and 500 "representative" American books. Announcements of the venture were sent to key officials, citizens, and groups of scholarly interests: "The Center will be open daily for the use of the French public who wish to inform themselves concerning America and things American." Public response was immediate and dramatic. Hundreds of people waited in line during the first weeks, many desiring only standing room around the walls to reach the materials displayed. Serious and popular readers vied with each other for service, and for a time the librarian was undecided which group to favor; this question was later resolved when the quarters were enlarged to double the seating capacity and a separate room was obtained to house the reference and technical materials. Space continued to be a problem and the library was destined to undergo two other moves before coming to its present location on the Champs Élysées.

## DEMANDS FOR SCIENCE SERVICES

From the outset and continuing until re-

<sup>1</sup> The chief sources are the official USIS reports of the librarian, dated January 1945-June 1948, and of the general staff meetings from August 1945 to date. Several library staff members have seen continuous service since 1946, and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The author, now director of the library, has served under two previous directors. The article, "USIS Library: Paris" (*Library Journal*, June 1, 1953, pp. 945-948) by the author of this article, and Gladys Solomon's "Information Please!—Paris Style" (*Christian Science Monitor*, December 17, 1949, p. 13) have also been used.

cently there was an almost exaggerated concern with the sciences and technology. This policy was undoubtedly due in large measure to the excessive needs of the postwar period and the consequently heavy demands made upon the library by practitioners in scientific fields, especially doctors. French scientific life had long been cut off from foreign developments by the black-out of war, and its normally vigorous and creative nature had been stifled. Reports of the librarian regularly mentioned the great use by specialists in 1945. So numerous were requests for technical and medical journals during the first weeks that loans were limited to a period of forty-eight hours; many of these were used for the photostating of certain articles. In May there were over 5,000 inquiries and reference questions noted in a report for the previous six-weeks period; the large majority of these were in the fields of chemistry, medicine, engineering, radio, housing, and architecture. The number of visitors to the library in August exceeded 10,000; by October the figure had reached 13,000. Lists of library periodicals distributed to other libraries and research centers brought increasing demands. In a single month of this year a total of fifty-one scientific and technical organizations were furnished documentation of various kinds.

The trend was the same in 1946. The documentation service in medicine had become so important that other centers were providing materials to strengthen the USIS collections; it was reported that a gift of books had been received from the École de Médecine of the Université de Paris, and that 200 medical periodicals had been acquired from the library of the Sorbonne. Extensive purchases of books were made with the National Research Council bibliography, *Scientific, Medical and Technical Books . . . 1930-1944*, as a guide; French professors were invited to participate in this

selection. Copies of this bibliography were presented to appropriate Paris libraries. Photostating of scientific articles unavailable in Paris, which had formerly been referred to Washington for procurement, had to be discontinued, so large was the volume of requests; however, this service received new life when the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique offered to assume responsibility for it. The importance of the library's services was further heightened with the closing of all of the French ministerial information centers, due to reasons of economy, and the resulting increased demands for scientific documentation coming from government officials. To assist with this rapidly expanding service, a young Frenchman having special training in the sciences was appointed.

In 1948 an American librarian, a specialist in science reference work, arrived to supervise this phase of the library program. A special department had been begun, and the book collections in the 500's and 600's and the files of periodicals in science and technology had become the largest and the most important classes in the library. The science trend was strengthened with the launching of the Economic Cooperation Administration program in France, for it was USIS policy to closely support the Marshall Plan objectives. Technology exhibits, booklists on "productivity," and the publicizing of useful materials on the many and varied topics having to do with labor, management, and the stimulation of business and industry were important functions of the new department. Strong interest in American medical books and journals continued during this year, and it was reported to USIS officials that the Paris physicians were desirous that the library remain open during the evenings to permit their visits after business hours—a request which could not be granted because of inadequacy of staff.

### CHANGE OF EMPHASIS

This emphasis on science and technology continued until 1952 when it began to be obvious that the collections were deficient in American literature, fine arts and music, and certain of the social sciences. There were by this time fewer requirements for scientific reference and, conversely, a growing number of requests for information in non-scientific subjects; circulation in the natural and applied sciences had fallen considerably. Definite developments in the international publishing field were factors in this lessening interest in science, as far as the specific library services of USIS were concerned. French libraries and institutions, as well as individuals themselves, were resuming their subscriptions to American periodicals. Book purchases from across the Atlantic, first stimulated by the Economic Cooperation Administration, began to be more than a trickle. The Department of State had taken over the Informational Media Guarantee program, aiding foreign booksellers and American publishers by underwriting dollar returns for payments made in local currencies. UNESCO book coupons came into use. Franco-American bookseller contacts were being renewed and widened. In short, the free exchange of printed matter was again well under way with the improved economic situation and there no longer existed the need for the phenomenal science services which the library had supplied during its early years.

### IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Accordingly the library staff decided that as far as the objectives of the library were concerned, other subject fields were equally as important as the sciences, if not more so. There could be no justification for neglect of the humanities and the social sciences in developing the library services: a scientific view as the sole perspective of American

society was simply an inaccurate one. Furthermore, one of the most distorted contentions of anti-American propaganda, acceptable even to many sympathetic Europeans, was that, although Americans excelled in technology, they were devoid of culture, i.e., culture in the sense of artistic and spiritual creativeness. Critics were absorbed with the problem of American civilization, the characteristic symbols of which, at least in their thinking, were production lines and the dollar sign. It was difficult to point out to such critics that there existed a massive volume of cultural activity of all kinds in the United States, that some libraries and museums had richer holdings than many European ones, and that drama, symphonic concerts and exhibitions were very widely supported. French visitors to the States admittedly were astonished at such activity but even their reports made little impression upon prevailing criticism.

### A BLUEPRINT PROVIDED

In 1953 the Science and Technology department was discontinued and the room was given over to work with periodicals. Books in the 500's and 600's were weeded out and then shelved within their class locations in the general collection. The files of medical and technological periodicals were considerably reduced and older runs were presented to appropriate libraries and institutions. Immediate attention was directed to the expansion of the book collections in the deficient subject areas. The following statement of library policy as relating to science and technology was proposed:

1. A limited number of subject fields should be determined, the paramount considerations being general reference needs and broad library usefulness.
  - a) These fields should provide a blueprint for the development of the

- the sciences and technology collections, and for reference activities.
2. Materials, in general, should be limited to the following:
    - a) Books of a historical nature, limited to, or emphasizing American contributions.
    - b) General surveys of current activities and peculiarly American topics.
    - c) Yearbooks and compilations within certain special fields, e.g., medicine.
    - d) Catalogs and buying guides, e.g., in industry and engineering.
    - e) Periodicals should be generously provided, representing many subjects no longer found in the book collections.
  3. Generally the library will disavow the label of "research library" nor will science collections be either continued or developed with the aims of research in view—except, incidentally, as the materials which are provided may be found to be of special use.

Although this statement has not been officially adopted, it does represent the thinking of the library staff and it is serving as an interim guide in book selection and reference work.

The library reference service is based upon a small but adequate collection of familiar American reference books. The standard encyclopedias, dictionaries, and yearbooks are supplemented by many special aids, including those for science and technology which are mentioned in the policy statement above. Telephone directories of the larger American cities are frequently used sources. A unique type of Americana of great interest to the French is the mail order house catalog. Descriptive materials on American cities and states, such as travel guides, maps and street guides, and chamber of commerce brochures, are never sufficient for the demands. Educational directories and files of college and university catalogs are constantly used by exchange students and professors. Professional registers in medicine, law, business, and the arts facilitate

transoceanic contacts for many persons. Dictionaries of Americanisms, colloquial usage and slang provide help for astonished students of the "American language" and frustrated translators of Hemingway and Faulkner.

#### DOCUMENTATION CENTER

The library is a "special library" only in the sense that it is a government library, or that it is limited to materials on the United States. To the French it is a "documentation center" and it is included in the list of such centers in the official *Répertoire des Bibliothèques de France*. The total of the book collection is approximately 20,000 volumes, of which about 6,500 are French translations—all representing a choice of recently published works on American life and culture. Periodical subscriptions exceed 450, many of which are in medicine and technology—a concession to patrons interested in these fields since the discontinuance of the special science room. Among these subscriptions are found the outstanding titles in literature, music, art, and religion. Education, business, psychology, and library science also are well represented.

Excellent working relations are maintained with some of the major libraries of Paris. Exchange of reference information is frequent. The library often makes gifts of duplicates and new books to these libraries when the materials are outside of its own fields of interest. It also advises and aids with the official Information Service presentations of selected American books to French universities. Regular contacts are had with the libraries of the Sorbonne, Sainte-Geneviève, the Faculté de Médecine of the Université de Paris, and the Bibliothèque Nationale. The libraries of international agencies, especially UNESCO, NATO and SHAPE, also make use of the library's services. Since the beginning of

the Information Service program in France, good relations have been maintained with the American Library in Paris, a private subscription library devoted to both English and American life. Similar contacts, culminating in reference service, loans to students, and professional library advice, are had with the library of the Fondation des États-Unis of Cité Universitaire.

By far the greater part of the reference service is required for information of contemporary importance. Current American materials like newspapers, government publications, and special reports of governmental and private agencies may be in demand in France almost as quickly as in the United States. American activities of all kinds, especially those of international character, are immediately made public since French press services in the United States are as active as the American ones in France. Such sensational, though newsworthy, items as the Kefauver and the Kinsey reports were also of front page interest in France. The Eisenhower Economic Report and his historic declaration on the peaceful uses of atomic power were of infinitely wider significance, geographically, than in the United States. In May 1954, only a few days after the Supreme Court's decision on segregation in education, French publications were featuring stories on this topic simultaneously with the American press. Indeed, Americans often are surprised to learn how closely their ideas and opinions are followed in France. American periodicals are more widely read than it would be assumed; the major ones of news and popular value are found on most of the large newsstands in Paris. Certainly no controversial article escapes attention. The elaborate and far-fetched war issue of *Collier's* appearing in 1952 created a furor of discussion as to American foreign policy. *Life* magazine's article on Indo-China in 1953 and its special

issue on Germany this year caused only a little less excited attention and comment. There are few developments in the United States which do not have implications for the library, whether they be in foreign policy, industry, literature and art, or in rehabilitation of the physically handicapped—all may have news significance in France and set up currents of interest among groups and individuals having parallel interests and specializations.

#### WORKING WITH TEACHERS

If American science and technology have determined past library emphasis in reference and reader services, it appears now that the humanities and social sciences will prescribe much of the work of the future. The majority of library registrants are people with such interests—university professors, *lycée* teachers, and students constituting one large group; in addition to these are journalists, lawyers, publishers, translators, and creative workers in literature and art. The first group is very significant, the teachers providing the best, and almost the only contact through which USIS is able to reach young people with American books. One means by which this contact is exploited is the annual series of Americana Day programs sponsored by the Cultural Section of the Information Service for the benefit of French teachers of English. These programs utilize appropriate lectures, films and exhibitions and are built around some important theme from American life, possibly in literature, history or sociology. They are carried out entirely in the English language. The American novel, American Indians, the Negro, and education have been subjects of successful Americana Days. The library participates with exhibits of books, e.g., on the teaching of English, the "American language," and children's literature. Book lists are distributed and announce-

ments of library services are made. Each of the six Information Centers has at least one such program each year and the audiences are most enthusiastic.

Nearly a thousand copies of the list, *Books on the English Language and American Civilization*, compiled by the library staff, were distributed to teachers in the Paris-Cherbourg area alone. Circulars describing library services were included with the lists. The effectiveness of such a contact was more than proved; in one five-week period, for instance, the recipients of these lists sent in thirty-five letters of inquiry about library services, there were ten visits of teachers from Paris *lycées* and *cours complémentaires*, and loans of over 300 books were made. The Paris teachers are always interested in simple and readable materials in American history and geography for use in their classes. In this connection the *Picture Book of the States* series, written by Bernadine Bailey and published by Albert Whitman and Company, has been found so useful that the library stocks individual titles in duplicates for all six libraries. This teacher contact with *lycée* students is utilized for special library programs; for example, the book fair for children and young people carried out in 1952, and the American holiday programs during the same year. Hundreds of young Parisian scholars have been introduced to American life and thought by means of American books, as well as films, music and story hours.

#### LIBRARY EXHIBITS ATTRACT READERS

In publicizing the services of the library, exhibitions combined with special programs are effectively employed to reach other groups than school children. The publication of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in French translation was the occasion in the library for a colorful display of American books in translation, which was

opened with an appropriate program before a group of translators, publishers, book reviewers, and professors. The featured speaker was Jean Dutourd, prominent author and the translator of the Hemingway book. A similar ceremony in April 1954 was that of the opening of an exhibit of first and special editions entitled, "American Books, 1655-1954," originally displayed in London by the Times Bookshop and later loaned to the Paris Information Service. This program was dignified by the attendance of the American Ambassador, the Director General of UNESCO, and several important French publishers. Library exhibits are a regularly used device to inform and stimulate the prospective reader, and considerable thought and planning are given to them. Recent exhibits which have attracted much attention were one on Louisiana timed to appear with the magnificent French exhibit marking the sesquicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase, and another, "The West in Fiction," the West being a subject of perennial interest to the French. Other lesser ones have been based on a number of topics, ranging from American cookery to prefabricated houses.

Among other pertinent library reference services is the close cooperation with the work of the other book programs of the Information Service. These programs are those of the Presentations and Translations Units, the former having the responsibility for large-scale buying of select American books for planned distribution and gifts throughout France, and the latter for the encouragement of the local publishing of translations of American books. The library serves as a bibliographic center for these activities, and staff members occasionally assist in the formal presentations of gifts. Evaluations of books, authors, and translators as well as other information are regularly interchanged among these three

units allowing a comprehensive approach to both American and French publishing fields as regarding books of program utility.

#### REFERENCE PROCEDURES

In conclusion it may be of interest to summarize something relative to reference procedures and the questions. Inquiries reach the library by telephone, by letters, and, of course, by personal visits. There are seven French staff members handling these questions, two of them being assigned to the periodicals room. This staff is supervised by an American professional librarian. Inquiries coming by phone are routed to the proper desk although, generally, there is no specialization except for questions in science and technology; the library is fortunate, however, in having among the reference staff members backgrounds in English, art, economics, and music in addition to library science. Telephone inquiries, which are very numerous, may come from government ministries, business firms, other libraries, and the many American and international agencies in Paris. Such requests may be for matters of quick reference, such as an address, the price of a book, or some statistical figure; or they may be for information requiring a lengthy search, such as background facts on federal services to education, or how the official price indices are derived.

Reference letters are quite common and Paris receives as many as a hundred in one month. Some inquiries are referred from the branches and, occasionally, from the French colonies and possessions where there are USIS centers. Many inquiries are of a technical nature requiring considerable time and effort to compile the answers. One person is often assigned to handle the letters and no matter how difficult they may be, all receive serious attention with replies usually mailed within one to three days.

The questions vary as much as they do in any American public library. An author writing a book on Beaumarchais wished to have details about materials on the American Revolution in the National Archives in Washington. The American Friends Service Committee needed a loan of books on human relations for an international conference in Switzerland. The French division of General Motors wanted advice as to the organization of a technical reading room for its employees. UNESCO required documentation for a special issue of the *Courier*. A visiting group from the National Research Center of Yugoslavia wished to see the operations of the library and hear about its organization. The woman's magazine, *Fémina* needed data on the consumption and the prices of eggs in the United States. A theatrical group wanted addresses of American universities in order to plan an itinerary for the presentation of French plays.

#### RESEARCH AID TO AUTHORS

Many important researches have been based in part upon materials and assistance furnished by the library. The reference staff, understandably, takes great pride in some of the completed projects. An early example was an important book on the uses of penicillin in medication as practiced in the United States. The two war books of Georges Blond, *Le Survivant du Pacifique* and *D'Arromanches à Berlin* are other examples, the first being an account of the aircraft carrier "Enterprise" in the Pacific theater of operations and the second dealing with the Normandy campaign. Another recent example is the much discussed book, *Tableau des États-Unis* by André Siegfried; the savant of the Académie Française not only utilized library materials but he also interviewed American library staff members on certain topics. The editors of *Réalités*,

an outstanding and beautifully illustrated example of French journalism, called upon the library for supplementary information for their special issue on the United States which was published in 1953 in separate French and English editions. Many lecturers rely upon library reference aid which has been provided upon such subjects as American youth, American women, and the blind in the United States. And the reference librarians are still sentimental over the pictures of American dress of the Civil War period which they furnished for the designing of costumes for a masquerade ball sponsored by the firm Parfums Guerlain—the theme, "Gone With the Wind."

#### REFERENCE STAFF

The French staff members are constantly engaged in studying American reference tools and materials, an activity guided and encouraged by their American colleagues. In-service training, of necessity, is a continuous process. Though much of it requires individual personal effort, there are planned staff talks, reports, and book reviews. It is essential that they have as much background knowledge of the United States as possible, and every activity is stressed which will contribute to their useful information. Great reliance is placed upon the aid of each assistant in reference procedures, and the close cooperation of French and Americans is often imperative in the interpretation of questions. Every printed resource, intellectual background, and human experience within the organization is called upon when there is need; if these fail, other libraries and agencies are contacted. In special cases questions may even be referred to Washington for fuller information. On the whole the success of the staff is quite high when measured by standards of initiative, resourcefulness, logical follow-through, and speed.

The position of the French staff is often a difficult one when aiding with subjects of a controversial nature. Display by patrons of anti-American sentiment calls for careful handling. But the policy of objectivity, rooted in good sense and good manners, does not blind them to a sense of high purpose in their work, to a belief in the aims for which the library stands. Being in a favored position as far as information is concerned, they have caught a vision of the real America, a vision shorn of the transient events of the day and the obscuring things of only superficial relevance. The United States is no easy country either to understand, or to interpret—particularly in times of international stress as these today.

#### TYPICALLY AMERICAN ATMOSPHERE

American concepts of freedom of inquiry and the objective pursuit of knowledge, as observed in the library, command respect simply because they are identical with the concepts of the French. Another impressive thing about the library to the French is its typically American atmosphere, so different from the prevalent situation in many European libraries. The informality and freedom which characterize its activities are genuinely inviting—access is free, loans are free, movement is unchallenged. One may read or look as he wishes, browse, remove books from the shelves, sit where he pleases, leave when he pleases—all of these things without the restraints of officialdom and red tape. Materials and reference service are freely available to be utilized as the reader wishes.

A library as an institution can be no greater than the aims for which it stands. The United States Information Service Library, therefore, is a modest but effective symbol of Franco-American cooperation and understanding.