

let in a blast of cold, mountain air. There were no records to keep, no students to serve, the library opened late and closed early, and all was serene along the banks of the Old Buffalo. I suspect that stories of this kind could be told world without end about every little college library across this land of ours.

Then something happened. Libraries have come alive, and the whole idea of libraries and librarianship has undergone a tremendous change. The library, once the storehouse, has turned into the laboratory of the whole college. The librarian now becomes ex-officio a member of the faculty of each department, and he must of necessity teach, instruct, and lead in the arts and sciences. Every phase of library activity has increased a hundredfold. And herein we find our dilemma. Librarians who are neither

trained nor prepared to carry on these activities are suddenly finding themselves in the midst of this boiling cauldron, having to spread themselves thin to meet demands for their time, efforts, and abilities. Much trouble comes from the fact that we do not have enough time to do all the things which are demanded of us. There are not enough staff hours. By trying to do all the things which are asked of us, we find, unfortunately, that much of our effort is in vain because we are trying to do too much, carry on too many activities, and operate in areas for which we are not properly prepared.

Most assuredly something needs to be done. After thirty years in active library work (most of it spent in a small liberal arts college atmosphere) and in three library schools, I do not know the answer. Do you?

By KEYES D. METCALF

Staff Participation in Library Management in a Large Research Library

THE THINGS THAT I SHALL HAVE TO SAY will not be very profound; they may all seem obvious and routine, and the clichés will be plentiful, I fear. They will not, at least, be quoted from other authors. For better or worse, I have carefully avoided trying to bone up on the literature of the subject. Instead, I shall speak only from first-hand knowledge accumulated during more than fifty years of experience in library work.

Let me start by saying that I believe unhesitatingly and heartily in staff participation in library management in large research libraries—in all libraries, for that matter. Staff participation, like other good things, can be misused; my belief in it does not mean that I approve when it is made an excuse for laziness of the chief librarian, or when he tries, by means of it, to escape the

responsibility that he ought to accept as his.

In order to explain why I believe in staff participation, I am going to consider four major topics: (1) the effect of staff participation on staff members, (2) its effect on the chief librarian, (3) its effect on the library, and, (4) its effect on the library profession.

The first of these topics—the effect of staff participation on staff members—particularly appeals to me because I have always been interested in training young people for library work. I have always wished that I had the ability to teach and that I could have done more to train the young men and women who are to become leaders in the next generation. It is pleasant now, in my latter days, to have an opportunity at Rutgers to try my hand at it.

My interest in the subject goes back to the time, fifty-one years ago last summer, when I made up my mind to become a librarian. I was then spending a summer vacation from high school working as a hired man on an Ohio farm. I knew that I had a lot to learn about libraries, and wondered how to go

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about learning. The next month—September, 1905—I was fortunate enough to get a job in a library, and I have stayed with library work ever since. I was very fortunate indeed in 1905 because that first job of mine was under Azariah Smith Root, who, I still believe, was the greatest of American college—as distinct from university—librarians.

Azariah Root had a deep interest in library training. Not long after I began work for him, he became chairman of the American Library Association committee that was the forerunner of the Board of Education for Librarianship, and he later served as director of the Library School at the New York Public Library. I do not know whether or not he had given any thought, at the time I started work in the Oberlin College Library, to the subject of staff participation in library management, but I do know that, within four months, he permitted and, indeed, encouraged a high-school junior to participate in the administration of the library. He was not lazy, and he was certainly not trying to dodge responsibility; but he arranged for me, under close supervision, of course, to gather a group of boys of my own age and to direct them in the task of sewing, with shoestrings, great quantities of periodicals and newspapers into manila rope bundles.

This was during the Christmas holidays of 1905. I was sure already that I wanted to make a career of library work, but I suppose I might have had at least occasional doubts about the wisdom of my choice if it had not been for this early opportunity to take the lead in accomplishing something in a library that seemed to be interesting and worth while. At the time, I should add, I had no desire to become a library administrator.

This is not an autobiography, and I shall not tell in detail of the opportunities that Azariah Root gave me to participate in library administration during the years that followed at Oberlin. It may be worth pointing out, however, that my first exposure to the problems of library architecture came while I was still in high school in 1906. Azariah Root was then at work on plans for the building that, when it opened in 1908, was the best college library building in the country. He saw to it that I became interested in building planning, and I never lost

that interest, though it was not until twenty years later that I had another opportunity to work on a plan.

When the Oberlin library moved into its new building, I had a good deal to do with planning the move and carrying it out. The excitement I experienced at that time in making the wheels go around in a library is responsible, I suppose, for the fact that I headed toward the hard life of the library administrator instead of down one of the paths that permit a librarian to spend his time in closer contact with the books that attracted him to the profession. The administrator, unfortunately, finds himself dealing less with books themselves than with administrative machinery for handling books.

One more word about Oberlin may be added. In 1912, when Professor Root was preparing to take a sabbatical leave, he found no one on his staff who was ready to accept responsibility for administering the library during his absence. Though I was then only in the midst of my training at library school, he decided that my six years of experience under him as a page had given me administrative experience enough to manage the library for eight months, and I took over the task.

These are only personal reminiscences of forty-five to fifty years ago, but I think they are relevant. Indeed, if it were not for these experiences and the good I think they did me, I should not have been ready to accept this assignment and hope that I should have something to contribute.

It is my opinion, based on experience rather than theory, that staff participation, particularly if it involves taking responsibility, ought to begin very early in a library career. It is the best training for administration that has yet been developed. Library schools have been trying to teach administration for many years, but I fear they have been unsuccessful on the whole because the instruction has been too theoretical in nature. I believe that some of the graduate schools in other fields, such as the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, are learning how to teach administration, and, thanks in part to their example, our library schools are now moving in the right direction.

It seems preferable to give administrative

training to students who have had some practical library experience—administrative experience in libraries, if possible. The advanced seminar in library administration that I had the good fortune to conduct at Rutgers last spring could not possibly have worked out as well as it did unless the participants had all come to it with a background of experience in library administration.

My opinions on this subject can be supported by examination of the early careers of successful chief librarians in research libraries. I shall not attempt here to recite a series of short biographies, but I suggest that you check on the background of a few such men. I think you will find that nearly all of them are librarians who had a chance to participate in administration while they were junior members of a library staff. Moreover, if you investigate successful library administrators who are not trained librarians, I think you will find that most of them had good administrative experience before they came to their present positions.

Further, I believe you will find that a remarkably large percentage of the country's leading librarians obtained their administrative experience in a relatively small number of libraries, and that these are libraries with a librarian who, in addition to skill of his own in administration, had an interest in building up a staff on which there were able administrators. The way to do this is to give members of the staff an opportunity to take part in administration.

A census of successful library administrators would enumerate many who worked with Edwin Hatfield Anderson and Harry Miller Lydenberg at the New York Public Library, and many more who worked with William Warner Bishop at the University of Michigan. It would reveal a much smaller number who came during the same period from the staff of the Library of Congress, though this staff was much larger than the staff at Michigan or the New York Public Library. This certainly does not mean that Herbert Putnam was not a great librarian. But Anderson, Lydenberg, and Bishop believed in staff participation in library management, and were successful in encouraging it. Putnam, whatever his convictions, did not accomplish nearly as much in this field.

For further evidence based on my own experience, I should like to turn back, this time, to the year 1914. I had then completed library school, served for eight months as the responsible administrator of the Oberlin College Library, and had the benefit of participation in administration for several years. I was in charge of the main book stack in the New York Public Library, with a large staff made up of high-school boys who were there because a job was available, not because they had any idea of becoming librarians. The New York Public Library did not have a shelf list in those days, and it was decided that one must be created. As you can imagine, making a shelf list for a library of that size promised to be a considerable task. It was assigned to me by Mr. Anderson and Mr. Lydenberg because I was then directly in charge of a large percentage of the library's collections.

They realized that a good deal of time had to be devoted to the relatively routine work of keeping the stack going, and that I ought to have someone under me in direct charge of the new shelf-list job. One day when I was talking with Mr. Lydenberg about selection of a person for this assignment, he smiled and said he did not care what the person did—if he or she wanted to go down to the basement, lean back in a chair, and use the furnace door for a footrest, that would be all right as long as it produced results. I was a very serious young man at the time, and found it hard to understand an attitude toward library administration that seemed entirely new to me. But it made a lasting impression, and I came to realize that successful administration is not necessarily a simple matter of hard work by the administrator himself; other things may be involved. By talking over an administrative problem with me, Harry Lydenberg had taught me something and had greatly stimulated my interest in library administration. As one result, a considerably larger proportion of my time was spent, thereafter, in talking over administrative problems with other members of the staff of my own age and rank. In this, you may be sure, we were all encouraged by those to whom we reported.

At about this same time I was appointed to a committee to deal with policy problems

in the field of the library's cataloging. This group was not asked to make final decisions; it was expected to study the subject and report to Mr. Anderson and Mr Lydenberg. The assignment was interesting and instructive. I am convinced that committees of this kind are one of the most desirable means of ensuring staff participation in library administration. The results are beneficial, both to the chief librarian and to members of the staff at all levels.

To summarize what has been said of the effect on staff members of participation in library management, it is highly desirable because it is the best method yet discovered for interesting capable young librarians in administration and training them for it.

It seems to me that such participation has an equally desirable effect on the chief librarians. One of the great dangers of administrative work in a library is its tendency to separate the librarian from those who are working with him. Responsibility belongs to the man at the top, and he must accept it. This responsibility cannot really be shared with members of the staff, and cannot fail to isolate the chief librarian in some measure, but he is lost unless close contact and ready communication with the staff can be maintained.

I recall a conversation of twenty years ago with one of our best-known librarians. He said, "I'm too busy because my library is a little too large for one man to administer, but not large enough to be a two-man job. I can't afford to hire a first-class assistant because there isn't enough work for two administrators."

This man had isolated himself from his staff; he was not administering his library satisfactorily, and I happen to know that it was a great relief to all concerned when he retired. His successor, one of our best university librarians, has found that administering that library is not just a one-man or man-and-a-half job; it is a four-man job, and there are now at least four first-rate administrators on the staff. One result of this is that the library's reputation has improved almost unbelievably during the past twenty years.

Staff members may play a major role in intralibrary communication—an especially important aspect of administration. By their participation in *ad hoc* committees, staff

discussion groups, and special luncheons, and by their work on staff information bulletins and in library association business, they give material aid to the librarian in the accomplishment of his task, and the benefits are felt throughout the library in various direct and indirect ways, including some of which the librarian may be totally unaware.

Staff participation in the management of a large library benefits the head librarian by keeping him in touch with his staff, and by helping to make his decisions and policies effective; it also has a tutorial result. It is a means of developing lieutenants who can administer departments or divisions of the library. Just one example may illustrate this process. Edward Freehafer was given training at the New York Public Library reference desk and in other sections of the library; he was then taken into the office of the director as general assistant and given five years of assisting management. This was the foundation that, followed by other assignments and further participation in the administrative process, prepared this able man to direct the entire system.

To continue the account of my own experience, I remained at New York Public until I was forty-eight. Except for two years as acting librarian at Oberlin, I had never had an independent library position, yet I suppose I had had as much library administrative experience as anyone of my age, because those for whom I worked had been men who realized the importance of staff participation in management. I then became librarian of Harvard College and director of the Harvard University Library, a position for which I should have been completely unprepared if it had not been for these years of participation in management.

I have spoken of the chief librarian's need to maintain close contact and ready communication with the staff; one major reason for regarding this as highly important is that he will learn from his staff if he will listen. Several minds ought to be better than one; the stimulation that comes from exploration of new ideas and possibilities is pleasurable as well as useful. There is a tendency for the chief administrator to get into a rut. This is one of the greatest dangers he runs, and nothing is more likely to shake him out of it than new ideas, including both

those that will come to him from members of his staff and those that he will develop for himself as a result of intellectual contact with others. Heavy responsibilities tend to make a man conservative, and stimulation should always be welcomed.

A related point may be suggested here. Many capable young men and women who enter library work and have a leaning toward administration are inclined to accept a head librarianship in a small institution where there may be no assistants on the staff of a calibre to provide intellectual stimulation. The temptation may be particularly strong because such a position is likely to offer a higher salary than could otherwise be obtained immediately after completion of library school. But the unfortunate result, in some cases, is that the young librarian rapidly gets into a rut and never gets out of it. I was fortunate because the first World War prevented me from settling down in a small college library where I should not have had the stimulation that came from working with a considerable number of young librarians of my own age. Work in a small library of my own would have meant missing a great deal.

To return to the needs of the chief administrator—it is of the greatest value to him to have others working closely with him on library problems, particularly when these are not merely “yes” men. No matter how much natural administrative ability a chief librarian may have, and no matter how good his judgment, he will be at a disadvantage if he cannot consult with members of his staff who can propose alternative methods and plans. By consultation, of course, I mean full discussion—not the practice that has been described as calling for a vote by saying, “All opposed say ‘I resign.’”

I have freely made use of suggestions by librarians who worked for me and with me, and I am well aware that this contributed immeasurably to whatever success I had as an administrator. I had good library school training, but Azariah Root, Edwin Hatfield Anderson, and Harry Miller Lydenberg taught me more than the school did because they encouraged me to take part in the administration of their libraries. I hope that I contributed something to them in return; I know, at least, that I am indebted more than I can say, for ideas, stimulation, and

help, to associates at the New York Public Library—to Frank Waite, Charles McCombs, Paul North Rice, Rollin Sawyer, Mary Kitzinger, Minnie Sears, Robert Henderson, and others of my own generation; and to Quincy Mumford, Edward Freehafer, Wyllis Wright, Charles Gosnell, Robert Downs, and Andrew Osborn, to mention only a few from the next generation.

I should like to add that the process continued after I went to Harvard, where I was similarly indebted to Andrew Osborn, Fred Kilgour, Reuben Peiss, Phil McNiff, Ed Williams, Elmer Grieder, Hugh Montgomery, Sue Haskins, Doug Bryant, Bill Jackson, Bill Cottrell, Dave Weber, and many others. There are more names that could be added to the list, both at the New York Public Library and at Harvard, and I hope I shall be forgiven by those who have been omitted here.

The good effects of staff participation in management on those who participate and on the chief librarians who encourage them to do so have been considered; but libraries may not be run entirely for the benefit of those who work in them, and one would hesitate to recommend the practice if it had harmful effects on the library itself. Can we, to paraphrase a pronouncement attributed to the Secretary of Defense, assert that what is good for the librarian is good for his library? I think it is, provided, as I have indicated already, that the chief librarian does not try to escape responsibility in the process. He must not blame his staff if it gives him bad advice and he takes it; he must not blame them when things go wrong, and take the credit when they go well. But it seems evident to me that anything that makes the chief administrator a better librarian should benefit his library also.

As an example from my own experience, I can cite the Lamont undergraduate library at Harvard, which is generally regarded, I believe, as a successful innovation and a well-planned building. I am perfectly ready to claim some credit for the original idea; but, in developing the plans I had the help and advice of Phil McNiff and Andrew Osborn and Ed Williams and Frank Jones, to name only a few of the chief assistants, and, if I had not had this help and advice, Lamont might well have remained a good idea that never achieved satisfactory material form.

Clarence Francis of General Foods is quoted as saying, "Younger executives come to me with what they think are new ideas. Out of my experience I could tell them why their ideas will not succeed. Instead of talking them out of their ideas, I have suggested that they be tried out in test areas in order to minimize losses. The joke of it is that half the time these youthful ideas, which I might have nipped in the bud, turn out either to be successful or to lead to other ideas that are successful." Libraries, like great corporations, ought to welcome youthful ideas.

If this is enough to show that institutions as well as individuals benefit from staff participation in management, one more point remains to be considered. What about the profession? The answer may seem self-evident, if you agree with me thus far, but a few words about how the profession benefits may be desirable.

I have already confessed my doubts regarding the effectiveness of the administrative training that our library schools have been able to give. I am convinced that, at best, their training needs to be supplemented by practical training on the job. Good administrators are surely good for the profession, and staff participation is an indispensable method of producing them.

Another point involves recruiting. Perhaps the greatest failure of librarianship today is the fact that it is failing to attract a sufficient number of really capable men and women; some of us would be glad to have them come into the profession with or without library-school training if they were of high enough quality. This failure is the more discouraging because our academic libraries are integral parts of our colleges and universities, and—if propinquity means anything, as it does in so many areas of life—it would seem that no other profession except college teaching would have as good an opportunity as we have to recruit undergraduates. Some of us blame our failure on low salaries, but I cannot think that this is the only factor or even the most important one.

We are to be blamed most of all, I think, for permitting most of our college students to go through their four years—years during which they are deciding what profession to enter—without ever encountering a

librarian whose duties, opportunities, and responsibilities go beyond handing a reserved book over a desk. (This, by the way, is the strongest argument I know against separate undergraduate libraries, which tend to make it even more likely than it would otherwise be that students will come into contact with only routine library work.)

If the situation is to be improved, much of the job will have to be done by those professional assistants who come in contact with undergraduates most frequently. If these assistants have an opportunity to deal with library administrative problems through consultation and discussion with their superiors, through committee assignments, discussion groups, or in other ways, many of them may develop an interest in library administration and an enthusiasm that will be communicated to the students with whom they deal. We need to attract only a relatively small number of well qualified recruits to meet the profession's needs. If we could succeed only in attracting to librarianship a larger percentage of those who work for us as student assistants, it would help significantly.

As one final point—though this, too, might be taken for granted—it can be argued that, if libraries operate more successfully because of staff participation in management, this in itself is good for the profession. What is good for libraries is good for the profession of librarianship.

As you were warned at the outset, this has been pretty obvious and routine—so much so that it might be described simply as common sense. But common sense ought not to be despised by the administrator, for it is the most important element in successful administration. I remember that, at the dedication of this library, John Buchan said, "A sense of humor consists chiefly of a sense of proportion." So does common sense, if I am not mistaken. A library administrator needs, above all else, a sense of proportion. It is my contention that the best way to develop such a sense is long practical experience by participation in administration, and that the best insurance against loss of that sense of proportion is continued intellectual give-and-take between the chief administrator and members of his staff.