The Courier   Libraries

10-1971

The Management of a University Library: The 1970's
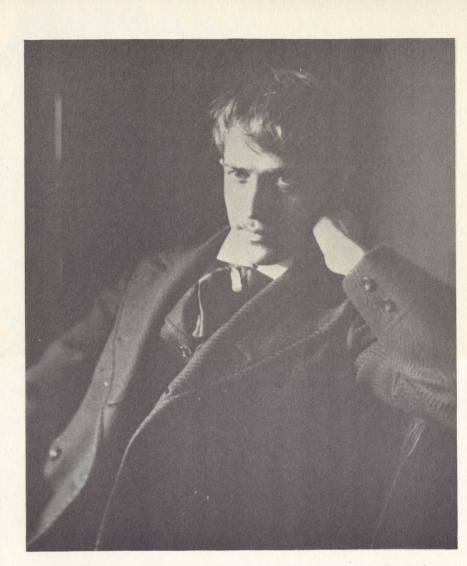
Roger H. McDonough

Recommended Citation

Stephen Crane in 1893. Photograph by Corwin Knapp Linson, artist, friend of Crane, and author of *My Stephen Crane* (Syracuse University Press, 1958). From the Stephen Crane Papers, George Arents Research Library.

THE COURIER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Management of a University Library: The 1970's

by Roger H. McDonough

It must be confessed that for many years I was fairly envious of my academic library colleagues who appeared to be happily and safely ensconced behind ivied walls, seemingly secure from the trials and tribulations that all too frequently plague those of us who live at the heart of the political scene in the fifty state capitals. This, of course, was before the academic scene erupted a few years back and our colleges and universities were shaken to their very foundations. Things have quieted down a good deal, but it is quite possible that the groves of academe may never be serene again, at least in our time.

It was flattering, in a peculiar sort of way, that the library was so frequently the focal point of attack on the part of the student activists. But if occupied buildings, damaged catalogs, bomb scares and other acts plagued the libraries, these matters were, in most instances, comparatively unimportant compared with the very real, ongoing, daily problems with which librarians are confronted in learning how to cope with more students, greater demands, increased costs and hold-the-line budgets.

Henry S. Commager of Amherst College points out in *The Library College Journal* (Fall 1970) that "A library inevitably reflects its supporting society": hence Denmark, democratic and equalitarian, has developed a public library system that is one of the finest in the world, one that is open to all citizens. But, Commager notes also that in Denmark, "no one, not even professors, is permitted in the stacks of the university libraries." He contrasts this with the prevailing American system which increasingly views the academic library as community and service oriented. However, Commager notes, "community" is a broad and ambiguous term and the university library's first duty is to serve the community of learning. To do this, it must

Dr. McDonough *is Director of the State Library, Archives and History Division of the New Jersey Department of Education. The article is a revised version of an address delivered by Dr. McDonough to Library Associates during the mid-winter meeting in New York City on January 13, 1971.*

"provide materials that embrace the past, present and future, and, above all, it must embrace the whole field of knowledge, not just those subjects that momentarily command the interest of the public or of students." As an example, he notes that "it is far more important that the university library subscribe to the *Proceedings and Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* than that it subscribe to a dozen or more current popular magazines. Popular magazines can be obtained elsewhere; the proceedings of the Philosophical Society can not. The popular magazines deal with ephemera; the Philosophical Society with those things men of learning think permanent."

This is the traditionalist view and I suspect that most students would reject it out of hand. This, of course, is part of the problem. The university library is supposed to be the conservator of what is best in our civilization and yet, at the same time, to reflect accurately the intellectual and social ferment of our time; to be, in a word, relevant. It is quite a challenge, and the problem is exacerbated by the sheer pressures that are inflicted upon the library by the element of growth. For example, twenty years ago about ten thousand titles were published annually in the United States. Today, it is thirty thousand with about an equal number published in Britain and Germany, and in Japan, too, for that matter. Add to these journals, documents, and an incredible number of ephemeral materials, and you have a considerable mass that is enormously difficult and complicated to manage. Where it used to cost one dollar to put a book on a shelf, for example, it now costs somewhere between five and ten dollars, in many cases more than the cost of the book itself.

All this indicates that the modern university librarian must be an administrator of great ability if his institution is to survive and prosper. A large library is an enormously complicated organism and it takes considerable managerial skill to keep it in control. Therefore, librarians are turning to automation, including computerization, miniaturization, joint storage and retrieval, cooperative purchasing and many other similar devices to help meet the challenges confronting them.

In this connection it is worth noting that the Council on Library Resources in Washington, a Ford Foundation subsidiary, has recently made a grant of $130,000 to the Association of Research Libraries and the American Council on Education for the purpose of establishing an office of university library management study. The news release announcing the grant noted that "although the proportion of universities' operating budgets allocated to their libraries is small, perhaps 4 to 5 per cent, the current financial problems of universities, continued high enrollments, and the increasing amount of graduate work and research underscore the need for funds allocated to academic libraries to be used as effectively as possible through strengthening of management functions. It is contemplated that a number of specialized studies will be made under grant auspices, including the areas of planning

systems, management information systems, manpower development, organization alternatives, manual systems and automation, and inter-institutional cooperation." Many such studies and programs are already going on in various parts of the country. North Carolina, for example, through its Department of Higher Education, recently completed a study designed to improve the bibliographical capabilities of all college and university libraries, whether private or public, and to facilitate interlibrary cooperation by improved interlibrary loan and other procedures. New York State has its "Three R's" program which seeks to improve the reference and research capabilities of the state's libraries, although not enough funds have been provided as yet to make the system fully operational. In New Jersey, the Department of Higher Education is attempting to computerize technical processes of the State University Library and the six state college libraries through a system known as Computer Aided Processing and Terminal Access Information Network (CAPTAIN). This is a sophisticated, fairly ambitious approach which seeks to computerize all ordering and all cataloging processes for these state-supported academic libraries. It is an enormously complicated project.

Dan Lacy, vice president of McGraw Hill, had some pertinent things to say about library automation in a paper prepared for the President's Commission on Libraries and Information Science:

> The most widely discussed potential impact—the transformation of library collections into microform or digital-computer memories and the use of computer technology for retrieval—will probably be the least significant and the least likely to occur on a large scale. Assumptions that such a transformation will occur are likely to ignore or give insufficient weight to three considerations. One is that a majority of users of most libraries are not seeking specific information or specific brief passages but rather the opportunity to read a text at leisure, whenever they choose, in an attractive and portable format capable of being removed and read elsewhere, even if the same holdings are also incorporated in an information storage and retrieval system. This will mean that the cost of transforming the collections into newer formats is usually an addition to, rather than a replacement of, other costs, thus eliminating the economies that might be hoped for.
>
> Another neglected consideration is that the major part of the task of finding desired documents or facts is now accomplished by casual visual inspection, by browsing on the part of the user or the library staff. Any system that makes a collection of documents inaccessible for this sort of inspection enormously increases the task of subject analysis, indexing, and bibliographical control necessary for its effective use. . . .
>
> The third consideration is that the principal benefit the typical user wants from an information retrieval system is not assurance

that it has identified and included all the documents that may relate to his interests, but rather assurance that it has *excluded* all documents except the minimum necessary to serve his purpose. The swift and feeble-minded patience of the computer is perfectly adapted to searching a collection of documents and identifying all those that have certain pre-designated characteristics, thus assuring the inquirer (if the cataloging has been thoroughly done) that he knows about *everything* in the collection in any way relating to his subject. But this very undiscriminating thoroughness means that the computer will dredge up in the process vast quantities of only superficially or nominally relevant junk. Narrowing the search is achieved by multiplying the number of descriptors (terms used to define more precisely the kind of documents sought). Even when this technique is carried to its maximum practical limits, it is characteristic of computer-based information retrieval systems that they tend to overwhelm the inquirer with unusable masses of repetitious citations to other data.[1]

Mechanization is clearly the wave of the future, however, and all of us are striving mightily to keep up with and to participate to the fullest extent in these new developments as they come along, including the development of electronic data banks and all the rest.

Meanwhile, as we await the day of the push-button library, we are making significant progress on another front through the development of cooperative library systems. These vary from state to state, but our own New Jersey plan is typical of many across the country. The state plan ties all of our 1500-plus libraries together through a three-layer service arrangement beginning with local school and public libraries, advancing at the second level to fifteen to twenty-five strong-point area reference libraries strategically located throughout the state and topped, at the third level, by four research libraries: Princeton University, Rutgers University, the Newark Public Library and the State Library. Each of these three levels has its own discrete level of funding and this is clearly written out in the State Aid Bill which was enacted four years ago. A reference referral "hot-line" collect telephone in the State Library handles difficult questions from second-level libraries; those that the State Library cannot handle are passed on to the other research libraries. In effect, this collect telephone call service ties the whole thing together and makes it work.

This reference referral system has been given a tremendous boost in the past year by the development of the Micro-automated Catalog project known by its acronym MAC. It was designed to provide cheap tape cartridge copies

---

[1] Douglas M. Knight & E. Shepley Nourse, ed., *Libraries at Large*, (Bowker Co., 1969). "Social Change and the Library: 1945-1980" by Dan Lacy, Chapter I.

of the entire catalog of the State Library for distribution to selected libraries in various parts of the state. The purpose was to speed up the interlibrary loan process. Copies of the microform catalog were presented to the participating libraries along with reader-printers. Each library now can tell in a few seconds whether a book it needs is in the New Jersey State Library; by pushing a button the inquiring librarian can get a print-out of the catalog card, which then becomes a transaction request form. The system is working beautifully and plans are now being made to carry out a similar project with the catalog of the Newark Public Library and possibly the catalogs at Rutgers and Princeton. The total project thus far has cost less than $25,000, which is very cheap indeed in terms of the results achieved.

In conclusion, I would like to sound a warning about the serious financial problems which appear to be looming up for our academic libraries and which have, in many instances, already resulted in serious financial cutbacks. This trend is nationwide and unless economic trends are reversed rather drastically, university libraries may experience economic "hard times" such as they have not encountered for a generation. I am sure that all library administrators will make every effort to practice economy and to utilize all the management techniques available in order to run their institutions in the most efficient manner possible. When the chips are down, however, I think we must recognize that a modern university library requires substantial financial support if it is to be an effective tool of learning; thus every effort must be made to preserve and protect our libraries from the economic pressures which are now gathering momentum. President Robert F. Goheen of Princeton University said some interesting and cogent things on this subject recently and I should like to share them with you:

> The library is a particular example of the element of the University which cannot be maintained adequately without annual increases in expenditures well in excess of the general inflationary trend. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of an excellent library to both students and members of the Faculty, especially in a university which puts great emphasis upon independent study by undergraduates and directed research by graduate students, as well as on faculty scholarship. In the past twenty years the size of Princeton's library has doubled to over two million printed books plus extensive collections of manuscripts and other materials. . . . The operating costs of the University's library system have also risen sharply, and we must clearly devote increased effort to finding supporting funds for its operations. During the past fiscal year alone, books, periodicals, binding, and general operating expenses rose nearly 19% to more than $3 million, exclusive of the costs of operating and maintaining the physical plant.

... Also, we must resist the temptation to make false economies—for example, failing to carry out preventative repairs and maintenance or allowing the quality of the Library to deteriorate gradually by excessive curtailment of book purchases. More generally, all of our efforts to reduce expenditures must be carried out with the understanding that institutional morale is a delicate thing, is irreplaceable, and, if let slip, cannot soon be restored.[2]

To Dr. Goheen's wise counsel, I can only add a fervent, "Amen."

---

[2] *The President's Report, October 1970: The State of the University.* Official register of Princeton University, Vol. LXII, no. 6, Nov. 1, 1970.