



Methods and Procedures

G. F. SHEPHERD, JR.

THIS CHAPTER will focus on methods and procedures of general circulation, registration of borrowers, use of restricted and non-book materials, and the status of centralized and decentralized lending centers, with an effort to survey briefly several types of libraries. Although there are many common denominators, one can hardly help being amazed at the extremes that exist in the kinds, sizes, and functions of libraries in the United States. While a casual and brief review of all libraries would show at least four common denominators: books, readers, staff, and service, to engage in a discussion of methods and procedures with several types of libraries in mind is somewhat like reading a dictionary. There is danger that the thread of thought might be snipped in too short a piece.

For many years most libraries have been penny-wise and pound-foolish, particularly in circulation procedures. The methods and procedures used have too often been complicated, devious, and difficult. Too often, procedures have been adhered to with the sole purpose of preventing some possible evil deed on the part of the reader; he might do this or that, out of line with accepted good practice. Thus it has been difficult to depart from custom and habit, and inertia has hindered a challenging inspection of outworn and obsolete routines. Countless operations have been performed the hard way under the assumption that thoroughness and accuracy could be achieved that way only, and as a result, the readers have often been dissatisfied with the service afforded them. Not enough attention has been given to the monetary cost of so much negative effort. The most books to the most readers at the least cost is a policy to which less lip service and more practical attention is given today.

The circulation function is being performed in all libraries with greater emphasis on simplified procedures for the borrower. Abusive readers will never be eliminated but neither are they increasing in proportion to "correct" readers. The citizen in the public library and

Mr. Shepherd is Assistant Director, Cornell University Library.

Methods and Procedures

the student in the college and university library rarely feels that he is "extracting" his books from the library. Rather, he may feel that it is difficult to escape from the library without having a book pushed at him.

In both public and college libraries, multitudes of records have diminished toward a minimum. The beauties and conveniences of airtight controls can no longer be justified on the use or cost basis. The irreducible minimum record in the public library is one enabling it to recall or reclaim books that are kept beyond reasonable time limits. Standing files for instant location of books not on the shelf are not considered as essential as they used to be, nor are files of charges standing by name of borrower.

Loan periods are being lengthened generally. This minimizes the importance of a date-due file and lessens the work load of writing overdue notices. One-month and longer periods, except for certain restricted materials, are being granted graduate students without noticeable difficulty. Longer loan periods are enjoyed by the reader with suitable safety to the library as long as satisfactory recall procedures are available. The home-use loan which was once granted to faculty only is now commonly extended to undergraduate students. It may be remembered that one Ivy League University library restricted loans to the faculty until shortly after 1900 and then cautiously extended the privilege to seniors. The success of complete openness clearly refutes past practices.

Further simplification, especially in the college and university library, has come with the elimination of the borrower's card. Rarely is the student reader put to any more trouble than that of signing his name to a card or slip containing highly abbreviated information about the book he wants. Occasionally for spot checking, or regularly at the reserve desk, he may have to show a student identification card or a treasurer's receipt.

Even though the borrower's card is still essential in the lending procedures of most public libraries, efforts are being made to shorten the time required to issue these cards in the first place, and furthermore, the internal library routines concerned with registration are being simplified. Considering the work load of registration in a large public library, one is not unsympathetic with the cries for short cuts and brevity. At the Queens Borough Public Library over 100,000 applicants are received and processed each year. Until the fall of 1954 a rather cumbersome and elaborate system of registration consumed the time of six staff members and still resulted in backlogs.

Seeking a way out of the maze and backlog with a reorganization of procedures, the staff gave special study to the purpose of the registration file. Since its main function was to provide a means of contacting delinquent borrowers it was decided to maintain only a file of delinquents. This constituted the main point of a new procedure. The borrower now fills out a single application which is processed by Central Registration. The borrower is sent his card direct from Central Registration and his application card is returned to the branch where it is kept in a numerical file. All except the petty delinquencies are followed up by Central Registration. Bulky files have been reduced to ten per cent of their former size, and there has been a commensurate reduction in the staff time required to maintain the reduced records. The account of the procedure by Ann Convey and Andrew Geddes¹ merits following in complete detail.

According to Margaret H. Smith² we have an example of a very successful simplified registration system at the Whiting, Indiana, Public Library. A single application card is the only record required from a borrower. All the data needed is on the card, including name, number, date of expiration and date to which fee is paid for non-residents. Reregistration involves only the change of date; the same number being retained by the original recipient through the years. By giving each borrower's name a number from the Cutter-Sanborn tables it is possible to arrange the application cards alphabetically and at the same time numerically, thus eliminating the need for a second numerical file or registration book. When fees or fines are involved, a simple colored clip refers to a file of the pertinent records. The process of reregistration is simply a matter of revalidating the information on the original card and advancing the date three years. The incidence of transposed Cutter numbers is slight, and when it does happen, it is more easily traceable than it would be with regular serial numbers. As long as the files are not too voluminous, visible index panels can be used as further simplification. Even when used as a standing card file there is no difficulty. The system at Whiting, Indiana, would seem to be very satisfactory to the borrower, since he does not have to carry a card. The reader everywhere always appreciates the elimination of useless red tape.

The actual mechanics of the loan transaction has undergone a mild revolution in recent years. Every effort is made to deal with the reader quickly. Various streamlining devices are being incorporated into the charging routines. Photographic, mechanical, and marginal punched card charging systems have become widely used. The various me-

Methods and Procedures

chanical systems which use primarily a transaction number for each withdrawal are most adaptable in the public library where it is not critically necessary to have a file by call number for books out of the library. Adequate explanations of these and other systems designed to speed up loan record routines are given by M. F. Tauber³ in his chapters on circulation in *Technical Services in Libraries*. Further comment on mechanical devices is given by another writer in the next chapter of this issue.

Upon reading the rules and regulations of public and academic libraries a few decades ago, it was quite common to see specific limitations on the number of books a reader might have out on loan at a given time. Except in areas where there may be acute shortages, little thought is now given to limitations. It is more often a matter of common sense and discretion. No supervisor in the fiction department of the public library will tolerate seeing a reader hoard the whole day's output of newly acquired popular titles; on the other hand the reader may be permitted to stagger out with a whole arm-load of nineteenth-century fiction. The academic library has also abandoned restrictions on the number of loans except for reserves and possibly a few other types of restricted materials. It is doubtful if the old-time restrictions could have been enforced unless the student was far less ingenious than he is today. Few record systems now provide the means to tell quickly how many books one individual may have.

In spite of the indicated trends toward more simplification and liberalization in loan procedures, nearly every library, public and academic, has a certain amount of restricted material to deal with. The application of the term "restricted" does not necessarily mean a conservative loan policy, and the term should not in any way connote censorship policies. In general, restricted materials fall in the following categories: reserved books, reference books, rare books, erotica and sex hygiene books, certain journals, and documents. The restriction observed is also a matter of degree and circumstance. What is necessary and suitable in the public library may not apply at all in the academic library and vice versa.

The term "reserved book" does not have the same meaning in the public library as it does in the college and university library. The public library uses the term to denote books for which there is a waiting list of borrowers. The term in the college and university library is usually applied to groups of books for assigned or required reading. The academic libraries commonly have two kinds of reserves, the closed and the open-shelf. The methods of handling reserves have

changed little from those described by C. H. Brown and H. G. Bousfield⁴ over twenty years ago. The same long cards for borrowers' signatures are used in the books and the same control records are kept. The principal changes seem to be in the de-emphasis of closed reserves and the greater use of open-shelf reserves. It is frequently necessary to advise the faculty member as to just what type of reserve procedure will best suit the needs of his students. He frequently overestimates the pressure on a given list of titles and wants them all on closed reserve. It has been demonstrated that if only the titles with real pressure on them are serviced from a closed area, the student's needs are better met. The titles that must be under the more stringent control of the closed reserve are most frequently arranged by author. This seems to provide the fastest operation for both the reader and staff. Those books under less pressure that are serviced on an open-shelf basis are most effectively arranged by course and within that group by author. The student encounters the minimum hindrance in perusing and selecting the titles he needs. In the open-shelf collection it is often useful to designate various loan periods according to the nature of the demands at various times during the term. A staff with whom the faculty cooperates fully is able to move certain titles to closed-shelf service during examination periods. Without proper warning of pressure on a particular title, trouble is apt to develop. An easy means of providing notice of the regulations and loan periods pertinent to any class of reserves is a simple strip fastened around the fore cover of the book on which is printed and stamped the pertinent information. A commonly used method of assuring compliance with reserve book regulations is to impose fairly heavy fines.

Reference books, though falling in the restricted category, are rarely within the province of the loan department, except perhaps in the smaller public library. If there is a formal reference department, loans of reference books are few and exceptional and are generally handled by that department.

To describe the methods and procedures applying to rare books from the smallest public library to the largest academic library means describing the procedure for handling perhaps a single shelf of books in the librarian's office, up to the larger operation of a rare book room containing many collections of rare books. At the lower end of this gamut, the circulation department may be responsible for the actual delivery of the book to the reader for use under supervision in the reading room. As we progress to a larger library, the circulation per-

Methods and Procedures

sonnel may be responsible for escorting the reader to some special nook or room, not yet large enough to have its own staff, where the rare books are kept and used. The routines for such limited operations are not complicated since there is seldom a loan outside the building. The important procedure is to secure clear identification of the reader and explain to him the proper safeguards in using the volume. It is interesting to note that at least one public library is liberal enough in its loan policy to allow cuneiform tablets to circulate. Emerson Greenaway, Director, Free Library of Philadelphia, mentions this in his discussion of the place of rare books in a public library.⁵ The procedures in the large academic libraries rarely involve the circulation personnel at all. More often it is a matter of directing the reader to the rare book department or assisting him in finding a substitute edition that can be taken out of the building.

Nearly every library has something of a problem in circulating erotica and sex hygiene books. The library must not appear to act as a censor and yet it does have the responsibility of preserving such material for those who need it. The chief concern in all procedures is to establish clear identity of the borrower. The reader should be warned too that careless handling might cause the book to disappear into the hands of the curious. The novels of Henry Miller and similar works do not survive long in any library without restrictions on accessibility.

Even though every library may stoutly maintain that whatever it has is for use, it may mean use within the building. Fragile material and heavily used documents and journals may legitimately come under some restrictions. However, the general liberalization of lending practices has cut deeply into these classes of formerly restricted materials.

An increasing amount and variety of non-book materials constitute the resources of the public and academic libraries today. Recordings of music, poetry, speeches, talking-books for the blind, micro-texts, and picture collections introduce special methods and procedures. The special machines required for microfilm, microcard, and microprint eliminate those materials from use out of the building. Use in the building involves instruction in the use of the machine, provision for recording the use, and inspection of material for damage when the reader has finished. Music and other recordings, especially in the public library, circulate as book material. Special bags or envelopes are provided for safe carrying of records. Equipment requirements for special materials have been discussed by R. L. W. Collison, Refer-

ence Librarian, City of Westminster, more adequately than is found in the American literature on the subject.⁶ Public libraries which also serve school systems have considerable traffic in the picture collection. With protective envelopes the pictures are borrowed as freely as books.

The growth of city systems, county and regional systems, and the use of the bookmobile have created a great increase in the number of service points, and it is no longer possible to tell from a central point which book is in what individual's hands. The central library will know what block of books is on deposit at a given branch, but the record of lending of specific titles to individuals is kept on a local branch basis. It is not to be inferred that a reader is limited to any one unit of a system. He is normally accredited at all branches. In the rapidly increasing county and regional systems, the autonomy of the constituent units is almost completely preserved. However, a central authority plans and directs uniform methods and procedures.

Large academic libraries which have decentralized collections in a number of departmental libraries often operate with less uniformity in circulation procedures than the public library. The reading clientele of the various departments on a college or university campus differ widely in their needs and demands. The easy informality in a small mathematics library would not be acceptable in a large and busy engineering library. Self-service on the part of a small group of faculty and graduate students may be no handicap to efficiency whereas it could be utter confusion in a larger group. Granting loans for an indefinite period subject to recall is not an unusual policy in the small departmental library serving a research staff. The greater the number of readers, the more regularized are the procedures. Some variance in the lending methods and procedures is quite justified if we constantly remember that libraries are managed for readers and not just the librarians. In both public and academic systems of decentralized service, the circulation activity is generally directed from the central agency, and statistical reports are submitted to it.

References

1. Convey, Ann, and Geddes, Andrew: Needed; a Miracle. *Library Journal*, 80:2805-2807, Dec. 15, 1955.
2. Smith, Margaret H.: Simplifying Registration. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 23:258-259, Nov. 1948.
3. Tauber, M. F., and Associates: *Technical Services in Libraries*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1954.

Methods and Procedures

4. Brown, C. H., and Bousfield, H. G.: *Circulation Work in College and University Libraries*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1933.
5. Greenaway, Emerson: Rare Books in the Public Library. *Library Journal*, 81:2135-2140, Oct. 1, 1956.
6. Collison, R. L. W.: *Modern Storage Equipment and Methods for Special Materials in Libraries*, Hampstead, England, published by the author, 1955.