



Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

HAROLD L. HAMILL

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, which Helen Hunt Jackson called “. . . a sort of island on the land,”¹ is a broad arc stretching along the Pacific more than 200 miles from Santa Barbara southward to the Mexican border and eastward to the mountains that shut it off from the desert beyond. Its off-center hub is the Los Angeles metropolitan area, where live over seven million people. Answering the question, “What kinds of people?” Leo Grebler has refuted the clichés of “. . . retired Iowa farmers, movie and television stars, senior citizens seeking sunshine, engineers, oil diggers, and so forth. One can indeed find all of these . . . but the fact is that modern Los Angeles, like most of the large metropolitan areas of the Western World, is inhabited by all kinds of people.”²

Although Southern California has recently pioneered in distinctive retirement communities, the 1960 census showed that 36.6 per cent of the population of Los Angeles County was under twenty years of age.³ Occupationally, “professional, technical & kindred” workers made up 15 per cent of the employed persons in Los Angeles County, only 11.8 per cent in the United States as a whole.³

There are two conspicuous minority groups, Negroes and Mexican-Americans. Negroes make up 79 per cent of the non-white population, the rest are persons of Japanese, Chinese, or other descent. Hundreds of thousands of Negroes have moved into the Los Angeles area, particularly into the larger cities, during and following World War II, but have not been totally assimilated into the population. They now represent 7.6 per cent of the people of Los Angeles County, as compared with 9.5 per cent of the total who bear Spanish surnames. Both of these groups more than doubled in number between 1950 and 1960, the Negroes increasing by 112 per cent.³ The 1960 census figures on

Mr. Hamill is City Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, Calif.

housing patterns, educational attainments, and economic status for both these groups reflect varying degrees of discrimination, although less in general, and in employment considerably less, than in most other metropolitan areas.

More Japanese live in and around Los Angeles than anywhere else outside Japan itself. The Jewish population is second only to that of the New York area. As Grebler points out: "Los Angeles emerges as a metropolis with a highly cosmopolitan population mix. . . . The 617,000 foreign born persons counted in 1960 exceed the total population of the City of Pittsburgh, and an additional 1,173,000 were of 'foreign or mixed' parentage."⁴

Spectacular growth sets the population of Los Angeles off most distinctly from other large cities. Nothing short of a major earthquake or some other incalculable disaster seems destined to stop it. The population of the metropolitan area increased 54.4 per cent between 1950 and 1960.⁵ The city of Los Angeles alone went from 1,970,358 in 1950 to over 2,700,000 in 1965. Of the five American cities of over one million population, it was the only one to show a gain in the 1960 census. Most of this growth occurred in the San Fernando Valley, the city's own built-in suburb. The rest of the city had an increase of less than 4 per cent.³

Southern California's balmy climate (in spite of smog) and its widely-publicized pattern of informal and easy living have been important factors in attracting people. The emphasis which the state has placed upon public higher education has brought in others. Lucrative federal contracts for missile development and space exploration have made it necessary to recruit from other areas tens of thousands of highly trained engineers and technicians.

In *Westward Tilt*, Neil Morgan presents an enthusiastic view of the cultural patterns of the American West today. Los Angeles he calls:

. . . the center of gravity in the westward tilt. It is highly urbanized, seething with change, surging with strength. It also is capable of being utterly ridiculous—but it is steadily becoming less so. Its leaders are a responsible and mature breed these days. Its current wave of newcomers is the most urbane and discriminating which has ever come to the city. Los Angeles is underrated. It has come alive with vitality.

.

Right or wrong, a great deal of the nation's thinking is being done today in Los Angeles, and inevitably a larger share of it will be done there. In science, education, business and industry, and in the art of

Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

living, patterns are being set in Los Angeles which are being followed elsewhere. It will be fortunate for all the nation if the new personality of Los Angeles now emerging proves to be a brilliant one.⁶

Meanwhile, rapid population growth in Los Angeles has been accompanied by urban sprawl. To describe "the exploding metropolis," William H. Whyte, Jr., used this city as an illustration. "Los Angeles, which has sometimes been called 100 suburbs in search of a city, shows the pattern at its most extreme; there is hardly any center at all, and what center there is seems useful to most citizens chiefly as a way to get from one freeway to another."⁷

Los Angeles still has a distinct downtown section, and there is a certain amount of skyscraper building taking place in it. But actually millions of the residents of metropolitan Los Angeles are scarcely aware of "downtown." Decentralization of all the facilities and services required for their needs is so complete that they seldom, if ever, find it necessary to enter the downtown area. The neighborhood shopping developments contain facilities which compete with and sometimes overweigh the services offered downtown. All the major department stores have built substantial and even massive branches, ten to forty miles from the downtown area. The sales volume of some of these branches exceeds that of the parent store.

Office buildings, hotels, and apartments are being built from twenty to fifty stories high. The day of the single-family home and small garden-type apartment "court" seems to be in severe decline. As land costs continue to soar in many parts of town, the height of buildings and population densities follow. Still the general appearance of the whole area is much flatter and less crowded than that of other metropolitan areas.

If the growth of the population has been phenomenal, so has its mode of transportation. In 1960 there were 435 passenger cars per 1,000 persons.⁸ Eighty-three per cent of Los Angeles families own one or more cars. This is the way almost everyone is accustomed to travel—to work, to school, to church, to the market, to parks, to the beach, to the mountains—and to the library. There are no subways, interurban trains, or other means of rapid mass transit. A few bus lines operate on limited schedules, but relatively few people find it convenient to use them. Only 8 per cent of workers travel to and from their jobs in this way.³

For many years multitudinous studies and endless debate have been bestowed on the subject of creating a truly effective rapid transit sys-

tem, but present prospects for financing any of the proposals seem dim. Meanwhile, thanks to the most highly developed freeway system in the world, the population moves about in a relatively easy manner (with twice-daily exceptions—the morning and evening rush hours, when the freeways can produce horrendous traffic jams). It is not at all uncommon for southern Californians to drive from thirty to eighty miles a day to get to their jobs and home again.

Probably with no real relation to their automobile habit, much of the population is “mobile” in another sense. They move around a great deal, from one home or apartment to another. They are also inclined to move from job to job to gain economic advantage. Because the metropolitan area is a crazy quilt of governmental units, hundreds of thousands of people in the Los Angeles area seem completely unaware of governmental boundaries and relationships. Many literally do not know in what city they live. Moreover, their favorite shopping center, church, and school may be in different communities, and so they simply go where they find it most convenient or most agreeable to go.

Southern California has succeeded in achieving a highly diversified economy, much better balanced than in the past, when agriculture, tourists, and motion pictures were the major source of income. In 1960, employment in manufacture in Los Angeles accounted for nearly 31 per cent of total employment,⁹ a figure considerably lower than that for other major metropolitan areas in the country, but high in comparison with California as a whole. Median family income in Los Angeles County in 1959 was \$7,046, compared with a national average of \$5,657 for the entire United States.⁸

In spite of affluence in Los Angeles County, there are many people suffering from poverty and neglect. Although the 5.8 per cent unemployment rate for Los Angeles is lower than the national rate of 6.6 per cent,⁸ unemployment is increasingly a serious problem among the unskilled, many of whom are Negroes or Mexican-Americans. With the rest of the country, Los Angeles worries about the long-range effect of technological change and automation upon the labor force. Moreover, the permanent air of boom town optimism is heavily dependent upon defense and aerospace industries. Feelings of insecurity are heightened by the realization that if federal contracts should be substantially cut back or eliminated, much of the prosperity would swiftly vanish. In recognition of this, industrial leaders of the area have been urging still further diversification of the economy.

Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

The high level of educational attainment in Los Angeles is particularly worthy of note. In 1960, census figures showed the median years of school completed by adults who were 25 years of age and over to be 12.1, a level one and one-half years higher than the national average of 10.6 years. The proportion of college graduates was 9.8 per cent, as compared with the national proportion of 7.7 per cent. At the other end of the scale, Los Angeles County had 168,000 functional illiterates (less than five years of schooling), 4.7 per cent of the total population 25 years of age or over.³ The chances are good that the educational level of the Los Angeles area will continue to rise as California's far-reaching master plan for higher education is put into effect. College and university enrollments are going up at a spectacular rate, limited only by the strained ability of present facilities to absorb the students. In some parts of Los Angeles, over 90 per cent of high school graduates expect to go to college.

The region's natural advantages of climate and topography present many opportunities for recreation and amusement. Reading as a pastime faces impressive competition. Beaches, mountains, and deserts attract people from their homes into the outdoors on all but a very few days of the year. Both participative and spectator sports abound, and local enthusiasts call Los Angeles "the sports capital of the world." The major metropolitan newspaper carries a daily sports section running from eight to twelve pages. Cultural attractions, too, have seen a boom in recent years. Impressive theaters, art galleries, and musical groups have sprung up throughout the metropolitan area. Much of this activity is taking place in the suburbs rather than downtown. Newspaper listings indicate that the Los Angeles area probably surpasses every other area except New York in the number and quality of cultural events.

Understanding the problems of library service in the Los Angeles metropolitan area is contingent upon some understanding of the dimensions and patterns of government. The patchy topography of mountain and flatland has not lent itself to orderly and neat arrangement of government services. From the point of view of many critics, local autonomy has gone mad in creating a hopeless jungle of governments characterized by gerrymandered boundaries and special-purpose cities. In Los Angeles County alone, the number of cities has gone from 45 to 76 in twelve years. Stanley Scott thus describes the situation that has resulted from California's faulty incorporation legislation:

Many incorporation and annexation proposals appear to be decided by the lowest-common-denominator of criteria, i.e., "will our property taxes be any higher?" Often the more important criteria—the long-term quality of the community as a place to live, work and bring up children, and the stabilization or enhancement of property values—are largely ignored. . . .

The conventional conception of a city as a balanced community, governed and served by a municipal corporation, has been modified considerably by areas attempting to cope with special problems and by interest groups trying to gain special advantage. . . . Cities have been incorporated which have more cows than people, and for the purpose of protecting dairy farms against subdivision and higher levels of municipal taxation. One city's thoroughfares are privately owned, access to which is under guard. Another city consists primarily of cemeteries, has fewer than 300 (living) inhabitants, and derives most of its local revenue from burial fees. . . .

Some cities are enclaves of extremely valuable industrial property, whose chief function is the avoidance of taxation and other public responsibilities. [Vernon and Industry are examples.] Other cities are enclaves of poverty, some having as little as one-third the state-wide average per capita assessed valuation of municipalities. One city has been described as being little more than "a strip of undeveloped land on either side of a railroad track.

A number of cities have chosen to maintain no governmental staff to speak of, but instead contract with the county for almost all municipal services [the Lakewood Plan].¹⁰

The shape of the city of Los Angeles, core city of the metropolis, almost defies description. It is, very roughly-speaking, somewhat like a funnel whose one side has been mashed toward the left. It is spread out over 458 square miles, 217 of which (an area larger than the entire city of Chicago) are located in the San Fernando Valley, separated by mountains from the older, downtown, central part of the city. The Valley includes also the city of Burbank, the western part of the city of Glendale, and the city of San Fernando, a 2.3 square mile "island" entirely surrounded by the city of Los Angeles. Los Angeles also surrounds numerous other islands, including the city of Beverly Hills, unincorporated Universal City, federal territory, and a quantity of scraps, pieces, and strips of unincorporated urban areas of Los Angeles County. Los Angeles achieved its legally-required contiguous links to its harbor and airport only by annexing long strips of "Polish corridors." In some places these are only one block in width. The strip to the harbor is ten miles long. Attempting to create for this geographic

Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

absurdity a rational and economic pattern of public library service offers some special problems.

A considerable paradox exists in the attitude of the people of the Los Angeles metropolitan area toward their proliferating governments. While they seem to disregard boundaries in their daily lives, many are stridently insistent upon upholding the virtues of local autonomy. They are increasingly bitter about the rising property tax, and at the same time resistant toward consolidation, whether functional or complete, toward borough systems, toward "metro" government, and even toward library cooperation.

Nevertheless, students of government see some hope. Winston Crouch predicts "the gradual approach" toward some degree of coordination and integration:

1. Municipalities in the Los Angeles area will undoubtedly continue to annex, so long as adjacent, unincorporated areas are available. However, incorporation of cities is also likely to continue as urban communities develop.

2. Functional consolidation will continue to be used, especially when a city can free substantial portions of its budget for other assignment by transferring a function to the county. . . .

3. Cities will make extensive use of intergovernmental contracts, but may be expected to choose from among an increasing number of contractors, including the county, larger cities, and private enterprisers.¹¹

The metropolitan Los Angeles area is remarkably clean and free from graft, even from power politics. So far as efficiency is concerned, it is difficult to venture a value judgment. Over-heed to local autonomy is bound to take its toll in high taxes. The people of the area seem reasonably willing to lay out substantial amounts to assure the best governmental services and school systems they feel they can afford. Selection of civil servants is generally on the basis of ability and training rather than political considerations. California's several excellent schools of public administration have produced a high caliber of professionally-trained practitioners of that difficult art.

It should not be a surprise to find that the public libraries which serve this complex array of local jurisdictions are equally uncoordinated. Despite California's long-standing reputation for county-wide library service, nowhere in Southern California does any county have a county-wide library system to the exclusion of independent city li-

braries. Within recent years in fact, several cities have pulled out of existing county library systems to create their own libraries.

On the whole, most of the thirty-one libraries in Los Angeles County are well-supported and well-run. The competence, training, and experience of their administrators and staffs is generally of a high order. Although there may be no virtue in size alone, it is true that, as elsewhere in the country and as pointed out in the national standards, people living in the larger communities tend to have access to more specialized collections and services than those in the smaller communities. On the other hand, many of the smaller libraries, with budgets ranging from \$5 to \$10 or more per capita, do a really distinguished job in providing basic services and duplication of general materials, much better than the larger systems can do in view of their obligation to provide expensive, more specialized reference services.

For over thirty years the Public Library Executives Association has met to discuss professional and administrative matters of common interest. From this group have developed such cooperative activities as do exist. Possibly the most valuable product has been the establishment of a series of reciprocal library service agreements, whereby residents of one jurisdiction may use the libraries of adjoining areas without payment of fees by either individuals or governments. Among the thirty-one libraries in Los Angeles County, however, reciprocity is more conspicuous by its absence than its presence, and it would simply not be true to say that any really substantial inroads have been made on the problem of supplying a complete range of library services to all the people of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Nonresident fees range from none to \$10 annually. It is likely that complete removal of the present barriers will not take place until either state or federal funds compensate for the differences in levels of service and local financial support.

The Public Library of the city of Los Angeles is, relatively speaking, not as well supported as many of its smaller suburban neighbors, having a budget of only about \$3 per capita. It is, nevertheless, one of the country's most complex and resourceful library systems. Its central library is large, long-established, and completely departmentalized by subject. Over half of its sixty-one branches have been built within the last twelve years. Since 1950 it has been developing a branch system on a regional pattern. Now seven regional libraries, housing from 60,000 to 90,000 volumes each, back up the book resources of their satellite community branches. The Library's total book collection is

Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

over 3,100,000 volumes, annual circulation exceeds 14,000,000, and information questions reach nearly 9,000,000 a year. The total budget is more than \$8,000,000, and the staff numbers about 1,100.

The Los Angeles County Library is also one of the country's giants. It does not maintain a central library, but gives service exclusively through a system of ninety-one branches, including eight regional libraries, plus eight bookmobiles. In the fifty communities which it serves, it circulates more than 10,000,000 books annually. Book stock is over 2,225,000 volumes, and the operating budget exceeds \$6,100,000; staff numbers about 650. The other public libraries of the county range in size from Long Beach, with almost a half-million volumes, down to Vernon with 1,500.

There are many colleges and universities in the area. Massive increases in enrollments have brought these institutions many problems, not least of which is the provision of library service. The most impressive collections are in the two large universities. The University of Southern California, a privately supported institution with more than 15,000 students, has a long-established library of over a million volumes. The University of California at Los Angeles, with over 20,000 students, has recently opened a new graduate library building. Its total library holdings are now over two million volumes, and its goal is three million by 1970. This substantial collection has been built up within a relatively few years and reflects the determination of the Regents that UCLA should achieve the size and richness of the libraries on the Berkeley campus, and other giants in the east.

The state colleges in the area have a long way to go to achieve adequacy. One, with almost 20,000 students, has a library still under 200,000 volumes. None of the private colleges exceed 200,000 volumes, with the exception of the libraries of the Associated Colleges at Claremont which have more than 400,000. The service loads and demands placed upon the libraries of the universities and colleges of the Los Angeles metropolis call for dramatic upbuilding of their collections.

The librarians of UCLA, feeling a special obligation because they are a state-supported institution, have long attempted to make their distinctive collections available on as generous a basis as possible. However, as library problems have been compounded by the sheer number of students, the University has been reluctantly obliged to place some restrictions on the free use of the library by other than its own student body. The University of Southern California, too, must restrict borrowing privileges to those with proper credentials. Both of

these major universities will continue to face increasing problems of larger enrollments and the mighty task of trying to keep up with the product of the knowledge explosion.

As elsewhere throughout the country, public libraries in the Los Angeles area have been struggling to solve the problems raised by the veritable revolution in education which has brought the student out of the classroom and into the library—any library he can get to. High school libraries in the area are largely inadequate to meet the situation; most junior college libraries are even worse off; and elementary school libraries are almost non-existent except in Long Beach, which has a well-developed system. There is no point in laboring the subject further here; most school libraries are below current standards.

The area now has a substantial number of special libraries, many developed during the past twenty years. Some are quite limited, but others have many thousands of volumes and highly qualified staffs. Access to the area's two major scholarly libraries, the Henry E. Huntington Library & Art Gallery in San Marino and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California at Los Angeles, is limited to qualified researchers, as would be expected.

The 1950's were a period of great soul-searching on the part of California librarians, to develop standards for public library service, to formulate plans for cooperation among libraries, and to seek ways of improving their financing through participation in the state's broader tax resources. Co-leaders in this effort were the California Library Association and the California State Library. Among the publications emerging from these activities were: (1) *Public Library Service Standards for California* in 1953,¹² (2) the report on an over all survey of California public libraries financed by state funds in 1958,¹³ and (3) *Master Plan for Public Libraries in California* in 1962.¹⁴ In 1963, following two unsuccessful attempts, the California Library Association succeeded in getting a state aid bill, the Public Library Development Act, (Stats. 1963, Chapter 1802, p. 3630, §1) through the Legislature. Although the amount of funds made available for the program's first year of operation was only \$850,000, the priority given to planning grants has resulted in a healthy ferment of cooperative study among librarians in many parts of the state.

In Southern California, as soon as state aid became a reality, the Public Library Executives Association explored ways to achieve a cooperative approach toward an over all pattern for metropolitan library improvement. A quick survey was made as a guide to the logical group-

Metropolitan Library Problems of the Los Angeles Area

ing of libraries for grants, and applications were made accordingly. A total of seven state-supported planning grants were awarded to libraries in the Greater Los Angeles area. The largest of these, \$40,000, was made to the Los Angeles Public Library on behalf of itself and nineteen other libraries for a survey completed in June 1965 (but not yet published). Directed by Martha Boaz, Lowell Martin, and Henry Reining, the survey explored the feasibility of establishing a cooperative library system or systems which would include the public libraries and other libraries of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. It recommended the organization and services which will make modern library resources fully available to all the citizens of the area. Its recommendations relate the regional program to state-wide plans.

Southern California library hopes are high that from this survey and the more localized planning studies now in progress, as well as from Lowell Martin's current state-wide survey (federally financed), will emerge a complete and sensible program for library service to its vast metropolitan area. The goal is to provide a network that will give every citizen convenient access to the fullest possible range of book resources. Few librarians have any idea that such a goal can be reached without extensive reliance upon state and federal funds to subsidize services which have more than local use, particularly those levels which have wide-regional application. To fill the most highly specialized needs of all, public librarians look forward to the day when the holdings of the area's great university libraries will provide research facilities really equal to those of other major universities.

Another area of library interest only beginning to be explored may also prove to have far-reaching implications for library development in metropolitan Los Angeles. This is the application of automatic data processing to library operations. At the present time the Los Angeles Public Library has under way an extensive study of an integrated systems design for automation of many of its technical services, including book ordering, maintenance of serial files, registration and circulation procedures, and some aspects of catalog processing which could involve such work as establishing a Branch Union List, central and branch inventory data processing, in-process location and control, book check and book pocket preparation, and label preparation and spine marking.

Whatever may happen in library development in the Greater Los Angeles area, the situation is not likely to stagnate.

HAROLD L. HAMILL

References

1. McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California Country; An Island on the Land*. New York, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946, p. 7.
2. Grebler, Leo. *Profile of the Los Angeles Metropolis: Its People and Its Homes* (University of California, Los Angeles, Graduate School of Business Administration, Real Estate Program, Research Report No. 3, Part 1). Los Angeles, University of California, 1963, p. 11.
3. Welfare Planning Council (of) Los Angeles Region, Research Department. *Background for Planning* (Research Report No. 17). Los Angeles, Welfare Planning Council (of) Los Angeles Region, 1964.
4. Grebler, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
6. Morgan, Neil. *Westward Tilt; The American West Today*. New York, Random House, 1961, pp. 137, 153.
7. Whyte, William H., Jr. "Introduction." In Fortune. *The Exploding Metropolis*. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1958, p. 9.
8. Grebler, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
10. Scott, Stanley. "California Legislation Governing Municipal Incorporation." In California, Governor's Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems. *Metropolitan California*. Sacramento, Calif., The Governor's Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems, 1961, pp. 107-108.
11. Crouch, Winston W., and Dinerman, Beatrice. *Southern California Metropolis; A Study in Development of Government for a Metropolitan Area*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1963, p. 381.
12. California Library Association. "Public Library Service Standards for California," *News Notes of California Libraries*, 58:291-302, Spring 1963.
13. California Public Library Commission. *Reports Pursuant to 1957 Statutes of California, Chapter 2328*. Berkeley, The Commission, 1958.
14. California Library Association, Library Development and Standards Committee. *Master Plan for Public Libraries in California*. Berkeley, The Association, [1962].

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- Boyd, Barbara Gray. "A Brief Inquiry into the Present State of Public Library Service in the Los Angeles Area." Unpublished survey prepared for the Public Library Executives Association of Southern California, November, 1963. (Multilithed.)
- Nadeau, Remi A. *California: the New Society*. New York, D. McKay Co., 1963.