



Introduction

GORDON STEVENSON

SOUND RECORDINGS have been a part of library services for many decades; indeed, in a few unusual cases the use of non-electrical sound reproducing devices can be traced back to before 1900. But progress in learning to exploit the full potential of this novel medium of communication was slow and erratic, hampered to a large degree by the bulky and fragile physical form of cylinders and 78 rpm disc recordings. With the rise of the long-playing disc in the 1950s, librarians began to develop more extensive collections for educational and recreational uses. This development continues today as media centers are established to integrate all audiovisual services and as a few librarians begin to deal with the problems and prospects offered by tape cassettes. The use of sound recordings as reference and research material has not kept pace with these developments, and despite our many years of experience with packaged sound, it remains—as a reading of this issue of *Library Trends* will demonstrate—a frontier area of librarianship.

In the United States, but for a few pioneering collections, the sound archive is a relatively new phenomenon. Its organizational forms are quite diverse, its purposes are often loosely defined, and its potential recognized by only a few librarians. In short, the sound archive occupies a peripheral place in librarianship. The extremely diverse functions of archival and reference collections, the highly specialized audiences they serve, problems of “bibliographical” control and access, the unusual legal and copyright dimensions of sound recordings, and the complex technical problems involved in preservation and restoration have all made it difficult to integrate sound services of this nature into the basic structure of library and information services. But what institutions do we have other than libraries to deal with this rich cultural heritage? There are no other institutions capable of doing for sound

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what has been done for print materials. In any case, the creation of a new institutional form should be avoided: it would be too costly, it would erode the development of the library as an information center, and in the long run would probably limit access to recorded sound. The answer, then, is for librarians to begin to act according to their long-standing claim of responsibility for communications media other than print.

What progress has been made, what are the major problems, where do we go from here? This issue of *Library Trends* deals with these questions largely within the context of libraries and archives in the United States. The international dimensions of the subject are quite important, for one can learn much from the experiences of colleagues in other countries. Channels for communications at the international level have recently been established with the founding of the International Association of Sound Archives, and this organization will soon begin to deal with the more vexing problems that cut across national boundaries. However, most of our basic problems are, I believe, peculiar to the United States.

What are the purposes and functions of the sound archive? In the opening article, Edward Colby explores some very fundamental issues and asks questions which must be answered if sound archives are to be developed to the extent that their advocates wish. Colby's paper throws much light on the following discussion by Carlos Hagen on the present state of United States archives. From these discussions the role of the private collector and the role of a few innovative sound archivists emerge as the major forces in the development of institutional collections during the past decade and a half. The problem now is to build upon the very firm foundation that has been established by the first generation of sound archivists. The transition must be made to organizational forms and methodologies which can cope with the materials both intellectually and technically at a high level of efficiency and competency. If Hagen is correct, the lack of adequate financial support which seems to plague many archives is not the basic problem, it is a symptom of a serious lack of agreement as to the social and cultural value of historical and research collections of recorded sound. It should be obvious that librarians are not the only reactionary forces that have delayed the full development of sound archives. In the end, librarians will respond to the needs of students and scholars once those needs are articulated, and as the use of sound recordings takes a firmer place in scholarship, sound archives will flourish. In any case, a degree of opti-

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mism emerges when one takes an account of what has been accomplished to date.

Of the recent events which will have an impact on future developments, none has been more important than the establishment of several new professional organizations. The founding of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) represented a turning point in the evolution of institutional sound collections. The role of the individual (the collector, the scholar, the librarian) will continue to influence developments, but will decrease as institutional collections and professional archivists and discographers carry on work which is beyond the resources of the individual. The numerous gains resulting from the founding of ARSC are only slightly dimmed by the possibility of a loss of contact with the library profession at large (which, in any case, has ignored the needs of the recorded sound specialists). Whether they like it or not, sound archivists have a lot to lose if they remain too far out of the main channels of library communications. For one thing, most of the administrative decisions which have affected and will affect sound collections in libraries will be made by library administrators whose knowledge of recorded sound is often grossly inadequate for the decisions they must make.

A further complication arises from the relationship between the sound archivist and the various subject specialists he must serve. The vigorous activities of ARSC have included efforts to bridge these gaps by joint meetings with groups representing such diverse interests as musicology, jazz, country and western music, speech communications, and commercial record manufacturers and distributors. A large proportion of the ARSC members are private collectors and discographers, which may strike one as unusual until one realizes that the bulk of the extant historical material (i.e., anything out of print) is in private hands.

The larger purpose of ARSC is to guide the future development of sound archives at the national level. The costs of founding and properly maintaining a sound archive are substantial and every effort must be made to avoid unnecessary duplication. Perhaps what is needed is not more sound archives but a more efficient use of those now in existence. If modern communications technology were put to use, a library could easily "plug in" to any major archive in the country. For example, the John Edwards Memorial Foundation (JEMF) has clearly defined its functions and its collecting areas (principally the sacred and secular music of rural white America as documented on commercially produced recordings). How many such collections are needed? Until some-

one can answer this question, it will be best to avoid the establishment of a dozen or more small, poorly staffed, and inadequately indexed collections when better service could be obtained by building on the strengths of JEMF and providing it with funds to develop a communications system linking it with the widely dispersed libraries needing access to material in its collection. The same can be said of literally dozens of other major collections.

What of the education of the young librarian interested in recorded sound? Apparently there are few courses in library schools and certainly no solid sequence of courses available to the future specialist. Certain aspects of the subject should be easily accessible to anyone attending an accredited library school. The fundamentals of discography, an examination of the social and cultural significance of recorded sound, the basic reference sources—these, at least, should find a place in introductory library science courses. But the training of the specialist is another matter. Perhaps here the answer would be a few special programs which permit selected students to fulfill the bulk of their library science degree requirements in a library school and then, as part of a formal program, work for six months or a year in one of the larger archives. However, the training of the specialist is a problem that can be solved with little trouble if we want to solve it. It is the education of the non-specialist, the reference librarian, the bibliographer, and the future library administrator that is the serious problem. Progress in this area is surely more the responsibility of the library educator than of the professional sound archivist.

Little else need be added here to the ideas which are presented in the papers which follow. If all of the problems and prospects of recorded sound have not been dealt with, this is because of the immense size and diversity of the field, the dimensions of which are only now becoming evident. To the casual observer, it may appear that little progress has been made in collecting, organizing, and providing physical and bibliographical access to recorded sound for reference and research. One has only to compare the situation today with the situation as it existed fifteen or twenty years ago to realize that remarkable progress has been made. Dozens of major collections have been established, the Association for Recorded Sound Collections has a vigorous professional organization, and on the horizon is a new generation of library users who are products of the electric generation and to whom recorded sound is more a necessity than a novelty.