

BRAYNE (1910)

Introduction

INTRODUCTION:

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Background:

Libraries are collections of materials organized and stored in systematic ways. Almost every culture which developed a written language also had forms of libraries. These libraries existed to preserve culture; the knowledge, theory, philosophy and art of a particular society were collected and protected for future generations. Some libraries were interred with their pharoahic owners, some hidden in caves by the Dead Sea, some burned in purges by conquerors, and some cloistered as religious beliefs changed. The power of written language was recognized and usually preempted by the powerful.

The idea of libraries for the masses was revolutionary and grew from revolutionary politics. The idea of democracy - one person one vote - was based on obtaining an educated electorate. People with enough information and perspective were to make intelligent voters. Public schools and public libraries were natural outgrowths of the democratic ideal. Compulsory education for children and public libraries for adult self-education were to produce an informed general public, capable of making decisions for the good of all.

With the explosion of both knowledge and media technology these two major functions - preserving culture and aiding self-education - have become blurred.

The "global village" produced by this knowledge explosion and the instantaneous methods of communicating it have made both enculturation and education functions of other institutions and organizations. In the United States most people rely on T.V., radio and newspapers for information and entertainment (i.e. culture). Adult education has become organized with diplomas certifying knowledge required. The small public library seems superflous, relegated to providing school theme information and best sellers before they come out in paperback.

Current Services and Use:

What roles then, beyond the above, can a small public library fill which will justify the expenditure of public funds? What services can be reasonably expected in a small public library? Large public libraries with infinitely larger resources can still claim to be irreplaceable repositories of culture and research resources. What about small libraries?

First, for the 30% of the population that still use public libraries regularly (Gallup, 1976) there may still be traditional services:

Cultural - preserving the best literature, music, art, and making it available to all people whether they can afford to purchase books,

records, prints, or not. Small public libraries are often in areas where bookstores are nonexistent and theaters are far away. The selection of reading in the supermarket is definitely limited.

Educational - for children and young people the public library fills in gaps in school library collections, and is open when schools are closed. Further the public library usually has special story times, film programs, book discussion groups, etc. which the school doesn't provide. For adults the public library often has lecture and film series, and sometimes craft classes, etc. Some public libraries even house extension classes from distant colleges and universities, or hold prep sessions for high school equivalency exams.

Secondly, for posterity, libraries often maintain local history collections which are the only source for the public to really trace those roots we are all so aware of now.

Thirdly, there are the intangibles inherent in the idea of library. "Why I had to care for the books I borrowed, return them unscarred and on time, was because they weren't my property alone, they were everybody's. That idea had as much to do with civilizing me as any idea I was ever to come upon in the books themselves." (Philip Roth, 1978)



AVONHEAD LIBRARY (ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW MAY 14)

But these traditional services, valuable to the community as they may be, are still insufficient if they seem irrelevant to 70% of the possible users.

Redefining "Library" in Community Use: The conclusion of a study done in Maryland (Bundy, 1967) was: "Without a fundamental metamorphosis, a radical reconstitution of the institution, its ends, and its aims, the underlying evidence of this analysis would suggest that the danger is that the institution will atrophy further and ultimately remain as only a vestigial souvenir of another age." (p. 382)

Jack Chitwood in addressing a library buildings conference for the American Library Association (1967) said, "It is my contention that the potential of the public library has hardly been touched, much less fully realized, and that all of us must share this guilt. Our people need what libraries can be more than what most libraries are, and it is our responsibility to plan for these services." (p. 23)

What are the new roles and services which a new library building must prepare for? Once we get to the 70% which do not now use the public library and try to meet their needs with new services, what will these services be?

First, evidence which will be cited later shows that there is need for an information clearing house in each local community or area. People need informa-

tion on social services, health, law and the courts, birth control. They need to know where to apply for help, where to find out about housing, etc. They need to know what clubs and groups are available to them, what public meetings are being held locally, etc. The proliferation of federal, state and local agencies and departments has made coordination of and dissemination of information impossible for any individual. But public libraries, by joint efforts, could fill this need.

Secondly, people who cannot read need better ways of getting information and entertainment than relying on commercial media. Nonprint technologies multiply and libraries by demand could serve their clientele who have reading difficulties by procuring the kinds of materials these people want in nonprint forms. Buying through systems or some other cooperative way would make more materials available for less money.

Thirdly, through the systems of libraries which are now being formed and which will eventually include not only public libraries, but also academic libraries, school libraries, special libraries, museum libraries, business libraries, etc., a small library will be able to put any patron in touch with a huge network of library collections in a more immediate way than current interlibrary loan policies often dictate.

These three developing ways of providing services to those who currently

find libraries irrelevant or simply invisible will of necessity be demonstrated through community outreach programs which will help convince non-users to become users. But there are still barriers even when the services can be shown to be useful to everyone.

THESIS: TWO BARRIERS:

My belief is that there are two major stumbling blocks which concern the physical organization and formation of library spaces to convincing non-users that the library is or soon will be very useful to them.

(Lest we think the physical facility is not that important, a post occupancy study done on an academic library - Campbell and Schlechter 1979 - concluded that "the physical design of this building plays a more important role in determining user satisfaction and use than do the staff and administrative aspects of this setting." - p.26)

The first of these is the system of organization in libraries. As will be shown later, most people simply don't know how to use libraries. Small libraries have often aped large libraries with separate stack areas which many people find intimidating. The complexity of any classification system now in use, Dewey or Library of Congress, renders them incomprehensible to the majority of even regular library users. The benefit of such a system in a small library is mainly limited to the fact that the classi-

fication system helps group all books on a similar subject in the same place - a distinct advance on the old accession shelving method. A small library is in a very unique position to experiment with other ways of bringing materials and people than relying on a card catalog which is very difficult for even trained college graduates to use, and a stack shelving arrangement which makes subject groupings more difficult to perceive. The current systems of finding materials constitute a barrier which must be overcome, and which non-users of libraries cannot be expected to manage.



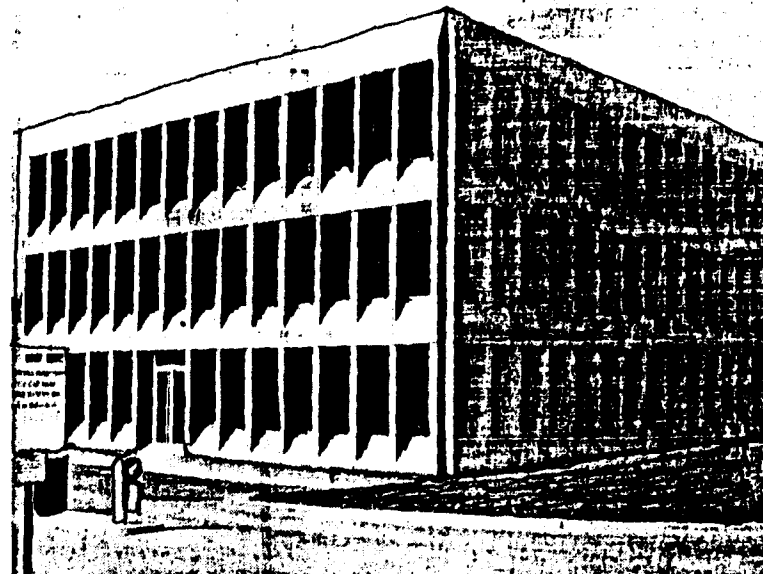
DECONSHIRE (WARD & ODD 1973)

The second barrier is the image of the library in the public mind. To many, particularly the poor and illiterate, the library simply doesn't exist. Some community outreach programs have been tried by innovative librarians in urban areas - movie vans which hold community shows right in the neighborhoods, special collections in housing projects, loans of toys and tools to disadvantaged people, etc. These programs have for the most part been successful, but unfortunately limited.

But to the larger number of nonusers the library exists for others. They are not interested, feel it has nothing to offer them. I believe this reluctance may be partially blamed on early frustrating experiences (e.g. not finding what was wanted, being intimidated by the old-time librarian image, having reading difficulties, etc.) but can also be blamed on the type of imposing, self-satisfied image many library buildings project. Libraries in small towns are often seen as symbols of community pride rather than useful, useable, approachable institutions which truly belong to all the people. Libraries can no longer be satisfied as to their a priori value - they must prove that value by real service to real people. The building must reflect that commitment and be comfortable for people not books.

The following concepts of library design are postulated jointly on behavioral research available in

printed form and on these stated ideas developed from years of helping and listening to library users and non-users. The first section includes overall building concepts, ways of thinking about the entire building design. The second deals with individual spaces within the building.



E. RACKNELL BRANCH LIBRARY (WARD, 1974)