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ADMINISTRATION OF A  
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BY  
ARTHUR G. ROSTWICK

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A.L.A. MANUAL OF LIBRARY ECONOMY

Type of Library	Chapters and Authors
	I. "American Library History," Mr. BROWN. Printed.
	II. "Library of Congress," Mrs. BROWN. Printed.
	III. "The State Library," Mr. WEAVER. Printed.
	IV. "The College and University Library," Mr. WEAVER. Printed.
	V. "Treasury and Subscription Libraries," Mr. BROWN. Printed.
	VI. "The Free Public Library," Miss LANE. Printed.
	VII. "The Historical Library," Mr. WEAVER. Printed.
	VIII. "Special Libraries," Mr. JENNINGS. Printed.
Organization and administration	
	IX. "Library Legislation," Mrs. VORP. Printed.
	X. "The Library Building," Mr. BARTMAN. Printed.
	XI. "Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment," Miss BARTMAN. Printed.
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XII

THE ADMINISTRATION OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY,  
ESPECIALLY ITS PUBLIC OR MUNICIPAL  
RELATIONS

ARTHUR E. BOSTWICK  
St. Louis Public Library

What is a public library?	Checking of errors
Public control by a board	Regulation of expenditure
Conditions of establishment	Appointments
Source of support	The librarian
The budget	Organization of the board
Methods of payment and account- ing	Committees
Appropriation or tax	Library reports
Certification of bills	Statistics
Pay-rolls	Publicity

**What is a public library?**—The test that will determine whether a library is truly “public” or not has never yet been laid down with authority. Its ownership, control, support, operation, and use are the determining factors. If it is owned, controlled, supported, operated, and used all by the public, there is no doubt about the matter. Such public libraries are those of Boston, Chicago, and St. Louis. But a library may be for free public use when privately owned, controlled, supported, and operated, like the Pratt Institute free library in Brooklyn. Such a library is generally considered public by those who use it. Oftener a library that is owned, controlled, and operated by a private body is publicly supported, wholly or in part, by agreement between the owners and the public. Such are the public libraries of New York City and Buffalo, N.Y. Less often a library owned and operated by the public is supported

wholly or partly by the income of an endowment. All these different kinds of libraries are loosely known as "public" if their use is free to all. But the word "public" rarely appears in the legal title of a library unless it is either owned by the city or town or has an agreement with it to do public work.

**Public control by a board.**—Public control is exercised usually through a board of trustees or directors, which may have a greater or less degree of independence. Occasionally this board has other functions; for instance, it may be the regular board of education or it may have in its charge also museums and art galleries. The public body of which the board is a creature is usually the city or town, but occasionally the county, the school district, or some other public entity. Thus the public library of Portland, Ore., is a county library, while that of Cleveland, Ohio, is a school-district library.

Until recently the counties of most states had no power to establish and support public libraries, but since the successful operation of a county-library law in California this power has been more frequently bestowed and county libraries are becoming more common.

The most usual form of library board is a separate appointive body. The conditions of choice and service are very various. In a large majority of cities the mayor has the appointing power; in many smaller places, especially in New England, the town elects, either in town meeting or by direct vote of the citizens. In a few cities the city council elects. A plan, once common, but now going out of use, is to allow the board of education to choose the library board. Sometimes the board is self-perpetuating; that is, it fills its own vacancies, but in this case the library is generally a private corporation doing public work by contract or an endowed institution receiving a small public subsidy. It is quite usual to make one or more public officials *ex-officio* members of the board. In some places there has been an effort to insure the representation of

different institutions, different elements of the community, different religious bodies, or different political parties. This is the case in Philadelphia and Scranton, Pa., and in Cincinnati, Ohio. Women are frequently members, especially in small places. The ideal trustee is a good business man or woman, interested in education, with few prejudices, affiliated with no narrow group, capable of continued interest in the library without trying to hamper the librarian by too close interference in detail.

Terms of office vary from three to six years; the lower number is quite usual. Generally a certain number of terms expire every year, but occasionally all terms expire with the mayor's. This plan was formerly more general but has been found to favor political control. In self-perpetuating boards the term is generally for life or during good behavior. The best opinion now favors a small board, of not more than five members.

The members of the board are generally called "trustees," but quite often "directors." Occasionally other names are used, such as "library committee," "board of managers," "commissioners," or "board of agents." In cities under the commission form of government some trouble has been experienced in placing the public library. The board of trustees has sometimes been retained, but often the library has been treated as a department of some one division of the city government. Librarians have been unanimous in their insistence that when this is done the library shall be classified with other educational institutions. Here the single commissioner under whose jurisdiction the library is placed has in general the powers and duties of the old library board. In commission-governed cities employing a city manager the board has usually been retained, and this seems the best plan.

**Conditions of establishment.**—Most states now have laws defining the conditions under which municipalities may establish

and maintain public libraries. In most cases advantage is taken of this law, and very often the state law alone defines the library's connection with the city or town. Sometimes, however, this is done in a section of the city charter, or by city ordinance. There may also be special acts of incorporation or the like; or agreements or contracts between the library or donor and the city, which in some cases consist only of a letter offering a gift and its formal acceptance.

The library property is generally held by the city or town and simply administered by the board, but the board may hold it as the city's trustees, or sometimes real and personal property may be differently held. In many cases the board has been legally decided incompetent to hold any property at all. Where the library is a private corporation it is not unusual to find that part of the library's property is owned out-and-out by the board and part by the city, although the public, of course, knows no difference. This is the case in New York and Brooklyn.

**Source of support.**—Public funds for the support of the library, unless from the income of an endowment held by the municipality, are in the last analysis always raised by taxation. The library may receive the proceeds of a special tax of so many mills or fractions of a mill on the dollar on the assessed valuation of the place, or it may receive a specified share of the general city tax, or the city may appropriate money for the library as for its other departments. In some cases libraries receive both the proceeds of a special tax and an appropriation. A library may also receive the proceeds of special fines or licenses. Thus in Massachusetts the proceeds of dog licenses are given either to schools or libraries.

**The budget.**—Most public libraries now regulate their annual expenditures by a budget, or classified schedule of expenditure, adopted at the beginning of the year. This budget may be made, wholly or in part, by the appropriating body. For instance, in New York the Board of Estimate and Apportionment



subdivides its library appropriation into such items as "salaries," "books," "fuel," and "light," and no change can be made without the city's approval. In these cases the amount of each separate item usually originates with the library and is granted or modified after suitable investigation.

But in other cases, and especially where the public money used to operate the library is the proceeds of a tax, and is not an appropriation, the budget is made by the board itself, and instead of being a fixed schedule that must be followed is simply an expression of its intentions—a statement of the way in which it expects to spend its money. And even when a board makes no budget at all, the librarian will find it a convenience to make one for himself, in which case it indicates merely his own intentions with regard to his recommendations to his board.

**Methods of payment and accounting.**—With the exceptions noted above, the expenditure of public money is usually left to the discretion of the board. But even where the city allows the library to spend its money as it likes, it does not always turn the money over to the board to hold and pay out. Where it does so pay over the money, it may do so in a lump sum, in equal instalments, on requisition (presumably with vouchers), or irregularly, as the taxes come in. In other cases the city retains the money, in which case the library may pay bills by drafts on the city or the city may pay the bills, duly certified by the library, in its own way. In case the library owns productive property it generally uses the income as it likes, although, as noted above, boards are often legally incompetent to hold such property, and then it is turned over to the city to hold in trust, in which case bills are paid from the income as from public appropriation.

The library, of course, accounts to the city for its expenditure of public money, and in many cases the city specially audits the library's books. In general the library accounts to

the city by means of an annual report, which is almost always printed. This is often the only accounting, and indeed there may be no accounting at all. Monthly statements are made in some cases, but in others the vouchers that go to the city treasurer are the only account made.

*Appropriation or tax.*—The right of the library to receive public money at all is usually determined by the state law—often the same general library law that defines the library's relations to the municipality. The law may be mandatory, but is generally only permissive. And not even a mandatory law prescribes all details; such a law generally becomes effective in a given locality only after a popular vote, and even then the appropriation or special-tax rate may vary within specified limits. A minimum appropriation may be prescribed, not by law at all, but by an agreement with a donor, as when the Carnegie gifts specify at least 10 per cent of the cost of the building. As a matter of fact this amount is rarely enough to maintain a Carnegie building and few libraries keep within it.

Within the prescribed limits, where these exist, or without them, where they do not, the library's public income is determined in various ways, as by the city council, by popular vote, by the city charter, by one or other of various city boards, or by contract with a donor.

Moneys received by the library itself in the course of its daily work, such as fines for overdue books, are variously treated. In many cases these constitute a good part of the library's income. In most cases the library retains these and uses them for what purposes it will, but in no inconsiderable number they are turned in to the city, which generally, though not always, holds them subject to the library's call.

The amount of fines, and also that of the private income, if any, enjoyed by a library, are sometimes taken into account by the city in making its appropriations. The library reports its total requirements for the year and states how far its own

receipts and income will go toward meeting them, with the expectation that the city will furnish the balance. This is what is done in New York, and applies, of course, only to the case of direct appropriation.

*Certification of bills.*—The librarian himself handles very little money—sometimes none at all—the bills being paid by the city if it is the custodian of library funds, otherwise by the treasurer of the board. His contact with the bills is merely to certify them and pass them on to the proper officer for payment. It is necessary, of course, to see that no bills are contracted or paid unless properly authorized by the board. If the board adopts a yearly budget it may simply be necessary to see that the total of bills in each category does not exceed the amount appropriated; if each expenditure is authorized separately, each bill must be compared with this authorization. In large libraries there is generally a financial officer of some kind who makes these adjustments and comparisons and whose audit is necessary before bills are paid.

*Pay-rolls.*—Pay-rolls are handled in various ways. The library may draw on the city treasury for the whole amount necessary for a single pay day and make the individual payments itself, either by cash or check; or the pay-roll, properly certified, may be sent to a city department, which pays the library employees as if they were its own.

*Checking of errors.*—The actual receipt of goods and the actual performance of work ordered is of course implied in the certification of the bill. The best municipal practice is now to require that the person certifying to receipt or performance shall not be the one who gives the order. This may be arranged in a large library by employing an official checker to examine work and goods and certify them.

*Regulation of expenditure.*—Details and rate of expenditures are generally supervised in the librarian's office. Even when there is a budget he will naturally adopt some program or plan

of subclassification. For instance, when there is an item for books, he will wish to decide in advance how much he can afford to put into reference books and how much into books for circulation, how much for children's books, how much for each of his branches, etc.

Part of this expenditure he will extend uniformly over the year, but not all. Salaries will be so extended, but not heating and lighting. In the purchase of books current fiction will be fairly uniform, but not purchases like that of a quantity of children's books to replenish the shelves of a branch.

**Appointments.**—In the appointment of its force, as in the disbursement of its funds, the library is usually left to itself, but not always. A few institutions are subject to city civil service rules, the local civil service board making out examination papers for admission to the staff and for promotion within it. Other libraries, to a considerable number, have their own systems of service, and this is the plan that commends itself to most librarians.

**The librarian.**—The executive officer of a library is usually styled the "librarian," although he is occasionally given the title of "director." He is employed directly by the board and is sometimes also its clerk or secretary. He is its expert adviser and the responsible head of the library. The amount of independence that is allowed him in the administration of his office depends on the constitution and traditions of his board. They may outline to him merely the broadest lines of policy or they may wish to dictate details of daily work. In a library of considerable size, where the librarian is, as he should be, a competent executive officer, his duties are properly all those that usually appertain to such an officer, such as the formulation of rules for the conduct of the library, the making of nominations for appointment and of recommendations for promotion and salary increases, etc. In general the board represents the owners of the library: that is, the public, who

are interested in results—not in the methods of bringing them about, which are naturally left to the librarian's judgment. If he is secretary of the board he is of course present at its meetings; if not, he should always be present by invitation.

**Organization of the board.**—The board meets usually once a month, although some library boards meet as often as once a week. It commonly controls the expenditure of money either by making definite annual appropriations (a "budget") at the beginning of the fiscal year and requiring the librarian to keep within them, or by acting upon individual expenditures as the librarian recommends them.

The board commonly has a constitution and by-laws, which define its powers and those of the librarian. They may be very brief or may prescribe details somewhat closely. The best usage favors brevity.

**Committees.**—The board does its business ordinarily through committees, and decides matters at its meetings largely by acting on reports from these. Standing committees may include an administration or library committee, to care for ordinary details of administration, appointments, promotions, etc.; a book committee, to pass on book titles for purchase; a finance or auditing committee; a building or house committee (if the library building is too large to be cared for by the committee on administration), and an executive committee, to act for the board in intervals between its meetings. This is often composed entirely of ex-officio members, as officers and chairmen of committees. The board's officers are usually a president, vice-president, secretary (often the librarian), and treasurer. In cases where the city holds the funds and pays the bills and where the library has no property of its own the last may be omitted as unnecessary.

**Library reports.**—As noted above, the board usually makes a printed report annually to the city authorities. The bulk of this document consists usually of a report made by the librarian

to the board and includes statistical and financial tables. Such reports are often brief and intended to be consulted rather than read; others are readable accounts of the library's work for the year. Recent practice has tended toward the insertion of illustrations and toward making the report as attractive as possible to the general reader.

*Statistics.*—The non-financial statistics presented are of two kinds—those relating to the contents of the library and its condition and those relating to the use made of its contents. With the recent wide extension of the use of public libraries this second type of statistics has also expanded until it occupies the larger part of the tables presented. Of the first type there is usually a statement of the number of books owned by the library, verified by inventory, with the number found missing, deductions for books lost, soiled, or worn out, and additions by purchase and gift. These may all be given by classes and by localities—central library and branches, for instance. It has been customary in this connection to print a long list of book-donors' names with the amount of their gifts, but many libraries are now omitting this. Statistics of use include those of registration, reading-room attendance, hall or library use, and circulation of various types—over the ordinary issue desk, in the children's room, through branches, stations, and traveling libraries. These are generally all classified. Percentages of the number of books shelved in each class and the number circulated in each class are also usually represented, either in separate tables or in parallel columns with the corresponding numbers.

Library statistics were formerly rarely comparable one with another, because of the different ways in which they were presented. A scheme for drawing up the statistical part of a report was adopted by the A.L.A. Committee on library administration in 1914, and statistics according to this plan are now appended by many libraries to their reports.

**Publicity.**—The function of a library report is really double—to render an account of the library's work to the public and its representatives, who are paying for it and who have a right to inquire about its methods and its results; and, second, to stimulate public interest in the library. This stimulation of interest is in itself an important part of the library's general administration and is effected also in other ways—by issuing cards or placards calling attention to the location of the library and its uses; by slides in moving-picture theaters; by window displays of books or other material where this is possible; by library publications, such as a monthly bulletin or by frequent separate printed lists, and by embracing every opportunity to speak before local organizations in explanation of the library's aims and its ability and willingness to do public service. This sort of publicity work, which some librarians dislike to call "library advertising" on account of the objectionable connotations of the word, has this in common with all legitimate forms of trade advertising—the fact that it is an effort to acquaint the public with a branch of service about which it is to its advantage to be thoroughly informed. The efficacy of such efforts received noteworthy demonstration during the Great War, and probably publicity work for individual libraries will profit thereby. Some authorities even favor paid advertising in the press and elsewhere, while others are of the opinion that libraries, like the public schools, are in position to secure without charge all the publicity they require.

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