

# Book Reviews

*A Metropolitan Library in Action; A Survey of the Chicago Public Library.*

C. B. Joeckel and L. Carnovsky. University of Chicago Press, 1940. xvii, 466 p. \$3.

*A Metropolitan Library in Action* by Professors Joeckel and Carnovsky bids fair to take its place as a landmark in the literature of librarianship. This is not because it is the most complete study of an individual library yet made. Nor is this because of the cost (\$10,000) and time taken for the study. Rather the importance of this book lies in the fact that it has at least three far-reaching implications for librarianship. These may be briefly stated as follows:

1. Administrative organization and management are of greater importance to library service than many librarians have realized in the past.

2. The soundest approach to the evaluation of a given library's service is the case study method.

3. Library service (and more specifically library administration) is most effectively approached from a combination of the five viewpoints: library "administration as law, as institution, as experience, as theory and invention, and as problem and relationship."<sup>1</sup>

Each of these may be examined briefly in turn.

A significant statement on p. 417 underlines the importance of organization and management:

One important proviso is made with respect to larger library revenues. Increased income should be accompanied by the administrative reorganization and service changes suggested later in this chapter. It

<sup>1</sup> Dimock, M. E., "The Meaning and Scope of Public Administration," in Gaus, J. M., White, L. D., and Dimock, M. E., *The Frontiers of Public Administration*. University of Chicago Press, 1936, p. 9.

is unwise to add new fuel to the engine before the engine itself has been thoroughly overhauled and is ready to function efficiently.

Now the above is not an attempt to designate administrative organization as more important than increased revenues. But it does underline the fact that more money will be of little avail unless the library has an efficient and smooth-functioning organization.

If one wished to apply this point to librarianship in general, several interesting possibilities might arise. Few librarians have failed at some time or other to emphasize their need for additional income. One wonders how many of them have first given careful study to their administrative organization and services, and satisfied themselves that they are as efficient as possible. Again how many librarians have developed plans at all comparable to those proposed in this book for the Chicago Public Library? Naturally such a librarian's plans could not be as comprehensive or as far-reaching as those for Chicago, but some plans should have been made before additional money is requested. Again one may well wonder whether such a request, made after careful study and planning, would not have better chances for success than simply a request for money unaccompanied by any careful analysis. One may be unduly influenced here by the better chances of success of a request analyzed by Professors Joeckel and Carnovsky, and documented by *A Metropolitan Library in Action*. But the same principle applies even if the request comes from the library staff itself—it is more likely to succeed

if it is preceded by careful study and is documented by detailed plans.

In one sense of the term, the entire volume is devoted to "administration." The chapters devoted specifically to administrative organization and management, however, constitute approximately one half of the book's 466 pages. No better evidence could be cited for the importance of these topics.

#### *The Case Study Method*

*A Metropolitan Library in Action* is the best example to date of the application of the case study method to library evaluation. Hence, certain comments are in order.

As already suggested this book is conclusive evidence that the best way of studying a given library is the case study method. While the authors draw heavily upon the experience of other libraries, as well as standards of the American Library Association, their recommendations are clearly for the Chicago Public Library. Furthermore their evidence is based on the needs and problems of Chicago and not assumed needs or the experience of other libraries. This fact makes it difficult to disagree with specific findings or recommendations. For example, a member of the faculty of the University of Illinois Library School might be expected to question whether

"The establishment of a general first-year library school in Chicago would be a fortunate event. . . ." (p. 423)

And yet the authors make it quite clear that such a step would be one way of solving certain of the library's pressing personnel problems. Other recommendations might also be questioned, but even if they would not be best for the majority of

libraries, Chicago might well be (and undoubtedly is in some cases) the exception to the rule.

A frequent misconception is that the case study has little to contribute to general professional knowledge. This may be attributed in part to the excessive dependence of librarianship in the past upon the "How we do it" type of article. Other librarians try to follow suit and find unsatisfactory results. This book helps to clear up this problem. It is not a collection of "How Chicago does it" items. Instead it is a complete and factual description of all the conditions under which the Chicago Public Library operates. As such any library which finds all of its conditions similar can make use of the findings and recommendations.

#### *Libraries Use the Book*

Anyone familiar with libraries or library literature can testify that other libraries are using the book and are finding it extremely helpful. The authors' statement

"The essential universality of library problems justified the publication of this case study of a single library" (p. v.)

is quite true. It is true, however, because the authors have given careful attention to all of the conditions and factors which are pertinent. Thus, another library can determine for itself which of its factors are comparable and which are not. Argument by analogy is valid only if all of the conditions are similar.

The Chicago Public Library is an excellent choice for such a case study. This is partly because of its size and partly because of the variety of problems encountered. One can find in this book some discussion of almost every aspect of li-

brarianship. Similarly too the choice of authors is a happy one. Professors Joeckel and Carnovsky are detached enough to avoid the slavish imitation of one institution or of one way of doing things. In addition they draw heavily upon a wide background of knowledge, experience, and observation of other libraries.

But perhaps the greatest contribution of this book lies in the fact that it synthesizes all five of the approaches to the study of library administration: administration as law, as institution, as experience, as theory and invention, and as problem and relation. There are other examples of these various approaches to librarianship<sup>2</sup> but nowhere else are they so skilfully blended into one unified treatment.

It would not be difficult to take each of these five approaches and illustrate their use in this book. This, however, is not necessary, for a few examples may suffice. Take for example the authors' treatment of law. Chapter III deals with the government of the library, i.e., the legislation under which the library operates. But the approach is always from the standpoint of the effect upon the library's operation and management. Furthermore, there are at least fifteen other references to legislation throughout the remainder of the book. The authors thus quite properly consider legislation as defining and delimiting the operation of the library. And for this reason they do not limit their discussion to what is commonly termed "library" legislation.

#### *Use of Theory and Invention*

Again, one may commend the authors' skilful use of theory and invention. As an example:

<sup>2</sup> Waples, Douglas. *Investigating Library Problems*. University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 66-77.

It is further suggested that consideration be given to a plan for the retirement at age sixty of assistants who have not passed beyond a point in the library service equivalent to the present Grade IV. (p. 204)

Here was a problem which was important and for which there has been no adequate solution in the experience of other libraries. Consequently the authors could either have avoided it or have tried a new approach. Characteristically they chose the latter course, and an interesting new suggestion is added to the professional body of knowledge. Incidentally librarianship needs more of this.

The book is full of examples of the problem and relationship method. Chapter II, "Chicago: The City and Its People," sets the tone of the entire volume. The library's management and services are considered against the background of social and economic conditions, and even in discussing the institutional aspects of the library one is always conscious of this underlying viewpoint.

#### *Implications for Librarianship*

The significant implications for librarianship, however, lie not in the use of any one of these approaches to administration but rather in the use of all of them. This is the type of professional contribution which is greatly needed today. From an excessive use of the "experience" approach (the "how to do it" type) librarianship might easily swing to the other extreme and overemphasize say the "institutional" approach. In recent years there seems to be a large increase in the number of articles and studies dealing with the formal framework and procedures of administration. Such studies are needed and will be valuable, but it would be unfortunate if they become the "vogue" to the exclu-

sion of other approaches. Again librarianship needs all the theory and invention it can obtain, but it would be unfortunate if there should be as universal devotion to any single approach as there has been to the experience approach among librarians generally.

The most important need of library administration is for studies of, say, law in relation to library experience, sociological and economic backgrounds, and theories and invention. *A Metropolitan Library in Action* has set the pattern by its admirable synthesis of the various approaches. It is to be hoped that other similar contributions will follow.—*E.W. McDiarmid, University of Illinois Library School.*

*The Chicago College Plan, by Chauncey Samuel Boucher, Revised and Enlarged after Ten Years' Operation of the Plan.*  
A. J. Brumbaugh. University of Chicago Press, c1940. 413p. \$3.

THE FIRST EDITION of this work presented a description of the organization of the Chicago College Plan and its first years of operation, a discussion of the philosophy and content of its curriculum, a description of its personnel and materials, and of the many problems and difficulties of its operation. The present edition adds to the first work the record of successful additional years of operation of the plan, and some highly important as well as highly interesting material concerning the guidance and personnel work, the four-year junior college, the student evaluation of the program, and the modifications and additions to the original program brought about by study of that program in operation.

At first glance, this work seems to be for the professional educator. To li-

brarians the volume is extremely disappointing since the discussion of the library facilities of the University of Chicago College is limited to sixteen pages. Taken apart from the rest of the volume, these pages present little to us, it is true, beyond a record of circulation and a description of library materials and their organization. A thoughtful reading of the whole volume, however, gives meaning to the library statistics—so much so, in fact, that the reviewer ventures the opinion that this volume is one of the best available discussions of the objectives and problems of college library administration.

The materials of a college library are its books and its readers, and its field of operation is the contact between the two. Whether we think of reading in the critical, analytical sense used by some, or in the recreational and dilettante senses used by others, this contact between the book and its user is the opportunity and the responsibility of the college library.

The Chicago College Plan places a heavy emphasis on the careful, critical reading of books. It does not presuppose, as some people seem to think, that good reading is all that is required for an education. It does, however, make that contact between the book and its reader a highly important step in the educational process. Consequently, this descriptive volume about the plan has much to say about the methods and results of reading, and, both directly and indirectly, about the problems, the methods, and the achievements of the library.

For example, in the discussions of the philosophy and content of the curriculum, and the organization and presentation of course materials, considerable emphasis is placed on the suitability of books to their users and to their purposes. Again in