Guest Editorial

From Storehouse to Laboratory: Trends and Ideals in Academic Librarianship Reflected in C&RL, 1946–1968

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Dee Garrison’s classic history of American public libraries, Apostles of Culture, vividly describes the idealism that drove and shaped the work of American public libraries through the turn of the 20th century. The book seems to lead naturally to questions of what ideals have shaped American libraries in more recent periods. Specifically, as an academic librarian, I have long wondered what happened to our profession’s ideals in the midst of the social and political transformations that followed World War II.

A careful survey of C&RL from 1946 to 1968 identified about 89 articles that reflect such ideals, either implicitly or explicitly. These articles also convey a vivid sense of the changing environment and rising trends that provided the context for those ideals. I chose 1968 as a stopping point because it marked a turning point in the nation’s history, politically and culturally, and because Mary Lee Bundy and Paul Wasserman’s article “Professionalism Reconsidered” (January 1968), with its sweeping critique of the current state of academic librarianship, seemed to mark the end of an era.

Ideals—whether explicit or, especially, implicit—are elusive things, of course, and this study does not pretend to be scientific; nor does it range beyond C&RL. But I hope that will not prevent it from being useful as a glimpse of the engine that propelled our profession not too many years ago. The discussion raises some intriguing questions: How realistic were the library leaders of the time in their vision of what they were working for? Were their ideals based on a clear-eyed view of their situation, or were those ideals partly grounded in wishful thinking or a desire for greater importance? I hope that examining the assumptions and aspirations of the postwar period will shed some light on our own situation today.

Trends in the Profession, 1946–1968

Explosive Growth

The ideals and assumptions of the postwar period developed partly in response to a number of dynamic new trends in American academic libraries. First, librarians faced a dramatic expansion in their libraries’ acquisitions, patron base, and demand for services. Acquisitions rose and increasingly expanded beyond books and serials to include microforms, audiovisual materials,
and special collections. Returning veterans went to college on the G.I. Bill, and soon campuses also faced the invasion of the baby boomers. Demand for library services grew rapidly on several fronts, including course-related services, library instruction, and research support.

The Library of Congress filled 12 miles of shelves with new additions to its collections in 1944 alone. In 1946, Herman Henkle and Seymour Lubetzky cited Fremont Rider’s estimate that, if the current rapid growth of the collections continued, “the Yale Library will, by the year 2040, have approximately two hundred million volumes occupying over six thousand miles of shelves …and an annual increase of twelve million volumes requiring a staff of over six thousand catalogers.” In September 1965, C&RL’s “News From the Field” section had a subsection titled “Buildings,” describing all the new library buildings being planned, built, or opened. It included libraries at 15 different institutions.

Because of the influx of baby boomers, enrollment in colleges and universities was expected to nearly double by 1970. Clifton Brock foresaw that rising enrollments would demand much more space for reading rooms and would put a lot of pressure on library services. By the mid-1960s, many teachers’ colleges had turned into multipurpose state colleges and then into state universities. This meant that their graduate programs expanded, and librarians felt the pressure to upgrade the library’s book and periodical collections.

In addition to the growth in enrollments, librarians faced a growing amount of research activity; expansion in libraries themselves, leading to the creation of new departments, construction of new library buildings, and their attendant challenges and disruptions; dramatic growth in the number of books and other materials being published per year; and expansion in the variety of materials being published. This rapid pace of expansion also meant rising costs. According to the National Science Foundation, from 1940 to 1950, expenditures for organized research in American universities increased by 90 percent; from 1953 to 1960, they increased by 126 percent.

The resulting stress on librarians was best described by E. Hugh Behymer, who noted that college libraries used to be peaceful, mostly deserted places. But now:

The library, once the storehouse, has turned into the laboratory of the whole college…. Every phase of library activity has increased a hundredfold…. Librarians who are neither trained nor prepared to carry on these activities are suddenly finding themselves in the midst of this boiling cauldron, having to spread themselves thin to meet demands for their time, efforts, and abilities…. we do not have enough time to do all the things which are demanded of us.

Behymer admitted frankly that, despite 30 years of experience in libraries and library schools, he didn’t know the answer to this dilemma.

The personnel shortage in libraries was widely felt. Frank Lundy and Kathryn Renfro predicted that the rapid growth of book collections would mean that “Service staffs, correspondingly, must become larger and larger…. The problems thus posed can be met only through intensive cooperative effort.” Six years later, when President Eisenhower’s Committee on Education Beyond the High School reported its findings, Paul Reinert inferred from the report that librarians would need to recruit to fill the many vacancies in their ranks. Rodney Waldron predicted that the shortage of top-notch staff would grow, forcing “additional streamlining of procedures, short cuts in indexing, cataloging, and increased salaries.” Staff shortages would also force automation.
Emphasis on Science and Technology

Librarians also encountered an increased emphasis in American education on science and technology, after innovations in those fields contributed mightily to the Allied victory in World War II. Abraham Barnett noted the influence of “this age of sputniks, when we Americans have been unnerved, perhaps too easily, by Soviet successes,” in motivating educators and librarians to raise the intellectual level of college students.13 By 1963, an additional incentive to learn about science and technology had emerged: the space race. Wyman Parker noted that the race to the moon “has accelerated our entire educational program... There is now a curiosity about the physical world akin to that of Elizabethan England.”14

The titles of the first four articles in the January 1966 issue of College & Research Libraries reflect the turn to science: “A Mechanized Circulation System,” “Systems Analysis in University Libraries,” “Statistics and Standards for College and University Libraries,” “Systems Evaluation by Comparison Testing.” Thomas Minder contributed an article on scientific library management in July of that year; Frederick Kilgour joined in with an article on systems analysis in libraries a year later; and that same month, Paul Spence reviewed a book on scientific management in libraries. Spence was ambivalent about the emphasis on scientific aspects of library management—cost analysis, flow charts, and the like—rather than on books and bibliography. He lamented that, in the book under review, “The index contains no reference to a book... This is a book about things—books as things, people as things—and about methods for studying the manipulation of these things to achieve the most efficient financial advantage.” Yet he acknowledged that librarians needed to know about scientific management methods as management duties took up more of their time.15

Perhaps the culmination of this turn toward science in C&RL was a 1966 systems analysis of libraries by Ferdinand F. Leimkuhler, a professor of industrial engineering. Leimkuhler claimed: “[A library] can be viewed as a complex communication system charged with the task of transferring information through space and time, and as such, it is particularly amenable to engineering analysis.” Leimkuhler’s conclusions were the product of several years of discussions and joint research projects between industrial engineers and library staff at Purdue University.16 This extended interaction itself reflected the turn toward a scientific approach to library management.

Automation

The increased importance of science and technology after World War II, together with the rising demands on librarians, raised the prospect of automation. Rodney Waldron wrote optimistically that automation would free librarians to spend their time on books and their contents, “returning to the age when the librarian was an intellectual, a knower of literature, and spent less time with clerical mechanics.”17 Speakers at the 1963 Airlie Conference on the topic of “Libraries and Automation” echoed this optimistic view.18 Automation would help solve other current problems in libraries, too, such as tight storage space, staffing shortages, declining budgets, rising overheads, and repetitious procedures.19 (Everyone seemed to assume that, once set in motion, the machines would run by themselves without human intervention or maintenance.)

By 1967, several articles reported in detail on actual or proposed automation efforts in individual libraries—such as using a video machine to teach students how to use the library effectively,20 implementing a computer-run circulation system,21 or using a punchcard-based
system for information retrieval. Kilgour regarded a degree of automation as inevitable and saw its positive side. He noted that the advent of computers forced us to reexamine the library as a system in the modern sense, like the U.S. telephone system or the electrical grid. By the end of the century, he predicted, computer “consoles” might be available for student use all over campus.

But others viewed the prospect of automation with anxiety. Vern Pings went to great lengths to demonstrate that, no matter how advanced they were, computers would never replace human creativity. Robert S. Taylor warned that “Technology is forcing decisions on the profession that it may not yet be prepared to consider, let alone resolve.” Eugene Graziano seemed ambivalent—well aware of how profoundly automation might change the profession but hopeful that it would leave the core of library work intact. He predicted that, while the systems analyst would “have great authority in the operation and control of the library systems of the future … it does not follow that the competent, resourceful, generalist librarian will necessarily be superseded by ‘machine-men.’”

**Responses to the Trends**

**Cooperation and Specialization**

Academic libraries responded to these challenging postwar trends with increased cooperation in library services, and increased specialization. As early as 1946, William Carlson noted many rising forms of cooperation, such as union catalogs, union lists of serials, bibliographical centers, cooperative and centralized cataloging, interlibrary lending, and interinstitutional and regional agreements. He saw cooperation as one of the most important directions for the profession’s future growth.

David Weber noted the proliferation of specialist positions in the library, which he took to be a sign of the maturing of the profession. Cecil Byrd described the duties and qualifications of 10 subject specialist librarians recently hired by the Indiana University library system. And one of the few bright spots in the picture of the library profession painted by Mary Bundy and Paul Wasserman was their approval of the growth in library subject specialists.

**Concern with Status**

A much more prominent topic of discussion in *College & Research Libraries* in this period, however, was a concern with status. Rising standards in college instruction and faculty research, with the resulting growing demands on librarians’ skills, evidently added fuel to the eternal fire of librarians’ status anxiety. In this period, several *C&RL* authors expressed a desire for librarians to be on a par with academic faculty. Jane Forgetson noted that, in academic institutions, in general they were treated as poor relations: “There’s always a little room for them behind the stove.” If they wanted to gain the respect of faculty, she wrote, librarians needed not only to have an MLS but also to commit to a program of continuous learning in appropriate subject areas. Felix Reichmann warned that faculty wouldn’t fully accept librarians as professional equals unless they demonstrated that they fully shared in the faculty’s interest in the books and the growth of the collection. James Govan, too, felt that the key for librarians was subject knowledge: “It is as scholars that we find acceptance in a community of scholars.”

Other authors wished for librarianship to be recognized as an academic discipline. Like so many authors since, Robert Downs argued that librarians should have faculty status, since their work was becoming specialized and would doubtless soon require “academic preparation
as thorough and as advanced as [that of] their colleagues in other fields.” Ethel Fair argued that librarians should do more research in librarianship, partly so that academic librarianship would be seen “as a liberal discipline rather than as a field of applied technology.”

Tai Keun Oh warned that, if librarianship were to advance as an academic discipline, librarians must do more research in the management field. Many other C&RL authors echoed his emphasis on research, although they differed as to where the research should focus. Daniel Bergen wrote that gaining subject knowledge was more important for librarians than doing research in librarianship. Barbara Petrof declared: “If librarianship is to receive its due level of recognition it must move to higher levels of abstraction; it must have a theory.” John Titley announced optimistically that “The proclaimed need for serious research in the library field… [is a sign of] our growing professional sophistication.”

There was also worry that academic libraries might not be able to keep up with the rapidly rising intellectual demands of their student and faculty constituencies. Gerald Jahoda noted that, while libraries were a source of information for scientists, they were not the source; instead, they faced competition from other sources such as preprints, papers and conversations with colleagues at conferences, and the like. Reviewing a book on the planning of the innovative Hampshire College, Patricia Knapp was dismayed to find that libraries were barely mentioned at all. Were college librarians being taken for granted? Or were they not rising to the intellectual challenge of effectively using the resources they acquired and organized? She concluded, “What we need in academic librarianship is new departures to complement programs as promising as [Hampshire’s].”

The rising professional anxiety reached a kind of culmination in Bundy and Wasserman’s 1968 article, “Professionalism Reconsidered.” Their essay was a searching and often harsh evaluation of the profession, with special emphasis on the defects of library education. Bundy and Wasserman excoriated library school programs for their lack of substance: “The indoctrination process of the schools in feeding fuel to professionalism has been remarkably weak…. the substantive content, the body of significant professional knowledge, the theory, the philosophy and the ethic, these have evaded the field’s grasp except in rare and isolated instances.” The authors warned darkly that, “if librarianship does not move much more rapidly forward toward enhanced professionalism, the field will not only decline rapidly, but ultimately face obsolescence.”

Ideals and Assumptions

A Man’s World

It’s worth reminding ourselves at the outset of this section that the authors of these articles from 1946 to 1968 were almost exclusively male. Any hypothetical or generalized person mentioned (such as “the librarian”) was also assumed to be male and was referred to with male pronouns, as was common at that time. A startling example of the low profile of women in the literature is Luther H. Evans’s article, “History and the Problem of Bibliography” (1946). A footnote on the first page reads, “Much of the composition of this article is the work of Adrienne Koch.” She is not acknowledged as a coauthor, compiler, or editor anywhere other than the footnote, and the byline for the article goes to Evans alone. Such was the atmosphere in which some women librarians labored, although a few did publish articles and receive credit as authors.

Primacy of Bookmanship and Reading

Another striking feature of articles of this period, to modern eyes, is their pervasive emphasis
on bookmanship and reading. Blanche Prichard McCrum declared: “I believe that as Spinoza was intoxicated by the intellectual love of God, so librarians must be intoxicated by the love of knowledge and of books before they are able really to enter into the heart of the library matter.”46 Felix Reichmann wrote that librarians drew their (professional) strength from their knowledge of books as Antaeus drew his strength from contact with the ground.47 Similarly, George Leyh viewed librarians as both administrators and scholars.48 He added that they should be sure to read the classic works in various fields, especially in first editions.49

Robert H. Muller proposed a supervised program of reading for professional library staff, which would involve reading on the job for at least 10 hours per week. He included a table showing how many more books could be read over a period of 25 years, through this program, by a “non-ambitious librarian” (1,750 more books) and by an “ambitious librarian” (2,500 more books). While Muller acknowledged that the library would have to either cut back on its workload or hire more librarians to accommodate this reading program, he added that the program’s long-term results would be well worth it: better service to the public, greater staff competence, higher staff morale, and more effective recruiting to the library profession.50 Muller anticipated that the program might become universal.51

Other C&RL authors responded not by pointing out that the program was impractical but by suggesting refinements to it. Theodore Yerke emphasized that librarians should read not mechanically, to absorb information, but humanistically, “to become ‘whole’ men.”52 Howard Burton described a way to increase their reading speed while maintaining or even improving comprehension.53 To many academic librarians in this period, as to Muller, wide and deep book-learning was the single most important professional qualification, as well as the key to winning the respect of faculty.54

By 1968, however, this pervasive focus on books was beginning to seem narrow, at least to Bundy and Wasserman. They saw it as an example of the timidity of librarians in practicing their profession. Reference librarians, they pointed out, tended to treat bibliographies of printed sources as the most authoritative, as if print were the only source of reliable information. But “the more fundamental commodity of modern times is information and …it takes myriad forms.”55

**Education as a Route to Peace and Democracy**

Regarding their work in a wider context, a number of postwar C&RL authors looked to education to promote peace and foster the development of good citizens in a free democracy. McCrum titled her 1946 presidential address to ACRL “Peace, Like War, Must be Waged.”56 To Felix Hirsch, libraries had an active role to play in fostering international understanding, which would help ensure peace: “Every effort made in each individual library for a better appreciation of the culture of other peoples, every formal attempt at international cooperation, every personal gesture of friendship, counts in the great cause of freedom.… College librarians have the inescapable duty to do their bit in order that the young people who are now engaged in academic studies may live and study in real peace.”57 Reviewing the Harvard report General Education in a Free Society, Louis R. Wilson concluded that it would convey to librarians “one of the major goals of present-day American education…. [to contribute to] the perfection of American democracy.”58

Luther Evans (together with Adrienne Koch) credits bibliography with an important role in fostering international understanding, and thus, peace. To prevent the sheer volume
of published material from overwhelming the scholar, he writes, “I think the assumption of bibliographical leadership on a cooperative basis by the United States, Great Britain, and Russia …is practically imperative.” In the wake of the war:

The future availability of knowledge for the whole world is… bound up with the bibliographical planning we do. In this area American librarians particularly must henceforth live up to the exacting demands of statesmanship. To fail here means …the retardation of the role of America as a great agent of international understanding and progress. And this role, as I see it, is not too distantly connected with the keeping of peace among the… nations of the future.59

William Carlson comments on the element of naïveté in this view of education as the remedy for the world’s warlike tendencies:

We librarians have tended to have a naive faith in the value and power of our books. If only people would come to our libraries and read our books and if only we could get them all organized for easy use, we have frequently said…. everything would be all right…. we have failed to realize that books reflect human experience and are therefore both good and evil.

Nonetheless, Carlson ends his essay with a prayer that, in effect, wisdom will prevail and books will save the world:

Let us hope and pray that the vast library resources and bibliographical aids of our nation and of all nations may yet, through the work and study of men of learning and goodwill, ourselves included, bring to men everywhere understanding, tolerance, humility, and, above all else, wisdom to use their God-like powers for the good of their fellow men.60

In a similarly idealistic spirit, Dean Lockwood proposed the creation of a single world library. Every country would contribute one copy of each work published within its borders every year. The world library would be not a single building but a “city of libraries,” “in a dry and salubrious climate.”61 Lockwood presented no specifics such as who would fund such a library, who would coordinate agreements with all the countries of the world, and so on; rather, his essay was a grand vision.

Learning as National Defense
While they believed that education would promote peace and democracy, some of the same authors also saw learning as a means of national defense. This latter view became more prominent (in C&RL, at least) by the 1950s, after Russia’s testing of the atom bomb and the rise of Mao in China triggered fears of the nuclear threat and the spread of Communism. In her address to ACRL, McCrum made it sound as if we were still at war, with education and libraries on the ramparts: “The learned societies of the United States are bulwarks of its intellectual life, as witness the contributions of groups of scientists to the winning of the war.
A.C.R.L. should not ‘cease from mental fight’ until it has an organization as good in its own sphere as the best organizations in other fields.”

In his review of *General Education in a Free Society* that same year, Louis R. Wilson noted the report’s assertion that:

In the modern world, ushered in by the atomic bomb and V-J Day, some means must be found by which every citizen of the United States shall gain an understanding of his heritage and of what his duties as a citizen are. This can no longer be left to chance, except at the peril of all that America has thus far held dear.

Luther Evans, then the Librarian of Congress, took a similar sweeping view of the responsibilities of educators and librarians. To him, libraries were “a fundamental factor in maintaining and strengthening the fabric of civilization…. They must continue… to face, with calm and quiet courage, their responsibility of service in the great task before us all—the task of surviving as free nations in a world yet to be attained.”

Norman Cousins declared that libraries could give us the historical perspective we needed to cope with the accelerated pace of change since 1945—and to avert the threat of nuclear holocaust.

Wyman Parker wrote that we librarians must protect the freedom to be exposed to new ideas; this was fundamental to the effort to preserve our democracy. Librarians needed to teach the truth as best they could, so as to teach students to make good decisions,

...for we are now in the key position of gravest responsibility for the entire world…. This college generation must have the humanistic and religious training to visualize the best kind of world, and to bend our legislation toward the end, where the dignity of man is paramount. Toward this goal the library in the liberal arts college is dedicated.

From the vantage point of 2019, the idealism of this passage is breathtaking. Parker evidently regarded education as the means of saving the world from evil. As we have seen, William Carlson and Theodore Yerke shared this view. They, too, assumed that reading the classics of literature and other “great books” would enlighten and ennoble the reader.

**The Library as Temple and Refuge**

In keeping with this veneration of reading, several C&RL authors in this period described the pursuit of knowledge as a sacred calling. A.F. Kuhlman wrote that librarians must support higher education and research “so that our colleges, universities, and great reference libraries may become true centers for the enlightenment of mankind.”

Parker wrote that, in the library, “one associates with the greatest minds of all time…. one receives counsel and, as a result of communion with finer minds, oneself grows in stature, wisdom and humanity.” Reinert declared that librarians needed to keep a proper sense of perspective to ensure that colleges and universities would remain “citadels of learning where a community of living scholars is actively engaged in the preservation, discovery, and teaching of the wisdom of the ages.”

A number of C&RL authors of this period regarded the library as a haven for intellectuals, especially in the humanities. Howard Mumford Jones wrote, “We must maintain the university library as a center for disinterested thought…. [Such libraries] are the laboratories
and the refuge for the scholar, the humanist, the writer, and the philosopher…. If, without vision, the people perish, without philosophy, a nation cannot survive."70

**Conclusion**

I came away from reading C&RL in the postwar period with a strong sense of how high the stakes appeared to be, at that time, in academic libraries’ project of supporting education and research. Many authors felt deeply the seriousness and importance of librarians’ work in spreading knowledge. They assumed that the survival of civilization was at stake. While the high stakes must have caused considerable anxiety, they also must have given academic librarians a strong sense of mission.

The postwar years were also a time of professional anxiety. Concern about the profession’s degree of status, and insecurity about how librarians compared to faculty or to IT professionals such as systems analysts, continued throughout the period. Some C&RL authors worried that librarians were not scholarly enough; others, later, worried that they didn’t know enough about automation, systems analysis, management, or the theory of their profession.

Curiously, throughout this period, librarians seemed to define themselves mainly by the standards of other professions. Almost none of the authors whose articles I read for this study tried to define what it means to be a professional librarian, on our own terms. Many wrote that we should be more like faculty; many wrote (and others continue to write) that we should have faculty status; some wrote that we should become more comfortable in the company of scientists or systems analysts. Several wrote about how we could better serve our patrons. But what does it mean to be a good professional librarian, apart from good service and our connection with other professions? Bundy and Wasserman describe “[e]xuberant professional spirit, high ideals, zeal, and commitment to innovation and experimentation”71 as desirable qualities in a librarian. But what does “exuberant professional spirit” look like? What “high ideals” should we uphold? What should be the purpose behind our innovation and experimentation? They don’t say.

At the beginning of this essay, I asked: How realistic were the library leaders of the time in their vision of what they were working for? Were their ideals based on a clear-eyed view of their situation, or were they partly grounded in wishful thinking or a desire for greater importance?

Reading the contributions of so many C&RL authors leaves me with mixed feelings on this point. In their articles, an idealistic dedication to learning and service seems to be intertwined with constant anxiety about their status and an element of vanity. They yearn to be taken seriously as scholars and professionals; they harbor notions—of saving the world with reading—that seem overblown in our more cynical age. Yet underneath their earnestness is a profound faith in the value of learning, a certainty that knowledge leads to wisdom and away from the dark forces of human nature, which leaves a 21st-century reader with a sense of loss by comparison. It must have been good to feel such a solid, uncomplicated faith in the value of learning and to know that one’s colleagues in the academic world and beyond shared that faith. Even though by now it may seem that neither knowledge nor anything else can protect us from our own dark side, how splendid it must have felt at that time to believe in the library as a bulwark against evil. And how comforting it must have been to believe that reading would make us not only better students, faculty, or librarians, but also better human beings. Still, if such faith was possible even after the massive destruction and
slaughter of World War II, perhaps some shadow of it is still possible in our own troubled times.

Today, in this period of ever-tightening budgets, when academic institutions and all their activities are subject to close scrutiny, it is hard to step back and focus on ideals. But it will help us better advocate for our libraries, to administrators and to the public, if we can be clear and eloquent about the larger goals we are trying to serve. What is our aim, and why does it matter? There is a place for idealism as we make our case. There is also a place for idealism as a force to sustain us as we deal with another period of rapid and fundamental change. Although they need to be tempered by realism, our goals in pursuing the library profession also need to be compelling—and inspiring.

Notes

tally, Graziano’s article was the only one I encountered in the period from 1946 to 1968 that referred to librarians as men and women, not just men.


32. Forgetson, “A Staff Librarian Views the Problem of Status,” 280.


34. James F. Govan, “This Is, Indeed, the Heart of the Matter,” C&RL 23, no. 6 (Nov. 1962): 472.


44. Bundy and Wasserman, “Professionalism Reconsidered,” 25.


49. Leyh, “The Education of the Librarian,” 145.


51. Muller, “A Program for Staff Reading,” 238.


62. McCrum, “Peace, Like War, Must Be Waged,” 3. “Not cease from mental fight” is a quote from William Blake’s poem “And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time”: 
I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

67. If only this were so. As a young academic in the early 1980s, I couldn’t help but notice that my faculty colleagues were neither extraordinarily wise nor exceptionally noble, despite their extensive reading. And, of course, neither was I.