

# Review Articles

## The National Library in 1946 and Before

*Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1946.* Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1947. 538 p.

Library reports should be required reading for librarians. Whether you accept this dictum for many reports, or some reports, or a very few selected reports, you must include the *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1946* in your list of notable library reports. By whatever standard you judge it—historical significance, literary excellence, importance of administrative or technical issues discussed, or sheer institutional drama—you must rank it among the great reports in American library history. Certainly it should be required reading for librarians. And more important today, it should be required reading for all members of Congress and for the Bureau of the Budget.

The central theme which unifies the whole long document concerns a question about the scope of the library which most librarians will contend was answered long ago. Is the Library of Congress the national library or is it simply the Library of Congress? The answer seems clear to librarians generally. It seemed clear to the Librarian of Congress and his associates, who, with infinite pains, prepared a budget request of \$9,756,852 for the fiscal year 1947, an amount they thought appropriate for a full-fledged national library. But the answer was not clear to the members of the subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations, before whom the budget hearings were held. They were in doubt. They thought it high time "to give attention to the need for a determination as to what the policy of the Library of Congress is going to be in the way of expansion and service to the public and to the Congress." They went on to say, "It would seem that the library has evolved into not only a Congressional Library but a national and even an interna-

tional library." The committee was not ready to resolve the issue itself; it suggested "that the responsibility for determining library policy rests with legislative committees of the Congress charged with the responsibility for the operations of the library and not with the Appropriations Committee."

And so the Appropriations Committee expressed its doubt in financial terms by reducing the library's budget request from \$9,756,852 to \$6,069,967. The issue raised by the committee rocked the librarian and his advisers back on their heels. But they rallied their forces and accepted the challenge, as the *Report* itself amply testifies.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Report* for "fiscal 1946" is in large part an instrument of proof designed to show that the Library of Congress is the national library. That basic fact is often in the foreground or, if not, always in the background, throughout the various parts of the document.

The 538 pages of the *Report* may be conveniently divided into four parts. The first, a monograph of over 200 pages in itself, is the history of the library from the beginning, told in facile and unsteretyped prose by David C. Mearns, director of the Reference Department, under the title, "The Story up to Now." This is no dry-as-dust public document. It is an absorbing narrative of the growth of a great library through the years, told with many quotations from the sources. Somehow Mr. Mearns is able to fit his style to each period he describes in the library's history. The very phrases used as captions, often selected from the supporting documents, add much to the flavor of the text. For example, the heading, "Our Union Does Not Require It," is selected from the letter of an indignant Bostonian who opposed the ridiculous idea of the establishment of a library for the Congress. "To the Complete Satisfaction of Congress" is one of the headings used in the story of the administration of Herbert Putnam. And the account of Archi-

bald MacLeish's stirring five years as librarian is told under the caption, "The Brush of the Comet." Throughout the narrative, quotation heaped upon quotation shows that the library was continually referred to by its librarians and others as the "National Library."

In the second part of the *Report*, the new librarian, Luther H. Evans, takes up the narrative. In vigorous sentences, he describes frankly and forthrightly the events of "fiscal 1946." Special emphasis is laid on the fate of the 1947 budget, described above, and on the appointment of the Library of Congress Planning Committee, composed of eminent scholars and librarians, selected by the librarian to advise him on the proper functions of the library in the future. Other chapters of the *Report* proper deal vividly and always frankly with the "Service of Materials," "Acquisitions Grand Scale," "Preparation of Materials," and "Administration, Personnel, and Finance." These chapters depict the library in action in its service to the Congress and the national government and to libraries and scholars throughout the nation. Students of library administration will be specially interested in the complete organization chart of the library, which shows for each administrative unit the number and grades of its staff members.

The third part of the *Report* is a most unusual administrative document. It is a complete reprint of the "Justification of the Estimates, Library of Congress, Fiscal Year 1947." This the librarian himself de-

scribes as "the most important state paper to issue from the Library since the Report of the Committee on Library Organization in 1802." In cold figures, with cogent supporting statements, this courageous document sets forth in "man-years" and dollars what the present administration of the library thinks will be required to operate the national library at full capacity. The framers of the "Justification" sought to cope fully, for the first time, perhaps, with the needs and problems of the library in all its technical procedures and its many services.

Last of all come the statistical appendices. Even these are interesting. A few illustrations may serve to indicate the complex problems of processing and servicing with which a great library must grapple. Accessions for the year 1946 totalled 4,291,346 "pieces." The national union catalog now comprises 13,718,489 cards. Printed catalog cards to the number of 27,584,211 were sold or distributed. Readers served were 699,740. Nine pages are required merely to list the publications issued by the library.

The reviewer finds no statement in the *Report* itself of the number of "man-years" required to write it. Whatever the correct figure may be, he has no complaint to make. As a librarian and a taxpayer he is quite ready to contribute his mite to the cost of setting down in cold type, for the Congress and the people to see in complete detail, the facts and figures about their national library in 1946 and in the years before.—*Carleton B. Joekel.*

## Further Progress in Cataloging

U. S. Library of Congress. Descriptive Cataloging Division. *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress*. Preliminary edition. Washington, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1947. 125p.

In the July 1947 issue of *College and Research Libraries*, this reviewer discussed the two significant documents<sup>1</sup> which prepared

the way for the publication of the new *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging*. To any one familiar with these two documents, the rules come as no surprise. They are merely the crystallization—the formal expression—of functions and principles which, in their earlier fluid state, had already been widely discussed and publicized. And while there are doubtlessly rules which in application will need

<sup>1</sup>U. S. Library of Congress. Processing Department. *Studies of Descriptive Cataloging, a Report to the Librarian of Congress by the Director of the Processing Department*. Washington, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946; and U. S. Library of Congress.

Advisory Committee on Descriptive Cataloging to the Librarian of Congress. *Report*. Washington, Library of Congress, 1946.