

WHO CONTROLS THE LIBRARY SYSTEM?

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"Controls" is a strong word - and subject to many interpretations; on any given day the control of a library system may be passed from the chairman of the county commissioners to my secretary or to the custodial staff or to the Pennsylvania Bell telephone repairman or to the President of the Board of Directors or to the Human Relations Commission or to the OCLC computer terminal or to the boiler inspector or to the IDS driver or to the computer programmer who failed to negotiate the payroll or to the state auditor who held up state aid checks or even to my dear wife who forgot to set the alarm.

What we need to talk about and discuss is a way to organize and support a library service program. Most of what I will have to say is based upon my own experiences in Lancaster County and what I have gleaned from others. Whether these concepts will work for you is a decision that will be made in cooperative study and investigation with other administrators and policy makers in your area. Hopefully, you will profit from mistakes and successful applications of others. I know the Bureau of Library Development will be most helpful in providing guidance and direction to you in your deliberations and plans to improve library service to rural residents.

And speaking of rural residents, I guess it's time to knock down some other straw houses. The definition in the Random House Unabridged Dictionary says "rural" is characteristic of the country, country life or people, rustic tranquility. Synonyms include unsophisticated and rough. Rustic in a derogatory sense means crude, boorish. In a favorable sense, rustic means a homelike ruggedness. Many people, of course, live in rural areas because they need to be near their particular nature of work. There are also many who live in rural areas because they choose to do so. All people who live in rural areas are not poor, dis-

advantaged or uneducated. In fact many may be super rich, highly advantaged and extremely well educated. This becomes a concern for those of us who administer library services to rural populations. And it becomes a great concern to County Commissioners who observe annually more and more people leaving urban areas to have the advantage of open spaces, trees, green fields and a piece of the environment they can control. But having lived in the city, they also want, expect and demand the same kinds of services -- city water, storm sewers, police and fire protection, good roads, snow plows, zoning and even quality library service.

Lancaster County is an interesting place to study some of these contrasts. Nationally and statewide most people see us as quaint, plain, Dutchy and Amish. We are that. We are also rural. The county is the highest producing agricultural county, not under glass or irrigation, in the United States. Forty percent of the farming is done by the plain Mennonites. Another forty percent of the farming is done by the Old Order Amish. Both groups make up a large portion of the rural residents the library serves. Yes, of course, the Amish read! They just don't drive cars! Their education up through the 8th grade probably gives them a reading level comparable to the national average. Amish read a great deal and they are very selective and conservative in what they read. Rural residents in Lancaster County are served by a bookmobile, reading centers, and seven independent libraries. Our county rural extension circulation in 1977 was 223,800 items -- nearly 1/3 the total circulation for the system.

But Lancaster County is more than lush farms producing agricultural products. The headquarters of Armstrong Cork has brought to the community some of the world's leading engineers, physicists, chemists, artists, industrial and interior designers, graphics personnel and planners. RCA Color Tube Division, Hamilton Watch, Buisar, Schick, and Black and Decker have added additional complements of highly skilled engineers, technicians and designers. Three colleges, two seminaries, an opera house, symphony orchestra, theater groups, a national tourist

center, a major publishing and food packaging industry and a county seat full of lawyers, businessmen and industrialists have all added to the equation. The Spanish American population growth made the Black community the minority group until three years ago when 3,000 Vietnamese settled in the county.

Where do all these people live? Of the county's 320,000 inhabitants, only 60,000 live in the city of Lancaster. One hundred thousand live in suburban townships. The remaining number live in small boros or rural areas.

Disadvantaged? Hardly. Today a farm in Lancaster County sells for \$5,000 to \$7,000 an acre. Most 80 to 150 acre farms have a land value of one half to three quarters of a million dollars. Those quaint stone farm houses in the county complete with a brook sell for between \$80,000 and \$150,000. Would that I could be classed rural disadvantaged! But, of course, we do have rural poor and shanty towns back in the hollows and along the river. They, too, add to the population requiring library service.

Libraries don't just happen; rather, they emerge and evolve through a variety of good times and bad times. Founded on high ideals, many bloom and flower in spite of bitter winters of political governance and summer draughts of arid financial dehydration. Some die out completely; others spread a seed or revive their roots in a neighboring garden. Properly nurtured through a library system, many continue to grow.

Lancaster County is known as the Garden Spot of America. Unfortunately, its library growth had a weed patch beginning, similar I should imagine to most libraries in the commonwealth.

Libraries in Lancaster County began in 1759. The Library Company of Lancaster was the 4th oldest subscription library in the Commonwealth. Among its charter members were national patriots and signers of the Declaration of Independence, Edward Shippen, George Ross and Robert Fulton. Later Thaddeus Stevens, James Buchanan and Thomas Paine played a role. The first library was a noble venture with a collection of 700 books. Within three years it was faced with money problems. That

problem continues today. But at that time the board had an innovative idea. Why not rename the library after someone in the Penn family and encourage their support? And so in 1763 the Library was chartered as the Juliana Library Company in Lancaster, named after William Penn's daughter-in-law who was married to Thomas Penn. Juliana was flattered and from her home in London she sent some books. The Board of Directors was encouraged and commissioned Benjamin West, the famous portrait painter who was studying in London at the time, to paint Juliana's portrait to hang in the library. Juliana was flattered and sent some more books. But the money never came. The timing was bad too. For in 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed and all relations with the Penns and Juliana were severed. No portrait. No money -- just a few books. If you're taking notes, be sure to write down the first rule in library success. Never name a library after someone and then expect to get the money. Get the money first.

During the Revolutionary War the library was closed and the books and philosophical instruments were packed away. It was reopened in 1784. But by then many of its founders and subscribing members had died or moved elsewhere and eventually most of the books, instruments and furnishings were sold to pay back rent.

In the early 1800's Lancaster became the center for the new builders, journeymen, traders and mechanics. Many young men came to Lancaster to study or learn a trade. By 1831 the Mechanics Society had been formed to provide a place for young men to meet. Included in the Mechanics Society Hall was a lecture room, lounge, and a recital hall. Also included was the Mechanics Society Library. The library flourished with relative success until 1898 when A. Herr Smith, a local congressman, left his home, library and portrait collection to the city for a library. The Mechanics Society Library was merged with the Smith collection. At long last the library in Lancaster had a permanent location. Most of the money for support came from donations, a small city allocation and contributions from the city schools.

In the 1920's county wide service was established as a separate entity of the library. Primarily the county service was supported by

contributions from county schools. An old truck delivered boxes of books to the schools. City residents were not permitted to use the books in the county collection. In 1937 a Miss Effie Detwilder gave money for the first bookmobile. The panel truck with drop down sides lasted for 14 years. In 1947 the County Commissioners agreed to provide \$5,500 annually to provide free library service to county residents in areas where no local library existed.

By the 1950's the A. Herr Smith mansion no longer was large enough to house the collection. Orange crates stacked 4 high were used as book shelves in sharp contrast to the marble floors and pillars and walnut paneling. During the next three years much community activity focused on the need for a new library. The plans were drawn for a beautiful Georgian building. The Board went to the voters for money and the issue was turned down 2 to 1. In spite of the defeat there was a rallying point. Three estates had endowments earmarked for the building and a massive campaign for funds was initiated. The present building was begun in 1953 and was opened in 1955. The library is now chartered as the Lancaster Free Public Library and has an association Board. County wide service to rural residents was still maintained from a separate collection funded by a small county allocation and contributions from rural schools. Support for the main library came from the city, urban school districts and private contributions. It was barely enough to operate on, and during one especially lean period, the library had to reduce drastically in hours of operation. To make matters worse, the old bookmobile that Effie Detwilder gave 14 years back finally made it through one of the remaining covered bridges and collapsed in one of Pennsylvania's better pot holes. While the bookmobile is gone, the pot hole still remains and is skirted daily by the present bookmobile. Funds for the new bookmobile -- now over 20 years old -- came from service club contributions and through the sale of coat hangers collected at street corners! How this worked or how much money it brought in still remains a mystery to one, but some staff members still recall their experiences at the collection boxes. Today the bookmobile makes 54 stops throughout the

county on a once a month basis.

Meanwhile, out in the rural areas there existed 7 small communities attempting to maintain locally independent libraries. Governed by local boards of directors, most operated with spartan funding and many were staffed by volunteers. Only one of the libraries would be able to meet local library standards. Six of them were about to lose state aid.

In 1968 Lancaster library was named as a District Center Library. The district center boundaries are the same as the county boundaries. The decision of the state to name Lancaster as a District Center was instrumental in bringing about developments within the next few years that would have great significance. For the first time the Board of the Lancaster Free Public Library had a legal responsibility to lead, coordinate and provide guidance to the local independent libraries. Additional state aid as a District Center provided funding to strengthen library services county wide. Among some of the activities and services provided for the local libraries were: surveys of collections, weeding, regular consultant visits, in-service training of all kinds, development of a county wide circulation system, establishment of a daily delivery service, direct telephone reference and book selection guidance to name but a few.

After a long process a resolution was finally adopted by the County Commissioners in February 1969 which made the library the Lancaster County Library. The resolution gave the authority and designated the library to act as an agent of the county to provide library service to all residents and taxpayers in Lancaster County. A ten year plan was approved by the Board which would require increased contributions yearly from the county to assure that state aid would be continued due to local effort. The plan called for \$50,000 increases yearly. Unfortunately there were several years where the expected increments were below the agreed amount. At the present time the library receives \$350,000 from the County Commissioners.

When the library became a county library the County Commissioners agreed by law to assist in the maintenance of only one local library in

the municipality. This law passed in 1917 as PL1143 and amended in 1931 as PL127 embodies two basic principles of a public service agency:

- a. Library service should be planned and provided in a systematic way primarily for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the people.
- b. Systematic planning and delivery of library service is feasible only when coordinated and administered by a single agency. Thereby the residents of various parts of a municipality will have reasonable assurance of equal treatment. Thereby the taxpayer may have assurance that his tax dollars will be used to develop the range of services wanted and needed.

In addition to the county library there are 7 smaller independent libraries in the county. A plan was developed to bring these libraries into the county library system. Participation in the system would enhance the small local library's ability to serve its residents. Smaller libraries which were in danger of losing state aid could continue to receive state aid if they were under contractual agreement with a system library. As a further enticement to bring the smaller libraries into the system the county library board approved a plan that would give the local libraries book credits equal to their state aid. Originally the plan was to give book credits that would double state aid, but local appropriations from the county did not permit this luxury. Finally, the county library would agree to order and process books at no charge for member libraries under contract to the system.

Five of the local libraries were quick to realize the advantage of joining the system. They continued to receive state aid, they receive book credits equal to state aid to allow them to add more new titles through book credits and all books were processed free of charge. As a member of the system, they did not have to meet pressures of local library standards.

A year ago a sixth library agreed to contract membership with the system. At the present time the 7th library remains locally independent. It does not meet standards nor does it receive state aid, and it is doubtful that it will ever join the system.

Local library boards object to participation in a system because

they believe they will lose their local autonomy. While I believe this not to be so -- and it certainly is not the case in Lancaster County -- the problem state-wide and nationally is very real. Local pride is a very important element in a small community. Once this autonomy is taken from the community through forced school consolidation, local groups become suspicious of all other agencies and attempts to gobble up local expressions of community efforts. The attitude toward merger, systems development, or consolidation may be real or imagined. But it must be understood and dealt with patiently.

Before some of the local libraries joined the system, they wanted direct representation on the county library board, though two members of the library board are appointed by the County Commissioners. In order to overcome this barrier, it was agreed that each system member library would appoint one member to serve a rotating term on the county board so that at any one time at least one of the libraries would be represented. The representative term was decided on the basis of when the library joined the system.

In 1976 a District Center Advisory Council was established by the county library board. A representative from each library in the district serves on the council whether the library is a member of the system or not. Council members drew lots to determine lengths of terms and elected a council chairperson. The chairperson serves as liaison from the council to the county library board, but has no vote.

The purpose of the Advisory Council is to plan cooperative system and district activities among libraries and to recommend to the county library board priorities for action. The council meets four times a year. Among some of its more recent studies and recommendations are: book selection policy, a staff manual, affirmative action plan, copyright policy statement, Governor's Conference program reports, plans for local speakouts, discussions on physical barriers to handicapped, and a review of contracted services for independent libraries. In many instances policies are developed by the county library board and reaffirmed by the council. The fact that the council meets only four times a year limits its advisory leadership role due to urgency of some

matters that need to be dealt with with expediency.

Now then, let's go back to the title of this paper, "Who Controls the System?" I said I wouldn't be able to answer that question, but at least together we can explore some aspects and make some observations.

First of all let's look at the responsibilities of the local library board. Each board, whether in a system or not, should realize that it has assumed the responsibility to provide or arrange for public library service for a group of people. I think we would have to believe that the board has the people's best interests at heart and would want to provide the best service and access to the greatest amount of materials possible. The board, through its policies, can limit that service or take steps to broaden it at every opportunity possible. One library board in the Lancaster District has exercised its control by denying its population access to a greater collection and wider array of services in the system. Likewise through its action it has exercised some control or restraint over the system itself even though it is not a member. Individuals in the county can not borrow books from that library directly. Further, this local library does not meet standards and does not receive state aid. The state aid it loses, or its local citizens lose, goes back to the state. The only way the system can get this state aid is to continue to encourage the local board to join the system or to develop and submit a special plan on how those funds could be used to benefit directly the people in that local area.

Frankly, I'd be concerned if I lived in that community and knew that through direct actions of the local board I was cut off from a greater access to materials from a larger system, that my tax dollars were not being spent wisely, and in fact my tax dollars weren't even wanted by the local library.

Perhaps if my anger were strong enough I could rally local citizens to a cause. But let's face reality. Most local library boards are association boards. Few are elected by popular vote and most are self-perpetuating boards. The old adage about fighting city hall may have little meaning here, for in many cases city hall isn't even represented on the library board. So much then for the control and influence

the non-member has over a library system. Let's look now at the system.

The library system as it is understood in Pennsylvania is primarily the county library system. These systems have been developed over the years in many ways and reflect the policy of the commonwealth to encourage the development of county library systems. There are three or four types of library systems:

1. A city library which has been named, or serves by agreement with the Board of County Commissioners, to provide library service to county residents. The board of directors or trustees of the city library serve as the county library board. While the law intends for appointees from the county commissioners to serve on the board, this may not always be so.
2. Counties in which the Board of County Commissioners has appointed a county library board to establish and implement a county library. This type was usually created over 20 years ago.
3. Counties in which there is a merged city-county library board. The County Commissioners appoint a county library board, but it usually functions in unison with a city or borough library board.
4. Counties in which a county library board has been appointed by the County Commissioners, but which does not actually run a library. The board serves as a coordinator of local libraries in the county, although generally doing very little coordinating. It receives county and state funds and distributes them to local libraries.

A report from the Bureau of Library Development in January 1977 reviews these types of system structures by saying:

"The systems have one characteristic in common: The director of the county library strives to exercise little or no influence over the members. He/She does not feel the responsibility for the quality, quantity and scope of library service which the people in the various parts of the county receive. Those factors are left to each local library board to control. Consequently, the basic purpose of a system is almost never fulfilled in Pennsylvania Counties."

What this review is saying includes several things. First, the control of a system is still within the decisions of local library boards. Second, county library administrators and boards may be ineffective in fulfilling their responsibilities. Third, the state itself has not provided the leadership through standards, state aid, incentive programs and enforcement procedures to ensure more effective library

systems. Let's look at each of these briefly.

In the beginning local library boards may have had these characteristics. They were too large--or too small. They were self-perpetuating and they did not reflect a cross section of the community the library served. They were highly intelligent, but in library concerns were extremely uninformed. While some board members may have represented the highest business and industrial elements of the community, they rarely saw any transfer of management concepts to the library. They became nervous in making policy, rarely saw the need to explore new avenues of efficiency and did not recognize the dollar value of those they employed. Most waved banners of local pride and looked upon county, state and federal legislation as negative control elements. Highly conservative, they sought to avoid controversy and were satisfied with the status quo. It seemed that it was only when there was a danger in losing state aid or having to close their doors that they sought outside help. For many it was the realization of having the best of all possible worlds. The system these boards joined still provided local boards with the autonomy they so desired, but at the same time provided them with new programs, materials, services and funding. Most local boards have had to give little in return. In fact, a lot of pressure has been taken off their corporate shoulders. If management procedures, policies and decisions from the system are not to their liking they can still exercise local options not to approve them and if pressure from the system gets too heavy they can always exercise a decision not to renew the system contract.

Now let's look at the administrator and board of the county library system. I would have to disagree in part with the statement that the county system director strives to exercise little or no influence over system members. I believe they strive. But I would have to agree that in many ways they are unsuccessful. Perhaps they are guilty of moving too fast, though a ten year plan is hardly a leap for change. Most county system administrators have the highest professional ideals. They keep up with trends, get out of town to see what's going on elsewhere, they have learned an understanding of the political process, and hopefully

they strive to provide a leadership role for all library members in the system. In their continued defence I would say they may likewise have a low frustration level caused by a limited financial ability to allow a system to function, by apathy of a community or by restraints in the laws that limit the system's ability to perform. The characteristics of a system board may be similar to that of a local library with its same attitudes toward outside control. Increasingly the county library system board and administrators will have to reassess system goals and review the objectives to reach state goals. It may mean a reorganization of the system board, the development of more system advisory councils, or continued review of system contracts. The reassessment should include a variety of education programs to effect positive attitudes toward systems development on the part of local and system boards, county commissioners and local municipal authorities and the community at large. Furthermore, the members of the system should play a more active role in the decision-making process leading to system wide policies. Unfortunately for many systems, the system is viewed by its members as a way to save the little libraries. Instead of looking for new ways for the system to bail them out, they should explore ways where each library's contribution will strengthen a system to benefit everyone. Perhaps this is where the basic system philosophy has its most serious communications problems. Systems may not be too effective in enforcing their own standards for membership when pressure from the state or county political forces hold a firm grip on the purse strings.

Finally we come to the role of the state. Its efforts to encourage county library systems development recognizes the advantages of the county financial structure. Furthermore, the population of Pennsylvania counties is sufficient in most cases to justify maintenance of an efficient and effective library program. For the most part, legislation to encourage systems has been too flexible and permissive and provided not so much for reorganization as it did for recognition of prevailing and existing patterns. The many variables in types of county library system structure has made enforcement of

some standards difficult. The state, like so many in our nation, has never put its money where its mouth is. State funding for the bureau and on down to local libraries has never been consistent with reality. Action in recent months may prove beneficial in the years to come as a result of the goals and recommendations of the recent Governor's Conference on Libraries and Information Services and with new legislation that is either in a holding pattern or intended for the future. But in the interim, local libraries that cannot meet standards or even afford to exist as a library at all can join a system and continue their course. The state having created the mechanism for a system believes that the system itself will raise the level of the sub-standard library. The question is, will the state exercise its control over the system if it fails to comply? How will it choose to do this? Using what criteria? Will it act?

Controlling the library system might also be interpreted as managing the library system. Management infers in part some measure of accountability. It also must include such key components as structure, planning, policy making, communication and evaluation. I would also say that one manages something for growth with a future goal. We manage to build, not destroy.

County Commissioners should be concerned with these management concepts, for after all they should or do provide a large portion of the funding. Some commissioners will say the library board is too large, too self-perpetuating, and not representative of the total county. If this is so, and it may be in many areas, then the Commissioners should call for a reorganization. Instead of twenty or twenty-five board members, they may wish to have the board made up of one representative from each system member. They may wish also to appoint some members-at-large to ensure the board represents all levels and elements of the community.

However a board is organized, it should function as a system board. Its decisions should advance and strengthen the system, its member libraries, and result ultimately in better library service. To achieve this the system members must develop goals, communicate

these goals to members and then initiate procedures and implement action to bring system goals to realization.

Now we all know that when we start developing goals, we can really get fancy. At the outset they may be way beyond the understanding and financial grasp of the system or its members. Objectives that may lead to these goals should be many and varied which will allow system members to see immediate progress and benefits. Realization that a system has achieved five or six short term objectives gives encouragement to tackle some long range programs. Such objectives should be measurable and related to meeting or surpassing state standards. Some objectives may be obtained with little or no expenditures. Other objectives may be based on percentage growth over a period of years. It may be that contracts from a system will have to call for local member libraries to submit a plan to the system detailing how they will endeavor to meet some aspects in their operations that are deficient. Furthermore, if a member of a system cannot contribute its fair share, what role will the system board play in resolving these issues?

I suspect the key to all this lies in the hand of the chief administrator of the system. It would be an endless task for me to identify all the "Bartholomew Hats" the system director wears. But the most important of all would be the communication hat. To be informed and keep others informed is essential in the decision making process. And that is why the system or a library has hired a professional administrator in the first place. To plan, to assess, to recommend, to advise, to implement, to modify, these are among the management functions of the administrator. And if this is so, then, yes, perhaps the system director controls the system.

Probably most system administrators will throw up their hands and say, not me. It's the law. My hands are tied. Standards say do this, be that, have this, prove that. But systems work with more than state library standards. A fair portion of the system's budget, its time in developing policies and meeting deadlines for compliance of the law is related not to information needs of the users but rather regu-

lations such as: Labor and Industry, ERISA, Civil Rights Act, Building Codes, EEOC, tax measures, L.S.C.A. guidelines, to name but a few.

One thing a system should not do is cast the State Library or Bureau of Library Development in the role of the "heavy." The leadership it exhibits as well as the wide variety of inservice and education programs it conducts has continually added to our professional growth. The standards it promotes and by law enforces were not dreamed up in a vacuum. Rather, they were developed in cooperation with all levels of librarianship. Subjected to hearings, added input from the field and refinement by the professionals, they are adopted by the state to be enforced. Without these documents, most system administrators would not have the clout to move librarianship forward. Without them, few systems would be developed. Without them or other state and federal regulations, few library boards or local funding agencies would take any action at all!

I said at the beginning that I didn't like the word controls. Rather than to say, "Who Controls the System?" we might have asked "Who Has the Responsibility to Ensure the Success of a System -- and at What Levels?" There are 16 separate definitions of the word "system" in Random House Unabridged Dictionary. Each definition includes key words such as unity, comprehensive plan, methods of procedure, orderly arrangement, assembly of facts, principles and doctrines, a structure of members. We all play a part in the library system. We can encourage it and promote it. We can discourage it or control it. We can also work to improve it for a better quality of library service. That's our responsibility.