

**CATALOGING:
SUGGESTIONS FOR THE
SMALL PUBLIC LIBRARY**

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Cataloging: Suggestions for the small public library by Esther Crawford

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ESTHER CRAWFORD

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Note.

The following suggestions were presented in a paper read before the Ohio library association, Toledo, Aug. 9, 1899, and published in 1900, while the writer was acting as head cataloger in the Public library of Dayton, Ohio. The present edition has been entirely rewritten and several new suggestions embodied. The substance of both editions is to be traced largely to ideals and their practical realization which were made possible by the librarian under whose administration they were formulated.

E. C.

Cleveland, Ohio, February, 1905.

190484

CATALOGING

In preparing this paper the writer has had in mind neither the beginner nor the trained cataloger. The former is not familiar with the terms used and therefore cannot understand the full significance of what is recommended. The latter, presumably, is already equipped with power to solve the various questions here discussed. The subject will be treated, rather, with special reference to the needs of the untrained catalogers (i. e., the librarians) in the average small public libraries—those who have been struggling alone long enough to recognize that there are problems in cataloging, but who are too burdened with performing the duties of librarian, cataloger, messenger and, too often, janitor to find either time or mental power to solve these problems.

The line of demarcation between the small and the very small public library may be ever so variable as to number of volumes, but the line is finally fixed by the points beyond which the public calls for information become too varied for the librarian to answer them without some sort of index to her resources beyond the mere shelf-list and her own memory. Just when that stage is reached each library must determine for itself; but the arrival at this point will mean the diverting of a portion of the funds from book purchase to the work of making existing resources more available to the community.

Here is the crucial point at which every librarian meets one phase of the great problem of seeing for herself and persuading her trustees to see the wisdom of building along long lines rather than short ones. It is difficult for trustees to realize that they alone are *finally* in a position to encourage or to check the usefulness of a library as expressed through the catalog or the lack of it. They control the funds and create public sentiment to furnish funds, without which no library can make its resources available. They have the power of choosing the librarian and assistants and the consequent standard of excellence or unfitness which shall characterize all the work done in the library thereafter. They only can dictate the policy of distributing funds among salaries, book purchase, records, general supplies and care of the building, in such a way that the material and merely showy demands shall not rob of

their means for vital growth the more significant but less ornate foundations for culture. They only can shape the policy of book-buying so that it shall meet the actual, known demands of the people in their own town, instead of buying what the book agent happens to send them for inspection, or buying what is theoretically good whether read by their own people or not, or buying to suit the individual tastes of the members of the board. Books bought under the last three policies are very apt to fall into an early state of local atrophy. The waste of money in buying such books is not small; but after adding to that the cost of cataloging and otherwise preparing them for circulation, one may judge how much of the economy in library records depends upon the book-buying policy. But granting that the books have been bought with the greatest wisdom, it still rests with the board to say whether they shall serve their full uses or not; that is, whether a given book shall be made to answer ten different questions for ten different people through ten months in the year by being thoroughly classified and cataloged, or whether, by not being fully cataloged, it shall answer but the one question, Has the library such and such a book?

To both trustees and librarians of small public libraries, then, it is the aim of this paper, not to set forth a code of rules, but to outline the purposes of a catalog, its relative place in the economy of a library, what are its essential and non-essential points, and what is the best way of getting their libraries cataloged if that has not been satisfactorily done. Some, perhaps much, of what is here outlined will be already within easy grasp and some will be beyond attainment without more time, money and assistance.

A. Purposes of a catalog:

1 To answer the question, What have you in the library by a certain author, e. g., Lyman Abbott?

2 To answer the question, Has your library a book by a certain title, e. g., Miss Toosey's mission?

3 To answer the call for specific subjects, e. g. The best short summary of the Spanish-American war, suitable in cramming for examination; or, A good cowboy story; or, Something that tells how to treat the hair to simulate marble in costuming and posing for Greek statuary; or, What to feed pet rabbits, etc.

4 To tell where any book which answers your question may be found, if in its correct place on the shelves.

B. Relative place of the catalog in the economy of the library:

1 It is the center and standard for all other records. The accession book is a catalog of the books in your library arranged numerically from one up to the last book bought, and is therefore a history of the growth of the library from year to year. The shelf-list is also a catalog of the books in your library, arranged by classes in the same order in which your books should stand on the shelves. It is manifest that neither of these lists is adapted to answer questions which the public bring. For these the public catalog proper must be compiled, listing each book once by its author, once or more by title, and from once to one hundred times, less or more according to the nature of the book, for subjects on which it treats. In all three of these catalogs the foundation principles of entry are the same, i. e., Who is the author, what is the title and what the imprint for this book? In deciding these fundamental questions, the same rules for selecting author, title and imprint apply to all three records, varying only in fullness to suit the needs of each list. The absolute necessity is apparent, therefore, for a set code of rules which shall be a guide in these foundation details, not only for yourself in guarding against hap-hazard and contradictory work, but for anyone who may assist or succeed you. Such standard rules are now⁵ in process of publication by the A. L. A. Publishing Board. They represent the composite judgment of the A. L. A. committee on cataloging as to those modes of selecting author, title and imprint for cataloging purposes which shall most nearly meet the usages common to the greater number of libraries throughout the United States. The rules aim to provide a common basis upon which to unite for securing the benefits of printed catalog cards now furnished to subscribers by the Library of Congress.

The A. L. A. rules, however, do not deal with the selection of subject entries and would, therefore, better be supplemented by the ¹ Simplified Library School Rules and by the more detailed ² Rules for a dictionary catalog by C. A. Cutter. For United States documents, the best guide is Miss A. R. Hasse's ³ United States government publications; a handbook for the cataloger, of which Parts 1-2 only have been published. Miss Hitchler's Cataloging for small libraries⁴ fills a very practical need.

1--Library Bureau, \$1.

2--Edition 4, 1904, free from the U. S. Bureau of Education.

3--Library Bureau \$1.25 each.

4--A. L. A. Publishing Board, 15 cents.

5--November, 1907.

But if these or any other rules become a guide, it will be equally necessary to keep an exact record of any variations, enlargements or condensations of the rules, no matter how slight the changes may be. The failure to do this will inevitably result in a slipshod catalog having exactly similar books cataloged in widely divergent manner, besides putting one's successor to the disadvantage of verifying each rule with a certainty of errors for future correction.

2 Besides being the center of all record work, the catalog is the one medium through which the resources in the library are made available to all classes and ages of people, at all times and on all subjects and even to the librarian who is popularly used for a catalog. It is especially needed as a clear record of the possible usability of each book when that is out, as it should be most of the time. The reader's wants, when ascertainable, are commonly of such a special nature that he is impatient of the more general books and articles which do not treat his subject in the line of his particular needs. The catalog, if not so made as to reveal the specific way in which a book or chapter treats a given subject—that is, if cumbered with bibliographic details and mere words and repetitions instead of answers to thought—that catalog is as a stone to the intellect hungry for bread. That is the kind of catalog which justifies the complaint that readers do not use it or that they read only through the first line on the card.

If the trustees can afford it, there is one substitute for a catalog, viz., a librarian who knows intimately every book in the library; who has the memory for each book and that fine, discriminating knowledge of the reader's tastes and abilities which will enable her always to fit the right book to the right person; who will never be absent from the library during the ten hours in which it is kept open every day in the year; who will never die nor take a vacation—marriage is out of the question. But such a librarian is not easy to find, and when found is generally unable to communicate her own powers to her subordinate, if she have one, or to her successor; nor, in the nature of the case, is she available to more than six people at any given time while carrying on the routine work of the library. Her substitute, subordinate, or successor having no mechanical device for getting at the library's resources, is left in the humiliating and unjust attitude of appearing ignorant, incompetent, or unaccommodating, because she does not know her library. Patrons

must often be sent away without any answer whatever for their inquiries, or, worse yet, with wrong answers given at random to cloak the assistant's ignorance. On the other hand, the librarian who is also the catalog is fairly certain of a life tenure in office and a gratifying local reputation for much learning and wide acquaintance with books, whether well founded or not.

That the end of a librarian's work should be spiritual rather than material or mechanical may be taken for granted. It is doubtful if we need more exhortation so much as more enlightenment upon the way thereto. The spiritual becomes possible largely through the unobtrusiveness of the material; and the unobtrusiveness of the material becomes possible, not by neglecting it, but by reducing it to such skill in handling, such perfection and accuracy in adjustment of means to ends, such beauty and simplicity in form, that it serves the ends sought without fuss and clatter. Do not be deceived into the belief that because these mechanical things are not to be spread before public notice that they are therefore of small importance and to be considered last in the plans for the library. Not even the most engaging manner and winning enthusiasm will sustain indefinitely a librarian's power with trustees if she is not able to answer their very prosaic and frequent questions as to books, money and work, by giving exact figures founded upon the unseen, unknown and unpoetic work of keeping accurate statistics. Nor will she be able to satisfy her patrons indefinitely if, instead of the bread and meat of reading matter desired, she is able to give them only the confections of smiles, apologies, profuse regrets and affable promises. The existence of a good catalog will by no means supply the necessity for the personal element; but it will at least save the librarian from the hopelessly futile task of trying to make bricks without straw. In fact, the more generous the soul of the librarian, the more spiritual her power, the more common-sense her abilities, the more she will be obliged to depend upon a perfect machinery to carry out her aim of cultivating the best reading habit in her community, by bringing the right book and the right person together at the right time; the more she will be balked at every turn and rendered frantic by her inability to meet these ends, because her resources are not classified so as to be found quickly, nor are adequately cataloged so as to show whether there be anything at all in those resources which will answer the particular demand. To be true in her ability, genuine in her enthusiasm, and sincere in her

kindness, the librarian must in the nature of things be forced to *begin* with machinery and must insist that that machinery be so perfectly constructed that it can be relied upon to tell the truth whenever used; otherwise, a quietly working medium of expression becomes instead a turbulent source of confusion and discord.

The catalog as a part of this necessary machinery will then fulfill the following economic purposes in a library: 1) Prevent waste of library funds in buying duplicates which are not needed. 2) Unify and systematize all of the record work done by your library. 3) Be an accurate, full, easily usable and up-to-the-hour means of knowing the resources of your library on any point likely to be sought for in your own town. 4) Be equally a tool for the public and for the librarian, thereby relieving the latter of the strain of bearing physical and mental impossibilities, besides rendering the public more intelligent in their capacity to help themselves. 5) Make the library usable and not merely exhibit erudition or intricacy.

C. Essentials and non-essentials as to

1 *Scope*. It is absolutely essential that a catalog contain the author, the title generally, and the subject of every book in the library. Calls for material will be made from these three standpoints every hour in the day and therefore will compel your resources to be entered under these three forms. If, however, so much of a catalog is beyond attainment where less would be possible, one may get along for awhile with an author and title catalog, provided the books themselves be well classified and well arranged on the shelves. Then, to a certain extent, the classification index and shelf-list will answer as a subject catalog for entire books.

2 *Form*. As between the printed and the card catalog, it is better to select the card form. It is less expensive, is always up-to-date for the last book purchased and requires but one consultation to exhaust its resources. A printed catalog is extravagant in cost, is out of date the moment it goes to the printer and continues to grow more and more unusable. If supplements are printed, the number of consultations is extended and the inconvenience of use increased. But if catalogs must be printed to answer local clamor, let them be occasional bulletins of new books, special lists, etc., which will cost far less, will answer public needs almost as well and attract patrons to the library in a far more effective way. As between the dictionary and the classified catalog, by all means select

