

SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

by
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The usual definition of a special library is that it is a privately owned specialized collection serving a specialized clientele. This definition applies as well to a collection of art objects in a museum as it does to a collection of literature on zoology—and there is a wide range of special subjects between these two. The Special Libraries Association now has 19 divisions. The Social Sciences Division of SLA has two sections, the Science-Technology Division has seven, and the subjects covered range from *advertising and marketing* to *petroleum* and *transportation*. Myrl Ebert in her article "Introducing special libraries" (NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES, Fall, 1962, p.2) lists eight other special library associations. So while special libraries may be grouped together as representative of a type of library different from public libraries and college and university libraries, they also differ widely among themselves in subject content of collections as well as in policies and procedures.

One common feature of special libraries is that the clientele served is usually small and has a common interest. Library policies and procedures are formulated with the convenience of the patrons in mind, and this applies to all phases of the library's operations—acquisitions, cataloging, circulation and stack arrangement, and to a lesser extent,

reference. Conventional library customs and procedures are never as strongly altered, or altogether disregarded, in other types of libraries as in special libraries. And it is this gearing of the library's whole operation to the convenience and interest of the clientele served, I think, as well as the specialized subject content of the collections, that sets the special library apart from other libraries.

The departmental libraries of the colleges and universities contain some of the largest collections of material on various subjects in the state and are true special libraries. And some of the larger public libraries which have participated in the State Library's Inter-library Loan Project have built up specialized resources in certain subjects, and these collections might be called special libraries within a public library. However, in this discussion of special libraries in North Carolina I have not included either of these types of libraries.

In volume I of *NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES* (1942), Mrs. Helen Monahan listed 12 special libraries in North Carolina and mentioned four others. I have not identified two of the libraries that she listed and two others have now combined as one—the N. C. Library Commission (established 1909) and the N. C. State Library (established 1812) combined in 1956 to form the N. C. State Library (established 1956). Mrs. Monahan listed the N. C. State Supreme Court Library as having been established in 1812; in other places the founding date is given as 1871. In any case, it was well established long before the Special Libraries Association was formed in 1909. Six of the libraries listed by Mrs. Monahan were medical libraries and the other six represented six different types of special libraries.

In 1954 the N. C. Library Commission issued its first separate publication of "Statistics of North Carolina: Public libraries, University and College libraries, and Special libraries, July 1, 1953-June 30, 1954". This publication listed 19 special libraries which included 8 of the 12 libraries listed by Mrs. Monahan. The report listed 8 medical libraries, 3 industrial libraries, 2 law libraries, and 6 separate types. The 1965 report on such statistics covering the year July 1, 1964-June 30, 1965, and issued by the N. C. State Library, listed 96 special libraries. The division of these 96 into groups shows 18 libraries for medicine, 22 for law, 20 for industry, 17 technical institutes, and 19 in a miscellaneous group.

The growth in the number of special libraries listed—12 in 1942, 19 in 1954, 96 in 1965—does not mean that the number of libraries in the state has increased as rapidly as the number shown. Rather, it indicates that more special libraries have reported statistics to the State Library. However, in some categories the increase has been rapid. In 1954 there was one technical institute; currently, there are 17; there were 5 industrial libraries in 1954, and there are now over 25. The number of hospital libraries, law libraries, and church libraries not reporting to the State Library must be large. In 1964 the American Hospital Association listed 172 registered hospitals in North Carolina. Most of these hospitals have libraries, albeit some of the collections are small. The Church Library Department of the Southern Baptist Convention listed 852 Baptist church libraries with the names of the librarians in charge of the collections. Again we must say that most of these collections are small, some are insignificant, but some of the libraries are probably sizeable collections, and not one Baptist church library is listed in the State Library's 1964-65 statistical report. There are 645 Presbyterian churches in North Carolina; only two of these libraries have reported to the State Library. The difficulty in obtaining statistics from such libraries is that the person in charge of the library usually does not remain in

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the position very long, and there is no one who feels responsible for reporting to the State Library.

The growth of interest in special libraries in North Carolina is shown by the formation of a North Carolina Chapter of the Special Libraries Association in 1966 with 33 charter members. As new industries move into the state and as the industries now here expand their research and development, the number of special libraries will increase until perhaps the report on statistics in 1976 will show as great an increase in the number of libraries as was shown for the period 1954-1965.

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