

SPECIAL LIBRARIES: A "COMING FORCE" IN N. C.

by

DORALYN J. HICKEY¹

According to the statistics compiled for 1940-41, the State of North Carolina boasted the grand total of six "special librarians," serving Western North Carolina Sanatorium (Black Mountain), two Veterans Administration facilities (Fayetteville and Oteen), and the North Carolina Library Commission, State Library, and Supreme Court in Raleigh.² By 1965-66 the total number of special *libraries* had increased to 96,³ although the correspondence of librarians to libraries was no longer "one to one." Whereas a few of the larger institutions employ a dozen or more staff members, some of the smaller ones fail to command the full-time attention of a clerk.

Unfortunately the development of special libraries in North Carolina is relatively undocumented. Unable even to formulate a successful definition to encompass the wide variety of libraries designated "special," the would-be historians have faltered. The official bodies which collected pertinent statistics—the North Carolina Library Commission and later the State Library—have depended upon reports from the special librarians themselves, who seem to be, as a group, notably unself-conscious. Published statistics are dissatisfying, for a perusal of the list of special libraries included therein reveals immediately that some notable examples were either not reporting or had, by some earlier definition, been excluded from consideration. Table 1 shows the peculiarity of the growth pattern revealed in the statistics for two decades, as selected from reports of the North Carolina Library Commission and State Library.

TABLE 1

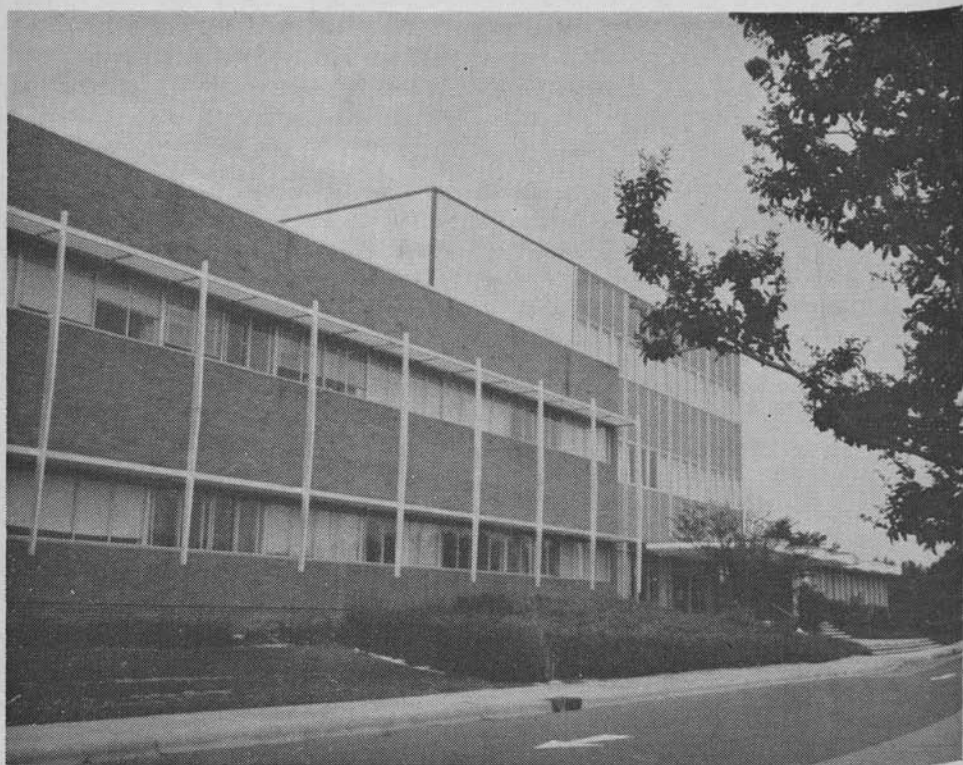
Special Libraries in North Carolina

| Fiscal Year | Number | Fiscal Year | Number |
|---------------|--------|---------------|--------|
| 1940-41 | 6 | 1950-51 | 4 |
| 1941-42 | 6 | 1951-52 | 4 |
| 1942-43 | 6 | 1952-53 | 5 |
| 1943-44 | 7 | 1953-54 | 19 |
| 1944-45 | 8 | 1954-55 | 18 |
| 1945-46 | 8 | 1955-56 | 19 |
| 1946-47 | 8 | 1956-57 | 18 |
| 1947-48 | 5 | 1957-58 | 19 |
| 1948-49 | 4 | 1958-59 | 34 |
| 1949-50 | 4 | 1959-60 | 37 |

¹Dr. Hickey is Assistant Professor of Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Despite the inadequacies of these statistics, two facts are clear: (1) the number of special libraries in North Carolina has markedly increased in a very short period of time (from 37 in 1959-60 to 96 in 1965-66), and (2) special librarians as a group loom very important on the state scene. The latter is further attested by the formation on April 6, 1966, of the North Carolina Chapter of the Special Libraries Association.⁴ An earlier, apparently premature, organization, the Special Libraries Section of the North Carolina Library Association, had been dissolved only ten years earlier because so few special librarians could be identified to comprise its membership.⁵

The sheer heterogeneity of special libraries has almost been their nemesis in North Carolina. Whereas the heavily industrialized Northeastern states could in the 1940's muster a sizeable group of librarians serving only technical and business organizations, the South has, until the present decade, generally supported primarily those special libraries required by governmental, medical, legal, and religious institutions. The broad definition of "special" does indeed include all such organizations and institutions; however, the older special libraries in North Carolina have tended to associate with national organizations of their own type; e.g., the Medical Library Association, American Association of Law Libraries, American Theological Library Association, Music Library Association, and the various type-of-library divisions of the American Library Association, rather than to band together.⁶



CHEMSTRAND LIBRARY—One of the more recently established special libraries in the state is housed in the Chemstrand Research Center (above), located in the Research Triangle near Durham. James G. Baker is librarian at Chemstrand.

The self-consciousness of special librarians within the state seems to have been born when North Carolina began to recruit industrial research units to its urban areas. Until that time, the industrial organizations had been able to draw adequately upon the resources provided by the public and academic libraries of the state; but technical research and development involved access to report literature which was not always available in the large academic collections. Industrial centers such as Charlotte, Greensboro and Winston-Salem, Raleigh and Durham, attracted research units by means of carefully planned public relations campaigns. With the research centers came, perforce, special librarians—some professionally trained, some not—who had problems and interests in common. Thus was formed a "core" of homogeneous special librarians who find more than merely social reasons for meeting together. Today those librarians who are only "semi-special" (for example, those who serve the specialized departments and schools within the universities) can join a working SLA Chapter in their own state because the vital nucleus for such an organization is now present.

Although the older special libraries in the state have rendered invaluable service during the past twenty-five years, particularly in creating a climate favorable to research and development, the history of special librarianship in North Carolina is really beginning with the present generation, as industrial and technological research units spread throughout the state. Further stability can be achieved by means of close cooperation between these special libraries and the academic and governmental institutions. Already the importance of the exchange of technical information has prompted the establishment of a literature searching service, begun in 1966, under the guidance of the director of the Technical Information Center at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Recent Federal legislation encourages the development of interstate and regional technical information communication as well.

The next quarter century will very likely see a steady, though perhaps not quite so spectacular, growth in the number of special libraries in North Carolina. The newly-formed SLA Chapter, implemented by industrial and technical librarians of the state, should thrive in the light of their guidance and enthusiasm. Special librarians serving other subject interests will no doubt, as in the past, identify themselves primarily with their own national associations and secondarily with SLA. They will also, however, discover and exploit the bonds of common interest with the industrial and technical librarians relating to the ways in which information service to a highly specialized clientele can be more effectively communicated. Special librarianship in North Carolina appears destined to achieve maturity and self-confidence as a profession within the next few years. Certainly the import of these librarians to the economic and social development of the state will, proportionately, be far greater than their numbers.

²North Carolina. Library Commission. *Statistics of North Carolina Public Libraries; College and University Libraries, July 1, 1940-June 30, 1941* (Raleigh, 1941). Although the title does not so indicate, this issue included, for the first time, statistics for special libraries.

³North Carolina. State Library. *Statistics of North Carolina Special Libraries, July 1, 1965-June 30, 1966* (Raleigh, 1966).

⁴Cf. Richard C. David, "The North Carolina Chapter of Special Libraries Association—A Team of Special Librarians," *North Carolina Libraries*, XXIV (Summer, 1966), 3-4.

⁵"Special Libraries Section," *North Carolina Libraries*, XIV (February, 1956), 45.

⁶Cf. Myrl Ebert, "Introducing Special Libraries," *North Carolina Libraries*, XXI (Fall, 1962), 2.