

by Kevin V. Brown

THE FIRST circulating library in America was organized in 1731 in Philadelphia. It had a limited number of books, a limited number of subscribers, and an unpaid librarian named Benjamin Franklin.

Libraries have come a long way since. There are nearly 40,000 of them today, of about 20 different kinds. The largest, the Library of Congress, has more than 10 million volumes, and public libraries alone circulate about a million books daily.

Impressive figures—but even more impressive is the fact that they're still growing. Keeping pace with modern needs, libraries today have to be a great many more things to a great many more people. Their only limit, in fact, is the supply of librarians.

"We're in a wide-open field," the director of one large library said recently. "There are thousands of careers opening up for the right persons."

What's creating them? Expansion, mostly. Libraries by their nature must grow, continually accumulating new material while keeping the old.

There are other reasons. Libraries no longer are mere distributors of books, as in Ben Franklin's day. A major expansion has been in services, in the creation of special departments from art to zoology. Most larger libraries now include facilities for adult education, children, films, forums, music, and research.

The most significant expansion, however, has been in the number of different kinds of libraries. Business and industry need their own specialized research sources readily available, so the larger companies have their own libraries. Special libraries also serve hospitals, law offices, museums, agriculture, news-

papers, movie studios, even Uncle Sam—the armed forces and the U.S. Information Agency have centers throughout the country and in many foreign lands.

All of these regular and special libraries need qualified people to run them. Last year there were 10,000 more jobs available than there were librarians. Most library schools had 100 percent placement—and one school had 12 jobs waiting for each graduate.

Why hasn't the supply kept up with the demand? Because young people choosing careers aren't aware of the new opportunities in the field and because of old-fashioned ideas about libraries and librarians.

"Most people still think of a library as a gloomy place run by an old maid who stamps books and 'shushes' people," said one—a married woman.

What, then, are the opportunities and what's a typical librarian like?

Libraries are divided roughly into three classes, and each has openings. There are about 28,000 libraries in schools and colleges, 7,500 public library systems, and 3,600 special libraries.

The best way to become a librarian is through college and a year in one of some 30 library schools. The "typical" librarian is harder to describe.

"Probably the two most common traits of a good librarian are a lively curiosity and an eagerness to help people," said one department head.

Rewards for such qualities are rich.

Librarians have a standing in a community comparable to teachers and, unlike Ben Franklin, they get comparable pay. The average starting salary for graduate librarians is \$4,000 and heads of large libraries earn as much as \$20,000.

The greatest reward, however, is the satisfaction of being close to the things they like best—knowledge

and people—and of being able to bring the two together. A librarian in a large midwestern city cited two instances in her own career that probably sum it up, because they embrace both extremes of the service librarians render.

When Gen. Douglas MacArthur was recalled from Korea, he made his now-famous reference to the ballad that goes "Old soldiers never die . . ." It threw newspapers into a frenzy—right at deadline.

The telephone at this library practically jumped off the hook as a frantic reporter screamed, "What's the song? Where'd he get it? We've got to know fast!"

On a hunch, the librarian dug up a World War I songbook and, sure enough, there it was—an old English marching song, sung to the tune, "Kind Words Never Die."

Recently, the librarian was confronted by a high-school boy who was near tears.

"I'm going to flunk English," he blurted. "The teacher gave me one more chance."

He had to find and describe the incident in Dickens in which a character disguises himself as a deaf man to test his girl friend's love. The librarian spent hours scouring Dickens' works with the boy and finally found it just before closing time. The character was Edward Plummer in "Cricket on the Hearth."

A few days later, the youth returned and announced happily, "I passed."

"If I had to choose which gave me the most satisfaction—helping the big newspaper or the small boy—I'd have to say the boy," the librarian said. "He was so young and needed help so badly."

(For more information about libraries and library schools, write the American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago 11, Ill.)

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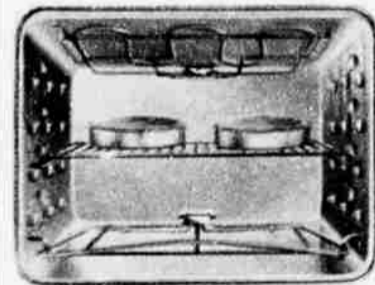
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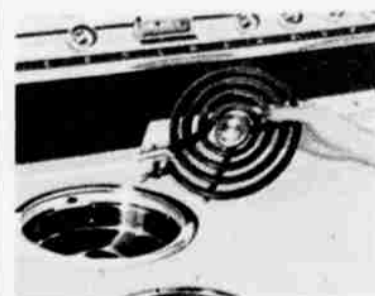
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