

Four Major Libraries Combine Research Operations

By ERIC PACE

The New York Public Library has joined with the Columbia, Yale and Harvard libraries in a sweeping and controversial program of combined operations that will entail cutting back purchases of many publications and systematically exchanging photocopies of previously published writings.

Details of the project were disclosed by the public library's president, Richard W. Couper, at a recent luncheon with editors and reporters of The New York Times. He said the four libraries, which together house more than 25 million volumes, would strive for speed in making material from their collections available to one another's readers.

Accordingly, the libraries are expected to use everything from Greyhound buses to the latest electronic equipment to relay original printed material and facsimiles back and forth.

This unified shuttle service is to be orchestrated by the use of Teletype machines, open telephone lines and centralized catalogues compiled by computers. It will enable the libraries to save money by buying only one copy among them, and not four copies, of expensive sets of volumes, for instance, or little-used journals.

The venture is "one of the most important cooperative undertakings in the research library field in decades," a spokesman for the four-library consortium declared here recently, adding that it was to be expanded "as soon as practicable" to include other research libraries — that is, libraries, meant mostly for advanced students and scholars, that do not regularly lend out their books. Only the noncirculating divisions of the New York Public Library are involved.

The necessity of joint action was agreed upon by the libraries' directors last year, and the consortium was formed. The program was elaborated in a 150-page master plan that is now being studied by their staffs. It is to be given substance in the near future, a public library executive said, when the four libraries set up a corporation, to be called the Research Libraries Group, to oversee their joint operations.

Criticism in Book World

As word of the venture has spread in the book world, there has been some criticism. The libraries' plans for systematic copying were called self-defeating by a spokesman for the Authors' League this week, and unfair by the copyright counsel to the Association of American Publishers. Proposed changes in purchasing practices were called potentially harmful by the president of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America.

No date has yet been set for the creation of the corporation, however. Its role was defined by the consortium spokesman, Edward White, as to work "through cooperative organization to promote the economical development of collections, preservation and conservation techniques, and more flexible reciprocal access to resource material."

Once established, the corporation is to set up an information center at Yale that will collect and give out data about the works that the libraries have in their respective collections. These include millions of maps, manuscripts and microfilmed documents, in addition to the millions of volumes, which are in 3,000 languages and dialects.

It is the corporation, whose director has not yet been named, that is to employ computers to catalogue periodicals and other categories of publications in the four participating libraries.

The early stages of the project are expected to cost \$10-million to \$15-million, senior library officials say, and their hope is that the money will be put up by foundations and corporations. That is a considerable sum, even in the world of the giant libraries — more than the public library's current \$13.5-million operating budget for its research divisions — but the outlay is worthwhile, the officials argue, since the future of the country's library system is involved.

"Innovative cooperative effort can now achieve major improvements in resources and services and a reduction in the rate of increase in library costs," one Harvard librarian said, while "without remedial action these costs will rapidly become insupportable."

More anxiously, the public library's Mr. Couper exclaimed, "We've got to do this, no matter what," during the luncheon with The

Underlying Mr. Couper's concern was the financial squeeze that afflicts his library, along with most of the city's major nonprofit cultural institutions, such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Technically speaking, the public library is a private institution, although its main building, on Fifth Avenue at 42d Street, is kept up by the city, and it is presently receiving \$1.1-million a year in city maintenance funds, with the balance of its budget coming from state, Federal and private sources.

The library stayed out of the budgetary soup last year, with a deficit of less than \$1-million, Mr. Couper noted. He said: "This year will be reasonably good, but next year we'll be right back in it." Deficits have been as high as \$3-million in the past.

What worries Mr. Couper and his aides particularly is the prospect of further inflation and higher expenditures for salaries and employe benefits, which already make up the bulk of the library's operating costs. Negotiations are now going on toward a new employe contract, to be in effect for two or three years, and some library executives expect the costs of salaries and benefits to rise by almost 10 per cent.

The library has also been plagued by rising expenditures for foreign publications because of fluctuations in exchange rates for foreign currencies in recent years. Foreign magazines and journals now cost about \$500,000 a year.

In addition, polluted air and declining quality in book manufacturing have caused problems affecting the preservation of the library's collections. About two million volumes are in need of some kind of touching up.

Library officials have been intensifying their efforts to drum up cash contributions, and the amount of annual donations has risen from \$750,000, given by 3,000 contributors three years ago, to \$3-million, now being given by 9,000 contributors.

In addition, Mr. Couper hopes for further funding, including Federal monies. The National Endowment for the Humanities last year allotted a \$1-million grant for the library's research collections, which include the Art and Architecture division and many others.

And the library stands to make substantial savings

through the Research Libraries Group. Mr. Couper said, in answer to a reporter's question, that collaboration with the other consortium members might eventually enable the library to spend 20 to 25 per cent less a year for acquisitions than it would otherwise.

This is partly because, as one of the consortium's working papers puts it, information is to be "exchanged as a means of coordinating the acquisition of expensive items."

"A special mechanism for selection of new serial titles should be instituted to lessen duplication," it also stipulates, and "as a long-term possibility, agreement may be reached on allocating responsibilities for in-depth collecting [of books and other materials] based on subject and language categories and on forms of material."

The prospect of reduced purchases is understandably unwelcome in parts of the book trade. Leona Rostenberg, president of the antiquarian dealers' association, said that "this plan could be harmful" and might, by limiting acquisitions for endowed collections, be unfair to their original donors. But public library officials said that purchases paid for by the endowment of major special collections would not be affected by the program.

More heated controversy has centered on the prospect of systematic copying of printed material. One of the consortium's working papers notes that "the broad array of existing computer, communications and photographic technology prompts convictions that library processes can be recast" and says the participating libraries are prepared to make "such materials as government publications, little-used serials" and expensive book sets promptly available to authorized readers from any of the other participating libraries by various means including photocopying.

The master plan also prescribes that there should be agreement on uniform price rates for photocopying done by one library of the consortium for another.

And library executives hope that before too long they will be able to relay printed material instantaneously from one participating library to another as the devices involved, known generally as telefacsimile equipment, become cheaper and more efficient.

Many authors and publishers feel it is only fair for libraries to pay royalties if they systematically turn out facsimiles of copyrighted material, but public library officials say there is no plan for the participating libraries or the corporation to do so. They cite a recent United States Court of Claims decision, in a case known as Williams & Wilkins, as supporting their position.

Nonetheless, Charles Lietz, the publishers' association counsel, said the proposed copying was unfair, and added that "if this is done without payment to publishers and authors for the systematic reproduction of the ma-

terial, it will inhibit the further production of material" by publishers and authors.

Irwin Karp, counsel to the Authors' League, voiced a similar view, saying, "The idea that scholarly publishing can survive under a system where libraries, which are among the principle purchasers of these works, organize systems of distribution and reproduction that have the deliberate purpose of eliminating purchases is an obvious self-defeating contradiction." And other publishing world veterans fear that enhanced cooperation among the libraries may also be harmful to the sales of nonscholarly books, such as books of verse.