Four Major Libraries Combine Research Operations

Criticism in Book World

As word of the venture has spread in the book world, there has been some criticism. The libraries' plan of systematic copying was called "self-defeating" by a spokesperson 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 spokesmen, Edward White, as "to work through cooperative organization to promote the economical development of service, collection, preservation and conservation techniques, and more effective and convenient access to resource materials."

Once established, the corporation would set up an information center at Yale that will collect and give out data about what libraries have in their respective collections. These include millions of maps, microfilms and microfilmed documents, in addition to the millions of volumes, which are in 3,000 languages and dialects. It is the corporation's director who has not yet been named, that is to employ computers to catalogue periodicals and other categories of publications in the four participating libraries.

The costs 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 incontrollable."

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 Brooklyn Museum. 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 recent drive in recent years, for 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 the red."

Mr. Couper also said that the prospect of further inflation and higher expenditures and reduced benefits, which already make up the bulk of the library's operating budget, are now going on toward a new employee contract, to be in effect for two years, and some library executives expect the costs of salaries and benefits to rise by about 10 percent.

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 400,000 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, for 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 other sections.

And the library stands to make substantial savings through the Research Librarie's computing systems in answer to a reporter's question, that collaboration with other members might eventually enable the library to spend less on acquisitions for books at the price, it would otherwise.

And partly because, as one of the consortium's working papers puts it, in form, "there is no provision for change as means of coordinating the acquisition of expensive books.

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 exist on dividing responsibilities for in-depth collecting (of books and other materials) based on subject and language categories and on forms of material."

Public library officials believe that the purchase of books is understandablely unevenly in parts of the country, with, for example, Mr. Berg, president of the antiquarian dealers' association, saying that "the libraries in the western United States seem to be buying books that are not available in bookstores, and it is not just a matter of convenience and price.

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 setting the stage.

Nonetheless, Charles Littell, the publishers' association counsel, said the proposed copying was unfair, and added that "if this is done with payment to publishers and authors for the systematic reproduction of the material, it will inhibit the further production of material" by publishers and authors.

Irwin Karp, counsel to the Authors' League, voiced a similar view, saying: "I think that every publisher 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 unsalaried books, such as books of verse.