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Reading Room Problems of the Harvard College Library, 1942-1947

THE servicing of required and collateral reading for students in Harvard College has undergone many changes during the war and post-war years, changes necessitated by the effort to make every possible adjustment to varying conditions. The year 1942-43 marked the closing of the freshman libraries in the Harvard Union and in Boylston Hall which had serviced the required reading for the large freshman survey courses in history, government, and economics, together with the tutorial collections in these fields. The two-term summer session was inaugurated, enabling some students to complete their college course before being drafted. Student enrollment dropped from 3500 in the fall to 1900 in May; but, because of the two-term summer session and the transfer of Boylston Hall and Harvard Union library activities to Widener, the total use of the Widener Reading Room compared favorably with that of other years.

With the fall of 1943 came the three-term year and the V-12 and A.S.T. programs. The men in the V-12 were an integral part of the College, using the same library facilities as the civilian students. Boylston Hall was opened as a study hall for the men in the A.S.T. program, since they had separate classes and special book reserves.

The summer term of 1944 marked the low point of Widener Reading Room use during the period of accelerated studies. In the following year, with the end of the war, there was a

sharp transition from the small war-time accelerated classes to larger groups of students. In November the return of some staff members from service permitted the expansion of curtailed library service, and the Boylston Hall and the Harvard Union libraries were reopened. Then, during the spring term, effects of demobilization were felt, when the enrollment of undergraduates reached 2800. The use of the Widener Reading Room increased one-third over the last pre-war year, providing a basis on which to plan for the expanding student enrollment.

Two major problems in library service became acute with the influx of returning students: books and their shelving, and seating facilities. The purchase of duplicate copies, made possible by additional funds, eased the book situation to a considerable degree, but the Library was harassed by the fact that standard texts were out of print and many books available only in limited quantities. Contrary to its usual policy, the Library purchased textbooks in order to give all students an opportunity to read text assignments. Simultaneously, measures were taken to increase the seating capacity. Twenty chairs were added to the Reading Room; graduate students having stalls were encouraged to use them by being allowed to borrow reserved books for use in the stacks; the Radcliffe students, who had been given the use of the west end of the Reading Room, were restricted again to the

Radcliffe study in Widener, with a supplementary study hall provided in the basement of the Memorial Chapel for use between classes. The Lowell Memorial Room, open formerly for a limited number of hours daily, was staffed during regular library hours; reserved books in Romance Languages were transferred to rooms G and H, insuring greater use of these two rooms and freeing shelving space in the Reading Room. The Child Memorial Library was opened during regular library hours, with an attendant in charge, and the increased use of this library by graduate students in English likewise helped to relieve some of the pressure on facilities needed for undergraduates. As a further move in this direction, books reserved for graduate courses in English Literature, Classical Philology, Romance Philology, and History were shelved in rooms N and O on the top floor of Widener. These rooms served also as subsidiary reading rooms when all the seats in the main Reading Room were occupied. In addition to the above measures, which were put into effect at the beginning of the fall term 1946-47, the Library held in reserve plans for a large study hall in the Harvard Union.

During the first months of the current academic year, facilities were taxed more heavily than ever before in the Library's history. Fifty-four hundred undergraduates constituted a 54.2 per cent increase over pre-war enrollment figures, yet the circulation of books for use in the Widener Reading Room increased nearly 250 per cent. This extraordinary rise in circulation may be attributed to several factors: the necessity of using library copies of textbooks when purchase was

impossible; the provision by the Library, as far as supply permitted, of additional copies of books for assigned reading; and, perhaps most important, extra effort on the part of men keenly aware of interrupted studies, shortness of time, and competition for training in the professional fields. After the hour examinations in November the heaviest pressure was off; the students had passed the first big hurdle and had settled into a somewhat more normal pace of studying. While it was true that even during the period of heaviest pressure Widener had been able to seat all readers either in the main Reading Room or in the rooms on the top floor, it was felt that the crowded conditions could and should be alleviated. The library space in the Harvard Union was not being used to greatest advantage, since the students preferred to use the more convenient though more crowded Boylston Reading Room. Therefore, to insure greater use of the Union Library, all the reserve books for two survey courses were transferred from Boylston Hall, and this move in turn permitted the transfer of three large courses from Widener to Boylston. These changes forced the maximum use of all the Union facilities and reduced the overcrowding of Widener. The advantage of having this seating space available was demonstrated during the fall term Reading Period, when another peak was reached and all three libraries were taxed to capacity.

The situation has been unusually difficult, and will remain so as long as books are in short supply and the enrollment heavy. In any case, the present conditions emphasize the need for a special undergraduate library, with all required reading and refer-

ence services centered in one building. Until the new library is built, improvisations with existing facilities will be continued, in an effort to pro-

vide the maximum of service now possible.

PHILIP J. McNIFF

Harvard's Importation of Foreign Books since the War

AS war spread across the world in the late thirties many libraries in the United States, including Harvard, asked agents abroad to hold for future shipment such books and periodicals as it might be impossible to forward on publication. The sudden shock of Pearl Harbor and subsequent events dislocated arrangements of this kind and left eventual coverage uncertain. Again, when war in Europe ended a bit more quickly than was anticipated, it had been impossible to work out in advance definite plans for reopening trade relations and restoring channels of acquisition.

Two years have now elapsed since fighting ended on the Continent. The first of those years was spent in formulating and getting into shape the machinery through which, during the past twelve months, a great quantity of European publications have been brought to American libraries. The situation except for Germany is now closer to its normal pre-war status. New methods have been developed in the acquisition of European imprints, and one project in particular did much to prevent high prices and offset competitive confusion. It is the purpose of this note to outline the channels through which material has been received at Harvard, and to give

a brief indication of its extent and variety.

The earliest shipments from what had been Nazi-dominated Europe to reach Cambridge after the war were received by the Harvard College Library during January 1946. These consisted of monographs for which orders had been placed previous to 1941, and of material published during the war years for which agents abroad had standing orders in the Library's name. Sweden, Holland, and Denmark were the countries of origin for these initial shipments. In March similar consignments came through from France, and, in the months immediately following, Italy, Belgium, Greece, and other countries were able to clear shipments. Booksellers' lists were received from Austria late in 1946 and it is expected that shipments from that country may reach Cambridge at any time. The situation with Germany is still bound up with official restrictions, but it is hoped that by the time this note appears Germany will be open for trade relations.

Some months before the earliest shipments arrived from Europe a project was organized called the Library of Congress Cooperative Acquisition Mission for Recent Foreign Publications, to which the Harvard

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