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BOOK REVIEWS

Casey, Marion. *Charles McCarthy: Librarianship and Reform*. Chicago: American Library Assn., 1981. 247p. \$16. LC 81-15022. ISBN 0-8389-0347-9.

Librarians should be "active and not passive agents of the democratic process." This 1940 admonition to the library profession from Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish came to mind as I read Marion Casey's excellent biography of Charles McCarthy, the founder of Wisconsin's Legislative Reference Library. McCarthy devoutly believed that information, scientifically gathered and disseminated, was the key to effective legislation. A dynamic Irishman with an innate sense for politics, between 1901 and 1914, McCarthy turned his Legislative Reference Library in Madison into an efficient, non-partisan weapon for reforming the legislative process. Wisconsin legislators not only had up-to-date, accurate information at their fingertips, they also could have the bills they sponsored drafted quickly and impartially. Casey effectively argues that the influence of McCarthy and his "information center" in

shaping Wisconsin's remarkable reform achievements rivaled that of Robert M. La Follette himself.

Today, legislative reference libraries are taken for granted. But, as the author makes clear, at the turn of the century McCarthy's experiment was itself a reform that needed constant defending against lobbyists and big business. Such a library also required close supervision. Testifying in 1912 in favor of Senator La Follette's bill to create a separate legislative bureau within the Library of Congress, McCarthy emphasized the importance of constantly checking to be certain the bureau "will not go to sleep and become a great big bureau of red tape" or a "football of politics."

Charles McCarthy, like most Progressives, believed in efficiency, democracy, and a rational society. His successful application of the principles of scientific management in a library setting attracted national and international attention. McCarthy's "Wisconsin idea," as his 1912 book was titled, was imitated in cities, states, universities, and professional societies, as well as at the Library of Congress. By 1915 over thirty states had some kind of legislative reference bureau.

The legislative reference movement also had an important effect on the American library profession, a point implied but not sufficiently emphasized by Casey. The bureaus were a major impetus to the special libraries movement and, in 1909, the creation of the Special Libraries Association. The SLA, with its focus on putting knowledge in all formats "to work," was itself a reform movement within American librarianship. McCarthy was indeed, as the author notes, "an early information scientist." He was also, in effect, one of the founders of the special libraries movement.

McCarthy was a historian by training. A student of Frederick Jackson Turner at Wisconsin, he received a Ph.D. in 1901. But a university position was not available to this unorthodox man who had both a working-class demeanor and a brogue. He was, however, recommended for a position in the documents office in the state capitol; it was this modest office that the ambitious, socially conscious "digger into truth" soon transformed into the Legislative Reference Library.

McCarthy's professional career was relatively short, apparently one reason why his contributions to the Progressive movement and to librarianship have been overlooked. After thirteen years in his library in Madison, McCarthy accepted a series of information-related positions outside librarianship: researcher for the Federal Commission on Industrial Relations, assistant to Herbert Hoover on the Food Commission, and assistant to Felix Frankfurter on the War Labor Policies Board. The jobs were information related because he made them so, insisting that the information he gathered and presented could ultimately lead to an improved American society. His career ended with his death, at the age of forty-seven, in 1921.

This is a clearly focused study of an intriguing and influential personality. It also is a thoughtful exploration of the relationship between the Progressive movement and the roots of a specialized and important branch of American librarianship. It is unfortunate that it has been produced from camera-ready typescript; in my view, it deserves better treatment.—*John Y. Cole, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.*

Shiflett, Orvin Lee. *Origins of American Academic Librarianship*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1981. 308p. \$22.50. LC 81-14969. ISBN 0-89391-082-1.

Here is a remarkable book. It is actually two stories in one, covering the roots of both the American academic tradition and the library service that accompanies it.

At first glance it appears to be a turgid account; there are five very long chapters with no divisions. Furthermore, the first two chapters are devoted to long and slow-to-develop accounts of the formation of American higher education at both the college and the university level. Shiflett, however, has done a remarkable job of sifting a great many sources to provide a thorough and highly readable text. In what is actually an abbreviated presentation, his is by far one of the most thoughtful analyses available of the influences that shaped American higher education.

By the time one reaches the final three chapters on the scholar and the librarian, the professionalization of academic librarianship, and the status of the librarian, there is no doubt as to why we had the kind of academic libraries we did in the days up to the 1930s. The thoroughness of Shiflett's scholarship sustains his sound analysis. Perhaps the writing could have been terser, but it is not offensive as is. In fact, for the academic history buff it is fun to read.

For one who has labored for over three decades in academic librarianship, it is surprising to realize how slowly the fundamentals of this sector of librarianship have grown. Revealing, though somewhat depressing, are Shiflett's findings of the low status of librarians in their academic environment through so many long years of development. Particularly distressing are the many bits of evidence he has found of the subjugation of women in the profession, although a great deal of what he says could be repeated about much of the American work force up to World War II.

Furthermore, his notion that the status of early academic librarians as scholars can better be attributed to the fact that the library was merely a unit to be run by a professor with spare time than to the idea that librarianship called for and demanded the mental-