

**THE FUTURE OF
REFERENCE SERVICE
AT THE
HANOVER TOWN LIBRARY**

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Reference and Information Services

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AN OVERVIEW

Reference service at the Hanover Town Library is currently a hit-or-miss proposition. Out-dated reference volumes still on the shelves suggest that perhaps this was not always the case. Over time, however, the patrons' expectations have been lowered to the point where they rarely turn to the library for even their simplest reference needs.

A plan for the development of a basic reference section over the next five years is detailed in this paper. The premise is that while the Hanover Town Library may not live or die by the strength of its reference service, improvement in this area could be a tool to help ensure that the library remains a viable institution in the town.

PRESENT STATUS

The Hanover Town Library, locally known as the Etna Library, is a small, rural library serving the Etna-Hanover Center community in particular, while welcoming patrons from the greater Hanover area as well. It has been, in fact, the official library for the Town of Hanover since 1905. The Etna Library is independent of the Howe Library, but the Director and Children's Librarian at the Howe graciously serve as outreach and support persons for the Etna Librarian. The library also uses the Howe as its connection to the NH State Library van service.

The purpose of the Hanover Town Library is to be a source of recreational reading and general information for children and adults in the community. There are approximately 5000 volumes, including a small collection of non-fiction covering a limited, but growing, number of topics. Ready reference sources are few and generally out-of-date.

Traditionally, the library's weekly hours have been few (just 10 as recently as 1988) and the budget limited. Thanks to a gradual increase in hours and funds over the past five years, the library is now open 14 hours per week and has a books and subscription budget of \$2600 for fiscal year 1993-94. The librarian works alone, 12 hours per week (plus one administrative hour). Volunteers working on a rotating basis open the library two additional hours a week and provide help with special projects when asked. A Friends of the Library group is in the planning stage.

The librarian is responsible for all aspects of collection development and management, reference service, and programming. Children's programs are a priority, with storytime for preschoolers held every other week and an "Introduction to Storytime" program for toddlers presented in six-week sessions winter, spring and fall. Vacation activities for school-age patrons such as puppet-making workshops and the annual Summer Reading Program are offered as well.

The Board of Trustees applied to the NH Statewide Library Development System (SLDS) in the 1980's. Consequently, the librarian has access to consultant services, van delivery, films, the centralized card service, and (potentially) Library Services grants. Originally the Trustees were committed to attaining Associate Library

status; interest has lapsed over the past five years.

An Apple IIe is used for cataloging and word processing, and is available to the public. There is no terminal hook-up, however, to the NH Automated Information System (NHAIS).

Finally, the library is a one-room structure with an unfinished (occasionally damp) basement, severely limited storage space (one closet), and no physical growth possibilities. Compliance with the ADA standards would prove difficult at best owing to the site and physical structure, and may not be deemed necessary because of Hanover residents' unrestricted access to the Howe Library.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Gateway 2000: A Strategic Plan for the New Hampshire Automated Information System suggests that by December of 1996 all libraries should budget funds for local access to the NHAIS. This "recommended action" creates a vision of future reference service at the Hanover Town Library. As previously mentioned, the library is entitled to apply for a Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grant. Project Access grants of \$850 or less are available to libraries, allowing them to access the NHAIS. The Walpole Town Library, for example, obtained a grant in the amount of \$289 in 1990 to purchase a modem to connect an existing Apple IIe microcomputer and printer to the NHAIS (*Granite State Libraries, July 1990*).

When considering the possibility of enhancing the library's reference service with technology, however, it is important to note that grants are awarded to libraries partially on their "assurance and willingness to meet public library standards in accordance with the SLDS." Furthermore, these are matching funds. And last: "Libraries receiving grant funds must show a willingness and a capability to support funded projects subsequent to LSCA funding involvement" (*NHSL: Long Range Program for Library Service, 1992-1996*).

The prospect of a hook-up to the NHAIS raises two interesting and fundamental questions: Is the Town of Hanover committed to the continuing existence of the Etna Library? If so, will there be a commitment that the library should grow technologically? One could argue that history is on the library's side, but in these days of budget cuts and accountability nothing seems to be sacred.

A minimum of 22 open hours weekly would satisfy the SLDS. Increasing the hours by eight over the next five years demands statistics backing growth and demand. While both numbers have increased since 1988, they have leveled off over the past two years. Matching funds to obtain the grant would have to be committed as well as yearly budget increases to cover personnel hours, purchase of reference sources to meet SLDS requirements, and support for the grant project (telephone service and equipment repair and maintenance, e.g.).

Another question should be asked: Is there a real need for reference service in the Etna Library? In a discussion on the future of reference service held at the University of Texas at Austin in Spring of 1989, a systems analyst in the audience warned we should not "approach problems backwards, by looking at the available tools and then trying to force solutions onto them." These points firmly place all plans for an NHAIS hook-up into the "five-to-ten years from now" future.

THE PLAN

The questions above may best be answered by the gradual implementation of a plan over the next five years, the goal of which would be: ***To be able to answer most non-technical ready reference questions with the library resources on hand.***

The objectives to be met in an attempt to attain this goal are as follows:

1. ***The Board of Trustees and Town Selectmen should make a commitment that the library will seek status as an Associate Library under the SLDS.*** In terms of reference services, this objective has several tasks to complete. Hours should be gradually increased from 14 to 22 by 1998, with a schedule "that allows access to users and potential users; including morning, afternoon and evening hours." Volunteer hours will no doubt be critical to the successful completion of this task. Of the additional eight hours sought, however, no more than half should be volunteer hours. The librarian's hours would annually increase by one or two, thereby creating a minimum impact on the budget.

Sufficient numbers of standard reference books and materials to supply information must be purchased. This will require a budget plan to allow for the timely replacement of out-dated materials balanced with new titles as judged necessary by the librarian. An initial commitment of \$800 (which includes \$600 for replacement of the out-dated encyclopedia) for fiscal year 1993-94 will create a basic reference collection. Each year thereafter for the next four years, at least \$100 should be allocated for reference materials.

2. ***The librarian should annually evaluate and weed the reference and non-fiction sections.*** Volumes would be replaced, repaired, or discarded, and new materials would be purchased in order to maintain a balanced, useful reference and information collection.

3. ***Within two years, the physical set-up of the library should be scrutinized and rearranged to facilitate one point of access to reference materials.*** The reference section should be readily accessible and identified to incoming patrons. The layout should reflect a view towards the possible future use of technology. As suggested by Jennerich and Jennerich in *The Reference Interview as a Creative Art*: "Patrons must enter an atmosphere that is above all conducive to asking for and receiving appropriate service."

4. ***Within five years, the librarian should have received training in the use and function of the NHAIS and Reference and Information Services via workshops and Library Techniques courses.*** The librarian should also make a commitment to reinforce, change and improve her interviewing techniques. A basic introduction to the reference section and reference service for volunteers should be conducted.

5. ***Within two years, the Board of Trustees, in conjunction with the librarian and Friends of the Library, should develop a campaign to increase awareness of the "new, improved" layout and services available at the library.*** Mailings, open houses, programs, news releases and posters all might be used to draw patrons.

6. ***Weekly statistics should be kept and monitored annually.*** Statistics will serve as indicators of use, growth and patron satisfaction (questions answered or referred to other sources).

7. ***The plan should be evaluated annually for current status, progress and problems in implementation.*** In 1996 the Board of Trustees and the librarian should determine, based on progress made, statistics, and public input, whether or not to pursue a grant to connect the library with the NHAIS.

CONCLUSION

The commitment to give the library a chance to remain a viable institution in the Town of Hanover requires a short leap of faith. The benefit to the community will be apparent within a very short time, however, because the goal of the plan is not necessarily to obtain access to the NHAIS. The goal is to provide a vital, effective reference service at the Hanover Town Library. While the whole concept might seem a bit like "If you build it, they will come..." perhaps in this case that is how it should be. A relatively small budget commitment will improve the library's capacity to serve the community's reference needs. Publicity and word-of-mouth are powerful tools for drawing patrons. And of course patron satisfaction is the ultimate goal.

REFERENCES

Wiggin, Kendall F. Gateway 2000: a strategic plan for the New Hampshire Automated Information System / prepared by Kendall F. Wiggin, State Librarian. Concord, N.H.: New Hampshire State Library, 1993.

Granite State Libraries, Vol.26, No.2, July 1990.

Library Services in New Hampshire: A Long Range Program for Statewide Library Development (1992-1996). New Hampshire State Library, December 1991.

"The future of reference service," a panel discussion held at the University of Texas at Austin, Spring 1988.

Jennerich, Elaine Zarembo and Edward J. Jennerich. The Reference Interview as a Creative Art. Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1987.

I chose to develop a basic reference collection for the Hanover Town Library because I feel it is important that my patrons have access to reference service within their community library; however, budget and space constraints dictate that the collection be highly selective and small.

Tools used:

- "Bare Bones Reference Collection." Vermont Department of Libraries, July 1991.
- "A list of Reference works designed for the small public library in NH." NHLA Newsletter, November/December 1989.
- "Standards for Associate Libraries." A Planning Guide for Public Libraries in NH, NHLTA, 1987.
- Katz, William. Introduction to Reference Work, Vol. 1. 5th ed. McGraw-Hill, c1987.
- "Reference Book Bulletin." Book List, American Library Assoc.
- "Enormous Changes on a Small Planet." New York Times Book Review, 12/20/92.

Budget: \$800.00 (for FY 1993-94)

I have based my selections on these criteria:

1. Most information for the \$.
2. Accuracy, authoritativeness.
3. Easy to use format.
4. Up-to-date.
5. Helps to fulfill "Standards for Associate Libraries" in NH.

I have excluded items which:

1. Are too expensive.
2. Encompass information which has not been requested during my 4 1/2 year tenure.
3. Would take up the limited space and most likely not be used.

The reference collection at the Hanover Town Library now includes:

World Book Encyclopedia, 1988 ed.
Information Please Almanac, 1993 ed.
Random House Dictionary of the English Language (unabridged), c1967.
Random House College Dictionary, rev. ed., c1984.
Little Oxford Dictionary, 6th ed., 1986.
The American Heritage Children's Dictionary, c1986.
Penguin Dictionary of Quotations, 1982.
I Quote, by Virginia Ely; c1947.
The Great World Atlas, American Map Corp., c1986.
Consumer Reports magazine and Buying Guide.
Local telephone directory.
Roget's International Thesaurus, 4th ed., c1977.
Emily Post's Etiquette, (newest ed.)
Books in Print, 1988-89.
Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, 24th ed., c1965.
Guinness Book of World Records, 1992.
Famous First Facts, by Joseph Nathan Kane, 3rd ed.; c1961.
American Spectrum Encyclopedia, c1991 (one-volume).
New Webster's Universal Encyclopedia, 1987 ed. (one-volume).
New York Public Library Desk Reference, c1989.
Dictionary of American Slang, c1967.

While most of these reference volumes are basic and generally good works, they are sorely in need of up-dating. The one-volume encyclopedias are not useful (one was a gift) and take up space. Some of the titles which are recommended as "additional" could be budgeted for in subsequent years.