

CHAPTER 36

Public Libraries*

A. NATURE AND COMPOSITION

1. DESCRIPTION OF FACILITIES

(a) *General Characteristics and Services Rendered*

The growing complexity of our modern world, rapidly changing occupational structure, and increased leisure in our affluent society have greatly increased the importance of our library resources as an integral part of our educational system. Public libraries of the United States provide knowledge and inspiration to all who use them. In 1966, it is estimated that total circulation from these libraries will approximate 1 billion books loaned to some 55 million citizens. In addition to these borrowers, millions use public libraries to study, do research, listen to music records, watch films, or simply for recreational reading. Public library users include businessmen, workers, researchers, professionals, housewives, children and teenagers, farmers, members of the Armed Forces—in fact, all segments of the population.

Public libraries have a number of common elements, including physical space, shelves with books, tables and chairs for readers, a circulation desk, and work areas and equipment for staff. However, the extent and variety of facilities and services depend in large part on the size of the community which the library serves. Thus, for a very small community, the library may be housed in a single room in a village hall or community center, which provides a couple dozen bookshelves with a few hundred books, four or five chairs, and possibly one table for readers. The library, probably staffed by an untrained librarian, may be open 4 to 6 hours per week.

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