

Public Libraries in Transition From 20th to 21st Century Models

Peter A. Gisolfi, AIA, ASLA, LEED AP



Abstract

Early on, public libraries in America tended toward grand appearances befitting seriousness of purpose. Library design changed gradually through the 20th century and more dramatically with automation and new technology. Today's libraries are becoming lively community cultural centers that may include art galleries, flexible auditoriums, meeting and conference rooms, media lounges, and cafés.

This essay discusses changes in public library design. It focuses on four recent examples — two traditional libraries and two innovative libraries. The changing requirements present significant challenges for library administrators and for the architects who must design the libraries to be organized and used appropriately, now and in the future.

The experience of being in a public library is influenced emphatically by the building and the distribution of physical elements within the building. The experience is influenced also by the ways the library staff and library patrons use the building. The observations in this essay are derived from my personal and academic lives as a library user, and from my professional life as the architect of many library buildings.

My earliest memories are of the public library in the center of the Village of Bronxville, New York. I used that library repeatedly from the time I was 8 to 18 years old. I remember gray-haired librarians behind the circulation desk looking somewhat like the woman in Grant Wood's painting, "American Gothic." The librarians were serious, grave, gentle and helpful. I remember that the circulation desk was high, that the oak drawers of the card catalogue contained well-used library cards, and that there were slide-out panels for notetaking. Near the circulation desk were wood-paneled reading rooms where oil paintings hung. It was a place where you could sit at a wooden table and write a paper for school. The stacks were dusty and densely packed. The collection seemed ancient and extremely serious.

My other vivid library memory is of Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University. The symbolism of the building was overtly religious. The main entry space appeared to be a church with groups of card catalogues in the side chapels and the circulation desk at the end, where you might have expected to find the altar. This symbolism set the mood of whispering tones. To the left of the circulation desk was the main reading room — a high-ceilinged room with clerestory windows and long tables for intensely working students. The vibrations from the communal concentration were palpable.

My favorite room in the library, off to the right, was the Linonia Brothers Reading Room, an inspiring space with alcoves that faced out to an inner cloistered courtyard of the Gothic Revival library — more ecclesiastical imagery. In the alcoves were comfortable green leather chairs and ottomans where more relaxed students would sit and read or sleep. Often, I would be distracted by the books on the shelves in the alcoves, and would find myself reading something other than the assigned material. There was a serendipitous, communal quality to the Linonia Brothers Reading Room that was dramatically different from the mood of the main reading room.

All of this illustrates that we are influenced by the physical setting of the library. Someone has to determine what that physical setting will be, and that the physical setting supports the manner in which the library is used.

Overview of Public Library Design: Late 19th Century to the Present

The basic model for the design of public libraries in America was developed in the second half of the 19th century. These buildings tended toward grand appearances, featuring ornate spaces with cathedral-like attributes befitting seriousness of purpose. That type of design, however, focused more on warehousing and protecting materials than on circulating them.

This model changed gradually over the course of the 20th century. Largely as a result of the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie, who gave more than \$65 million for public library buildings in this country, the circulation of books began to share importance with other functions we take for granted in modern libraries. These newer activities included lectures, classes, meetings, concerts and galleries. Whereas 19th-century libraries catered to an educated clientele, libraries of the 20th century began to conform to Andrew Carnegie's vision of libraries as "instruments for the elevation of the masses of the people." Modern libraries became more egalitarian places.

One of the most significant changes to take place in 20th century library design concerned children. Commonly in 19th-century libraries, young children were not welcome. But around the turn of the century, the public library in Brookline, Massachusetts, opened the first reading room for children — in the basement. A few years later, the Minneapolis Public Library recognized children as a constituency, but relegated them to a corridor in the building. Before long, children's reading rooms became a part of every well-planned public library, complete with appropriate book collections and specially trained children's librarians to guide youngsters in their choices and encourage good reading habits.

Around the middle of the 20th century, labor saving devices began to be introduced. One of the first was a pneumatic tube system that carried books between the main library and the annex at the Library of Congress. Near the end of the century, libraries found more efficient ways to check books in and out by means of drive-up windows for pickup and return and the automation of the card catalogue — the staple of record-keeping for virtually every library in the world—and circulation systems. The new automation included computer terminals, touch screens, microfilm readers, and the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog) system — the computerized card catalogue. As automation truly took hold, New York Public Library president Vartan Gregorian was quoted as having called the change from manual operation to computer operation "this leap into the 21st century of 19th century-style surroundings."

Recent innovations in the public library include wider aisles between book stacks, lower shelving for easy access, comfortable seating, and display areas to highlight acquisitions and current events. In addition to traditional services, such as circulating book collections, library buildings might include art galleries, studios, theaters, media lounges, auditoriums, conference rooms, community meeting rooms, and even cafés.

Computer technology continues to affect the way libraries function. Public libraries have fully embraced the digital revolution, supporting wired and wireless connections to digital communications from networks inside and outside the library. Another emerging technology for use in American libraries is RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). This technology has begun to replace the traditional barcodes on library items, such as books, CDs, DVDs, etc. Information is scanned by an RFID reader, which charges the item to a patron's library card number when it is borrowed and, in turn, catalogues the item back into the collection when it is returned.

Further automating the process, but less frequently used, is a materials handling system, a conveyor belt device that sorts returned items and carries them to a retrieval station so that library workers can reshelve them. Both the RFID readers and materials handling devices can be installed at the circulation desk or at self-service stations for patrons. This new development may lead to reorganizing the functions at the library's entry. Some public libraries with RFID capability have been able to position circulation functions — traditionally in a prominent entry location — to less important locations, allowing an information or welcome desk to become the focal point at the entry way.

All of these developments have dramatically changed the patterns of organization, use, and administration of the library. The pattern of organization of a library indicates the arrangement of the basic program elements within the library building or within the space allocated to it. The pattern of use refers to the actions of users within the building — both the public (patrons) and the library staff. The pattern of administration denotes the allocation of library staff and resources. The patterns of organization and use, and the method of administering the library are intrinsically connected. As architects, we attempt to design library buildings that operate efficiently in terms of the simplicity of movement and staff allocation.

Pattern of Organization

It is easy to describe the standard model of organization for a small public library built in the later part of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. The circulation

desk, the hub of the library, was always located just inside the main entrance, immediately visible and accessible to patrons entering the library. Typically, the staff workroom was located adjacent to the circulation desk. Near to it, patrons would find the card catalogue, the inventory of every book housed in the library. The adult reading room and the adult collection, arranged according to the Dewey Decimal System, would be located to one side of the main entrance. Depending upon the size of the library, the adult collection might be separated into reference, periodicals, nonfiction, and fiction. These collections might inhabit the same space, but could also be located in different alcoves, in different rooms, or even on different levels.

At the beginning of the 20th century, children's rooms came into being. Typically, they were located on the first floor and were often directly opposite the adult collection, with the circulation desk dividing the two areas. A public function room often would be located in proximity to the main entrance or could be placed on an upper or lower floor. Although many smaller libraries were designed on one level, it was common to construct two- or three-level structures to accommodate these additional functions. This basic pattern of organization held sway for approximately 125 years.

Pattern of Use

In late 19th- and 20th-century public libraries, the pattern of use was as repetitive and predictable as the pattern of organization. Upon entering the library, a typical patron immediately would encounter the circulation desk. Two or three staff members would be assigned here to answer a constant stream of questions from the public and to check borrowed books in and out. Having returned books, the patron could then take advantage of other library offerings, perhaps consulting the card catalogue or proceeding to the periodicals collection to read magazines or newspapers, to the reference section to research information, or to browse the shelves and select books to be borrowed. Seating in all of these areas responded to a variety of preferences, including sitting at a table or sitting more informally in a comfortable chair.

An alternative pattern of use would be to arrive at the library with young children who might want to look for books or participate in a program being offered in the children's room. Another destination might be the library meeting room where a lecture, film, or concert might be taking place. Before leaving the library, the patron would again pass the circulation desk where books to be borrowed were checked out.

Another aspect of the pattern of use has to do with materials handling. No matter how many volumes a library has in its collection, typically 20-to-30% of the holdings

may be out of the building at any given time, in use by the public. Books are constantly coming and going; new books are being acquired; books are being reshelfed, and books are on loan to and from other libraries.

Libraries of the period operated in predictable ways that can be graphed, charted and understood quite simply. The patterns of use — of the library's staff and its patrons, as well as the movement of its collections — were then, as they are now, fundamental to the design and organization of the building.

Pattern of Administration

The pattern of organization of a library building and the pattern of use within that building directly influence the way the staff operates. Administering the late 19th- and 20th-century library was hierarchical and could be carried out with relative ease and with minimum personnel. The library director was the chief executive officer of the enterprise and reported to an appointed or elected board of trustees. Library boards always wanted the buildings to operate with as few staff members as possible. Common questions were: "How many staff members need to be on duty at 8:30 Thursday evening when the library is open?" Or, "Can we keep the library open after hours for a public meeting with only one janitor present?"

The library director also administered the budget and supervised the activities of the library staff, which included professional librarians, nonprofessional technical staff, and building maintenance people. In most libraries of the period, the director's office was located adjacent to the staff workroom near the circulation desk. In some libraries though, the director's office was positioned so that it was also accessible to the public.

Then, as now, libraries typically were open more than 40 hours a week, and staff members worked in shifts in order to cover weekday hours plus evenings and weekends. The few professional librarians on staff helped patrons with reference material, oversaw the children's room, and kept the collections in order, choosing the new books to be acquired and disposing of older, less circulated books. The technical staff checked books in and out, sorted and reshelfed books that had been returned, dealt with inter-library loans and, occasionally, assisted patrons in finding a particular book. The maintenance personnel cleaned the building and concerned themselves with basic repairs and the ever-malfunctioning heating system.

Libraries Respond to Change

Over the last decade public libraries have responded to changing patterns in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of success. Some remain true to their traditional patterns. Others try to mesh automation and technology with their 19th- and 20th-century roots. Still others are what we might call hybrids — some contemporary ideas, yet with one foot still planted in an earlier era. On the leading edge are those libraries that embrace the new patterns, respond with buildings that function as community cultural centers, and introduce new initiatives.

The following case studies examine four approaches — two relatively traditional libraries and two that are more innovative. Each has addressed the changes taking place in the design and function of contemporary libraries, and each has responded differently.

- The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a small, community library that offers the familiar comfort of a traditional building in a traditional village while serving its patrons with new technological accommodations. This library exemplifies institutions often found in small towns throughout our country.
- The Greenwich Library serves a large and diverse population. It was originally designed as a traditional library, but has tried to accommodate innovation with a series of building additions that have resulted in a library with many offerings but little continuity.
- The Princeton Public Library is a new building with a clear public attitude. Yet, it is tied to some traditional methods, notably a circulation desk and a visible security system. It is transitional, a hybrid that at some point may shed its dependence on traditional methods.
- The Darien Library is a new building, committed to emerging 21st-century patterns of organization, patron use, and administration. It differs substantially from the other three examples, perhaps making this library a model for the future.



Entry Court and Main Entry to the Dobbs Ferry Library, looking towards the clock tower, the Adult Library, and the Community Room.

Two Case Studies: Traditional Libraries

Dobbs Ferry Public Library, Dobbs Ferry, NY

The new Dobbs Ferry Public Library was planned at the end of the 20th century and was designed by my firm, Peter Gisolfi Associates of Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, and New Haven, CT. The library opened in January 2003. It is located on a compact site on a bend in the road along Main Street in the Village Center. This 16,000-square-foot library is conceived as two rectangular solids, each of which is orthogonal to its neighbors. These two rectangular elements, with their distinctive gable roofs, are connected by a flat roofed, single-story pavilion, which forms both the entryway and the periodical space within the library. The two rectangles and their pavilion form three edges of a public courtyard, which opens to the sidewalk on Main Street. The site slopes dramatically to the west and accommodates a small parking lot under the building. At the same time, the west slope provides open views to the Hudson River. Another important element in the architectural composition of the library is a solid masonry clocktower that encloses a ceremonial stair in this three-level structure. The clocktower resembles eight other clocktowers that identify the other important public buildings in this hillside village.

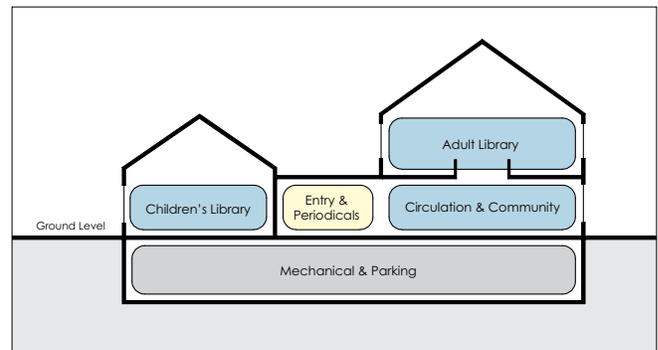


View of the Dobbs Ferry Library with the Children's Library to the left, the Entry Court and Main Entry in the center, and the Adult Library and Community Room to the right.

Pattern of Organization

The building is organized quite simply in the manner of a traditional 20th-century library. At the basement level are mechanical space, storage and parking. At the first-floor level (street level) are the most active areas of the library, including the entry foyer, community auditorium, and the periodicals room which leads to an outdoor reading terrace beyond. Also on the first floor, in the smaller rectangle to the left, is the children's room. To the right, in the large rectangle, are the circulation desk, the staff work area, the director's office, a conference room, display cases for recent acquisitions, shelving for digital media, and the public meeting room with adjacent restrooms. The public meeting room can be accessed also from the entry courtyard, allowing the library to be closed when a public function is occurring after regular library hours.

On the second floor of the larger rectangle are the adult fiction and nonfiction sections, and the young adult section. This area of the library looks out to the northwest over the Hudson River. The reference room nearby looks to the southeast over Main Street. As the diagrams and this description show, the pattern of organization of this building follows the traditional pattern of 19th- and 20th-century public libraries, adapting to the peculiarities of this site, the village context of Dobbs Ferry, and the wider context of the Hudson River Valley.



Section diagram of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library

Pattern of Use

The pattern of utilization also conforms quite closely to the typical patterns of the period. Patrons enter the library and immediately can appreciate the view. They can relax in the periodicals collection or out on the terrace. They can see the entrance to the children's room on the left and the circulation desk on the right. Adjacent to the circulation desk are displayed the library's most recent acquisitions as well as the collections of popular CDs, videos, and DVDs — items that have been added to library collections in recent years. If the patron's destination is the meeting room, it can be accessed from inside the library or from the public terrace, which opens to Main Street.

To reach the inner sanctum of the library, patrons can take the public stairs or the elevator. The intimate spaces of the second floor allow for browsing, reading, choosing books, or conducting research in the reference library, which is attuned both to the Internet and more traditional reference volumes. As in most public libraries in the United States, the OPAC System has replaced the paper card catalogue. Seven public OPAC terminals are distributed throughout the library — five in the adult/young adult section on the second floor and two in the children's room. The patterns of utilization of the Dobbs Ferry Public Library are rooted in 19th- and 20th-century models but accommodate easily the digital and Internet innovations of the last 20 years.



View from the Dobbs Ferry Library main entry to the periodicals area, with the reading terrace and Hudson River beyond. The circulation desk is to the right.

Pattern of Administration

Data for the Dobbs Ferry Public Library

- 16,000 square feet
- Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a nonprofit organization.
- The library is funded by the Village of Dobbs Ferry.
- A seven-member volunteer board oversees the library. Members are Dobbs Ferry residents, appointed by the Mayor. Members can serve two five-year terms.
- The library is administered by a director.

- The total library staff is 19 (9.5 FTE), of which 5, including the director, are librarians.
- The normal staffing for the library is 8; the minimum staffing is 4.
- The library is open 7 days a week for 54 hours from October through April, and 6 days a week for 50 hours from May through September.
- The average daily attendance is 500.
- The library contains 48,000 items, of which approximately 7,200 items (15%) are typically in circulation.
- Items in circulation generally follow this pattern: 1,080 items (15%) are children's books; 2,880 (40%) are adult fiction; 720 (10%) are adult nonfiction; and 2,520 (35%) are digital media.
- There is a circulation desk on the main floor, a reference (help) desk on the second level, and a children's librarian's desk in the children's library.
- The staff monitors all public areas.

The pattern of administration to serve the public is also traditional. The head librarian can be found in his office or at the circulation desk. Books are still checked in and out by the library staff and are sorted and reshelfed as they always have been. The children's librarian is in her alcove, adjacent to the story room in the children's area. The reference librarian is at her desk upstairs, available to assist patrons in their quests for printed or digital information. The library accommodates a pleasing sense of coming and going, the low chatter of children's voices at street level, and the tranquility of the upper floor.



The second floor adult area at the Dobbs Ferry Library provides views down to the first floor and out to the Hudson River

Greenwich Public Library, Greenwich, CT

The main branch of the Greenwich Library is located at 101 West Putnam Avenue, in downtown Greenwich. Throughout the 1800s, the library existed under a number of names and in several locations, finally moving into its present site in March 1960. An addition in 1969 included the Cole Auditorium at street level and an additional 8,000 square feet of library space on the second floor. The Peterson Wing, designed by Cesar Pelli, opened in 1999. This addition provided 32,000 square feet of new space and 68,000 square feet of renovated space. The present library is 104,000 square feet. Significant changes and space-planning improvements are being considered as part of a long-range plan for the library.



Main entrance to the Greenwich Public Library

Pattern of Organization

The main entrance of the library leads to a double-height space dominated by a grand stair. Just beyond the entry doors is an information and welcome desk. To the left of the entry doors is the circulation desk for book check-out and return. To the right are a smaller book check-out desk and two recently-installed self-check-out machines.

Left of the information desk is a large reference section with computers for public use. At the far left corner of reference is a large area primarily devoted to business books and secondarily to local history. Beyond the business section is a separate space that resembles a chapel and is used for quiet study and meetings. Housed to the right of the information desk are paperbacks, new books and large-print books. A separate room to the right of the new books display contains periodicals, nonfiction, and a reading room. Additional shelving for nonfiction is located in a mezzanine space overlooking the reading room.

The second floor is accessed by the grand stair, located prominently to the right of the information desk; the second floor can be reached also by an elevator located

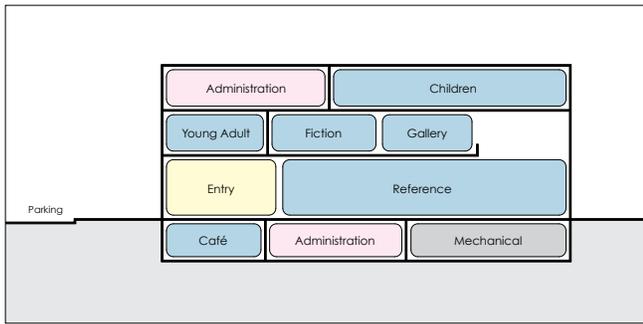
behind the stair. On the second level, the young adult section is located at the top of the stair. This section consists of extensive stacks as well as library tables and chairs. To the left of the young adult section is a large collection of audio books, DVDs, and musical scores. To the right is fiction and music CDs. The fiction section, similar to the young adult section, consists of stacks and library tables. Behind the young adult books is a circulating print collection, which is adjacent to foreign language books. Also on this level is the Flinn Art Gallery (behind locked doors), which provides rotating exhibits, often by local artists. There is also a small kitchen, the trustees' office, the Friends of the Library office, and a conference room not open to the public.

The third floor is accessible by elevator only. Here are located the library administrators, the staff room, and the children's library, which is a large but austere space dominated by book stacks. There is a pleasant story room with a zodiac-inspired ceiling, and a separate room for picture books, located across the center hall, not adjacent to the story room. The third floor administrative offices are located at the end of a long corridor; they are remote from the main functions of the library and separated from the public.

Except for a café, the lower level, accessed by stair or elevator, is for internal library administration — including a training room, a staff workroom, and a resource management area. The Cole Auditorium, a 325-seat performance space, has no public entry from inside the library. The auditorium's entrance doors are located to the right of the library's main entrance doors and, as such, the auditorium functions as a separate building with its own lobby and mechanical systems.



View from the second level down the ceremonial stair to the entry level of the Greenwich Public Library.



Section diagram of the Greenwich Public Library

Pattern of Use

The pattern of use of the Greenwich Library is completely determined by the layout of the building. There is one carefully controlled entry point and two places to check out books — in alcoves to the left and to the right of the entrance. Patrons use the first floor spaces as dictated by the functional organization of the floor plan. For special collections and fiction, they go up to the second level, either by the ceremonial stair or elevator, which provides the only access to the children's room on the third floor.

Overall, there is a sense of seriousness about the Greenwich Library and about storing a large collection that serves a great number of patrons daily. This seriousness extends even to the children's area, which at first gives the impression that storing the collection is paramount. The 104,000 square feet of space, housing nearly 400,000 titles, appears to be many separate, episodic repositories of books.

Pattern of Administration

Data for the Greenwich Library

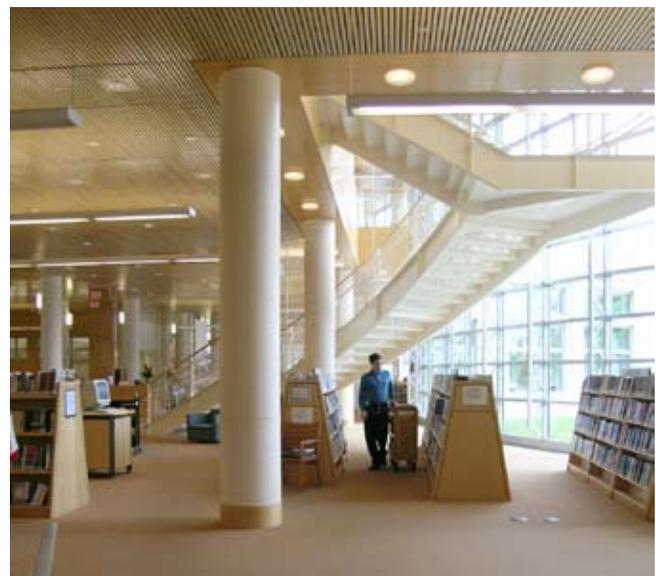
- 104,000 square feet
- The library is a nonprofit organization.
- The library is funded by an annual grant from the Town of Greenwich, a library endowment, and annual fundraising, including a joint fundraiser sponsored by the Friends of the Library and the Board of Trustees.
- An 18-member Board of Trustees oversees the library. The Friends of the Library group nominates trustees from the community. The first term for new trustees is one year, but trustees can be renominated for two- or three-year terms an unrestricted number of times. The president of the Board of Trustees serves for two years and then retires from the board.
- The library is administered by a director, a deputy director, and six department managers called coaches: custodial, information, lending, resources management, and two branch coaches (Byram Shubert and Cos Cob).
- The total library staff is 116 (92.12 FTE), of which 33, including the director, are librarians.
- The normal staffing for the main library is 60; minimum staffing is 27.

- The library is open 7 days a week for a total of 72 hours.
- The library averages 2,500 daily visitors.
- The library contains 388,000 items, of which approximately 128,000 (33%) are typically in circulation.
- Items in circulation generally follow this pattern: 37,120 items (29%) are children's and teens' books; 57,600 (45%) are adult fiction and nonfiction; and 33,280 (26%) are digital media.
- Staff members are stationed at a check-out desk and at a welcome desk.
- Staff members monitor public areas for the library's own programs.

The Greenwich Library is administered in the manner that is traditional for the second half of the 20th century. The core administrative staff is located on the third floor in offices that almost never can be reached by the public. The circulation desk and information desk are always staffed with library workers to assist the patrons. These formal desks establish clear boundaries between the public and the library staff.

Books are returned to the circulation desk. They are sorted and reshelfed in the traditional fashion, although the library is considering installing an RFID system and a materials handling system. Specialist librarians are assigned to the various collections.

These separate collections seem to be remote from each other and operate independently. The overwhelming impression is that the Greenwich Library is a complicated storehouse for a large collection. The library has some limitations, but more than 2,500 daily visitors take advantage of the depth of the collection, the research opportunities and computer availability, and the hundreds of programs offered annually to the public.



Two Case Studies: Innovative Libraries

Princeton Public Library, Princeton, NJ

The new Princeton Public Library opened in April 2004. It was designed by the architecture firm of RMJM Hillier of Princeton, NJ. The 50,000-square-foot building occupies three stories and is served by a small mechanical penthouse. The façade of the building faces Witherspoon Street on the east with a double row of columns. The interior space formed by this colonnade houses the more public functions of the library.

To the south of the library is a Presbyterian cemetery. On the west is a public parking garage for library patrons and other visitors to the downtown, and on the north side is a public piazza furnished with tables, chairs, and benches. The public piazza is defined by the library on the south, multifamily housing on the west, and commercial space on the north. It opens on the east side to Witherspoon Street. The entry foyer and the first-floor community room open to the piazza, which is used by the library for outdoor functions and programs, and is maintained by the municipality.

Pattern of Organization

Upon entering the library from the piazza or the parking garage, library patrons encounter the entry foyer. This space contains the public café and also serves as the lobby for the 180-seat community room. Public toilets and book-return bins are accessed from the entry foyer.

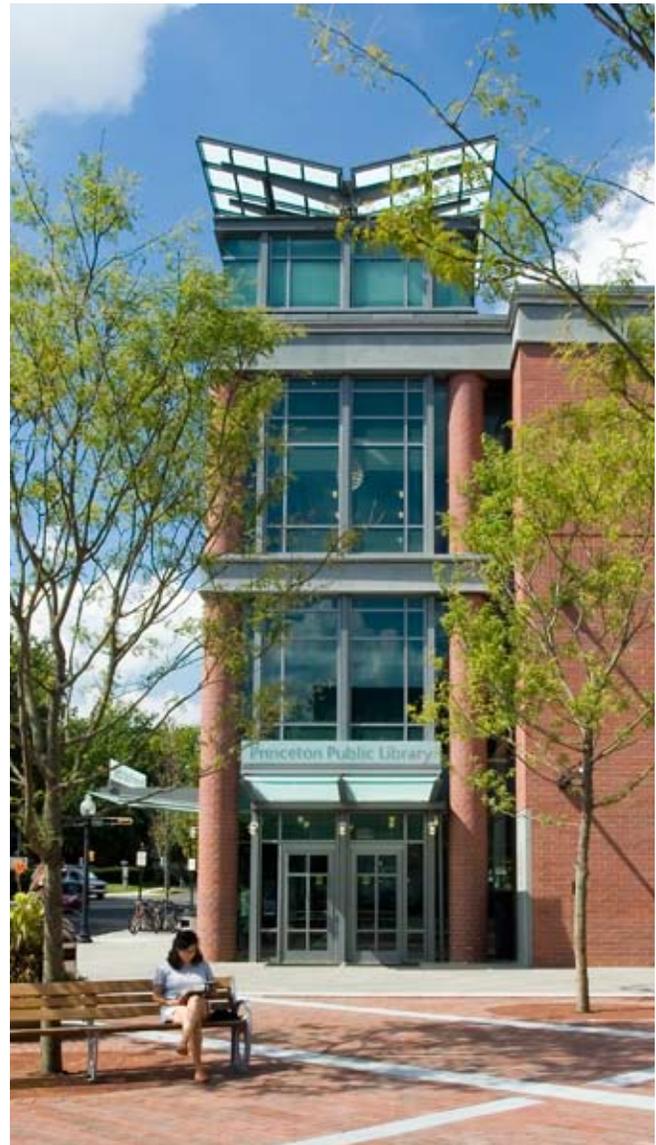
Proceeding south from the entry foyer, patrons pass through security devices and enter the library proper. The library shop and circulation desk are on the left, adjacent to Witherspoon Street. The major portion of the first floor houses recent acquisitions, the digital collection, fiction and newspapers — the collections that are most in demand. On the south side of the first floor are technical services and a quiet study room.

A grand stair, located on the east side, facing Witherspoon Street, leads to the second floor. On this floor are located the nonfiction collection, the reference section, and periodicals. The boardroom is located on the east in the colonnade overlooking the street, and independent study rooms are located on the west. The second floor also houses some administrative support areas.

The grand stair continues to the third floor. The major public functions on this floor are the children's library and the teen library. An outdoor terrace is located in the colonnade facing east to Witherspoon Street. The children's story room is located at the southeast corner. The teen library is situated at the northeast corner facing the street and the piazza. The administrative functions on the third

floor include offices for the library director, assistant director, business manager, and public relations, marketing, development, and human resources personnel.

Certain common features organize all three levels. The three-story, double colonnade on Witherspoon Street, facing east, contains public elements, such as the ceremonial staircase, the library shop, and the outdoor terrace. The private study spaces are situated on the southwest corner facing the cemetery. The office spaces are located on the second and third floors on the north side of the building. As expected, the elevator, public toilets, and fire stairs are stacked and are internally located. The library is organized sensibly, somewhat like an office building, with a public face to the street.



Main entrance to the Princeton Public Library from the public square adjacent to Witherspoon Street showing the exterior of the stair and atrium.



View from above to the interior of the atrium showing the Library Shop at the Princeton Public Library

Pattern of Use

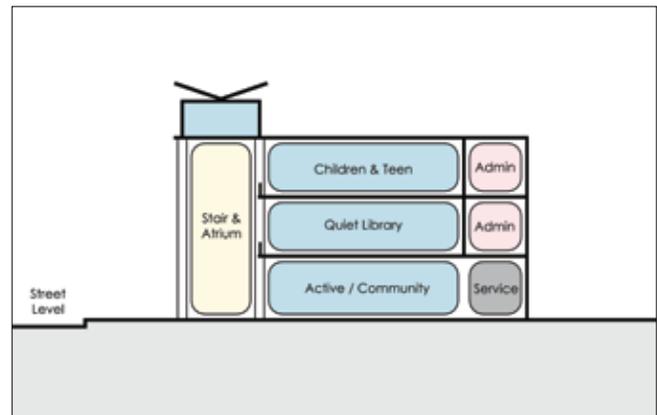
The new Princeton Public Library is much more heavily used than the previous 27,000-square-foot library. The old library accommodated 1,000 patrons daily, whereas the new library accommodates 2,500 daily visits. The library contains 177,000 items. Typically, approximately 35,400 items in the collection (20%) are in circulation most of the time; of this, 12,390 items (35%) are digital media.

For several reasons, the library's planners placed the children's library on the third floor. Considering all of the functions to be accommodated on the first floor — entry lobby, café, popular collections, community room — there was simply not enough room for the children's library to be located on the building's relatively small footprint. Also, because the library abuts a busy street, there was concern about the security and safety of children. Adults who are not parents of young children gather on the first and second floors, making the children's library, which tends to be noisier than the adult sections, private, unobtrusive, and safe. Bulky items and strollers, always a part of transporting children, are easily accommodated by the public elevator. The third-floor location for the children's library works well.

The teen library on this floor serves young adults. The two areas are compatible — the children's library busiest during the morning hours, and the teen library busiest after school.

The library functions as a community center. The café, shop, community room, fireplaces, private study rooms, and the lively public piazza all speak to this issue and encourage public engagement and activity. The café is always filled with people. About 175 people chose to watch election returns in the library's community room. Business meetings and tutoring sessions occur regularly in the private study rooms. According to the director, patrons regard the library as their own living room, and often rearrange the furniture for their comfort and convenience, just as they might at home. When the fireplaces are lighted on the first and second floors, some people stay all day to read and socialize. Parallel to these activities is the constant flow of people in and out, borrowing books, seeking information — the more traditional functions of a public library. The Princeton Public Library is a very public library.

OPAC terminals are located on all three public levels — four on the first floor, two on the second, and three on the third. The library staff is distributed on all three floors and interacts in many ways with the patrons. The director suggests that “perhaps the circulation desk is a trap.” But, she notes that the DVDs have to be locked up behind the circulation desk, because when the library tried self-check-out for the digital media, too many disks were stolen.



Section diagram of the Princeton Public Library

Pattern of Administration

Data for the Princeton Public Library

- 50,000 square feet
- The library is a nonprofit organization.
- The library is funded jointly by Princeton Borough, which pays 80% of the operating expenses, and Princeton Township, which pays 20%, in addition to contributions from the Friends of the Library and unsolicited donations.

- A nine-member Board of Trustees oversees the library. The mayor of each municipality served by the library appoints three trustees, and three are state mandated.
- Trustees serve five-year terms for an unrestricted number of terms.
- The library is administered by a director, an assistant director, and four department managers.
- The total library staff is 77 (47 FTE), of which 17, including the director, are librarians.
- The normal staffing for the library is 25-30; minimum staffing is 12.
- The library is open 7 days a week for a total of 71 hours.
- The library has 2,500 daily visitors.
- The library contains 177,000 items, of which approximately 35,400 items (20%) are typically in circulation.
- Items in circulation generally follow this pattern: 12,390 items (35%) are children's and teens' books; 7,080 (20%) are adult fiction; 3,540 (10%) are adult nonfiction; and 12,390 (35%) are digital media.
- Library staff members are stationed at a check-out desk and at a welcome desk.
- Staff members monitor public areas for the library's own programs.

The library added 5 FTE staff members to the original 42 FTE when the physical setting doubled in size. This represents an increase of approximately 11%. Even in the slowest periods, at least two staff members are assigned to each floor.

The core administrative functions are on the third floor. Technical services, including acquisitions and interlibrary loans, are handled from the first and second floors. Checking out items and the sorting of returned items before reshelving are handled on the first floor. Generally speaking, the Princeton Public Library is administered in a traditional fashion. The main control point is the circulation desk, which is adjacent to the entry and the security system. The librarians and library staff interact somewhat more freely with the public than in traditional models, suggesting that the Princeton Public Library aspires to a less formal model of administration.



Children's library at the Princeton Public Library



Exterior view from Route 1 to the entry of the Darien Library. The central bay houses "Main Street" on the first level and the Reference Room on the second level.

Darien Library, Darien, CT

The new public library in Darien, CT, is a major civic presence on the Boston Post Road. The building is influenced by its setting in New England, by new ideas about library usage and organization, by advances in information technology, and by theories of sustainable design. Peter Gisolfi Associates of Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, planned and designed the library over a two-year period. The construction of the library took an additional two years. The library opened to the public in January 2009.

The red brick building holds the southeast corner of Boston Post Road and Hecker Avenue, at the southern end of the Darien Town Center. The library faces east to Route 1, with a cemetery on Hecker Avenue to the south. To the west of the building are the reading courtyard and the parking lot, which is accessed from Hecker Avenue.

The building is a new type of library. It is a community and cultural center that supports a great variety of activities for its patrons. It is a technology library, offering the latest digital media as well as assistance and instruction in their use to library patrons. And it is a traditional library that provides for the quieter library functions in new ways. There is no circulation desk. There is an automated materials handling system, and librarians collaborate with patrons seeking information.

Pattern of Organization

Patrons can enter the library on the east side from Post Road and on the west side from the parking lot. On the west, the building is configured to form an outdoor reading courtyard, which is shaded by honey locust trees.

Because of zoning constraints, the footprint of the building is 16,000 square feet, but it contains 57,000 square feet, including a basement, two floors and a mezzanine. Stylistically, it borrows from regional New England public building traditions in its massing and exterior materials of

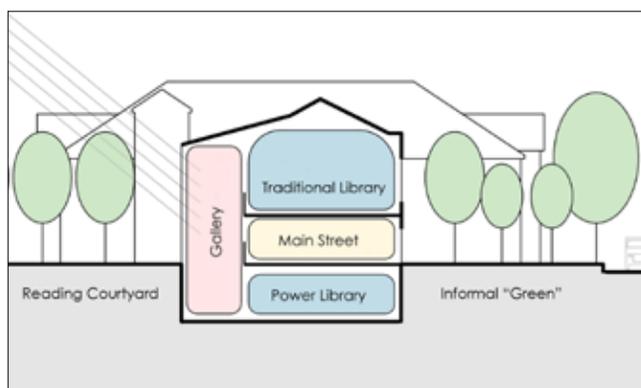
brick with a sloping slate roof. The interior of the building is finished with natural materials and is simple and timeless — essentially modernist.

The Darien Library is organized in a way that reflects the most recent changes in library design. The library contains four levels that are interconnected and transparent to each other — a ground floor technology center, the main (first) floor for the major public functions of the library, and a second floor and mezzanine for reading and research. The four levels are connected by a vertical shaft or atrium that houses a series of staircases behind a glass wall. The glass-enclosed atrium allows natural light to brighten the staircases and is situated to overlook the outdoor reading courtyard.

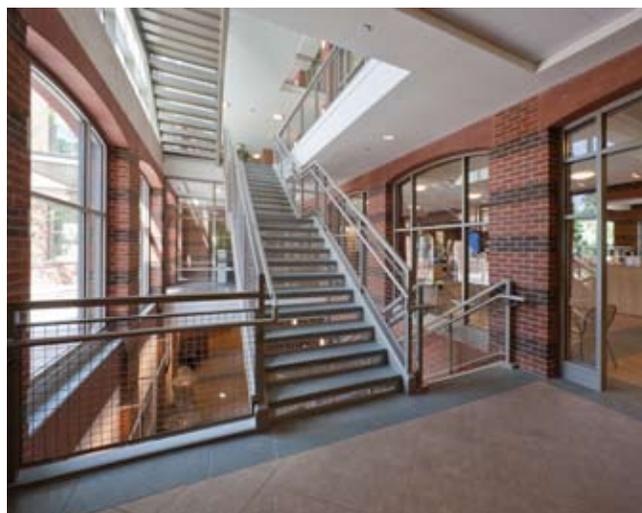
On the first floor, at the center of the building, is the “Main Street” area. This space includes café seating, an information desk, and spaces for new acquisitions and digital media. South of the Main Street area on the first floor is the children’s library. This is a 6,000-square-foot space, subdivided by implication into areas for younger and older children to allow for activities as varied as playing with toys or working on computers. Within the children’s library is a welcoming place for story time. On the northern end of the first floor, opposite the children’s library, are the fiction collection, the café, and a community auditorium with seating for 175 people. Thus, all of the functions that are most in demand are located on the first floor.

At its lowest level, the public stair atrium serves as an art gallery. Immediately adjacent to the art gallery is the digital library that includes an open area containing the latest computer equipment, an area for computer instruction, and several private workspaces. Next to the digital library is a reading and study space for teenagers. Also located at this level are the library’s technical support functions, the materials handling system, and space for the mechanical equipment that supports the entire building. Forty percent of the ground floor space has been left unfinished to allow for future expansion.

The second floor and the mezzanine function together and are organized as a traditional library. Public areas on the second floor form a continuously open floor space but, again, are divided by implication. Adjacent to the atrium on the second floor is a two-story reference library with a mezzanine on the north and south sides. The southern part of the second floor is devoted to the non-fiction collection. There are mezzanines overlooking this area as well. The northern portion of the second floor is devoted to the periodicals collection and to an informal, quiet reading area. The remainder of the second floor in the northwest houses the library’s administrative offices. The top of the atrium connects to the mezzanine level. In addition to the open mezzanine, this floor contains the library boardroom and the staff room.



Section diagram of the Darien Library



At the Darien Library, the stairway in the atrium gallery connects all four levels with “Main Street” to the right, the “Power Library” below, and the “Traditional Library” above.

Pattern of Use

The pattern of utilization of the new Darien Library differs from traditional patterns of the 20th century. For one thing, there is no circulation desk. Patrons pick up an item serendipitously or find a particular item in the collection by consulting the OPAC system. There are 12 OPAC terminals distributed throughout the library. RFID self-check-out terminals, located in the central Main Street area, encourage patrons to check out books themselves. If an individual needs help, librarians or assistants are available. In order to return books, patrons put them into the self-return kiosks located in the west foyer. The materials handling system sorts books by category to expedite reshelving by the library staff.

Main Street is the heart of the library — a community center with electronic bulletin boards for information, a café for easy socializing, and the community auditorium for lectures, films, music, and other programs. In addition, all of the digital media items and recent acquisitions are available in the Main Street area. In another departure from the tone of a traditional library, there is no attempt to keep this area quiet. In fact, talking and socializing are encouraged.

Adjacent to Main Street is fiction, which is located on the first floor because it is the most popular part of the library's collection. Although it is open to Main Street, it is somewhat quieter than the Main Street area. Yet, here too, no one attempts to enforce an environment of silence. Also adjacent to Main Street and behind glass doors is the children's library, which is located on the first floor to make it easy for parents encumbered with strollers and other infant and toddler paraphernalia to get around.

Both the digital library and the teen area on the ground level are adjacent to the art gallery at the base of the atrium. Again, the intent is to create an informal environment that does not require silence. Within the digital library is a central area with computers available for individual use. There is also a computer classroom for library staff members to offer instruction. Smaller, quiet rooms for group projects and meetings are located nearby. Small office and home office support services are also available.

Resources include office supplies, computer software and facilities to scan, copy, print and bind documents. On the southern side of the digital library is the teen area, which is equipped with computers and comfortable furniture. This section of the building operates as a "power library."

The second floor and mezzanine function more like a traditional library. For example, the reference library is furnished with long reading tables with task lights, where patrons can plug in their laptops. In general, the furnishings are soft, and there are large, quiet spaces for reading and study. There are also several small workrooms and conference rooms that library patrons can reserve. A fundamental difference between this traditional library and its forebears is that librarians at this level are located informally at help desks in order to collaborate with patrons as they search for information, rather than being stationed at a formal circulation or reference desk.



View of the Reference Room with transparency to the atrium gallery at the Darien Library

The library is designed to enhance transparency. Nearly all of the public space of the library is continuously connected. There are no separate public rooms on the second and mezzanine floors. In order to make it easier to supervise the children, the first floor children's library is separated from Main Street by glass doors and glass openings. Similarly, on the ground floor, a glass wall separates the digital library from the adjacent art gallery. In addition, the four-story vertical atrium, which contains the staircases, elevator lobbies, and the art gallery, continuously connects all levels and all public spaces within the building.



The "Main Street" section of the Darien Library

Pattern of Administration

Data for the Darien Library

- 57,000 square feet; 51,000 finished space
- The Darien Library is a nonprofit organization and the owner of the building.
- The library is funded in part by the Town of Darien for salary, personnel, and operating costs. Residents support the library through an annual appeal.
- A Board of Directors oversees the library. Board members are elected for three-year terms at the annual meeting of the Friends of the Darien Library. Board members can serve two terms.
- The library is administered by a director and two assistant directors.
- The total library staff is 50 (29.7 FTE), of which 13, including the director, are librarians.
- Normal staffing for the library is 10; minimum staffing is 6.
- The library is open 7 days a week for a total of 69 hours.
- The library has 1,500 daily visitors.
- The library contains 160,000 items, of which approximately 48,000 items (30%) are typically in circulation.
- Items in circulation generally follow this pattern: 16,800 items (35%) are children's books; 12,000 (25%) are adult fiction; 4,800 (10%) are adult nonfiction; and 14,400 (30%) are digital media.

- Librarians are not stationed at desks; they move about to help patrons.
- Librarians or staff monitor all public areas when they are in use.

The new patterns of utilization require that the library be administered differently from a traditional 20th-century library. On the ground floor, administrative functions include technical services, which handles new acquisitions and interlibrary loans, and the materials handling system, which presorts all of the items that are returned so that they can be reshelved that day. In the digital library, located at this level, professional staff offer instruction and advice on Internet access and also help out in the teen library with digital and computer issues.

On the first floor Main Street area, library staff members are present at the welcome desk and circulate among the collections. There are service personnel (not library employees) in the café. The children's librarians work exclusively in the children's library, where they organize the programs of activity and are accessible to children and their parents. Located on the second floor are spaces for the central administration of the library. Librarians are informally available to provide help in all the areas at this level, especially reference. On the mezzanine level are places for quiet reading as well as small rooms that are used for meetings and group study; no library staff members are stationed at this level.

Sustainability and LEED Criteria at the Darien Library

The Darien Library differs from the other libraries under consideration because it was designed as a sustainable building and is in the process of receiving LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold certification from the U. S. Green Building Council. It will be the first library in New England to meet the gold certification requirements.

Sustainability, when associated with building design and construction, refers to a set of values that relates to the natural environment. If a building is sustainable, it adapts itself to nature by doing two things: it takes the greatest possible advantage of natural processes and natural materials, and it imposes the least possible negative impact on the natural environment.

The Darien Library and its site were designed to be intrinsically sustainable. The site development reclaims land that had become severely toxic from chemicals in the ground water. To manage the stormwater, a biofiltration system directs all of the water to retention basins under the parking area; the filtered stormwater is released gradually into the ground water beneath the site. The site has been configured to place this civic building on the Post Road overlooking the adjacent cemetery. The

building forms three sides of the reading courtyard, and the parking is shaded with native plant materials. Four "standing-column" geothermal wells provide ground water for the heating and cooling system as well as irrigation water for the site.

The building is made of heavy materials, including concrete and concrete block, which provide high thermal mass. This effect helps to maintain a comfortable and stable interior environment. The exterior materials, including brick, slate, aluminum-clad windows, and copper flashings and gutters, are permanent and require virtually no maintenance. Materials used within the building, including porcelain tile, carpeting, wood paneling, and gypsum board, are simple and easy to maintain. This construction supports relatively constant temperatures that complement the manner in which the geothermal (ground-coupled heat pump) heating and cooling systems function. These systems tap into the constant temperatures below the earth's surface, making it possible to transfer the earth's heat to the building in winter, and transfer the building's heat to the ground in summer. The building is designed to take advantage of day lighting and outside awareness in all occupied spaces.

The mechanical system depends on the high R-values and low infiltration of the building envelope, and on daylighting in all spaces. Numerous efficiencies are designed into the HVAC system. Sophisticated lighting controls and a building management system are included to better utilize the systems and save energy. Overall, the building is designed with the health and comfort of staff and patrons in mind.

The metrics for the building are noteworthy. Eighty-five percent of the stormwater infiltrates on the site. The geothermal system uses approximately 50% of the energy required to operate a traditional system. There is no need for a boiler room or flue. The building uses 41% less potable water than a typical building, and requires no irrigation from the potable water supply. Of all the construction material used, 10% is from recycled sources, 20% is local, and 84% of the construction waste was recycled.

In summary, toxic land has been fully remediated and is now a sustainable green site. A permanent, energy-conserving building has been constructed, with sustainable strategies integrated into the building design. The interior spaces are daylit and transparent to each other. The flexible control systems can be continually modified to enhance comfort and save energy. As a sustainable building, the new Darien Library serves as an educational tool for the community — a beacon of sustainable design, constructed with the idea that lifecycle costs are more important than initial savings. This strategy is appropriate for civic buildings designed and constructed to last for generations.

Four Libraries: A Comparative Analysis

The four libraries we have studied illustrate the changes that are taking place in library design. They show the emergence of libraries as community centers and social meeting places, and how technology is influencing the physical configuration of libraries and the administration of library services. If we look again at the four case studies in terms of their patterns of organization, use, and administration, we will see how the transition to contemporary library design is unfolding.

Patterns of Organization

The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is organized in the manner of a traditional 20th-century library. The most active areas of the library, such as the entry, the children's area, periodicals, and the community auditorium, are on the first floor. A circulation desk for checking books in and out is located prominently near the entrance. Although an ambiance of calm is maintained throughout the library, the second floor adult areas are devoted exclusively to book stacks, reading and quiet study.

The collections within the Greenwich Library are episodically organized to fit within several additions that have been made to the building since its founding. An information and welcome desk greets patrons at the entrance; the circulation desk is to the left of the entry, conveniently located for book check-in and check-out. The addition of a substantial community auditorium offers opportunities for varied programming, but it is inaccessible from the inside of the building, which discourages serendipitous participation by library patrons. Another service enhancement offered within contemporary libraries is a café, and the Greenwich Library has installed one in the windowless basement, which is not ideal and creates no synergies with other activities.

The Princeton Public Library is elegantly integrated into its urban setting, offering a clear pattern of organization in the new, three-story building. The most public aspects of the building face Witherspoon Street and the community plaza that invites the public to the library. The first floor, with its light-filled café, community room, and library shop, functions as a community center. Popular collections, such as recent acquisitions, fiction, digital media, newspapers, etc., are housed on the active first floor. The large circulation desk, however, dominates this level. Nonfiction, reference, periodicals, and the children's and young adult sections are on the second and third floors, with study areas and lounge furniture making these quieter areas welcoming.

The Darien Library differs significantly from its 20th-century predecessors. It is organized as a community center on the first floor, a technology center on the ground

floor, and a more traditional library on the second floor and mezzanine; self-checkout and automated book return replace the function of a circulation desk. Popular collections, a café, and a community auditorium for presentations and events are located on the first floor — all overlooking the reading courtyard. Everywhere, it is transparent, with most of the public spaces organized to be continuous. This arrangement presents a new model for library organization.

In summary, the Dobbs Ferry, Princeton and Darien libraries place the most active elements of the program close to the entry point of the building. The Princeton and Darien libraries most resemble a community cultural center because of the prominence of the cafés, the community auditoriums, and the adjacent outdoor public areas. The traditional equation is changed significantly in the Darien Library with the elimination of the circulation desk and the formal reference desk. The Greenwich Library is somewhat of an outlier. The building is dominated by idiosyncratic special collections, and the functions that most represent a community cultural center — art gallery, auditorium and café — are remotely located in different parts of the building.

Patterns of Use

The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a small, clearly organized, community library. It follows the patterns of utilization of 20th-century models, while accommodating the major digital and Internet innovations of the last two decades. The building functions as a community cultural center, which is supported by the entry courtyard, the informal periodical foyer, the outdoor reading terrace (which overlooks the Hudson River), and the community meeting room — all of which are located in close proximity. There is an easy flow of patrons and staff in the library because of the simplicity of the organization and the transparency of the spaces.

The Greenwich Library is so unusually organized physically that the pattern of use is strongly influenced by the building layout. It seems to be used as several relatively autonomous smaller libraries (or collections), housed in unusual fashion under one roof. Patrons and library staff follow the traditional patterns of the last century, aided by recent digital innovations.

The Princeton Public Library has enthusiastically embraced the idea of community center. The method of checking out items and returning them is traditional, as is the relationship between the library staff and library users. But a sense of informality and public ownership pervades the library. The pattern of use is rooted in a previous century, accommodates new digital technolo-

gies, and shifts toward the idea of community center and community ownership.

In keeping with its modern organization, patrons use the Darien Library differently. The library provides a place to borrow books and other items, but it also provides diverse environments that can be used by patrons simultaneously engaged in wide-ranging activities. There is no circulation desk. Check-in, check-out, and sorting books are handled by automated systems. The library staff interacts with users on an informal basis. The institution functions as a community cultural center as well as a traditional library, but one that focuses on digital technology and on training users to access information in this new era. While accommodating these diverse functions, the building encourages interaction through transparency and the visibility of all activities. The pattern of use of the Darien Library departs from the past and responds positively to the communal attitude of today's library users.

Patterns of Administration

The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a small facility, administered in the traditional 20th-century manner. The library operates with a small staff and with no division between administrative and technical services. Various staff members are assigned to the major functions within the building, and they coordinate with each other in a straightforward manner.

In Greenwich, the administrative pattern follows 20th-century models, but for a much larger organization. The central administrative functions are separate from technical services, and each area of the library is staffed generously. These staff members appear to work relatively independently as dictated by the size and layout of the building and the diversity of the collections.

Princeton, too, is administered in a traditional fashion with the central administrative services separate from technical services. Each of the separate areas is staffed appropriately and is coordinated by the central administration. The library depends on the circulation desk and the security barriers at the entry foyer. In this respect, it is similar to most libraries of the 20th century. Although staff members are distributed throughout the building, the office areas are remote and seem to create a separation between patrons and librarians.

The Darien Library is hierarchically organized in a manner similar to the other libraries, with administrative and technical functions separate. At the same time, it is administered differently, because the circulation desk has been abandoned, and many of the traditional activities of the library staff are now handled by the users. In general, with librarians not tethered to help desks and free to circulate throughout the collections, a less formal method of interaction exists between the public and the library staff. This informality is encouraged by the library administration.

Data Comparison for Four Libraries

	BASIC DATA				STAFFING				USE					
	Square feet	Collection	Local Population	Items in circulation	FTE staff	FT/PT	Normal/minimum	Total staff	Items per SF	Hours per week	Daily visitors	SF per visitor	SF per FTE	Daily visitors/FTE staff
<i>Traditional</i>														
Dobbs Ferry	16,000	48,000	11,134	7.2 M (15%) Child: 15% Adult: 50% Digital: 35%	9.5	5/14	8/4	19	3	52	500	32	1,684	68
Greenwich	104,000	388,000	62,236	128 M (33%) Child: 29% Adult: 45% Digital: 26%	92	64/52	60/27	116	3.73	72	2,500	42	1,129	49
<i>Innovative</i>														
Darien	51,000	166,000	20,452	48 M (30%) Child: 35% Adult: 35% Digital: 30%	29.7	26/24	10/6	50	3.14	69	1,500	34	1,717	87
Princeton	50,000	177,000	13,495	35.4 M (20%) Child: 35% Adult: 30% Digital: 35%	47	35/42	28/12	77	3.54	71	2,500	20	1,063	94

The spreadsheet reveals some interesting data:

- The size of the libraries that we have considered varies from 16,000 square feet to 104,000 square feet.
- The collection sizes are directly proportional to the size of the building, with 3 to 3.7 items per square foot in each of the four libraries.
- The number of items in circulation varies from 15% of the collection at Dobbs Ferry to 33% of the collection at Greenwich.
- With respect to daily visitors, the Dobbs Ferry and Darien results are directly proportional to the size of the library, whereas the numbers of visitors at Princeton and Greenwich vary dramatically from that norm, with Princeton having twice as many visitors proportionally as Greenwich.
- It is hard to draw conclusions from the data on square feet per full-time employee. Two of the libraries — Dobbs Ferry and Darien — have about 1,700 square feet per full-time employee, while Greenwich and Princeton have only about 1,100 square feet per full-time employee. It would appear that two of the libraries may run more efficiently.
- In the four libraries, digital media account for approximately 30% of the items in circulation, no matter the size of the library or its collection.
- The Darien Library, which is organized to be transparent, is half the square footage of the Greenwich Library, which is organized episodically. But the Darien Library operates with one third of the staff that is required in Greenwich. The data shows that innovative libraries with automated systems and transparency can operate more efficiently than traditional libraries.
- Many parallels and disparities can be drawn from an analysis of the data provided. It was not the purpose of this study to provide reliable statistics because the sampling obviously is too small. What we can see is certain, easy-to-understand similarities, such as the 3-3.7 items per square foot, and the big disparities, such as the differences in the number of visitors and the number of employees required to staff the libraries.

Final Thoughts

In reviewing and comparing these four examples, we can learn many things about public libraries in the United States. Perhaps these lessons are best understood first as general principles about library design and then as specific trends that are emerging now. Let us start with general principles:

- At the most basic level, the design of the building influences the way you can run and use the library. It is not the only factor, but it is a major factor.
- Since the future is uncertain, we must design spaces that might be used for different purposes later on. It is a challenge to accomplish this goal while designing buildings and spaces with unique characteristics. Nevertheless, we must design buildings that are flexible and adaptable to future change.
- Although change is inevitable, a public library will always be an institutional building of significance. It should look like a library.
- To design a library, we must understand in great detail the program requirements, the objectives, and the patterns of organization, use, and administration. These factors determine the design of the building, which ultimately influences how the library is staffed and how patrons will use it.

The most apparent specific trends in the evolution of the public library are as follows:

- In all of our examples, the library is increasingly an important community cultural center.
- Based on emerging technologies in the operation of libraries, patrons are becoming more autonomous.
- A potential result of increased technology and automation is a reduction in the requirements to staff the library. Staffing reductions may be facilitated also by increasing the openness and transparency in the building.
- With the elimination of the circulation desk and, perhaps, the reference desk, the librarian's role may become more flexible and more collaborative with those seeking help and information.
- Historically, public libraries have been inspirational buildings that evoke the essence of books and learning. This objective for library design remains to some extent.
- Public libraries are ideally suited to be models of sustainable practice because they usually require stable indoor climates, and they can serve as examples for the public.

- The spatial organization in public libraries is becoming more open, transparent, and interactive instead of separate and compartmentalized.

Public libraries have been an important part of American society since the 19th century. The first libraries were designed to be inspiring, almost ecclesiastical spaces, which held valuable books and information. The library was a place of quiet, and awe, and dust. Much has changed, and we can be certain that more will change in the future.

With the introduction of digital technology and new ways of accessing information, the library has become an even more important community institution than in the recent past. This has defied all the predictions of 10 or 15 years ago, which had forecast the decreasing importance of public libraries. We are now designing the space for a much different institution than the library of the 1990s.

The essential dilemma that we face in designing public libraries is to represent the permanence and continuity of an important public institution, while simultaneously providing for the flexibility to accommodate inevitable changes.

Peter Gisolfi, ALA, ASLA, LEED AP, is senior partner of Peter Gisolfi Associates, a firm of architects and landscape architects in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, and New Haven, CT. He is chairman of the Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York, and is the author of the book, "Finding the Place of Architecture in the Landscape."

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