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About the Organization of Librarianship in the Soviet Russia in the early 1920s

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Abstract

The work examines the organization of librarianship in the Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. There were used as materials the specialized literature on the organization of librarianship in the Soviet Russia during the early 1920s. For the most part, this literature was published in Moscow through the People's commissariat for education.

The research methodology is presented by the traditional historical methods. One of them, the chronological method allowed authors to analyze the organization of librarianship, taking into account the historical situation. Using the method of objectivity and relying on facts, the authors were able to consider the organization of librarianship in its real state, in conjunction with the post-revolutionary situation. In turn, the civilizational approach made it possible to study the organization of librarianship in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s, in view of the accumulated experience in the pre-revolutionary period.

In conclusion, the authors state that in the early 1920s, librarianship in the USSR was formed taking into account the accumulated pre-revolutionary experience and international traditions. The Bolsheviks used the well-established American system of organizing librarianship and made only some additions and changes to it, bearing in mind the specifics of the proletarian state. The Bolsheviks also did not prohibit the decimal classification of books proposed by the Brussels International Bibliographic Institute. Nevertheless, there were special features in the training of personnel for libraries in Soviet Russia. Thus, the staff of librarians was trained on the principle of workshops for beginners, and hobby group activities for people who already had work experience.

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1. Introduction

In Soviet Russia, library work was important in educational activities. It included everything related to printed publications (book, journal, newspaper) and it was an integral part of out-of-school activities of students. In the early 1920s, librarianship included not only the organization of book exhibitions, readings, the distribution of recommendation posters, but also the organization of oral retelling of newspapers, the organization of reference work, circles, including young readers, etc. On this basis, the librarian's functionality expanded to a large size and required him to have certain competencies. In this work, we would like to consider the functionality of the librarian and the features of his training.

2. Materials and methods

There were used as materials the specialized literature on the organization of librarianship in the Soviet Russia during the early 1920s. For the most part, this literature was published in Moscow through the People's commissariat for education.

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3. Discussion

In the historiographical review, we would like to include works devoted to librarianship in the USSR in the period from the establishment of Soviet power to the end of the new economic policy.

Among such works, it is necessary to mention the one of L.M. Luchka on librarianship in the territory of the Yekaterinoslav region during the civil war (Luchka, 2020), E.K. Ivanova touched on the organization and state of librarianship in the territory of Chuvashia in the 1920s. (Ivanova, 2022), E.T. Golovina addressed the problems of librarianship on the example of the Stavropol village in the 1920s (Golovina, 2011). The author noted that in the early 1920s the librarianship in the Stavropol village was unsatisfactory, most libraries were closed, and in those that functioned librarians received such low wages that they had to look for additional work on the side (Golovina, 2011: 308). In turn, T.V. Badlaeva addressed the topic of librarianship in the territory of the Baikal region during the civil war (Badlaeva, 2009), and N.N. Mukhina studied book and library business in the territory of the Simbirsk province from the moment of the revolution until the end of the NEP (Mukhina, 2015).

In fairness, it should be noted that librarianship continued to be studied in subsequent periods. So, librarianship about the country's scale was studied by M.N. Glazkov for example, the second and the third Soviet five-year plans (Glazkov, 2009), A.V. Sozonova considered a similar case in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous district during the second half of the XX century (Sozonova, 2000), P.T. Maksimenkova applied to the study of librarianship in the Kaluga region in the period 1940-1950-ies (Maksimenkova, 2019).

4. Results

The personal composition of librarians was divided into two categories: persons without library experience and persons with it. In this regard, when preparing the first category of persons, it was assumed to organize a workshop, that is, a system of regular classes, according to a schedule and at certain hours. At the same time, the duration of the workshop should have been at least 1-1.5 months with daily classes of 4 hours a day (lectures, interviews and group classes) (Slukhovskii, 1924: 18).

Practical classes of librarians were held in factory clubs, in sponsored villages and other places. Librarians with relevant experience acted as the leaders of such classes.

Those who had already gained some experience in librarianship studied in a slightly different way. A library circle was specially created and operated for such people to acquire new

competencies and skills. Such a circle was supposed to be created not with its own organization, but at the level of the city, the district center, and the garrison. The thematic areas of the library circle's activities took into account the prevailing historical situation in the regions. So, in 1921, under conditions of starvation, library circles operated in Chuvashia, in which agricultural knowledge was actively studied and promoted (Ivanova, 2022: 15).

The library circle functioned by holding meetings at which the participants of the circle had to prepare and make presentations. Besides the reports on topics related to librarianship at each meeting, reports on the activities of libraries were also heard, and at the end of the meeting, the agenda of the future meeting was necessarily planned and approved. It should be added that the topic of the speeches was not strictly fixed, the librarians had the opportunity to independently choose the topic of the future report. Therefore, one time the theme could be a library poster, another time – a circle at the library, the third – holding a holiday, etc. Thus, the main work here did not lie with the head (as with beginners), but in professional and friendly meetings, where librarians jointly updated and deepened their knowledge of librarianship. At the same time, it was considered very useful to pay attention and devote meetings to experimental and demonstration events – an oral newspaper, a literary court, an agitation evening, and so on (Velinkin, 1923: 57).

Protocoling was an important part of the library club meeting. Thus, all meetings had to be recorded, and the minutes were required to be read out at regular meetings. It was also highly desirable that the position of chairman should be transferred to other members of the circle – this was how the individual's managerial skills were formed. Meetings of the library circle were open events and anyone interested in this topic could attend it.

However, the professional development of librarians was not limited to meetings. Conferences on library science played an important role in their professional development. Such conferences were usually short-lived, no more than 2-4 days, but the number of participants in them was significant, and their geography was quite wide. Conferences were usually prepared in advance and were associated with a number of material and economic costs, so they were entrusted to administrative and political associations.

In the development of curricula, course managers for both beginners and experienced librarians had to take into account local peculiarities – the level of training of students and the goals of librarianship for each region individually.

M.I. Slukhovskii noted: “In the USSR, librarianship is organizationally and technically built partly on the model of the American system, but differs in a number of unique features and achievements. All libraries are national property, which is natural for a proletarian state. They are generally available and, in principle, free of charge” (Slukhovskii, 1924: 27). In Soviet Russia, libraries were connected via single library network. The supply of provincial and county libraries with literature was carried out according to the state free program. While the libraries of the enterprises made purchases of books at their own expense. In the early 1920s, all library work in the USSR was led by the People's Commissariat of Education, and organizational issues were solved by the Central Interdepartmental Library Commission.

Now a little bit about libraries. Apart from permanent stationary libraries, there were also mobile libraries. The purpose of the latter was to cover remote and sparsely populated areas (villages, factories) with libraries and attract a mass reader. To do this, a selection of books in demand in the area was prepared and taken to the destination along with the necessary service personnel, books were distributed there until the demand for literature began to fall. After the drop in demand, the mobile library returned back to its stationary location. In the early 1920s, libraries allowed the form of issuing a significant number of books, according to the so-called collective subscription. A collective subscription was provided to an organization, and its representative took books in compliance with preferences of his team. As the team read these books, the representative returned the books to the library and took new ones. If the representative stopped returning books, then the librarian himself went to the enterprise, took the previously issued books and issued new ones (Trainin, 1923: 61).

The acquisition of libraries took into account the intellectual level of the average reader and specifically the historical situation in the country and in the region. Thus, in the 1920s, according to the experts, political enlightenment, socio-political issues, mathematics, history and professional knowledge were important for workers and peasants. In this case, fiction played an important role for moral education.

A special body was important in the library's activities – the Library Council (Smushkova, 1922: 58), which included not only librarians themselves, but also representatives from the readership. Regular meetings of this council provided a link between the library and the reader, solved problems that arose and prepared a work plan.

The library's activities were regulated by numerous rules, without which the library was unable to carry out mass educational work. One of these rules was the classification of literature, which divided all books into various departments, sub-departments, etc., taking into account their content. In the USSR, from the early 1920s and later, the decimal classification system (Morozov, 1923: 68), proposed by the Brussels International Bibliographic Institute, was used.

For the accounting and use of books in libraries, the compilation of card catalogs or the maintenance of a notebook was used. For the reader, the card system was the most convenient form, but for librarians, cataloging required a lot of work. In the 1920s, libraries often combined both forms: information about inventory and subscribers was filled in notebooks, and catalogs and subscription were on cards.

The inventory was a special notebook in which all books coming to the library were marked. Here the book received an individual number, which was called a cipher, and was entered into the general register of the library. According to this cipher, the book could easily be found in the library. This one became available to the reader after librarians added the corresponding publication card to the catalog.

The catalogs, in turn, were also different. In small libraries, one systematic catalog was enough. If there was a significant book fund, an alphabetical catalog was also compiled, in which books were listed alphabetically. And finally, in libraries with a large book collection, in addition to systematic and alphabetical catalogs, there was also a subject catalog (it touched on various issues of social and economic life of society). All these catalogs were necessary only for a fairly prompt issuance of books. At the same time, there were also several book issuance systems. One of them was a card, which was divided into two-card (with subscriber and book cards) and one-card (either subscriber's or book card). However, if it was impossible to keep card records, it was allowed to transfer the accounting system to a non-card system. The introduction of the subscription system required the librarian to be very careful, attentive and accurate in filling out the data (Khavkina, 1918: 36).

The last noteworthy aspect of the library's activities was reporting. According to the results of a certain period, librarians compiled reports and sent them to the governing bodies. Such reporting was necessary for the proper management of the library business in the size of the state. For the librarian, there were two types of reporting: daily (in fact, current statistics on the results of work for one day) and time-based (for a known period of time). The daily reporting was reduced to a daily count of the number of books issued, newly signed up subscribers, etc. Time-based reporting could be monthly or annual. Besides the statistical material, such a report also included the librarian's explanations to the text (Shtein, 1923: 96).

5. Conclusion

So, in the early 1920s, the librarianship in the USSR was formed taking into account the accumulated pre-revolutionary experience and international traditions. The Bolsheviks used the well-established American system of organizing librarianship and made only some additions and changes to it, taking into consideration the specifics of the proletarian state. The Bolsheviks also did not prohibit the decimal classification of books proposed by the Brussels International Bibliographic Institute. Nevertheless, there were special features in the training of personnel for libraries in Soviet Russia. Thus, the staff of librarians was trained on the principle of workshops for beginners, and hobby group activities for people who already had work experience.

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