

PLANNING THE MODERN PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING

*Gerard B. McCabe
James R. Kennedy
Editors*

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MODERN PUBLIC
LIBRARY BUILDING**

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A Member of the Greenwood Publishing Group

Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Planning for the modern public library building / edited by Gerard B. McCabe and James R. Kennedy.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 1-313-32155-8

1. Library buildings—planning. 2. Library buildings—Design and construction. 3. Public libraries. I. McCabe, Gerard B. II. Kennedy, James R. (James Robert), 1943–. Z679.5 2003 —dc21 2003051649

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2003051649
ISBN: 0-313-32155-8

First published in 2003

Libraries Unlimited
A Member of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
www.lu.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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PREFACE

As an architect specializing in libraries, I have been caught up in the rapid changes affecting the planning and design of libraries, new technologies, computers, rethinking of services and mission, effective use of personnel, and the effects of all of these on the functional and the aesthetic plan. At no point in history have there been as many changes in every aspect of the library. The display, storage, movement, recording, and retrieval of books—and even the very nature of books—are in a state of flux.

Libraries had a major revolution once before, in the nineteenth century, changing a system that had been static since the time of the Greeks and Romans. Books over the preceding centuries were treasures kept in closed collections monitored by caretaker librarians. With the revolution, books for the first time were placed on open shelves, the result of Dewey's development of a classification system that placed books in a universal order. Each book was assigned digits that placed it in line among all books. The public flocked to the open library shelves, accessing unrestricted materials for every possible purpose, especially education—the truly free library was born, and access to information bettered and advanced our democratic societies.

Now we witness a second major revolution in information allowing infinite access to all information from anywhere. This revolution also centers on digits—great, long lines of bits read by microchips anywhere at any time. This access to universal information provides a broad betterment for the world and its people. The library of Dewey's day is gone forever, replaced by the new library as a center for all forms of information and an equally important hub of community activities.