

Moving an Academic Library

by Sam E. Ifidon

*Relocating
a university library
in an African country
invites problems
very different
from those of moving
an American library.
The contrasts
are of interest.*

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In response to the crying need for better educational programs in Nigeria, the British Government in 1947 appointed W.H. Thorp, Chief Inspector of Technical Education, Nigeria, and F.J. Harlow, Principal, Chelsea Polytechnic, London, to:

1. make an assessment of the need for establishing a college or colleges of higher technical education with provision for training for the social services;
2. advise on organization and location of these colleges;
3. indicate how the new college organization and the institutions for technical education provided under the Ten Year Development Plan could be integrated into a complete technical education structure.

Three years after their appointment, Thorp and Harlow produced a report which recommended, inter alia, that there should be three branches of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology. In 1952-53, the Enugu, Ibadan, and Zaria branches of this institution opened with headquarters in Zaria.¹ In 1960 the Report of the Ashby Commission recommended that a university in the "Northern Region" of Nigeria with its headquarters in Zaria should integrate the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria.² In 1962, the Zaria branch of this college metamorphosed into Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

The library of the former college was housed in a small room which was later converted into a staff club. It was not until 1963 that a new library building was constructed at the cost of £39,000. The total area of this building was 25,000 square feet, with a book capacity of 70,000 volumes and a seating capacity of 120 readers. Just before the old library building was vacated in July, 1976, the bookstock totalled 150,000 volumes and the student population had risen to 12,000.

Construction of the new three-floor library building started in 1972. It was built at the cost of N2,000,000 (about U.S. \$3,000,000), with a total area of about 140,000 square feet, which can accommodate 500,000 volumes and seat 2,000 readers. It is the largest university library building in Tropical Africa south of the Sahara and north of the Kalahari.

Preliminary Arrangements

Administrative Considerations

By January 1976 it was reasonably certain that the move would take place that year. The consultants gave assurances that by April 15 at least 80 percent of the building would be available. The most logical timing for the move seemed to be between July and September when library service would be least disrupted. But in the four months prior to the move many things remained to be done: the purchase and erection of new shelves was part of the building contract, but the new furniture and equipment had not been taken care of; the amount of linear footage occupied by books in the main

subject classes had to be measured; the books had to be dusted and fumigated; the basic arrangement of the collection in the new building had to be resolved; the methods of making the move had to be determined; and sectional heads had to plan and lay out their new work areas.

Use of Committees

Since so much had to be accomplished in such a short period of time, it was decided to appoint several committees to work on various aspects of the move. The following committees were created:

1. *The Move Committee* was charged with the responsibility of: a) making a study of some recent library moves and highlighting the problems; b) evolving the logistics for the move; c) constituting a pressure group with a view to goading the Estate Department to action.

2. *The Subject Division Committee* was charged to: a) determine which items should constitute the Africana and Rare Book collections and to withdraw appropriate items from the open shelves; b) determine which items should go to the Arts and Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, Science and Technology, and Documents Rooms in the new library building; c) estimate the shelf space required for the items in each of these rooms.

3. *The Furnishing Committee* was charged to: a) collate all the lists of furniture and equipment required in the new library building and compiled by the sectional heads; b) obtain price quotations from various dealers for these items and submit the lists to the Estate Department which would execute the orders; c) bring to the notice of library administrators any items that had been inadvertently omitted; d) visit furniture makers, make a selection of standard items, and arrange for the immediate transportation of these to the new library building; e) distribute all the new furniture and equipment; f) take an inventory of the old items of furniture and equipment and advise library administration on the best method of disposal.

The Final Decisions

By the end of May, the following major decisions emerged from the recommendations of the committees:

1. The move would commence on Monday, July 19, 1976.

2. During the estimated period of the move (July 19-August 17) library services would be suspended.

3. The move would be carried out by the library staff with the assistance of some library science students and the Estate Department.

4. The move would take place between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. during a five-day week.

5. All books required dusting and fumigation in the old building before the move began.

6. The furniture and equipment manufacturers should deliver the ordered items directly to the new library for immediate installation.

7. The used furniture should be sold and the proceeds credited to the library furniture and equipment account.

8. The library staff of 224 (13 professional librarians, 20 paraprofessional staff, 180 clerical workers, and 11 library science students) should be divided into four groups: two groups in the old building to pack and load, and two groups to be in the new building to unload and arrange all items on the shelves.

The Move

The work of the committees did not end with the presentation of their recommendations, most of which were ratified after exhaustive discussions. The Move Committee still had to provide direction during the move, the Subject Division Committee was responsible for shelf-reading after the move, and the Furnishing Committee had to distribute the new furniture as lorry-loads arrived from the manufacturers.

Then came D-day—Monday, July 19, 1976. The move did not start, however, because the two six-ton lorries assigned to the operation did not show up. Contacts were immediately made with the Estate Department and before the error could be corrected the first day was over. The move actually began the next day.

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Furniture and Equipment Move

The original contract for the new library building included provisions for new shelves (excluding current periodical display shelves). During the early stages of preparations, one of the decisions made was that the offices and workrooms would be equipped with new furniture. Consequently the only old furniture and equipment to be moved were the card catalog, current periodical display shelves, library records (e.g., on-order and order-received files), the microforms and their readers, photocopying equipment, and some periodical backset shelves to supplement the new ones. Several members of the library staff who possessed a technical orientation were selected to move the equipment. The catalog trays were pulled from the main cabinet and were arranged in a logical sequence on the lorry; the compartment of the main cabinet into which each tray belonged bore the same letters as those on the tray. The same approach was adopted for library records and microforms. All shelving was dismantled and neatly packed; the microform readers and photocopying equipment were carefully lifted and loaded onto the lorry. These items were unloaded, and reassembled by the same group of library staff.

At the same time, lorry-loads of new furniture and equipment kept arriving on schedule. Members of the Furnishing Committee were ready to receive and locate the new equipment as it arrived.

Book Move

The library staff members who constituted Group 1, the group responsible for packing the books in the old building, were very familiar with the classification system. Packed boxes were labelled to correspond with the labelling on the shelves on which the books would be reshelved in the new building. Group 2, which was made up mainly of clerical staff, loaded boxes of books into the lorry. At the other end, in the

new building, Group 3, also mainly clerical staff, unloaded the boxes and carried them from the lorry to the areas designated on the boxes. Group 4 transferred the books to the shelf. Members of this group were also knowledgeable about the classification system.

Periodicals Move

When the book move had been completed, it became necessary, for two reasons, to regroup staff and reassign functions. First, the assignment of a new job would relieve staff of boredom which had already begun to manifest itself. Second, the move of periodicals would be slightly different from the move of books. Therefore, Group 1 labelled the backset shelves in both the old and the new buildings and sent the journals to Group 3 in the new building. Groups 2 and 4 were comprised of the same people as those who dismantled and reassembled the current display shelves. The current periodical titles were shelved on the display shelves by the same staff who had packed them in the old building. The leaders of these groups were professional members of the Periodicals Division. By August 29, 1976, the physical move was over.

Shelf Reading

The last major task was to ensure that every book was in its right place on the shelf. All of the professional and paraprofessional staff members took part in this exercise in order to complete it in good time. The shelf reading took one week to accomplish. On September 6, 1976 full library service was restored.

Problems

This move was not planned and executed without many problems. These problems will be treated under three separate subheadings: those that occurred before the move, those encountered during the move, and those experienced even after the move was completed.

Pre-Move Problems

The original contract date for handing over the building was May, 1974. But three factors made this impossible. The first was an industrial dispute arising from the popular Udoji Salary Review in Nigeria. The workers at the site, on several occasions, staged a sit-down strike when the contractors failed to pay them their Udoji awards. The contractors could not, of course, pay the workers this award without asking for more money from their client—Ahmadu Bello University. Negotiations for the additional increase consumed the better part of 12 months. Second, there was a shortage of building materials. Most of the building materials were not available in Nigeria and had to be imported. Therefore, when existing stocks ran out, construction work came to a halt. Even when the ships bringing imported materials arrived at Lagos, there was no room for them to berth. Ships often waited weeks for their turn to berth. This port congestion constituted the third factor.

Consequently, by 1976 when the move took place the building was two years behind schedule. The delays caused pressure to be exerted on the library's administration by two groups. The first group was composed of students who had no seats in the old library building. Their anger was greatest between January and May each year when they were preparing for their examinations. A student demonstration

was very narrowly averted in 1975. Pressure also came from the other university units which were waiting to take over the old building. These were the Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies, the School of Basic Studies Library, and sections of the Bursary and the university administration.

Problems during the Move

In a typical western country, library administrators who are planning a move may choose from several moving methods. Subject to other considerations, they may wish to use mechanical devices such as conveyor belts; they can hire professional library movers; they may use book trucks and special carriers; or they may rely on manual methods and crews of library workers.³ But in a developing country where there are neither mechanical devices nor professional library movers, the library administrator is left with no other method than the manual method and the use of library staff. As has already been indicated, the two six-ton lorries which were assigned for the move did not turn up on the day the move was originally scheduled to begin. Although the drivers were employees of the university, the lorries were hired from private transporters. Nobody could guarantee that they were in good mechanical condition. There were, therefore, occasional mechanical breakdowns. Toward the end of the move only one lorry was regularly available.

A second problem was the inadequate number of the 42" x 18" x 12" boxes supplied. Originally, 300 of the boxes were requested, but since it was felt that they were useful only for the move, the number was reduced by 200. As a result there were not enough boxes for the loaders and unloaders.

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Although canopies were erected to forestall damage to the books by rain, sometimes the rain was so heavy that a large quantity of water settled on the tarpaulins; at other times heavy storms blew off the canopies. Above all, since the muddy surroundings had not been landscaped, the lorries often got stuck in the mud. In all cases, there was a delay in setting things right before the move resumed.

A fourth problem was the need to combat the low morale of some staff members. Naturally, there were some lazy staff who tended to influence the hard-working and enthusiastic staff. Library administrators had to rely on persuasion rather than on punitive measures to keep all hands on deck.

Problems after the Move

The circumstances before the move were such that the library administration was bent on moving if only the contractors could give assurance of 80 percent satisfaction. This was precisely the percentage of the building that was ready for occupancy by July 20, 1976 when the move began. The structural defects which were detected in the building during the final inspection were still being remedied as the

building was turned over; in many areas electrical installations had to be completed; even in areas where work had been completed there were problems arising from the use of faulty chokes and starters.

The central air conditioning plant had been installed, but it had not been tested. Certain basic mistakes had been made during construction, and these had to be rectified before the air conditioner could be commissioned and tested.

Broken pipes and flooding of the toilets also occurred after occupancy. True, the library was in a hurry to move, but this did not excuse the slipshod work by the contractors. The only consolation was a clause in the contract which stipulated that the contractors would rectify any fault in the building at no extra charge discovered within a six-month period. But the presence of the contractors and of the furniture manufacturers who were still assembling the shelves and reading chairs bothered not only library workers but also library users when library service was resumed.

No doubt, some of these problems can be attributed to the unfinished nature of the building. The Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago had a similar experience. Robert Moran placed his thumb on this issue when he said:

Pressure to occupy a new building grows as completion draws near and it is not unusual to find buildings occupied before they are entirely finished.... The most serious problem the mover faced because of the unfinished state of the building was the possibility that the moving work flow might be stopped.... A second problem resulting from the unfinished state of the building was the lack of required staging areas.... The tradesmen, their equipment and the building material still in or coming into the building occupied much of the space which had been planned for use as the mover's staging areas.⁴

Conclusion

In spite of the many overwhelming problems, the Kashim Ibrahim Library, the main library of Ahmadu Bello University, moved its 150,000 volumes and 3,000 periodicals in about six weeks. The move required two weeks, and the resumption of full library service was only one week behind schedule. But considering the fact that there were not mechanical devices to facilitate the move, that the problems, especially the ones encountered during the move, were so complex, that no hired labor was available and that the period of effective planning—only about four months—was short, the move can be described as a huge success.

After the move, the staff members heaved a deep sigh of relief and satisfaction. The embargo placed on annual leave was lifted and many applied for their leave. It was a well-deserved rest for them!

References

¹W.H. Thorp and F.J. Harlow, Report on a Technical College Organization for Nigeria, laid on the Table of the Legislative Council as Sessional Paper No. 11 of 1950 (Lagos, Government Printer, 1950).

²Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, Commission on Postschool Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria, Investment in Education, Report (Lagos, 1960), pp. 41-46.

³Cf. American Library Association, *Library Technology Project—Moving Library Materials*, rev. ed. by P. Spyers-Duran (Chicago: ALA, 1965).

⁴Robert F. Moran, Jr., "Moving a Large Library," *Special Libraries* 63, no. 4 (April 1972):163-171.

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