

Profile of an Indiana Career in Libraries:**Harold J. Sander**


---

**Robert L. Logsdon**  
 Associate Director for Public Services  
 Indiana State Library

---

One of the sad commentaries that can be made about the library profession is that we are too neglectful of our history. We tend to be so caught up in the activities of the present and planning so hard for the needs of the future that we frequently have no time to reflect on the accomplishments of the past. This can be said not only concerning our profession as a whole, but in regard to our individual institutions and past leaders as well. Yet it can truthfully be said that without the effort and work of our predecessors we wouldn't be where we are today, for better or worse. Without proper recognition of their efforts we cannot fully appreciate what we have and anticipate where we are going. Therefore, it behooves us to take the time to look at the work of those hearty individuals who paved the way for us and to pay them the tribute they justly deserve.

The following is a brief biographical sketch of one of our recent colleagues and, while space limitations prohibit giving more than a cursory glance at his life and career, the sketch will provide the reader with an appreciation for the work and accomplishments of Harold J. Sander, who di-

rected the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library System from 1956-1971. (an interview of Harold J. Sander by the author, was conducted in Indianapolis on August 16, 1986. All direct quotations from Mr. Sander in this article are from that interview.)

Sander was born July 8, 1913 in Evansville, Indiana and grew up in and around that community. He attended local schools and was graduated from Reitz High School in 1931. This was during the Depression, and he discovered that jobs were difficult to obtain. Eventually he found a job with a flour mill for the meager salary of one dollar a day! Although he ultimately was able to earn ten dollars per week he continued looking for other employment opportunities. He recalls, "they were building a new library in Evansville. I thought, well, with a new building, there may be a job. So I applied there and sure enough I was appointed as, I guess they called it, a page for the county system. Later I was a truck driver and book shelver. I started to work there on April Fools Day in 1932."

From the beginning Sander knew that this work had no future, so he

[REDACTED]  
APR 28 1983  
[REDACTED]



*On December 31, 1981, Harold J. Sander received a "Key to the City"  
from the Mayor of Indianapolis, Richard Lugar.  
Photo by Ivan Christensen.*

enrolled at Evansville College on a part-time basis. Eventually he was able to attend classes in the mornings and work at the library in the afternoons and evenings. He continued this arrangement for several years and was graduated in 1938 with an A.B. degree in social sciences and history. It was during this period that he developed what was to become a life-long pattern of combining extracurricular activities with a busy work schedule. In the yearbook for his last year in college, Sander was listed as participating in the choir, the college quartet, the debate team and Phi Zeta Fraternity, as well as numerous other activities. In addition he was chosen a Campus Notable his senior year.

By this time he was interested in a library career and consulted colleagues at the Evansville Public Library on how to proceed. They encouraged him to attend Columbia University in New York City because "they figured that getting a job there and working would be simpler in a larger city than in a small college town."

He followed their advice and began the fall semester of 1938 attending library school and working part-time in Columbia's School of Business Library. In 1939 Sander received his B.S. degree in library science and was offered a full-time job in the business library. He accepted this offer and states that "having lived there in New York City a year as a student and seeing nothing and doing nothing because I was so darned busy. . . . it would be nice to spend a little time there and so I took the job." He remembers, "I guess I was the loneliest guy in the place because the people I knew when I was in school were gone. The school crop, they were busy up to their necks in work. I did finally meet a young woman, a library school student, near the end of the school term and that was it." The young woman was Edna

Worthington of Plainville, Massachusetts, and they subsequently married on August 9, 1941.

Prior to his marriage, Sander decided to return to his native state and he obtained a position in the Reference Division of the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis. In July 1941 he was appointed head of that section.

With the advent of World War II he joined the Army and served in the photo interpretation section of the XVIII Airborne Corp in Europe. While away he didn't forget the State Library and according to the 1945 April/June issue of *Library Occurrent*, "M/Sgt. Harold J. Sander, Chief of the Reference Division on leave, sent to the Library from Germany an interesting collection of Nazi propaganda which were on exhibit in May."

Following his discharge from military service he returned to Indianapolis and resumed his duties at the State Library. He also renewed his involvement with the Indiana Library Association [ILA] in which he had become active prior to the war.

Almost immediately he was swept up in organization activities and was appointed chairman for the subcommittee on Business Services of the Public Relations Committee. In this capacity he announced in *Library Occurrent* the formation of a monthly informative newsletter "to promote and increase library service to business and industry." This newsletter was entitled *Focus On Business and Industry* and made its appearance in April, 1946. It was published as a joint publication of the Indiana State Library and ILA with Sander serving as editor.

Shortly afterward he recalls that some of the members of ILA "lamented that we [the Association] need better communication, we need

a publication. I opened up my big mouth and with Brigham's permission I said I would give it a whirl. I was the editor, the business manager, I helped with stamping and mailing them. Part of it was done at my home and part of it at the State Library." (Harold Brigham was Director of the Indiana State Library, 1942-1962.)

In the first issue of the newsletter which came out in July 1947, Richard Sealock, then president of ILA, wrote, "The idea of a bulletin is not new with the Association. For some time members have felt the need for this. Only the perseverance of our new editor. . . . [Harold J. Sander] . . . proved that it can be done. . . ."

"His convictions that a bulletin could be nearly self-supporting plus the ability he had displayed as the editor of *Focus on Business and Industry* led to his appointment to edit the new bulletin. In fact there would not have been an ILA Newsletter if it had not been for Mr. Sander. With a quiet display of good taste and a modest pride Mr. Sander suggests that we use the name *Focus On Indiana Libraries* for our Newsletter." Sander edited this publication until 1950.

During the months of July and August, 1948 he served as Acting Director of the Indiana State Library while Harold Brigham, the Director, was on leave of absence serving as the interim Executive Secretary of the American Library Association. Remembering this time he says, "This was for a relatively short time. It was an honor. It was an ego inflating thing. I didn't do much. You couldn't in that limited time. The main point was to keep things going and hold the place together until bigger decisions were made by others."

Shortly afterward, however, he left the State Library to become head of the Business Branch of the Indianapolis Public Library. Not long after

he assumed this position a brief notice appeared in the December 11, 1948 issue of the *Indianapolis News* which said: "Convinced that many business executives and others do not know about the many services of the business branch of the Indianapolis Public Library, Harold J. Sander, new librarian, is doing something to correct this situation. Mr. Sander, who has talent as a salesman and a writer as well as being a librarian, plans to sell the public on greater use of the Library's extensive facilities through means of a new weekly publication, *Your Cue To Business*."

During this period he also taught a reference course at Butler University as well as continuing his involvement in professional activities. He was chosen president of the Indiana Chapter of the Special Libraries Association in 1950 and served in the same capacity for the Indiana Library Association in 1951. Another organization in which he became involved was the Industrial Editors Association. He recalls, "I was part of it and I was accepted, and I was always pleased about that because it gave me a little knowledge and background in public relations and working with business people."

Looking to increase his income and expand his administrative experience, Sander began seeking the directorship of a public library and in August of 1951 was appointed to the head position of the Roanoke [Virginia] Public Library. A new library building was under construction and he remembers it as an "ideal place to begin." Roanoke was under a city manager form of government and the library board was advisory, the routines of the library were well established and "unless you fell on your face and were a complete dud you couldn't fail."

As usual he became involved in a number of outside activities upon his arrival in Roanoke. He joined and

participated in the Virginia Library Association; initiated and wrote a weekly newspaper column entitled "Scanning In The Public Library."

In 1956 he learned that the directorship of the Indianapolis Public Library was open and he applied for that position. According to the July 11, 1956 issue of the *Indianapolis Star* he was selected from among thirty applicants to become the ninth City Librarian. He assumed his new duties on September 1st of the same year and on October 14th wrote his perception of the role of the public library for the *Indianapolis Star* magazine.

"I believe that the Indianapolis Public Library is potentially an important agency to help achieve a better future. . . .No other public tax-supported institution has so much to offer to so many people as does a public library. Here, for the effort of reading, information comes to those who seek it, education comes to those who work for it, understanding comes to those who allow it, inspiration comes to those who want it, and wisdom comes to those who look for it. The public library is a storehouse of printed knowledge where the accumulated knowledge of the past is organized and systematized for the convenient use of the citizen. In the public library the decisions for the future may be planned after interpreting the experiences of the past."

At the time of his arrival the public library was under the control of the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners. In recalling the transition from Roanoke to Indianapolis he remembers "it was a little confusing to say the least, to go from a city manager form of government where your board has only advisory authority, to under the school board where they have all the authority [and] you are a little fish in a big pond. The school

board was primarily involved in the formal educational system (the public schools), and the library was stuck on as an adjunct. You had to learn to live with that. You had to learn to roll with the punch. You had to learn when to speak up and when to shut up. You also had to get along. And sometimes you had to grit your teeth. As I look back on it, there were ups and downs."

From the beginning he saw this relationship as a limiting factor to the growth of the library system. Also the library served only residents within the city boundaries and county residents used the library heavily, although some did pay a fee to purchase non-resident cards, since there was no major library service in the county. Thus a major concern of his was that a separate county system, similar to others around the country, might develop and thus dilute the tax base and fracture library services if a number of systems were to operate within the county.

Although he worried about these areas, the library system nevertheless underwent considerable change and expansion during the first ten years of his administration. Among the changes and/or improvements were the opening of a new Broadway Branch in October, 1958; remodeling the Central Library in 1960; opening the Eagle Branch in rented quarters in December, 1960; opening Emerson Branch in March, 1962; building an Annex to the Central Library in 1963; and the opening a new Shelby Branch in November, 1965.

Organizational changes were also occurring during this time at the Central Library. Three primary subject divisions were created, the Art Division, the Science and Technology Division, and the Social Science Division. The Films Division was established in 1967.

Development of county wide library service continued to be a primary focus of Sander's administration. Although there were years of investigation, frustration and hard work, the efforts paid off in 1966 when the Marion County Public Library District was created with its own separate board, contracting with the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners for library services. The library's annual report described it this way, "On March 14, 1966, the Marion County Public Library District was created. The Marion County Public Library Board and the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners both passed resolutions stating their intent to work toward a single, combined library district as soon as possible. A service contract has been entered into whereby the Indianapolis Public Library will provide 'Open Doors' service to anyone living in the library districts. Also provided are administrative and processing services as new agencies are opened to serve Marion County."

A historian of the library system has noted in the booklet *Historical Highlights* that "unquestionably the great achievement of Mr. Sander's administration was the expansion of Library service to most of Marion County."

Finally, after years of hard work, planning and waiting on the part of Sander, his staff and other interested parties, a combined city-county library board was created and the school board divested itself of the public library responsibility. Sander wrote in the library's annual report that "June 4, 1968 is the red letter day of the year, the decade and the 20th Century for this library system. It was on June 4 that at concurrent sessions of the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners and the Marion County Public Library Board, the proper legal actions were taken to

merge the city and county (except for Beech Grove and Speedway) into one public library system, under one seven-member Library Board." Thus was created the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library (I-MCPL) system.

Services had been expanding to the county residences, and rental branches in shopping areas soon followed. Wanamaker Branch was opened in April, 1969, and the Wayne Branch began operation in December of the same year. In addition, the Northeast and Westlane Branches were remodeled and enlarged.

With the development of the county-wide system and the separation from the school system, other goals could now be addressed. On February 26, 1969 the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Foundation was established. Sander had been involved with starting a library foundation in Roanoke and he recalls "that I brought over a copy of the organizational statement and by-laws and they were the basis for the foundation established here." The foundation thus provided a mechanism by which gifts to the library could be received and appropriately administered.

His involvement with outside groups continued as well, and he served as an officer in many of them. Among those in which he was president were: the Portfolio (1964-65), Greater Indianapolis Information, Inc., (1964), the Indianapolis Literary Club (1969) and again for the Indiana Library Association (1969). He also served on the Council of the American Library Association from 1966-1969.

The library system continued to prosper, opening new branches and serving the communities of Marwood, Lawrence and Southport. The Central Library was air-conditioned and the collection reached a million volumes in 1971.

The years of service and hard work were not without their toll, however, and in 1970 on the advice of his physician Sander took a brief leave of absence during the summer. In 1971 his cardiologist warned him of impending coronary problems. On October 1, he tendered his resignation as director to the Board effective at the end of that year and was assigned to be head of the Broadway Branch, thus ending over fifteen years as director.

As one of his last acts as chief administrator he wrote an eight page statement entitled "Sander's Soliloquy" in which he gave his hopes, aspirations, and suggestions for I-MCPL. In it he made the following comment, "A Public Library's quality is measured by three things: its collections; its staff; and its service points (buildings). This Director is proudest of the staff. In fifteen years here we have managed, in my humble opinion, to gather together and maintain a group of individuals who are conscientious and dedicated. They seek to bring together the knowledge and information civilized man has acquired, transmit it via the printed word to the mind of man today, and preserve it for the citizens of tomorrow. This dealing with ideas is to most of our staff an exciting and rewarding experience. From the leadership of our administrators through the ranks to the shelveers of books and washers of windows, the I-MCPL staff is to me the finest in the world. I have never seen a more dedicated or earnest group laboring in the educational processes vineyard."

This respect was reciprocated at a reception honoring him on December 31, 1971 when staff, past and present, as well as friends, and dignitaries came to show their appreciation. The highlight of the festivities was the presentation of a "key to the City" by Richard Lugar, former school board member and, at that time, Mayor of the City.

Sander served the system for another year and a half as head of the Broadway Branch and then retired in 1973. Looking back he recalls this as a difficult and frustrating period for him and, while necessary for his health, he felt frustrated to have had to terminate his administrative career at the relatively young age of 58. In hindsight, however, he can state, "I guess I made the right decision because I'm still here." He has since withstood two coronary attacks, one in 1982 and another in 1984.

Although no longer actively associated with the system, Sander is hardly forgotten, and in May of 1985 he received a plaque from the Library Board which read:

Harold J. Sander  
Director of Public Libraries 1956-1971  
In recognition and sincere appreciation  
of his efforts in establishing the  
Indianapolis-Marion County  
Public Library System.

Commenting on this, he remarked "it's a beautiful, meaningful plaque. . . To get this sort of thing fourteen years after you've gone really touched me. The board doesn't really know me. . . They're all new and that they should do that in recognition of my work really warmed my heart."

This plaque, given years after his retirement, demonstrates the points mentioned at the beginning of this article, that where we work and what we do are the products of our predecessors. And because of this they deserve our "recognition and sincere appreciation." It is hoped that this biographical sketch in its small way provides tribute for a job well done.