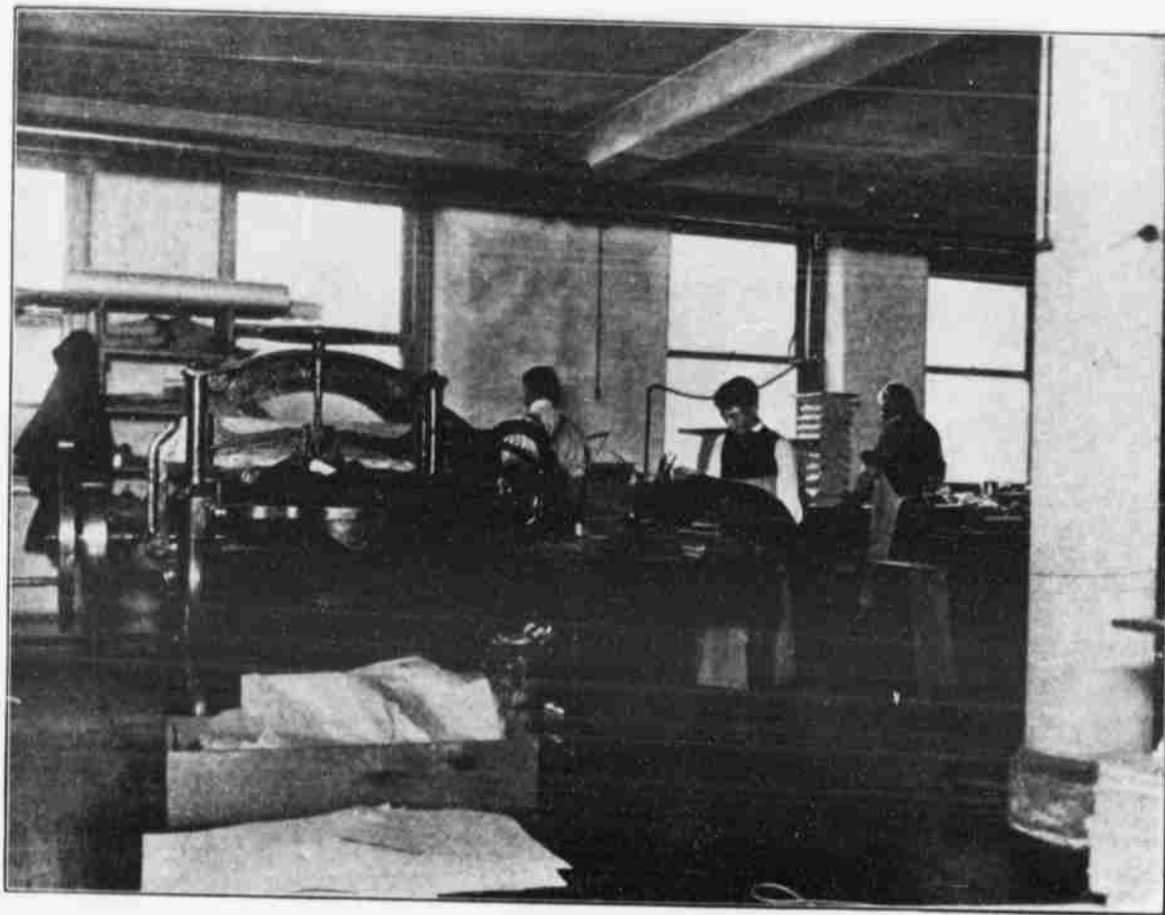


# Municipal Book Bindery a Success



BOOKS READY FOR THE SHELVES—  
Photo by a Staff Artist.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE WORK ROOM OF THE MUNICIPAL BINDERY—Photo by a Staff Artist.



LETTERING THE BACKS OF BOUND  
VOLUMES—Photo by a Staff Artist.

**A**LTHOUGH few have been aware of it, the municipal book bindery has become an established feature of public activity in many of our pushing American cities. With us, however, the municipal book bindery is limited by the conditions out of which it has developed. It is not, as might be popularly supposed, an institution where the citizen may take his books and magazines to be dressed in handsome covers and returned to him for his private use free of cost; it is not an institution bidding for business or turning out volumes to compete with those with which private enterprise floods the market; it is not an experiment in socialism put forth as a feeler to make way for the municipal bakery or the municipal department store. But it is none the less a reality—owned and operated by the municipality and engaged in binding books and periodicals right through the year, while its output of books is freely accessible to all the citizens and residents entitled to participate in the benefits accruing from progressive local government. This municipal book bindery is a manufacturing concern operated in connection with a free public circulating library, devoting its energies exclusively to the rejuvenation of much abused volumes that as instruments of entertainment and instruction pass from hand to hand among those whose book desires outrun their resources to buy books of their own.

Quite a number of municipal book binderies are in active operation in this country, chief among them that have been called to my attention being found in the public libraries in Boston, Pittsburg, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Newark, Peoria, Kansas City and Omaha. Some of them have been maintained for many years, but I am going to describe only the last named, because by reason of having just successfully completed its first year, it offers fresh and exact figures relating to the cost of installation

running expense and work performed that may serve for general observation and conclusions. With no special advantages in its favor and no special obstacles to overcome, I believe it may be taken as a fair type of the municipal book bindery, whose experience will be valuable for other growing public libraries.

The Omaha public library is closely approaching the point in its career that marks its twenty-fifth anniversary. It began in a very small way in 1877, when the remnants of a circulating library supported by subscription was bequeathed to the city by an expiring library association. Its growth has been slow but steady. Its meager resources were utilized under economic management to minister to the increasing demands of the reading public in a rapidly expanding western city. Not until it found itself eight years ago housed in a magnificent new library building erected with the assistance of a generous draft drawn upon the future did even those most intimately identified with it realize to what proportions their public library had attained.

Any one who will examine the budget of a public library, and more particularly of a public circulating library, will find that disregarding the outlay for salaries and maintenance of building the most striking of the steadily recurring items, outside of the cost of new books and periodicals, is that for binding and rebinding. The book borrowers literally consume the books. The popularity of the volume may be fairly tested by the rapidity with which its life is worn away. Its life when exposed to dangerous disintegration may be saved or prolonged only by a vigorous treatment—amputation, vivisection, grafting of leather parts or complete renewal of lacerated exterior tegument. Unless the binder comes to the rescue the book's usefulness is comparatively soon outlived and if the demand for it continues it must be replaced

with a new volume at still greater expense. The cost of rebinding is a burden to be borne just as legitimate as the original purchase price and the same is true of the binding of the host of periodicals whose completed volumes and half volumes are constantly recruited from the files of the reading room.

Although the increasing length of binders' bills arrested attention from time to time, the question of expense was not the most troublesome problem presented. Under agreements in force with local book binders in Omaha the public library could send books to any one of three or four establishments, which as a mark of special favor and evidence of public spirit would consent to undertake the work at profitable commercial figures. Of course they were imbued with the idea that they were greatly accommodating the library by coming to its rescue at all and explained that at the prices fixed they could not possibly profit except for the fact that library binding was used to fill in between other orders. That this was literally true was constantly evidenced by the fact that books sent out to be rebound were returned only after a lapse of from three to six months' time, while the character of the work was frequently of an indifferent variety. As the year's binding bills began to exceed \$1,500, it was repeatedly suggested that better workmanship, quicker time and greater general satisfaction could be obtained by installing a bindery for the library than by continuing the contract system. Notwithstanding correspondence on the subject several times with other public libraries binding their own books, action had been deferred from the fear that the number of volumes regularly calling for repair might not suffice to keep a bindery busy with even the minimum number of employees. But at last patience ceased to be a virtue; the delays and shortcomings of the outside binders made self-protection a necessity

and the directors of the library reluctantly and with some misgiving gave the order for the machinery and materials that were to install a municipal plant ready to commence operation January 1, 1901. When the bills were added up the outlay on bindery account for the year was:

Machinery ..... \$5,000.00  
Material (one year)..... 381.53

While this gave a total nearly \$200 above the original estimates furnished by supposed experts, it was by no means alarming. Ample space in the basement of the library building afforded a convenient location without additional expense. One head binder had been employed at \$18 a week and one woman assistant at \$9 a week throughout the year and one assistant binder at \$14 a week for about a month to catch up with back work, these wages being gauged by the scale of the local bookbinders' union in force throughout the city. The outlay on salary account was therefore \$1,386.05, which added to the cost of materials and deducting \$62.76 as the value of materials on hand raises the total current expense of the bindery for the year 1902 to \$1,704.82. The output of the bindery with the prices that would have been charged under antecedent contracts was:

	Cost Under Old Contract.
Binding, 1901:	
226 red binding at 50 cents.....	\$113.00
293 magazines at 75 cents.....	219.75
356 canvas at 70 cents.....	249.20
284 new backs, no sewing, at 25 cents.....	71.00
27 full sheep at \$1.50.....	40.50
11 newspapers at \$2.....	22.00
54 half-morocco at \$2.25.....	121.50
Total.....	\$1,777.20
Total number of books bound.....	3,178
Average cost per volume.....	\$5.59

The difference in favor of the municipal bindery figures out about \$75, while reduced to the average cost per volume it is 53.5 cents, as against 55.9 cents that would have been demanded by the private binderies. The \$75 doubtless represents no more than the interest on investment and deprecia-

tion of plant, so we may say that tested solely by the financial exhibit no appreciable difference can be discerned.

The advantages of the municipal bindery are, nevertheless, real and tangible. "I would not advise giving up our own bindery under any ordinary circumstances," says our librarian. "The figures for the cost do not show the benefits gained. When we sent the books out to be bound it took us on an average of four months to get them back and during all that time they were necessarily out of circulation and out of our reach. A book out of circulation or removed from the shelves is just the same as a book out of the library; it might as well be lost or destroyed. On the other hand, since we have been doing our own work the books rebound have been off the shelves on an average only two weeks, and volumes in active demand can be recovered and repaired in half that time under stress. I am satisfied, too, that we are securing a much better grade of binding. The outside binderies not only used library books to fill in slack time, but they were tempted all the time to use odds and ends of leather and boards for our books. Between inferior materials and inattentive workmanship the library's books naturally suffered severely. In our own bindery our books have the best materials and most careful work, no other orders having preference over them, rare volumes requiring special handling are readily protected and all the numerous vexations of slighted work avoided. If it cost us more to bind our books ourselves than to send them outside, it would still be better to maintain our own bindery."

If the first year is a fair test no hesitation need be felt in pronouncing the municipal bindery established in connection with the Omaha Public Library a success. And what it can achieve in this field can be accomplished by any progressive public circulating library with 50,000 volumes or more and annual resources approximating \$20,000.

VICTOR ROSEWATER.



TOOLING THE BACKS OF FINISHED  
VOLUMES—Photo by a Staff Artist.



MAGAZINE FILE ROOM—MATERIAL READY FOR BINDER—Photo by a Staff Artist.



PREPARING TO PUT ON THE COVERS—  
Photo by a Staff Artist.