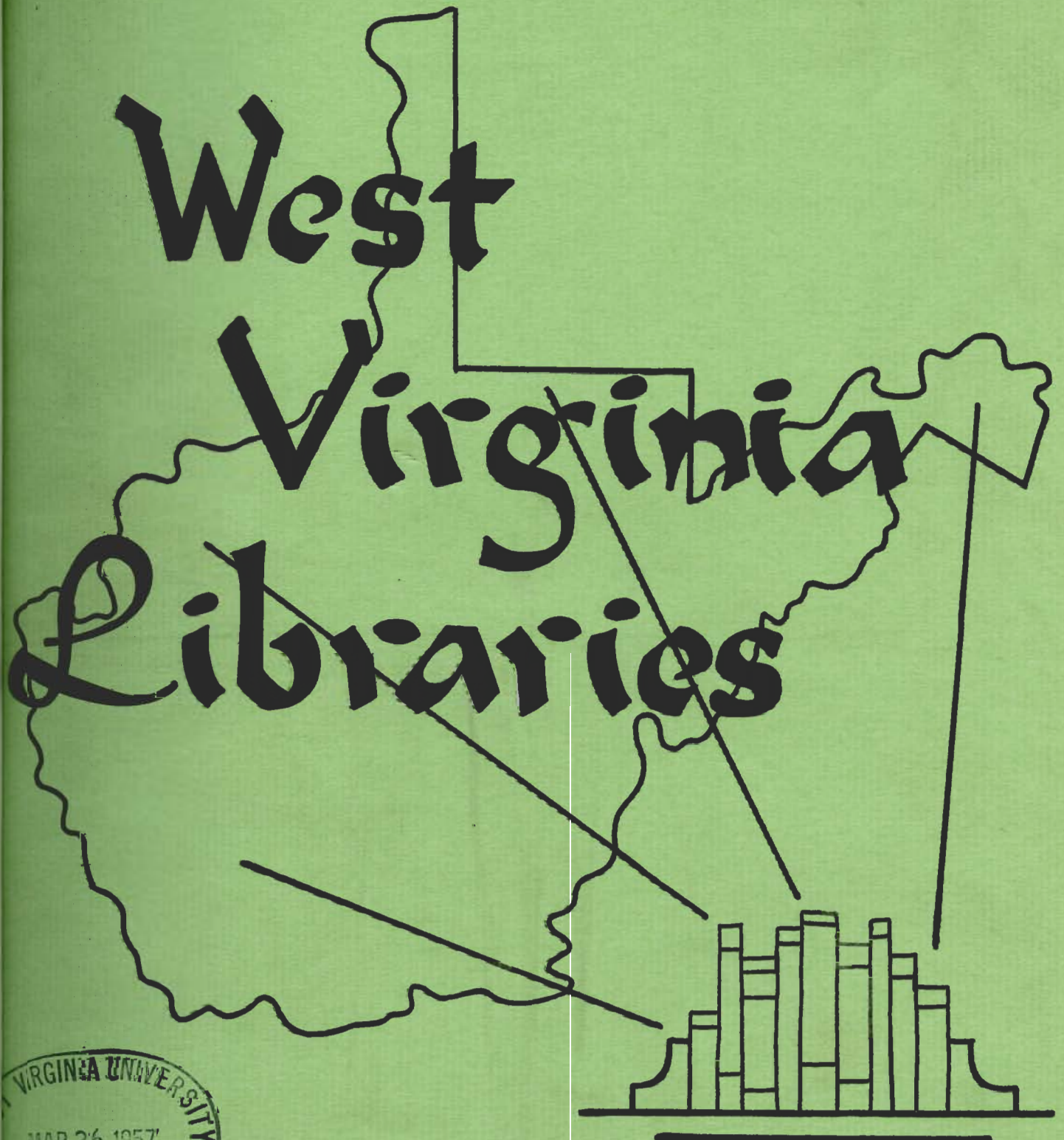


West Virginia Libraries



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Editor: Robert Munn. West Virginia University. Morgantown, W. Va.
Associate Editor and Business Manager: Vito Brenni. West Virginia University.

Editorial Assistants:

Public Libraries . . . Mrs. Adrian Belt. Waitman Barbe Public Library. Morgantown.

School Libraries (Northern District). Mildred Conrad. Martinsburg High School.

School Libraries (Southern District). . . Faith Kessell. Dunbar High School.

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AN ATTEMPT TO SECURE BETTER FINANCIAL
SUPPORT BY SPECIAL LEGISLATION

By

OMAR BACON, LIBRARIAN
HUNTINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

The fact that two of the largest library systems in the state, Cabell and Kanawha Counties, made efforts to secure special library legislation this year indicates that the present library law needs careful review. A discussion of the reasons why these libraries sought special legislation might shed light on the functioning of the present law and perhaps suggest areas for revision. This article will deal largely with the situation as experienced in the Huntington Public Library.

The West Virginia Public Library law as revised in 1945 is a good law. It provides for most of the basic elements that are needed for formation and operation of a public library. It makes it easy for any of the three levying bodies--City, County, or Board of Education--singly or jointly to establish and provide library service in any of the political units. This ease, however, has not made for a proliferation of libraries in the state. The majority of the libraries organized under the law secure their support from but one of the levying bodies. The Huntington Public Library, however, receives support from all three levying bodies. This brings to light some of the weaknesses in the law.

Though the library law provides that more than one levying body may contribute to the support of the library, it does not authorize these funds to be placed in a single account. Instead, each participating levying body must ask the library to use their own particular procedures for purchases and for payments. As a result,

we in the Huntington Public Library have to live with three different order procedures, payment methods, payroll policies, and keep three sets of books. Each levying body has its own requirements within which the library must function. Some examples might illustrate the confusion. One group of employees are participants of teacher retirement, social security and Workmen's Compensation, and are eligible for various group insurance plans. Those paid from funds of another levying body get only social security. The library, from its fines and gifts, pays for their Workmen's Compensation. Some employees are paid monthly while others are paid semi-monthly. The purchasing routine is constantly a source of much trouble since invoices often get mailed to the levying bodies instead of to the Library and must be forwarded.

Budget making and defending becomes extremely difficult when three levying bodies are developed. The budget must be developed to make a unified library program and then split into three segments. Because the library is an auxiliary agency and not an integral part of the levying body itself, there develops a dearth of felt responsibility for the library. As a result there is a tendency to thrust the responsibility to the other levying bodies with the result that the Library becomes a sort of stepchild. Added to this is the problem of defending the budget before three levying bodies with a total of 22 elected officials and numerous appointed ones. The Library Board and staff must spend great amounts of time in these efforts.

