

# On the Way to Becoming: The First 50 Years of NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES

by Frances Bryant Bradburn

*"Has the magazine, North Carolina Libraries, justified its existence, or should it be discontinued?"<sup>1</sup>*

This was the question that North Carolina Library Association President Hoyt Galvin of the Charlotte Public Library asked the association's executive board in June 1943. The response was heartily affirmative to continue, and it was backed up by a decision—in wartime—to increase membership dues from \$1.00 to \$1.50 to cover the cost of journal publication.<sup>2</sup> This was a victory indeed for a state library journal not yet two years old, and which had already undergone the first of many changes in editorship and emphasis.

The first editor had been Duke University's John J. Lund who, in his first and only issue, acknowledged NCLA's long history of "procrastination and timidity"<sup>3</sup> in establishing an official association publication. Since the turn of the century, the North Carolina Library Association had published a number of occasional documents, including the program of its first annual meeting (May 4, 1904) and "What a Library Commission Can Do for North Carolina" (1908). But once the commission was in place, many of the publication responsibilities that the association might have been expected to undertake were assumed by this state agency.

One of the most prominent of these publications, and certainly the spiritual ancestor of *North Carolina Libraries*, was the *North Carolina Library Bulletin*. Volume 1, number 1, of the *Bulletin* announced its purpose: "The Commission recognizes the essential importance of organized communication between it and the local libraries of the state and hopes through the medium of the *North Carolina Library Bulletin* to bring the libraries into closer relation with the Commission and with one another...[L]ibrarians throughout the state are requested to send in items concerning the work done in their respective libraries."<sup>4</sup> Thus began close to twenty-five

years of "quarterly" issues which were "...mailed free to librarians, county superintendents and others interested in library development. It contained information about the Commission, suggestions beneficial to libraries, book lists, news of libraries and librarians in North Carolina, and general articles pertaining to libraries and education."<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the *Bulletin*, a victim of the Depression, ceased publication in 1932. What was intended to be only temporary became permanent. One can only speculate that the void its demise left created the groundswell for what was to become *North Carolina Libraries*.

The actual foundation for the journal was laid when the 1939 NCLA Constitution added the provision that "The Executive Committee may contract for such publications as may be desirable for furthering the interests of the association."<sup>6</sup> With this constitutional precedent in place, the new president of the association, Mary Peacock Douglas of the State Department of Public Instruction, outlined her vision in a letter to the executive board: "I am very much interested in having a printed bulletin for the Association at least once each year during the next biennium."<sup>7</sup> In spite of the fact that this was only a vision (her line item for "NCLA Bulletins, 3 @ \$25.00 = \$75.00" was crossed out of her 6/27/40 handwritten Executive Board notes<sup>8</sup>), a four-page *North Carolina Library Association News* summarizing a research study in "Use of Books in Libraries in North Carolina Colleges," pending legislation, and conference information was distributed at the 1941 biennial meeting in Greensboro.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that it took the war, however, actually to propel *North Carolina Libraries* into existence. New association president Guy R. Lyle from Women's College of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, continued Ms. Douglas's push

for a publication. While one can only assume that his appointment as director of the National Defense Book Campaign encouraged him to use his office to make that final move for publication, journal emphasis during his tenure certainly reflected war concerns. Articles such as "Priority Rating for Libraries" which described how libraries qualified for certain materials during the war (April 1942); "War and North Carolina Libraries" (November 1942); and the "Reading Interests of Soldiers" (May 1944) reflected new, effective ways of stimulating the work of the state's librarians.

After the first issue, the responsibility for *North Carolina Libraries* followed the president of the association, and he or she appears to have taken a heavy hand in its creation. At some point in 1946/47, however, the "tradition" surfaced that the first vice president of the association should edit the journal.<sup>10</sup> Under this system, the frequency of *North Carolina Libraries* fluctuated dramatically, perhaps reflecting the variable interest of the vice presidents.

In 1951, after much lobbying on the journal's behalf by prominent librarians such as the University of North Carolina's Louis Round Wilson,<sup>11</sup> a series of "experimental" issues was undertaken. Rather than having the editorship determined by the elected office of vice president, the president appointed a temporary editorial board to publish the journal while the entire publication process was studied.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately for both the journal and the association, from the beginning the financial commitment for *North Carolina Libraries* was assumed almost exclusively by the Joseph Ruzicka Bindery. This arrangement was convenient for both the journal and the association, albeit the union was not always a happy one. Proofing errors were frequent, one set so horrible that the entire journal was reissued!<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the subsidy was such that the editors

could, for the most part, focus on content rather than advertising solicitation.

And content was a major concern from the beginning. While the first issue had only general information on committees and Victory Book Campaign local representatives, the second, April 1942, contained a study on "Book Stock and Acquisition in College Libraries."<sup>14</sup> This was published with the expressed hope that school and public libraries would undertake similar research. The June 1942 issue included a survey of the number of library professionals within the state.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning, *North Carolina Libraries* made an effort to serve as a vehicle to convey state standards and research. Bibliographies also were a major feature, with the first one listing children's books by North Carolina authors.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, it was a bibliography that defined the autonomy of the journal's editorial board from the NCLA Executive Board in 1957. The association had sponsored a children's book reviewing project, a project so successful that the committee planned to compile bibliographies of one hundred annotated titles several times a year. They requested that *North Carolina Libraries* be the vehicle of dissemination. Correspondence flew. While the initial question was whether or not to devote space to this monumental task, the underlying question was who really ought to make this decision, the NCLA Executive Board or the *North Carolina Libraries* Editorial Board. A major power confrontation was avoided because thirteen of seventeen Executive Board members said "no" to printing the bibliographies in *North Carolina Libraries* (13 no, 3 no opinion, 1 yes). In the corollary vote, however,

nine members felt that the Editorial Board should make the decision; five, the Executive Board; and three, a combination of boards.<sup>17</sup>

If there were still a question of Editorial Board autonomy, it was further settled soon after. In Spring 1958, editor William S. Powell of the University of North Carolina proposed a "panel discussion" on the problem (and its possible solutions) "that a number of public libraries in the state...are having a great deal of difficulty, particularly with discipline, in connection with public school students who use the libraries after 3:30 each afternoon when the school libraries close."<sup>18</sup> Powell sent letters to five public librarians asking for input, with copies to the chair of the School and Children's Section and the current NCLA president, a school librarian. Everyone contacted encouraged Powell to include school librarians in the dialogue (a tact he insisted that he had intended all along), but pressure from the school representatives and even the state librarian certainly implied a preference for withdrawal of the article entirely.<sup>19</sup> Powell stood his ground and published an excellent "discussion" focusing on all aspects of the public library/school library cooperation debate in June 1958.

Perhaps this small controversy and the subsequent gathering of material from many types of libraries across the state encouraged Charles M. Adams of Woman's College, the new editor, to propose section editors for the journal. While "reporters" had originally been intended, the years between 1944 and 1955 witnessed a board centered upon an editor with a few willing helpers. In no sense were they reporters or representatives. In 1955, editor Elaine von

Oesen from the State Library requested "reporters" for various library areas, the forerunners of the section editors envisioned by Adams. Under Adams's tenure, section representatives began meeting with their NCLA sections to convey information both to and from the journal.<sup>20</sup> It was also under Adams's editorial tenure that the practice of guest editors for specific issues was formally initiated.<sup>21</sup>

With these changes and additions, *North Carolina Libraries* adhered to a fairly stabilized publishing schedule until 1971 when Ruzicka withdrew its financial support. While the relationship with the Greensboro bookbinder had not been without its problems, the Association was unprepared for this announcement. Thus, on December 10, 1971, the Executive Board voted to discontinue publication when it became obvious that *North Carolina Libraries* could not support itself on advertisements alone.<sup>22</sup> While the Executive Board officially voted to suspend only one issue, the journal itself announced its possibly permanent demise with the heading, "Do We Need *North Carolina Libraries*?"<sup>23</sup>

While 1971 and early 1972 were discouraging times for the journal's editorial board and NCLA in general, in retrospect the self-examination and thus the conscious decision to assume financial as well as editorial commitment for the journal was a good one. Guilford College's Herbert Poole was appointed editor, and he and a new editorial board examined every facet of *North Carolina Libraries*. Poole was a brilliant choice. In a "Memorandum for the Record," Poole admitted that he hoped "that one morning we would see dynamic, forceful atypical persons in positions of responsibility in this organization."<sup>24</sup> He was such a person. Declaring, "Here is what I intend to do,"<sup>25</sup> Poole appointed representatives from every type of library in North Carolina, expecting them to procure at least two manuscripts every year. He did this and more, insisting that people fulfill their responsibilities toward the journal and gently nudging unproductive members off the board.

Poole had more than a management agenda in store for *North Carolina Libraries*; he had a social agenda as well. Under his subtle direction, he began to address the issue of African Americans in both NCLA and librarianship in general. He began this by challenging "someone" (who could only have been Ray N. Moore of the Durham Public Library) into doing something about this "lily-white organization"<sup>26</sup> by accepting the position as Public Library Section representative to the Editorial Board. Once she had accepted, articles began to appear on African American

### Editors of NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES

February 1942	John J. Lund
April 1942 - September 1942	Sarah Bowling, Mary D. Grant, and Sidney Holmes
November 1942 - September 1943	Hallie Sykes Bacelli, Pattie Bartee, Louise Justice Sink
December 1943 - December 1944	Ernestine Grafton
February 1945 - May 1946	Mary Lindsay Thornton, Sidney Holmes, Margaret Allman
September 1946 - March 1947	Harlan C. Brown, Nancy Burge
October 1947 - March 1949	Wendell W. Smiley
June 1949 - May 1951	Charles R. Brockman
October 1951 - May 1953	Hallie S. Bacelli
October 1953 - October 1957	Elaine von Oesen
February 1958 - September 1959	William S. Powell
Winter 1960 - Fall 1963	Charles S. Adams
Winter 1964 - Fall 1965	Adriana P. Orr
Spring 1966 - Fall 1968	Alva W. Stewart
Winter 1969 - Fall 1971	Mell Busbin
Winter/Spring 1972 - Fall 1978	Herbert Poole
Winter 1979 - Summer 1983	Jonathan A. Lindsay
Fall 1983 - Summer 1985	Robert Burgin
Fall 1985	Patsy Hansel
Winter 1985	Frances Bryant Bradburn



issues and interests such as public library matriarch Mollie Huston Lee;<sup>27</sup> "The African-American Materials Project —OEG-0-71-3890;"<sup>28</sup> and "A Survey Course in Negro Literature."<sup>29</sup> And none too soon, for *North Carolina Libraries* had been extraordinarily quiet on social issues in general and African-American issues specifically.

It is true that in 1944 the May issue of *North Carolina Libraries* featured speeches and information from the North Carolina Negro Library Association Conference. Entitled "The Development of Negro Libraries in North Carolina," the issue celebrated the NCNLA's acceptance into ALA. From that point on, separate listings of NCNLA members were included in the NCLA Directory of North Carolina Librarians published in the journal. But when individual members of NCNLA began to petition for NCLA membership in 1948, the journal made no mention. Silence was the watchword as the issue escalated. In an undated "Report of Activities Relative to a Merger of NCLA and the NCNLA" (sometime between 4/24/49 and 3/11/50) a joint publication of a single periodical was proposed: "In view of the expected opposition to an interracial library association in North Carolina."<sup>30</sup> Evidently nothing came of the proposal, and, in the April 1952 issue of the journal, the negative merger vote was reported.<sup>31</sup> No editorial before or after the vote was offered, no stand was taken, no desire to be on the record either for or against the merger was evident. Perhaps this was only inevitable. After all, *North Carolina Libraries* was a southern state journal, one that owed its existence to its membership. But in retrospect one regrets the journal's unwillingness to publish controversial and provocative issues.

Since the 1970s, however, *North Carolina Libraries* has been somewhat more courageous. Articles such as "The Status of Women in Academic Libraries" (Fall 1973) paved the way for the 1987 theme issue, "The Status of Women and Minorities in Librarianship" (Spring 1987); Emily Boyce's "The United States Supreme Court and the North Carolina Obscenity Laws" (Winter 1974) was a harbinger of an entire issue on intellectual freedom in 1987. Authors well known within the state and across the nation have shared their expertise: librarians and library educators such as Mary K. Chelton, Edward G. Holley, Marilyn L. Miller, Ray N. Moore, and Charlemae Rollins have shared space with authors such as Sue Ellen Bridgers, Madeline L'Engle, and Joe McGinnis and newspaper columnist Tom Wicker. NCLA Executive Board minutes and biennial reports have kept state librarians informed on association business, while theme issues like

"Minimum Qualifications for Librarians" (Spring 1980) and "Marketing Libraries" (Fall 1988) have apprised them of requirements and trends in the profession.

The validation that the NCLA membership has given *North Carolina Libraries* has been overwhelming and gratifying. From its inception, *North Carolina Libraries* and its editors have been supported by both the Executive Board and general membership through numerous survey responses, realistic budgets, letters to the editors, and general comments both formal and informal. But occasionally accolades from beyond its standard audience validate the quality and mission of the journal in a different way. In 1981, *North Carolina Libraries*, under the editorship of Jon Lindsay of Meredith College, won the H.W. Wilson Award, an acknowledgment among our peers nationwide of the excellence of this state library publication. And again this year, 1992, the journal has won the H.W. Wilson Award, which is "presented to a periodical published by a local, state, or regional library, library group, or library association in the United States or Canada which has made an outstanding contribution to librarianship."<sup>32</sup> It is this contribution to librarianship — to *North Carolina* librarianship — which has been the journal's goal for its first fifty years. It will continue to be so for the next.

*Editor's Notes:* This article is not intended to be a definitive history of *North Carolina Libraries*. That should be the province of a future master's paper, one which we of the journal would welcome. It is, however, an attempt to help us all understand why the journal is what it is today, and perhaps what it is on its way to becoming.

## References

- 1 Hoyt R. Galvin letter to Evelyn Harrison, June 12, 1943. Similar letters went to other Executive Board members.
- 2 Minutes, NCLA Executive Board Meeting, October 20, 1943.
- 3 President Guy R. Lyle, *North Carolina Libraries* 1 (February 1942): 2.
- 4 *North Carolina Library Bulletin* 1, 1 (December 1909-February 1910): 1.
- 5 Eugenia Ralston Babylon, "History of the North Carolina Library Commission," master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 1954: 20.
- 6 [North Carolina Library Association.] "Proposed Constitution," October 28, 1939. All documents cited in this article are part of the North Carolina Library Association archives collection maintained in the North Carolina Division of State Archives, Raleigh, NC.
- 7 Letter from President Mary Peacock Douglas to Executive Board, February 26, 1940.

8 Mary Peacock Douglas, ms. notes: Executive Board Meeting, King Cotten Hotel, Greensboro, N.C., June 27, 1940.

9 *North Carolina Library Association News*, October 2, 1941.

10 This "tradition" is never announced in official documents, but is lamented by several vice presidents in correspondence.

11 Summary of NCLA Minutes for the period of April 28-30, 1949.

12 Jane B. Wilson letter to NCLA Executive Committee, October 15, 1951.

13 *North Carolina Libraries*, Fall 1960.

14 "A Quick Survey of College Libraries," *North Carolina Libraries* 1, 2 (April 1942): 5-6.

15 *North Carolina Libraries* 1, 3 (June 1942): 2-4.

16 Mary L. Thornton, compiler, "North Carolina Bibliography," *North Carolina Libraries* 3, 1 (February 1944): 1-3.

17 Letters between June 16, 1957 and July 10, 1957.

18 William S. Powell letter to Miss Clyde Smith, March 21, 1958.

19 Letters from various Executive Board and Editorial Board members, March 21, 1958-April 25, 1958.

20 Charles M. Adams letter to Mrs. Elizabeth H. Hughey, President, October 30, 1959.

21 Charles M. Adams letter to Editorial Board members, April 4, 1961.

22 "Minutes NCLA Executive Board, December 10, 1971," *North Carolina Libraries* 30, 1 and 2: 8-11.

23 "Do We Need North Carolina Libraries?", *North Carolina Libraries* 29, 4 (Fall 1971): 159.

24 Herbert Poole, "Memorandum for the Record," April 17, 1972. p. 1.

25 *Ibid.*, 3.

26 The Editor, "A Reprieve," *North Carolina Libraries* 30, 1 and 2 (Winter/Spring, 1972): 5.

27 Ray N. Moore, "A Profile: Mollie Huston Lee," *North Carolina Libraries* 30, 3 and 4 (Summer/Fall 1972): 5-13.

28 Geraldine O. Matthews, "The African-American Materials Project - OEG-0-71-3890," *North Carolina Libraries* 31, 2 (Spring 1973): 28.

29 Dr. Blyden Jackson, "A Survey Course in Negro Literature," *North Carolina Libraries* 32, 1 (Spring 1974): 7.

30 "Report on Activities Relative to a Merger of NCLA and the NCNLA," p. 5.

31 Jane B. Wilson, President, "Results of Merger Vote. Report on the Vote Relative to a Merger between the North Carolina Library Association and the North Carolina Negro Library Association," *North Carolina Libraries* 10, 3 (April 1952): 32.

32 H.W. Wilson Award Nomination Form for 1992.

