

MODERN LIBRARY SERVICE FOR 5,000,000 CITIZENS

by

DAVID STICK

North Carolina is plagued by a mass epidemic of functional illiteracy — the inability of hundreds of thousands of our citizens to read and understand the basic written material with which they are in daily contact.

This is pointed up dramatically in some basic statistics which we sometimes prefer to overlook when we brag about the prevailing climate of progress in North Carolina. I refer to (a) Our high percentage of school drop-outs, (b) Our even higher percentage of military rejections, and (c) Our distressingly low per capita income.

Is there a cure for this mass epidemic of functional illiteracy? Or are the sceptics right in their contention that it is a hopeless situation, brought on by an inbred ignorance and mental lethargy among a vast segment of our citizenry, white and Negro, rural and urban, residing in pockets of poverty and hopelessness across our land from the Great Smokies to the sea?

I can answer that. The sceptics are wrong. There is a cure, and the name of the cure is knowledge.

But the problem is: how do you inject the magic drug of knowledge into the mind of a functional illiterate who dropped out of school, is shunned by his peers, knows no trade, cannot make a living, and nurtures a fear born of frustration and rancor over the very mention of the words "education" or "knowledge."

If you expect me to say that the answer is to bring this person, or any of the hundreds of thousands like him, into the nearest public library, then you are wrong. Because it is highly questionable whether there is a single public library among the more than 330 in this state which is designed, staffed, equipped, and operated in such a way as to be the catalyst in penetrating the functional illiterate's shield of ignorance with the proper dosages of curiosity and interest. For curiosity and interest are the harbingers of knowledge, and unless the library is able to generate both curiosity and interest in the minds of those not already library-oriented, then it is falling far short of fulfilling its proper function in the community.

By now have you seen through my strategy? Is it now clear that I am trying my best to rouse your anger, smother your pride, and prick your ire? And do you yet know why? It is because you are librarians and library trustees, and your libraries almost without exception have not coped with the demands of the declining decades of nineteenth century North Carolina. More important, as librarians and trustees you form the nucleus of a small hard core of library supporters who not only have not been doing the job, but are incapable of doing it — unless and until you become angry enough, and ashamed enough and aroused enough to go back home and start fighting for the kind of library and library services which are already providing the cure of knowledge in other communities in other states.

Not one North Carolinian in thousands knows what a modern library is, and what it can accomplish in this changing society. Do you?

The modern library is a community information center. It is the headquarters for cultural, educational, and research activities. It is the after-school study and entertainment center for children, a second chance for repentant school drop-outs, and hometown graduate school for adults seeking broader knowledge.

A library is no longer simply a storehouse for books; it is a storehouse for everything man has experienced and recorded, all indexed and computerized for easy access, and attractively packaged on filmstrips, records, and slides as well as in books, pamphlets, and periodicals.

In a modern library you can have immediate access to hundreds of current periodicals—popular, scientific, and technical. You can have competent assistance in finding almost anything you want to know, and the post-war publishing revolution now makes this information available to you on various comprehension levels — for the novice, student, or authority.

The modern library still checks out books; but it also checks out original paintings, filmstrips, and records. You can still go there to read and study, but if you need privacy for serious research or contemplation you can have your own room in which to work. You go to the modern library to see an art exhibit, or hear a lecture, or participate in a seminar. And if you can't go to the library, the library will go to you, in a modern bookmobile.

If your library does not have the book you need, the modern librarian will get it for you, through interlibrary loan. If you want to take a correspondence course, the library will loan you the textbook and study aids. In short, the modern library is truly "The People's University".

Unfortunately, in the great majority of our North Carolina communities, the modern library is nothing more than a dream locked in a librarian's mind, and in cities, towns, and counties throughout this great state the libraries — your libraries — still are little more than buildings designed and still used primarily as storehouses for books.

The statistics are grim enough to make a librarian start reading Nancy Drew on her nights off, and if the generally informed citizens of your community are not already aware of them, then it is time you spread the word.

The total combined book holdings of all our more than 330 public libraries add up to approximately one book for each of our nearly five million residents. If you eliminate the old encyclopedias, the obsolete reference books, and the other old dog-eared volumes there would be only half a book for each citizen.

Though income of public libraries has more than doubled during the past ten years, the average 1966 per capita income of \$1.31 is less than half the amount considered necessary to provide adequate modern library service.

Through determined effort on the part of a relatively few individuals, new libraries are being built annually; yet the need for additional new libraries, and expansion of existing facilities, increases at an even greater pace.

The failure to attract an appreciable number of young college students to careers in

library science, and an even more alarming failure to keep our library science graduates here in North Carolina, results in a continuing shortage of qualified librarians.

THE DOWNS REPORT

North Carolinians have an excellent guidebook for public library improvement in the Downs Report on *Resources of North Carolina Libraries*. As a member of the Governor's Commission on Library Resources I was privileged to have a hand in preparing the foreword, and the proposed program of action for the Downs Report. The following brief excerpts are as applicable today as they were when written in 1964:

"In measuring the Commission's findings against present needs, one fact becomes obvious: North Carolina libraries just do not have enough room, enough books, or enough librarians. As for the future, the rapidly increasing enrollment in public schools and colleges, plus the impact of the great economic and social changes taking place throughout the state, can only mean a greater demand for information and knowledge. Such a demand will call for more library space, more books, and more librarians. The Commission recommends that continued study be given to the development of a plan for joint local-state-federal responsibility for public library financing."

The Commission also recommended "the formation of a Statewide Citizens Committee for Better Libraries. The basic responsibility of this committee would be to assist in the organization, in every county and interested community, of a local committee for better libraries; and to coordinate such activities with existing groups such as 'Friends of Public Libraries'."

Less than three years after these recommendations were prepared they are being implemented.

As you know a statewide citizens committee under the name North Carolinians for Better Libraries is organized and functioning, thanks largely to the efforts of the Association of Library Trustees, which sponsored it initially, and the North Carolina Library Association, which provided funds for its organizational expenses.

In addition, at the request of the Association of Library Trustees and other concerned groups and individuals, the 1967 General Assembly created a five-member "Legislative Commission to Study Library Support in the State of North Carolina, particularly as regards the financing of Public Libraries, and to make recommendations to the General Assembly of 1969." These are major steps toward providing modern libraries and modern library service for all North Carolinians.

As chairman of the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support, however, I would be remiss if I did not offer words of caution and clarification. The fact that North Carolinians for Better Libraries has a voting member in your county does not mean that some layman has relieved you librarians and trustees of your responsibility in this matter of educating the public on the current status of your library and on what must be done locally to make it truly a modern "People's University".

The continued effort of dedicated librarians and trustees through the years has resulted in little more than maintenance of the status of mediocrity in which most of our library programs have long been mired. It must now be obvious, therefore, that librarians, trustees, and your handful of library-oriented supporters are fighting a losing battle. You must have help locally, and North Carolinians for Better Libraries can provide it. But at the same

time, no citizens group can effectively upgrade your library without your all-out support and guidance.

Money is the basis for solving our library problems in North Carolina. In the absence of a sound and understandable plan for library support, such as the unique cooperative system under which our public schools operate, the basic responsibility for library construction and operation has been left up to local government. In some instances the response has been heartening, good examples being right here in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, where there has been a valiant and continuing effort to provide modern library services, and my own little county of Dare, with the highest per capita local expenditure for libraries of any county in the state. In many other counties and cities, however, there has been a marked reluctance on the part of local governing bodies to provide even minimum financing for public libraries. Thus, some counties and communities are approaching the maximum extent of their ability to provide library funds, while many others have so far made only token efforts toward this end.

Obviously the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support, created by the North Carolina General Assembly, will be looking closely at the responsibility of the state in this connection. But lest some of you are already entertaining thoughts that the state is now going to take over your local financial responsibilities, I want to emphasize my belief that the Legislative Commission must also work closely with the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and the North Carolina League of Municipalities as well as with library groups such as yours, and agencies of the Federal Government, in the hope that it can come up with a workable, acceptable, and understandable formula for local-state-federal financing of our public library program.

The basic objective for all of us, as I see it, is to make modern library services accessible to all citizens of North Carolina. The success of these efforts will depend to a large degree on whether an appreciable segment of the informed and interested population in each city and county becomes sufficiently familiarized with, and concerned about, the inadequate status of our libraries in today's changing society. In the final analysis it is largely up to *you* — the public librarians and the library trustees — to spread the facts, generate the interest, and lead the fight for modern library services in your home towns.

NEW VISTAS FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES

by

JANE S. HOWELL

In 1966 the State Department of Public Instruction initiated the Demonstration School Libraries Project as one of the activities undertaken under ESEA Title II. The purpose of the project was to supplement library funds with a special allotment in order to enlarge collections for libraries in all media of learning, including books and audio-visual materials.

Superintendents and supervisors were asked to apply for the appropriations. As a result of applications and careful screening, ten schools at three levels were chosen. Selections were made on the basis of existing programs, probabilities of expansion, potential for growth, and accessibility to other schools and communities for observation by interested citizens and school personnel.