

# The North Carolina Library Commission

1909-1949

Condensation of paper read by Dr. Louis Round Wilson, 26th Conference, North Carolina Library Association, Durham, N. C., April 28-29, 1949

Tonight the North Carolina Library Association celebrates the fortieth birthday of the North Carolina Library Commission. The record of achievement of this organization merits notice and congratulations.

The Commission is the Association's eldest child. In fact, one of the first major objectives of the Association was taken in 1906 when it appointed a committee to draft a bill providing for the establishment of the Commission and authorized the committee to try to secure the enactment of the measure into law.

The participants in this first effort were A. M. Scales, of Greensboro, E. P. Wharton, of Greensboro, with Miss Annie F. Petty, Mrs. Annie Smith Ross, Mr. J. P. Breedlove, Mr. J. F. Wilkes, and myself as assistants.

The bill was drawn and taken to Raleigh by Mr. Wilkes and myself, and to legislators, but the idea was too new and revolutionary to win general acceptance. So it went over until 1909.

In the meantime the bill was revised, and when presented a second time by Mr. Wilkes and myself through Dr. J. B. Gordon from Greensboro, it was started on its way. The library bill passed the appropriation committee of the House, but got lost somewhere before the appropriation committee of the Senate acted on it.

At this point, through the efforts of Mr. Sol Weil of Goldsboro, D. P. Stern, a young lawyer of Greensboro, took over and in the last days of the session the bill ran the gauntlet and was duly passed, carrying an annual appropriation of \$1500.

The sections of the law defining the functions of the Commission were substantially those governing its operation today.

In accord with provisions of the Act the Commission was established April 1, 1909, and was formally organized on April 18, with the following members and officers: Hon. M. O. Sherrill, State Librarian, and Dr. J. Y. Joyner, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, ex officio; Dr. Charles Lee Smith, President of Edwards and Broughton, appointed by Gov. W. W. Kitchin; and Mrs. Annie Smith Ross, Librarian of the Carnegie Library of Charlotte; and Louis R. Wilson, Librarian of the University of North Carolina, appointed by the North Carolina Library Association. Mr. Wilson was elected Chairman, Mrs. Ross, Secretary, and Dr. Smith, Treasurer. The three officers were named as the Executive Committee and were charged with the selection of a Field Secretary.

Quarters were secured in the gallery of the old State Library, and at the second meeting of the Commission, Miss Minnie W. Leatherman, of the Louisville Public Li-

brary, was installed as Field Secretary and Editor of *The North Carolina Library Bulletin*.

For forty years, the Commission, charged with the functions mentioned, has steadily striven to promote the development of all types of libraries in the State. Four lines of activity may be reviewed briefly.

### 1. Library Legislation

Least spectacular but fundamental to library progress, has been work of the Commission in securing the enactment of laws making libraries possible and providing funds for service to libraries and for state aid to public libraries.

Since 1911 legislation has been steadily pressed upon the General Assembly and has kept pace with the best thinking of the Librarians of the State, region, and nation. In 1917 new legislation was passed to allow commissioners and county boards of education to make appropriations for library service and to allow cities to make appropriations to association libraries. In 1927 a further act was passed providing for the establishment of county libraries. In 1933 provision was made for contractual relationships with rural areas, other libraries, and other counties. Certification of librarians was provided for through the creation of a Certification Board in 1933, and the authorization of receiving and administering federal funds was granted it in 1937.

In 1937, the State Aid law was presented and again in 1939, but without success. In 1941 it was passed and a fund of \$100,000 for each year of the biennium was secured. This was increased to \$125,-

000 in 1943, to \$175,000 in 1945, to \$275,000 in 1947, and the legislature just adjourned increased it to \$350,-436. Support from counties and cities has also increased two and one-half times during this six-year period. At the 1949 session other laws were passed clarifying and extending previous legislation and authorization was granted counties to use surpluses, to issue bonds, and to levy taxes for library buildings and equipment.

This was general legislation. The effort to secure it has been accompanied by the biennial struggle to increase the appropriation for the services and administration of the Commission itself. These funds have grown from \$1,500 the first year to \$25,318.98 in the peak year 1928-29. In the biennium, 1949-51 the appropriation stands at \$33,261 each year with \$20,436 from the State Aid fund set up for its administration, making the total \$53,-697.

### 2. Book Services

Book services have taken a number of forms. The Commission took over from the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs its collection of traveling libraries and added to them. These were sent out at the beginning. This service was supplemented by loans to individuals and by an expanding reference service which is supported today with a collection of more than 50,000 volumes. Service to Women's Clubs, to debaters and to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Four H-Clubs, etc., has been continuous and has introduced thousands of North Carolinians to the value of books in daily living. Books in larger

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quantities have been made available to new libraries to ensure the success of their formal opening and early period of service.

### 3. Professional Aid

Professional aid to communities and libraries has been constant. Stimulation of local interest, advice concerning ways and means of establishing libraries, assistance in dealing with technical problems, aid in book selection, participation in institutes and summer schools for the training of library workers, co-operation with local authorities in securing bookmobiles and setting up procedures for participating in State Aid, planning co-operative programs with the North Carolina Library Association, the Citizens Library Movement, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Tennessee Valley Library Council, the W. P. A., the Southeastern States Co-operative Library Survey, the Southeastern Library Association, and the American Library Association—this has provided a bond of interest and helpfulness that has stimulated every form of library development in North Carolina.

Two of these activities call for special note — the co-operative relationships of the Commission with T. V. A. and the W. P. A.

From 1938 to 1947 the Commission worked co-operatively with the T. V. A. in extending library service to counties in western North Carolina in the Valley area. It assisted in working out contractual arrangements and advised as to the amounts that were to be secured from the T. V. A., the maximum to be received in any year being \$17,700 in 1942-43.

Work with the W. P. A. began in 1937 and was discontinued in June, 1941. Mrs. Mary E. Campbell was the State Director of W. P. A. and Miss Julius Amis was in charge of the W. P. A. library project. She worked in the Commission office in close co-operation with the Secretary of the Commission and the State School Library Supervisor. After W. P. A. was discontinued Miss Amis became a member of the Commission staff and was able to assist in the transition of library service from W. P. A. status to its present form. Miss Amis had during her connection with W. P. A. 11 professional and 48 non-professional supervisors. The peak of employment was in 1940-41 when 1450 people were on the payroll.

In 1937-38, which was the first year of the Project, W. P. A. appropriated \$545,000. Local units, school and public libraries appropriated \$258,496 as sponsors' contributions. In 1940-41, 44,768 books and 12 bookmobiles were owned and operated by W. P. A. During 1940-41, 110,000 books were mended. Many of the people engaged in the W. P. A. Program, who were workers in public libraries, have been continued as non-professional workers.

### 4. Publication

Publication has likewise been a fairly constant aspect of the Commission's work. Biennial reports giving statistics for libraries in the State have been maintained from the beginning and now constitute a body of data by means of which much of the growth in North Carolina libraries may be traced. In 1909 the Commission began the

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publication of **The North Carolina Library Bulletin** which served as the professional journal of the libraries of the State until it was discontinued in December, 1931. Since then news letters and folders have been issued from time to time. In 1948 **Libraries in North Carolina** was published containing the report of the survey made in connection with the Southeastern States Co-operative Library Survey.

This then has been a part of the record. In December, 1910 when the Commission made its first report, there was no legislation in North Carolina providing for the establishment of new public libraries. There were only 29 public and association libraries, the largest of which contained 12,000 volumes. At the same time there were 39 college and university libraries, the largest of which, at Chapel Hill, contained 55,000 volumes. At the end of 1948 there were 237 public, county, and regional libraries. They possessed 1,672,143 volumes and circulated 6,525,040. They spent \$1,312,653 in maintaining service of which \$266,588 or 7 cents per capita was in the form of state-aid, and carried books to rural districts in 79 bookmobiles. College and university libraries numbered 53 in 1947-48, owned 2,702,727 volumes, and spent \$1,252,758 on their operation. The N. C. L. A. and the Negro N. C. L. A. had 574 members. Four library training agencies were preparing librarians, and the legislatures of 1947 and 1949 appropriated a total of \$8,143,869 for library buildings at state institutions. Expenditures from state funds for school libraries had grown from \$10

per school in 1910 to \$330,000 for 1949-50, and the State Department of Education employed a school library supervisor and maintained systematic supervision and regulation of all school libraries in North Carolina.

Four secretaries of the Commission have served as leaders in developing these institutional resources for the educational, social, and cultural well-being of North Carolina. They were Miss Minnie W. Leatherman (Mrs. E. R. Blanton), 1909-1919; Miss Mary B. Palmer (Mrs. M. D. Phillips), 1919-23; Mrs. Lillian B. Griggs, 1924-30; and Miss Marjorie Beal, 1930 to date. These four working with the members of the Commission, their staffs, and the librarians and citizens of North Carolina interested in library development, have fashioned much of the splendid work that has been wrought. To them and their associates we, the members of the North Carolina Library Association, offer our heartiest congratulations and praise.