

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Even though the spiritual father of the public library in North Carolina never set foot in the state, he planted an idea which has grown until today 95% of our citizens have access to public library service through a network of municipal, county, and regional libraries.

In 1695 when the Rev. Thomas Bray, founder and secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, was appointed by the Bishop of London as his Commissary in the royal province of Maryland, one of the provisions of his acceptance was the promise of assistance from the bishop in furnishing books for the colonies. He himself did not come to North Carolina but sent "of his own particular pious gift" a collection valued at one hundred pounds, which was the origin of the first library open to the public in the state. The books prompted the first and only library law in the colony, passed in 1715. It provided "that the inhabitants of Beaufort Precinct shall have liberty to borrow any book out of said library . . ." Parish libraries were followed by a series of subscription and society libraries.

During the days of reconstruction little attention could be given to public service agencies. As demands advanced for public education toward the end of the 19th century, the need for a plan for continuing education became more evident. Public libraries began to be organized in North Carolina.

In 1897 the first public library supported by public funds was established in Durham, the result of a petition by a group of citizens to the General Assembly for "an act to incorporate the Durham Public Library." The first statistical report of North Carolina public libraries in 1910 shows a public library in Mooresville, also established in 1897. It is interesting to note that these were in industrial centers rather than the so-called "cultural centers."

Ten years prior to these two public supported libraries, a privately supported free public library was built and equipped by Mr. Charles H. Wing for the people of Mitchell County. This library, with a bookstock given by Northern libraries and friends of Wing was open and free to all the people of the county and was at that time declared the third county library in the United States. More significant in North Carolina was the plan of the building which had one floor to be used for an assembly hall for civic gatherings of the community. It may be called the forerunner of the multi-purpose room being incorporated into public library plans today.

The capital city, though not the first, may yet be called a leader in early public library development. It was at the turn of the century that a public library was established in Raleigh by Mr. R. B. Raney, who "having purchased the very desirable site at the southwest corner of Hillsboro and Salisbury streets, opposite the Capitol Square erected a brick building for the library of the best materials, tastefully and elegantly furnished it, and on the 1st day of February 1900, conveyed it by deed to a corporation" which was named the Olivia Raney Library in memory of his wife.

An indication of the strong liaison between educational development and that of the public library was evidenced in 1901 when the school commissioners of Charlotte operated a library opened to the citizens of the city. To supplement the commissioners' collection, the Charlotte Literary and Library Association turned over its small collection of books. This action inspired a request for the first Carnegie library building in the state. An original grant of \$25,000 was made in 1903 and a supplement of \$15,000 was added in 1914. By 1917 Carnegie grants for public library buildings had been given to ten North Carolina towns.

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An act of the General Assembly of 1903 incorporated the Charlotte Carnegie Public Library and provided for the establishment of a "Charlotte Public Library for Colored People."

The Greensboro Public Library began in 1901 when a town canvass, led by the chairman of the State Library Committee, resulted in a very generous subscription of \$3,000. City Aldermen donated three rooms in the city hall and appointed, under the Scales Library Act, a board of six trustees to organize and control the new institution.

The following year, the idea of a public library for Winston was presented to Mr. Carnegie and within two years a building was completed and open to the public with \$1,500 worth of books, a stipulation of the Carnegie gift. The opening of this library and others encouraged the society of Sorosis of Wilmington to offer its collection of books to the city, if the city would establish and maintain a public library. The challenge was accepted; and the library's first narrative report attested to its great use and value: "The library has induced the people to read more and it has also tended to improve the morals of the community and in this respect has proved a substantial benefit."

Other free public libraries established prior to 1910 were: Page Memorial, Aberdeen; Goldsboro Public, Goldsboro; R. Y. McAden Memorial Hall, McAdenville; Carnegie Library, Statesville; Hillsboro Public, Hillsboro; Hickory Public, Hickory; Waynesville Public, Waynesville. There was a total of fifteen public libraries offering books free to the citizens of their communities.

Until the organization of the North Carolina Library Association in 1904, the development of free public library service in the state had been on purely local initiative. Some benefactor, a literary or civic organization, or a group of interested citizens were responsible for the establishment of the public libraries in existence in 1904. Not once since that historic organizational meeting of the North Carolina Library Association on May 14, 1904, has the object of the Association been neglected: "Its object shall be to promote acquaintance and fraternal relations among librarians and those interested in library work; and by consultation and cooperation, to increase the usefulness and advance the interests of libraries and library work in North Carolina."

The Secretary-Treasurer's report of the first annual meeting of the Association clarified the organization's goals: "Professional librarianship, the creation of public sentiment favorable to public libraries, and systemized aid to rural, school, and public libraries, are matters which must be dealt with."

The term "rural library" is not to be confused with the connotation given it today. The phrase referred to the first collections of non-textbooks placed in the public schools. A special "rural library" law provided incentive funds to encourage the schools to develop these libraries, some of which were open to the public after school hours.

The need for a state agency to assume responsibility for public library service to the citizens of the state was recognized by the North Carolina Library Association April 26, 1906, following much discussion of a paper entitled "A State Library Commission" by Mr. J. P. Kennedy of Virginia. "It was moved that the Association should appoint a committee to appear before the next General Assembly to ask for the creation of a State Library Commission."

Success came in 1909 with the passage of "an Act to Establish a Library Commission" . . . which consisted of the superintendent of Public Instruction, the state librarian, two other persons appointed by the North Carolina Library Association and one appointed by the Governor. The Commission was authorized to give assistance, advice, and counsel to all libraries, and to all persons interested, as to the selection of books, cataloging, maintenance, and other details of library management as may be practicable. It was further authorized to aid in organizing new libraries and in improving existing ones, and to establish and maintain traveling or other libraries as may be practicable.

The first secretary began work in September 1909 with an office in the State Library.

Another state organization exerting strong efforts for public library development was the Federation of Women's Clubs. Almost every club had a committee whose chief interest was to obtain a public library for its community. Throughout the state club members have served diligently on library boards, and committees have contributed time, energy, funds, buildings, books and always statewide support to improve public library service.

Prior to the establishment of the North Carolina Library Commission, the Federation of Women's Clubs maintained traveling libraries which were made available throughout the state. In keeping with the Federation policy to "foster library development throughout the state," an agreement was made "that the Federation shall give to the Commission its collection of traveling libraries, the same to be operated by the Commission under the direct supervision of the General Secretary of the Commission."

With the limited number of free public libraries in existence, the Library Commission felt an urgent responsibility to offer some type of service to the unserved rural areas of the state. "Traveling libraries" seemed to be the answer. With the Federation's help the program was initiated and the first report showed an enthusiastic reception to the idea. The *Third Biennial Report* of the Commission stated that the traveling libraries furnished the people living on farms and in remote communities good books for general reading; the package libraries provided students and club workers with material for debate and club papers; and the reference department of the traveling library system supplied literature to individuals and libraries on special subjects. A traveling library was a box of books containing between thirty-five and forty volumes. About one-third of the books were for children, one-third or more were novels, and the balance were the best and most readable books of biography, travel, science, household economics, and agriculture. The boxes were fitted with shelves so that they could be used as book cases in the various communities. They were really the forerunners of the current traveling libraries—bookmobiles. The package library is not to be confused with the traveling library. The package library was a smaller number of books on some specific subject. The books were collected to answer requests from over the state for literature on social and political questions of the day. North Carolina's package libraries included magazine articles, speeches, briefs, newspaper clippings, government documents and pamphlets, or "shirtsleeve literature," as well as books.

Getting funds to operate the traveling libraries was a slow process. It was estimated that \$6,000 would be needed but the General Assembly of 1913 granted only \$1,500. Demands for the libraries continued to grow and those made available were used extensively. Maps showing the use of these collections indicate that they were spread from the coast to the hills. The desperate need was illustrated by the following letter received at the Commission:

Dear Miss Palmer

I am interested in those books for my children there isent eny Farmers union neer here if you will send me the libery I will pay expences and take all respnscibility on my sef and return them in 3 months for the sak of my children geting chance to read those books we live in a swamp.

In the early days of the Commission, the publication of *The North Carolina Library Bulletin* was undertaken. It was an organ for spreading news and advice on library matters and for the publication and distribution of library statistics, required by law. An early issue carried this statement, "The best way to start a library is to *start* one." Thus the idea of demonstrating library service was proposed in North Carolina.

No law authorizing the establishment and maintenance of public libraries by taxation existed when the Scales Library Act of 1897 became inoperative because it was not brought forward in the Revisal of 1905. Consequently, one of the early tasks of the Library Commission was to try to secure the passage of a strong public library law. Until a new law could be passed, the Commission suggested the formation of local library associations at public meetings for the purpose of establishing public libraries within the communities which had none. Federated Women's Clubs again took leadership.

In 1911 the General Assembly passed a law which provided for the establishment of public libraries in incorporated towns, for their maintenance by taxation, for the appointment and organization of the library board, and defined the powers and duties of trustees.

In the meantime other libraries were giving free service even though funds came from subscriptions or other sources. Without benefit of law counties made appropriations to libraries to provide service to rural residents. Where counties made no appropriations some libraries extended borrower's privileges to county residents free, or for a small fee. The growth of the county extension idea was a sign of real library progress in North Carolina and created the need for additional legislation.

The General Assembly of 1917 passed a bill permitting county commissioners and boards of education to cooperate with trustees of public libraries in extending service, authorizing both groups to make appropriations, and giving cities and towns the privilege of continuing appropriations.

Conditions during the war years held up the development of library service. Several libraries were forced to close and the opening of several new ones was delayed. But there was a definite trend toward private and subscription libraries becoming free public libraries with public support.

During the early twenties there was an upsurge of interest in the establishment of public library service—also an interest in securing financial support from tax funds. Tax votes, encouraged by both the Commission and the Association, were a boon to the extension of library service. At a meeting of the North Carolina Library Association in 1919, a resolution was passed endorsing "the policy of establishing a system of county libraries for the State," and recommending "that it work for the enactment of legislation to this end."

A significant step in county library extension was made in Durham County in 1923 when the first bookmobile went into operation taking library materials to the citizens throughout the county. This successor to the "Traveling libraries" was a gift from the Kiwanis Club to the Durham Public Library and was christened "Miss Kiwanis." The countywide idea was contagious and by the middle of the twenties there were twelve counties making library appropriations.

New impetus to county library development came with an amendment to the library law by the 1927 General Assembly. The amendment allowed, upon petition, an election for a special tax to be held in counties as well as cities and towns. Added stimulus to the promotion of public library service came with the organization of THE CITIZENS' LIBRARY MOVEMENT and the grants from the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

In the November 1927 meeting of the North Carolina Library Association, the Association was challenged to "organize, press the fight, and put libraries" in the forty-six counties that had none. A resolution was passed for a "library campaign for the education and promotion of library growth in North Carolina" and for a committee to be appointed to plan a campaign. Thus, as the word spread, the first organized cooperative effort on the part of North Carolina citizens to secure more nearly adequate

library service for all the people in the state was born—THE CITIZENS' LIBRARY MOVEMENT.

The Rosenwald Fund made grants to two counties—Davidson and Mecklenburg—for a period of five years to aid in the development of county service. The grant to Davidson was \$20,000 for a five year period and \$80,000 to Mecklenburg for the same length of time. These counties were to serve as demonstration counties. The Davidson County Library opened in October 1929, the first in the South to have a Rosenwald grant.

Libraries suffered from "the Depression" as did other service agencies. Financial support was greatly curtailed, but at the same time this economic crisis caused more people to seek out books and libraries. From 1929 to 1934 librarians used their ingenuity to serve more people with paralyzed budgets.

"A Plan for Library Development in North Carolina" was adopted by the North Carolina Library Association in 1933. This was a "five-year plan designed to create a coordinated library system reaching the entire population of the state," a means of bringing the libraries out of the rigors of the depression. Two basic tenets were to be followed: Demonstrations of library service should be given in areas with *enough people* and *sufficient wealth* to provide adequate service. An act of the General Assembly of 1933 gave legal implementation to the regional idea with the passage of a law permitting two or more adjacent counties to join for the purpose of establishing or maintaining a free public library. The same year the General Assembly established a certification board to issue "librarian's certificates under reasonable rules and regulations to be promulgated by the board."

Beginning in 1932 the federal government aided library service by furnishing clerks and bookmenders through FERA. In 1935 a new agency, the Works Projects Administration, was created. As this developed, long range planning took place and in 1937 there was a state WPA Library Supervisor directing the federal project from the Commission office.

The work project supplied demonstration bookmobiles which supplemented the demonstration bookmobile given to the North Carolina Library Commission by the North Carolina Library Association in 1936. At the time here was a total of eight bookmobiles in the state and it was observed that North Carolina "should have at least 80 to reach all the people who want books and who live too far from the libraries." (Today 95 bookmobiles are still not reaching all the people.)

PWA and WPA funds were also available to help construct public buildings. Ten library buildings and several community buildings with library space were a direct outgrowth of those projects.

The Citizens' Library Movement continued its work toward better libraries in North Carolina and asked the 1937 General Assembly for State Aid appropriations to help provide better service. This request was denied as was the next in 1939. A third request in 1941 supported by individuals, the North Carolina Library Association, the Citizens' Library Movement and the North Carolina Library Commission secured an Act to provide State Aid for Public Libraries in North Carolina with an appropriation of \$100,000 for each year of the biennium.

By this time many of the people in North Carolina without library service had experienced some service through a demonstration bookmobile and the people in the seventy-two counties without countywide library service were eager to qualify for the state funds which were to "improve, stimulate, increase and equalize public library service to the people of the whole state." The North Carolina Library Commission was authorized to administer this fund.

And the idea of extending library service to all the people of the state became a very real possibility. Seventy-six counties developed plans for countywide service and met other specifications the first year. The funds also stimulated the development of regional and tri-county libraries.

The contract of some of the western counties with TVA for library service had already paved the way for contracts and cooperative service. People saw that two units of government could share services successfully.

Again a war made inroads into library progress. At the time many libraries were placing orders for bookmobiles to extend service to all areas of the counties, vehicles were frozen and improvisations had to suffice until sales were again permitted.

Up to the present time State Aid has provided the greatest impetus to public library development in North Carolina. Income per capita has increased from ten cents in 1941 to fifty-one cents in 1954 and county and city funds have increased at a greater ratio than State Aid. Service has been extended from 57% of the population to 95% of the population. Counties with bookmobile service have increased from twelve to ninety-one. Counties with countywide service have increased from 28 to 92. Eight do not have countywide service and three of the eight have no public library within their borders. Bookstock has not increased proportionately. More people reading more books have worn them out so fast that the gain is slight—from 1/3 to 3/5 book per capita.

During World War II extension of service was limited physically. Trucks were not available for bookmobiles and materials were not available for buildings. These limitations slowed progress, but they allowed time for very careful planning and since the war there has been a definite upsurge in library building. More and more the library is being considered the informational and cultural center of the community and buildings are being planned accordingly.

County service has increased until the one-half ton panel trucks converted into bookmobiles after World War II are no longer adequate in some areas. Many are being replaced with larger walk-in type bookmobiles which carry more books, phonograph records and films.

The development of more public libraries in the state has reduced the need for the traveling library service from the Commission. Emphasis has shifted from the general collection to more specific subject areas. Books are maintained in the general collection to serve the people without public libraries and to supplement the public library collection, but the greater use of the Library Commission collection is to answer specific reference requests which are increasing steadily. Eleven public libraries, with a State Aid supplement, are building up special subject collections in designated areas and are making the books available throughout the state through interlibrary loans. An adult film program has been established cooperatively by the Bureau of Visual Education (Extension Division, University of North Carolina), the North Carolina Library Commission and public libraries in the state. It is financed by State Aid funds. The combined efforts of the North Carolina Library Commission and North Carolina Library Association working with the General Assembly have resulted in the revision of library laws to meet both the changing fiscal pattern of the state and current library trends.

The cooperation of the Institute of Government and the Public Libraries Section of the North Carolina Library Association, with the North Carolina Library Commission, has provided workshops and institutes which have been invaluable to trustees and library staffs. Not to be overlooked in public library development in North Carolina are surveys, especially the one of the nine Southeastern states through the cooperation of the TVA.

Between Thomas Bray's gift in 1715 and the ninety-five bookmobiles today there have been many efforts from individuals, librarian and non-librarian groups, and organizations to provide *good public library service to all Tar Heels*. The goal remains the same!