

Mountain Regional Library System 1946 - 1996



"Serving the mountains for fifty years"

Open House
Saturday, December 14, 1996
2:00 to 5:00 p.m.

deep roots

From humble beginnings during the WPA years of 1940 - 1943, public libraries were born in Georgia. In 1944, the state legislature passed a bill appropriating state aid to public libraries, which allowed many regional systems to be formed.

The Towns-Union Regional Library was founded in 1946, through the efforts of many people, including representatives from the county schools and boards of education, county commissioners, parent-teacher organizations and Young Harris College. The College agreed to sponsor the program and to provide space for the headquarters Library and director's office in the former Rich Building on the campus.

Mr. Walter Downs was instrumental in establishing the first library in this area. He was concerned about the meager availability of reading materials for students and citizens in the area surrounding Young Harris College. His vision led to the establishment of a small library of children's books for use by students enrolled in educational classes at the college. He helped outline the needs of the community and how a regional public library could help meet those needs.

His diligent efforts paid off when the entire book collection of the curriculum laboratory library of Young Harris College was donated to the Regional Library. The first \$1,200.00 of the regional fund, provided by the State Department of Education, was spent mainly for children's books. This established the beginning collection of approximately 1,500 volumes.

The first meeting of the Towns-Union Regional Library Board was held August 16, 1946. Miss Margaret Woodall was the first librarian, with a salary of \$2,500.00 per year. She had one "educational assistant", Miss Cornelia Lowe. Following Miss Woodall, there have been six library directors for the system: Roxanna Austin, Clara Lewis McMeekin, Eleanor Abernathy White, Edna Sullivan, Hellen H. Kimsey, and Teresa P. Haymore.

Book delivery began in 1948 in a jeep driven by the librarian. Since that Army surplus jeep, there have been four bookmobiles on the road serving our region.

The headquarters library was later moved to another building on campus, which now houses the Cherokee Coffee & Trading Company. The present headquarters facility was built in 1980.

Fannin County was welcomed into the region on May 3, 1957 and the system's name was changed to the Fannin-Towns-Union Regional Library. On April 7, 1958 the name was shortened to the Mountain Regional Library System.

strong branches

Fifty years after its inception, the Mountain Regional Library System consists of four libraries and one bookmobile serving three counties. The citizens of our region are very fortunate to have modern facilities that have all been built since 1980, with the exception of the Fannin County Public Library which was built in 1973. Property has been donated and plans are being proposed to build a new and larger library in Blue Ridge within the next two years.

Public libraries across the country are experiencing a dramatic upsurge in use and the Mountain Regional Library System is no exception. During the past 10 years the circulation of materials has increased 90%, from 124,549 to 236,027. The number of persons entering our libraries has risen 486%, from 17,804 to 104,296; and over 16,000 citizens have applied for library cards. The service hours of operation for all branch libraries have increased 61%, from 6,786 to 10,946 hours per year.

During this 10-year time period, our region has experienced a 20% growth in population. Sadly, however, our materials budget has only increased 15% in the same time period, while the average price of a novel has increased 141%. Demand for materials is higher than ever and unfortunately not all demands can be met with our limited budget. The use of interlibrary loan and access to the INTERNET has solved some of our problems, but public libraries are having a difficult time meeting all the needs of all the people.

Although our major area of service will always be books, the library is becoming more diverse as a service provider. These include: reference assistance (in person and by phone), magazines, newspapers, genealogy materials, summer reading program for children, bookmobile service to all three counties, Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (certification and service), books on tape, educational videos, CD-ROM reference sources, online catalog, INTERNET access, distance education via satellite (analog and digital), interlibrary loan, telefacsimile services, public use computers, public use typewriters, meeting room facilities (Headquarters and Union County), American Genealogical Lending Library (microfilm/fiche rental), records, special local and Appalachian collections, encyclopedias (electronic and print), voter registration, year-round programs for children and adults, and literacy referral.

You can see that the library is more than just books! Come check us out!

growing into the future

As you can see, the only real constant in our region is change. The population is growing and changing, and so are their needs and demands for library and information services. The Mountain Regional Library System has undergone major transformations in order to meet those changing needs.

In 1971 there was not even an electric typewriter in use in the entire library system; even as late as 1990 there were no computers in use in the library system. Today, all system libraries have online catalogs and public use computers; and they are linked to the headquarters library and to the world through wide area networks and the INTERNET. Thanks in large measure to the availability of Lottery funds for technology, the library is becoming an information source without walls, with an emphasis on access not ownership.

Access to information is useless without good leadership in finding the best information to meet individual needs. Our staff undergoes constant on-the-job and formal training to try to keep abreast of how to help our users navigate the world of information. But, our best efforts are dependent on reliable funding that provides the staffing, library materials, computers, telephone lines, electricity, and physical facilities to insure the access that our users demand. The future of information access will be only as good as our partnership with local, state, and federal elected officials and funding agencies. Technology is not cheap, and technology alone will not meet the needs of our citizens.

As the world becomes smaller and the demand for more highly skilled and better educated workers becomes greater, the availability of distance education to upgrade skills and earn required degrees will meet an ever growing need. Isolation is no longer an excuse for ignorance. Our citizens have access now to this opportunity to build their own futures.

The Mountain Regional Library System is growing, changing, and adapting daily to meet the needs of the citizens of Fannin, Towns, and Union Counties. Our ultimate aim is not just to build better libraries, but through meeting the educational, cultural, and recreational information needs of individual citizens, to build better, stronger communities.

The one constant you can rely on is our commitment to providing the best library and information services possible with the means at our disposal as we grow into the future together.

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MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY

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