Georgia Libraries Thank W.P.A.

March, 1943, brought to a close the participation of the Georgia Work Projects Administration in a public library extension program which has made a far-reaching contribution to library progress during the seven years of its operation. This program was sponsored by the Georgia Library Commission, whose secretary served as state supervisor for three years; it was designed to put into operation, on a demonstration basis, certain objectives set forth in the Plan for Library Development, as adopted by the Georgia Library Association in 1935:

1. To build up an informed public opinion on library conditions and needs in the state.
2. To develop county and regional libraries.
3. To co-ordinate school and public library service.

The W.P.A. State-wide Library Project began operation in March, 1936, with a staff of seven trained librarians (later increased to fifteen), serving as area or district supervisors. The supervisors worked in close affiliation with the Library Commission staff, the state school library supervisors in the State Department of Education, and with the Library Planning Committee of the Georgia Library Association. Throughout the entire period of the W.P.A. Library Project, all agencies concerned with library extension in Georgia have worked in closest co-operation, and all representatives consulted frequently together as the program expanded and plans were formulated, from time to time, for further development.

Georgia is a large state, geographically, and its three million people, located in 159 counties, live chiefly in small towns or the open country. Two-thirds of the population, largely rural, were entirely lacking in public library service when the Project started. Fifty-three public libraries were concentrated in the cities and larger towns, none of which did more than to open their doors free to the country people.

W.P.A. assistance was immediately offered to all existing public libraries to extend their services in various ways, such as longer hours of opening, organization of branches and deposit stations, and development of county-wide service. Beginnings of bookmobile service were provided by using a W.P.A. library clerk with a car to distribute books to rural schools, communities and homes. Within a few months after the inauguration of this service, one bright girl, Margaret Mitchell by name (though not the famous author of Gone With The Wind), was beginning to interest county organizations in raising funds for the purchase of a real bookmobile; Thomas county made this investment in the winter of 1936-37, being the first in the state to purchase and put one on the road for county library service. Four other counties followed in rapid succession. Then W.P.A. offered financial assistance to counties in the purchase of a bookmobile, and now twenty-eight bookmobiles travel up and down Georgia highways, serving people in one, two or three counties. Throughout the period of the Project, bookmobiles have been operated by W.P.A. library clerks, but with the liquidation of W.P.A. most counties are finding ways and means to continue this extension service.

Even more important than extending existing library facilities was the need to establish some form of public library service in the 115 counties entirely without it. W.P.A. has the proud record of having set up "W.P.A. operated library units" in 107 of these counties. Here arose the opportunity for co-ordinating school and public library services; wherever a library-minded county school superintendent was found, or schools were serving as real community centers, combinations of services were worked out to mutual advantage. However, a majority of the W.P.A.-operated units were entirely new organizations. These library demonstrations were set up on a permanent foundation, in so far as possible. The libraries were officially established by action of the appropriate county or sponsors—city council, county board of commissioners of roads and revenues, and city and county boards of education. A library board was likewise appointed in accordance with Georgia library laws governing municipal or county libraries. Provisions for quarters, furniture and equipment were made, minimum book collections were required, all meeting approval of the library supervisor, while financial contributions included a cash monthly fund for the purchase of new books, the amount of which was fixed according to the population served. The scale of the book fund was steadily increased from $100 to $400 per library. By means of this cash book fund, which reached the sum of $180,746 in 1942, 320,470 worthwhile new books were purchased for public library use, selected by the trained library supervisors, and classified and shelved by the W.P.A. central cataloging unit in Atlanta.

These books have increased the total book collections in public libraries to 992,217 volumes, supplemented by 15,000 volumes bought by the W.P.A. Library Project (which have now been given to the Library Commission), and 28,000 books belonging to the Library Commission. Increased book resources have brought about a steady increase in book circulation from year to year, which reached a peak of 5,391,310 volumes, or 1.7 books per capita for the entire state, in 1941. Three-fifths of this circulation were handled by the 400 W.P.A. library clerks working under the Library Project. Books were brought within reach of a million people in Georgia, who had had such reading opportunities and the response from rich and poor, old and young alike, has been gratifying enough and strong enough in expressions to supporting agencies to insure permanency for a large percentage of the libraries fostered by W.P.A., now that W.P.A. assistance has been withdrawn.

Continuation on a permanent basis of the Athens regional library, serving Clarke, Oglethorpe and Oconee counties, with doubled and tripled appropriations from the supporting tax bodies in these counties, is, perhaps, the greatest achievement for which W.P.A. deserves unqualified praise. The seed is sown for regional library service in Georgia. This is largely due to the influence of the trained library supervisors who, by their daily association with individuals in the libraries, contact with public officials and members of library boards, and innumerable speeches before organizations and groups, have developed a library-consciousness in the public. This is already reflected in determination to carry on libraries, without W.P.A. aid, and augurs well for future library progress in the state. Scattered over the state are also the beginnings of many other county and regional libraries, which will in time, with the help of state aid, de-
velop into co-ordinated systems of library service, thanks to one and a third million dollars which W.P.A. spent on its library program in Georgia from 1936 to 1943.

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