Regional Library Development and Service in Georgia

By MRS. S. M. HARRIS

For the past ten years Georgia has been making great progress in education. One of the outstanding reasons for this advancement is the planning and organization of the school systems according to the needs and desires of the people. Educators have felt that consolidation of schools for rural areas is the answer to the call for modern education. Working parallel with the educators have been the administrators of library service in municipal, county, school, and regional systems. The library administrators have felt they must have a special type of organization to render the most valuable service to rural areas.

The purposes of this article are to review the background for regional organization of libraries in Georgia and to summarize their histories from the beginning.

In the preparation of this study, there are three broad divisions for organizational purposes:

1. The impetus of regional planning; the groups sponsoring the project and their aims; and provision by legislation for regional organization.

2. The money needed to promote the program; Works Progress Administration; state aid; and contributions from other sources.

3. The kinds of service rendered; improvements.

It is necessary in the beginning of this report to state that by the term regionalism as applied to regional library organization in Georgia is meant service to areas made up of at least two or more separate counties. There are also limitations upon the service due to geographical area, scattered population, and insufficient funds.

Although Georgia did not actually inaugurate its state regional planning until 1930, its leaders in the library field had been making studies and plans as early as 1922. The various library conferences and meetings gave librarians a chance to view the Georgia library situation in contrast with that of other states and to gain a perspective for their work.
The Southeastern Library Association was formed in 1922. The programs of the conference stressed the desirability of suiting programs to special regions, and as a result, much attention, in the Southeast, was put upon the organization of regional libraries. The second conference of the Southeastern Library Association, held in 1926, brought with it a review of the needs of the region in all phases of library activity.

In 1930, library field workers of Georgia attended the Rural Library Extension Institute held during the summer at the University of Wisconsin. The viewpoints gained by these representatives at this Institute gave a common background and a point of departure for attacking the problems of the state. In 1934, a joint session of the Southeastern Library Association and the Southwestern Library Association was held in Memphis, Tennessee. There were present four hundred and fifty librarians and also representatives from the American Library Association. The meeting, among other points, considered what should be the new objectives of Southern libraries. Dr. L. R. Wilson, in his address to the two associations, made the following statements:

The final objective I propose is that these associations shall continue to imagine vividly, to plan constructively for future library development. From their establishment these associations have met to plan, to confer rather than to read papers. They have had planning and policy committees for years. Much of their achievement has been due to the way in which these and other standing committees have carried on their work. Librarians will have difficulty in finding anywhere else in America a better example of what library planning can accomplish than in the record of these associations in recent years.¹

Dr. L. R. Wilson also stated the problem clearly in referring to the South’s wealth—that had naturally to be considered in the planning for library development:

It is clear that the South, though rich in minerals, water power, forests, lands, soil, and other natural resources potentially capable of supporting a civilization comparable to that of any other region, largely lacks the accumulated capital and current income as judged by ordinary indexes, to convert these resources into products for its own social well-being and cultural development.²

The conclusion was that there should be consolidation of small and thinly populated areas to form larger areas of service; joint financial support by the local unit, by the state, and possibly by the federal government; and general cooperation among libraries of every sort within a state, with the size of regional areas to be determined by available resources.

Georgia did not benefit by the Julius Rosenwald Fund of a half million dollars set aside in 1929 for experimentation in county library service in the South. Also, the depression just at this time hindered the progress of library development. But out of the experiences gained in thinking and planning, there was a clarification of thought and a definition of new directions that might help with Georgia’s library program.

Georgia has one hundred and fifty-nine counties, and not one of them is as much as one thousand square miles in area, and only twenty-five are over five hundred square miles. This legal division of the state into such a variety of county systems necessitated some form of organization to facilitate library service. There are only twenty-five to fifty people per square mile on the average, and in 1935 there were sixty to eighty per cent of the total population without any public library service. The state was ready for organization and needed some force to take the initiative.

When the Parent Teacher Association learned of this and of the need for library service to rural areas, it quickly sponsored a legislative bill permitting counties to appropriate funds for library service to persons living in areas outside incorporated towns and cities and for contract service between existing libraries and unserved areas within the county or adjoining counties. Through the untiring efforts and the keen enthusiasm of the Honorable R. L. Ramsey, Representative from Fulton County, the bill was successfully passed without opposition in either the House or Senate. At this step in library progress, July 1, 1935, Fulton County initiated the new program by an appropriation of $5,000 to the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, making free library service available to residents of Fulton County from the headquarters library in Atlanta and all of its branches. A special county library assistant was employed to handle the increased service.

In the fall of 1935, as a result of a recommendation made by the American Library Association, a state library planning committee was appointed to lay out specific plans for library development. The
following plan, which covered ten immediate objectives and five long time objectives was officially adopted by the Association in 1935:

**Immediate Objectives**

1. Building up an informed public opinion on library conditions and needs in the state.

2. Certification of librarians.

3. Adequate support for public libraries in Georgia.

4. Development of county and regional libraries (by urging all existing public libraries to take advantage of the county library law to extend their services to their own county and to develop regional libraries as provided for in the law).

5. Strengthening Georgia Library Commission.

6. A school library supervisor in the State Department of Education.

7. Restoration to the State Library of such funds by appropriation as will insure effectiveness in its specialized range of activities.

8. Ample support for the development of college and university libraries within the state.

9. Opportunity in the state to obtain in the summer professional study and library training in an accredited high school.

10. Appropriate provision of library service for Negroes in all public libraries.

**Long Time Objectives**

1. State aid for libraries.

2. County and regional libraries within the reach of the whole population. The most satisfactory method so far devised for assuring rural residents library service comparable to that available to the urban population is through the establishment of county-wide library service or similar service to a group of small or sparsely settled counties with common interests but with limited resources from taxation. Such a setup would include central headquarters with a professionally trained staff and a carefully selected collection of books to be sent to schools, deposit stations, direct to readers by post, and wherever possible by book truck. Where there is an existing city library in the area, it would often be advisable to arrange for service to the county or region on a contract basis and give existing libraries in small communities the opportunity to become a part of the larger system. In order to equalize opportunity for regions of varying wealth, and to encourage the establishment of such library systems for the entire state, some state aid would be necessary.
3. Library service to state institutions for the handicapped and to institutions of correction.

4. Close coordination of school and public service in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of administrative expense, books, and equipment and to insure maximum service, both to adults and children.

5. Further development of college and university libraries to provide adequate resources and service for teaching and research and further coordination of research materials through the compilation and printing of union lists and catalogs.  

In November, 1935, at the joint conference of the Southeastern Library Association and the Southwestern Library Association held in Atlanta, Georgia, a statement prepared by the Policy Committees was presented. The statement reveals the library objectives of the South.

Five years of library development in the South show clearly in 1935 that substantial progress has been made and that new achievements are within reach. This advance may be attributed particularly to careful planning and unified effort throughout the region, and to local vision and initiative in individual states. Continued progress in the future points toward three ultimate objectives of library service which affect all the people—children and adults, and Negroes as well as white people:

1. Extension and improvement of library service in all urban and rural communities.

2. Extension and improvement of library service in educational institutions at all levels, comprehending elementary schools, secondary schools, and institutions of higher education; and

3. Establishment of effective correlation and cooperation between all libraries with reference to both resources and services, to the end that libraries may contribute to public welfare as this relates to Teaching, to Adult Education, to Recreation and Research.

Achievement of these ultimate objectives calls for new and increasing emphasis on the following immediate objectives as necessary means to a larger end:

1. State financial aid for local library purposes that recognizes the responsibility of the state in providing free libraries as an essential education service for all the people.

2. Maintenance in each state of a strong library extension agency

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with adequate state support to provide leadership and direction for an effective state program of public library development.

3. Adoption in each state of a regional basis for library service, recognizing the fact that two or more counties may combine limited resources to support library service where one county alone cannot maintain the service independently.

4. Maintenance in each state of a competent state supervisor of school libraries to give necessary leadership to the development of library service in secondary and elementary schools.

5. Increased citizen interest, and more active participation of library trustees, educators, and friends of libraries, in planning and promoting library development of all kinds.

6. Enactment of library legislation designed to revise obsolete laws and to provide necessary new laws.

7. Effective professional training for all types of library service, distributed geographically with careful regard to demonstrated supply and demand.

8. Establishment by law in each state of efficient systems for certification of trained professional librarians, designed to raise standards of the profession to assure the appointment of qualified people for positions.

9. Continuance and strengthening of the Southern Regional Office of the American Library Association to furnish information and guidance necessary for a strong, correlated program of library development throughout the region.7

One by one these objectives are being realized, and they serve as a working guide for the Georgia Library Association. Miss Sally Akin, who was president of the Georgia Library Association from 1935 to 1939, accomplished much, and during this time citizens’ library conferences were held in each congressional district. It was through these conferences and through the publicizing of the library situation in Georgia that thousands of citizens became interested in improving library conditions in Georgia. Stress was brought to bear upon county and regional libraries as the best means of serving Georgia’s rural population and also upon the need for state aid for all public libraries. The status of libraries in the state in 1936 was presented by Tommie Dora Barker in her study of libraries of the South:

Georgia has a population of 2,908,506. Of this number 1,836,974

are white and 1,071,525 are Negroes. 895,492 persons are classed as urban population, living in towns and cities over 2,500 in population, and 2,013,014 are rural people, living in villages or open country. From these figures it is clearly seen that Georgia’s library problem is to serve two races, the majority of whom live in the rural areas. To serve these people, 93 libraries are in operation for the general public — 41 of these give free service to the community and 12 others offer free service to the entire county in which they are located. The remaining 40 are classed as “association, subscription, and club libraries” as they receive no support from public funds but are maintained entirely by local organizations, mostly women’s clubs, and most of them charge a fee for the use of their books. Other library resources of the state include 14 junior colleges and 21 senior colleges, 407 accredited high schools in the state, and 24 special libraries, including the 3 state library departments, State Library, Archives and History Division, and the Georgia Library Commission. Looking at the other side of the picture we see:

Seventy-five per cent of the whole population without library service; 2,079,793 people without local library service; 115 counties without a single library for general public service within their borders; 1 city of 25,000 population without a free public library—Augusta (Young Men’s Subscription Library maintained since 1848); 2 cities 10,000-25,000 without a free public library—Athens and Waycross (the latter has a small subscription library); 3 cities 5,000-10,000 without a free public library—Carrollton, East Point, and Milledgeville.8

The WPA expended great effort on the organization and operation of “demonstration” public libraries in communities where inadequate or no previous library facilities existed. In October, 1940, the first regional WPA demonstration in Georgia was begun under the efficient direction of Miss Mary Berry, regional librarian. Clarke, Oconee, and Oglethorpe counties participated in the service with headquarters at Athens. The executive control consisted of a regional board, which included representatives from all three counties, with an executive subcommittee in each county to supervise branches and stations and to check on all financial obligations. After the first six months’ initiation program, the book collection consisted of 11,858 volumes, with 2,000 project-owned books, and 400 volumes loaned by the Georgia Library

8. Tommie Dora Barker, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
Commission. Sponsors' contributions amounted to $4,050.71, and WPA fund was $5,190.00.

The second regional library demonstration, organized November 8, 1941, included Walker, Dade, and Chattooga counties with headquarters at LaFayette. This Cherokee region was under the supervision of Miss Peggy Hampton. It was through the untiring efforts of Mrs. J. B. Kitchens, chairman of the Walker County Library Board, that the necessary sponsors' contributions were secured for Walker County. After the first three years' initiation program, the book collection consisted of 9,708 volumes. State Aid provided for 3,374 books. The income was $10,279; the population served was 36,918 people. There were seven staff members with a book circulation of 92,604 books for 1944.

In February, 1943, it was realized that the WPA was to be liquidated immediately.* This news was a staggering blow to library development; in particular to regional library development, since the entire WPA program was inaugurated to establish permanent "demonstration units." The Georgia-News Bulletin has given an excellent account of the service rendered by the WPA state-wide project, from 1936 to 1943. No figures are available for the services rendered to "demonstration units" alone, but these form a part of the larger picture:

There were 53 public libraries in Georgia in 1935 and 210 in 1942. County libraries in the same period increased from 44 to 142.

Although the Civil Works Administration inaugurated its program for a library program in Georgia in December, 1933, it was not until February, 1936, that the Works Progress Administration assumed the enlarged program of library service as a state-wide project. The Presidential letter concerning the initiation of this project is as follows:

To assist in organizing and operating library services in public libraries and public school libraries. Work includes extending existing library services by opening and maintaining branches and book stations and circulating books, magazines, and other library materials; extending library service to new areas; assisting in reference work; preserving and repairing library materials; conducting story hours for children; rearranging library collections against shelf-lists; revising and copying library catalogs, and typing and filing incidental thereto; cataloging, listing and arranging accumulated and duplicate books

*"Liquidation of WPA in Georgia," Georgia Library News Bulletin III (February, 1943), pp. 4-5.
and other library materials; assisting in compiling additional book lists for directed reading; and preparing pamphlets, clippings, picture, map, and photograph collections.9

On Friday, October 27, 1939, Rush Burton published a Georgia State Library Edition of the *Lavonia Times*, which edition brought before the public the needs, interests, and progress of Georgia libraries. Copies of this edition were sent to every school and library in Georgia. There were 25,000 copies printed and mailed to corporations, legislators, and other individuals exclusive of schools and libraries. The publicity given to libraries at this time gave an impetus for further planning and development. *The Lavonia Times* presented the following statements concerning needs and progress along with the WPA project:

On a map of Georgia, made four years ago, every county not having a free library was blacked out. Most of the state was black, for 115 counties out of 159 had no free library service for the people . . . . The WPA libraries in these black counties have started the reform. At first, informal and 'faith, hope and charity' libraries, they now have partial support from the properly constituted governing bodies of the towns and counties, and the people have realized that a library is essential to their welfare and happiness. The state has been divided into districts and each district is in charge of two librarians. That means that the WPA librarians have necessary supervision and teaching, and the development of the work has the attention and care of people trained and experienced.10

In 1943, regardless of the liquidation of the WPA project, the Statesboro Region came into being. This region includes Bulloch, Bryan, and Evans counties with headquarters at Statesboro, and with Miss Isabel Sorrier, Librarian. During the first year the book collection totaled 18,966 volumes. There were 39,699 people served and with a total circulation of 34,009 volumes. The total income was $3,977 with state aid amounting to $1,106.00.

Also in 1943, the General Assembly abolished the State Library Commission as a separate department of administration and made it a part of the State Department of Education. The new title of the commission became Library Extension Service, and Miss Beverly Wheatcroft was made librarian. The Library Extension Service continued

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its service of lending books and other printed materials to rural citizens of the state and to libraries and schools. The Library Extension Service has the supervisory control over regional library service under the direction of Miss Wheatcroft and the various regional supervisors. There are well-trained librarians in charge of each regional unit.

When the WPA funds were discontinued in 1943, the state came to the rescue in 1944 with an appropriation of $100,000. This fund was included in the budget of the State Board of Education, and no formal library legislation was provided. The same amount, provided in 1945-1946, has been administered through the Textbook and Library Division of the State Department of Education.

Out of this fund county allotments for the purchase of materials were established on the basis of the number of teachers in each county. These amounts ranged from $49.50 to $2,000. An additional $2,000 was offered to any two or more counties that were willing to unite in a Regional Library Service administered by a Regional Library Board and directed by a trained librarian. Nineteen counties qualified for these funds forming eight regional libraries.11

There were one hundred and eleven counties qualifying for state aid during the first year; one hundred and twenty-two counties the second year; and one hundred and twenty-six counties in 1946. Miss Beverly Wheatcroft makes the following statement:

As you will see, state aid has played a very large part in the development of regional libraries in Georgia. This may be because of the extra funds given by the state for the establishment of regional libraries, since all but two of the regional libraries—those established under the WPA and the Statesboro Region which started out on its own just a short time before WPA liquidated—have the impetus of state aid.12

In 1945 state appropriations were increased $50,000 over the preceding year, and local appropriations increased by $120,261. In 1947, although state appropriations were again raised to $150,000, county and municipal governments increased library appropriations by another $78,904, making a total of $718,061.09 now available from local appropriations for library service.

The legislation enacted for the textbook and library division of the

State Department of Education provides for the following type financial aid:

A fund of $150,000 for the development of rural public library service has been made available annually. The major portion of this money has been allotted to counties on a population basis as a direct aid for the purchase of materials. No matching is involved. Several requirements before the purchase of materials can be made must be met, however, before a county can participate in this fund.

1. The library must be under the control of a legally constituted municipal library board which contracts with the county for service, under a legally constituted county library board, or under a county board of education. Where library boards already exist and are recognized as assuming responsibility for public library service, it is considered highly desirable to work through the existing board or reorganize the existing board rather than to set up a new library board.

2. The library must work out and put into effect a program of service that will reach rural communities. Allowing county people to come to the town library will not be considered sufficient.

3. The library must be sufficiently supported by local funds to guarantee effective distribution of material. The state aid fund is not designed to raise funds to replace local funds and will not be available to a library whose budget is decreased.

4. The librarian in charge of the library must be certificated by the State Board for the Certification of Librarians.

5. All books purchased with this fund remain the property of the state.

6. In addition to the direct grant to each county, an additional sum of $2,000 is available for the purchase of books and toward the salary of a trained librarian if two or more counties decide to pool their library resources and furnish bookmobile service to the people of each county.\(^\text{13}\)

The fourth, fifth, and sixth regional libraries, using state aid funds, were organized during 1944 as follows:

(1) Mitchell-Baker Region serving Mitchell and Baker counties with headquarters at Camilla.

(2) West Georgia Region including Carroll and Heard counties with headquarters at West Georgia College, Carrollton, with Miss Edith Foster, Librarian.

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(3) Habersham-Stephens Region including Habersham and Stephens counties with headquarters at Clarkesville, with Miss Byrd Ivester, Librarian.

In 1945 two other libraries were added to the list:
(1) Chatham-Effingham Region with headquarters at Savannah and including Chatham and Effingham counties.
(2) The Dalton Region with headquarters at Dalton and including Catoosa and Whitfield counties.

In 1946 the Albany Region was organized with headquarters at Albany and including Dougherty and Lee counties. The same year Towns-Union Region came into existence and is comprised of Towns and Union counties with headquarters at Young Harris.

Then followed the regional division organized in Lowndes and Echols counties with headquarters at Valdosta.

New Regional Libraries serve Glynn County and Camden County which have combined for regional service with headquarters at Brunswick, beginning March 15, 1949. Spalding and Pike counties combined for regional library service with headquarters at Griffin and began service in the spring of 1949.

One of the best and surest means of library service is through bookmobiles which convey the best literature to the state's most remote hamlets. The development of this service shows rapid strides. Thomas County pioneered in the field early in 1938 with the help of WPA. Next in succession were Rabun, Decatur, Dougherty, and Bibb counties, making a total of five bookmobiles in 1938. At the present time there are 30 bookmobiles operating in 42 counties. Only two other states, Ohio and Texas, have more than 25 bookmobiles. In 1935, Georgia provided free public library service for only 44 counties and no bookmobiles or regional libraries at that time. At the present time there are 126 counties.

Mention should also be made of the Georgia Citizens' Library Committee. Last December this committee adopted the slogan, "Books in Reach of Every Georgian." The Committee encourages the people of Georgia to evaluate the library service available to them and to work for library improvement. The membership includes some of the state's most forward-looking people.

Among these are J. C. Haynes, Director, Public Relations, Sears, Roebuck and Company, Atlanta, Chairman; Mrs. H. L. Wingate, Pelham, Vice-Chairman; Mrs. Emory S. Lunsford, Atlanta, Secretary; Claud H. Blount, Vice-President of the First National Bank, Treasurer. Advisers include: Mrs. Troy Rucker, Alpharetta, Association of County Commissioners of Georgia; Miss Sarah Jones, Decatur, Georgia Congress of Parents and Teachers; R. L. P. Carter, Com-
merce, Georgia Farm Bureau; Mrs. Alfred Dorman, Statesboro, Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs; Mrs. W. A. Peavy, Atlanta, Georgia Home Demonstration Council; Miss Virginia McJenkins, Atlanta; Georgia Library Association. Consultants are Miss Tommie Dora Barker, Director, Library School, Emory University, Georgia; Mrs. A. B. Burrus, Librarian, Decatur-DeKalb County Library, Decatur; Miss Sarah Maret, Director, Cherokee Regional Library, LaFayette, Georgia; J. H. McGiboney, Superintendent, Carroll County Schools, Carrollton; and Miss Lucile Nix, Textbook and Rural Library Service, Atlanta.

At present, our state is undertaking to attain better regional library service by consolidation, by setting up larger units of operation. But when evaluated on the basis of the state's total population, it is clearly seen that Georgia still falls short of the amount spent per capita on libraries in the nation at large.

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<th>Georgia (1947)</th>
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