

## Chapter 3

### The Public Library Service Division, Private Support, and the WPA in Alabama

After the Carnegie library program ended in 1917, Alabama remained behind most states in the development of tax-supported public libraries. Even though Carnegie's contribution provided additional public and financial support, the state and its citizens were reluctant to finance public libraries fully throughout the state. The additional problem of providing library services to the large rural population also proved difficult for many parts of the state. The Library Extension Division, within the ADAH, was the only office given the responsibility to direct public library development in Alabama. Its continued growth and expansion were necessary to build a true statewide tax-supported public library system. Fortunately, outside aid became available to help promote the development of public libraries in Alabama. Private funding was secured from the Rosenwald Fund, which provided money to develop a county library demonstration project in Walker County, Alabama. In addition to this private funding, federal assistance became available through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which provided workers to libraries throughout the state in an effort to ease the economic hardships of the Depression. These private and federal sources of funding, an increase in public support, and legislation were all vital elements on the road to developing a statewide tax-supported public library system in Alabama.

The Library Extension Division, created in 1907 within the Alabama Department of Archives and History, continued as Alabama's only administrative unit providing assistance to the state's public libraries. Thomas Owen, director of the ADAH, persisted in his efforts to encourage the development of tax-supported libraries through both the Library Extension Division and the Alabama Library Association. Unfortunately, at the time of his death in 1920, Owen had not lived to see his dream of "a free public library in every city, town or village of over a thousand inhabitants."<sup>1</sup> It would be another fifty years before Alabama provided free tax-supported public library service to all of its citizens. A combination of federal and public funding made it possible for library service to expand throughout Alabama.

Upon Thomas Owen's death, his wife, Marie Bankhead Owen, succeeded him as director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. During Marie Owen's administration from 1920 to 1955, the focus of library development in the United States began shifting from creation of municipal libraries to the development of county and regional libraries. These types of libraries drew financial support from a larger tax base and therefore could collect more money for library operations. County and regional libraries could also provide services to more isolated and rural populations through library branches and stations. This type of development allowed a central library to administer branches in outlying areas, a system that became especially important in the rural South.

During the time when much of the United States was becoming more urban, the urbanization trend was slow to take hold in the South. In 1920, only twenty-two percent

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Owen, "Alabama Libraries and Library Buildings," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 25 December 1910, 1.

of Alabama's population was urban, and by 1930 this number increased to only twenty-eight percent. Only seven other states had smaller urban populations than Alabama in 1930, and four of these states were also located in the South: Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.<sup>2</sup>

Table 4.--Tax-Supported Alabama Public Libraries, 1923\*

Name of Library	Controlled by	Volumes	Income from Taxation	Other Income	Total Income
Anniston Carnegie Library	City	10,000	\$2,500	\$1,224	\$3,724
Birmingham Public Library**	City	98,736	\$60,000	\$7,195	\$67,195
Dothan Public Library**	Society	3,000	\$300	\$102	\$402
Gadsden Public Library	City	7,995	\$1,800	\$907	\$2,707
Huntsville Carnegie Library	City	7,000	\$1,200	\$0	\$1,200
Selma Carnegie Library	City	10,000	\$1,250	\$1807	\$3,057
Talledega Public Library**	City	17,685	\$1,200	\$1,100	\$2,300
Tuscaloosa County Library**	Association	9,000	\$830	\$180	\$1,010
Union Springs Library	Association	3,812	\$1,000	\$247	\$1,247

\*Includes those libraries reporting income, and with 3,000 volumes and over.

\*\*Provides branch service.

Source: United States Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1923, Bulletin 1926, No. 9*, (Washington: GPO, 1926), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau. Inter University Consortium for Political and Social Research, "United States Historical Census Data Browser"; available from <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>; Internet; accessed 22 February, 2000.

Only nine percent of the South's rural population had tax-supported public library service in 1926.<sup>3</sup> Alabama reported only nine tax-supported public libraries in 1923 and of the nine libraries, shown in Table 4, none reported that they were controlled by a county. Four of the nine tax-supported libraries reported that they provided branch services, as shown by the asterisks in Table 4. Both the Talladega Public Library and Birmingham Public Library reported eight branch stations, Tuscaloosa Public Library reported five branches, and Dothan Public Library reported three branch stations.<sup>4</sup>

Seven other libraries, shown in Table 5, reported to be free in 1923, but were either not supported by taxes, or did not report their sources of income. Two of these libraries were controlled by cities and were most likely tax-supported public libraries, even though they did not report their funding sources in the 1923 survey.

Table 5.--Non Tax-Supported Alabama Public Libraries, 1923\*\*

Name of Library	Controlled by	Volumes
Eufaula Carnegie Library	City	4,000
Fairhope Public Library	Corporation	7,000
Geneva Public Library	Association	3,000
Association Public Library (Mobile)	Society	22,000
Mobile Library	Corporation	38,000
Montgomery Library Association	Society	15,000
Troy Carnegie Library*	City	6,000

\*Includes service to five branches.

\*\*Includes libraries reporting over 3,000 volumes and over.

Source: United States Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1923, Bulletin 1926, No. 9*, (Washington: GPO, 1926), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Louis R. Wilson, *Geography of Reading: A Study of the Distribution and Status of Libraries in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938). 31. Wilson's south consisted of, Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

<sup>4</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1923, Bulletin 1926, No. 9*, (Washington: GPO, 1926), 13-14.

Across the South, public library development continued to be slow. This lack of development left large rural areas of the South without access to any library services. The county library trend that helped alleviate some of the problem of serving rural population soon became a part of Alabama's library development. As the rest of the country began to embrace the idea of the county library system, Alabama followed.

Municipal libraries often left a large rural population without any library services, and funding was often prone to the whims of town councils, administrators, and the continued support of local organizations. The county library system acquired its funding from a larger tax base and also provided a central site of administration for library outlets throughout the county. As public libraries developed in Alabama, most followed the early trend to develop as municipal libraries, leaving the rural areas without service. The new regional and county library system plans offered a way to serve these hard-to-reach areas with library branches or stations that could be administered through a central office.

The first county library appeared in the United States in 1818 in Pike County, Indiana.<sup>5</sup> But it was not until the American Library Association (ALA) conference in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1923, that the ALA acknowledged the benefits of the county library system. During the conference the ALA Council agreed "that the county is the logical unit of library service for most parts of the United States, and that the county library system is the solution of the library problem for county districts."<sup>6</sup> At this time over half of the states had enacted their own county library laws, and most of the southern states had passed county library legislation as well. Alabama's own county

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<sup>5</sup> Harriet Catherine Long, *County Library Service*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

library legislation was passed in 1919 and stated that the "court of county commissioners, the board of revenue or other governing body of the counties of this State shall have the right to establish and maintain or aid in establishing and maintaining free public libraries, for the use of their citizens of their respective counties... ." <sup>7</sup>

A county library system usually consisted of a main library building in a county seat or larger town and branch libraries or stations situated throughout the county where the rural populations could take advantage of the services. Often branches or rural stations were found in general stores, schools, community or local government buildings--anywhere a stock of library materials could circulate. By 1929 the United States Bureau of Education reported only thirteen free public libraries in Alabama administered by a county, town, or city. Of the thirteen libraries, two were administered by a county, ten by a town, and one by a township. <sup>8</sup>

One of Alabama's earliest county libraries was established in May of 1927 in Calhoun County. In 1931 the Calhoun County system boasted thirty library stations in rural areas throughout the county. <sup>9</sup> The Birmingham Public Library, though not a county library, did provide branch libraries throughout the city even before 1920. As early as 1916 the city of Birmingham was providing the Public Library with a car to deliver books to its area branches. <sup>10</sup> The idea of a central library with several branch outlets proved to

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<sup>7</sup> H.R. 944, Session of 1919, *Alabama General Laws and Joint Resolutions*, September 30, 1919.

<sup>8</sup> United States Bureau of Education, Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1929, Bulletin 1930, No. 37 Washington: GPO, 1931, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen, *The Story of Alabama: A History of the State*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1949), 293.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Milam to Thomas Owen, June 15, 1916, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Directors Office. *Administrative Files, 1901-1920*. Folder, A599. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

also be useful in providing services for a large city as well as a county area. In the 1930s other county libraries began appearing in Alabama.

In Eutaw, Alabama, the Greene County Library opened its doors in June 1930. Often the county library was supported by money donated by local clubs and individuals. In the case of the Greene County library, the initial funding reportedly came from local organizations, personal donations, and the proceeds of a local town play. Scenarios such as this were common across the state as individuals tried to develop public library service for the local population. The county supplemented these solicited donations with rooms for the library and custodial service, while the city of Eutaw provided the librarian's salary.<sup>11</sup>

Since it was not based on tax appropriations, funding of private organizations and individuals was difficult to rely on as a consistent source of income from year to year. The fund-raising interests of local clubs often changed as new officers were elected and new members joined. This familiar situation was often too common across the state, and the goal of statewide tax-supported library development had several bridges to cross before every one of Alabama's citizens would have easy access to a free public library.

On the surface it would seem that the state was moving forward with the development of tax-supported free public libraries. Even before 1920, Alabama had a county library law and a Library Extension Division (LED), within the Alabama Department of Archives and History. By 1935 several other southern states had library extension agencies, but over half were not active in development or adequately funded.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Owen, *The Story of Alabama*, 311-313.

<sup>12</sup> Tommie Dora Barker, *Libraries of the South: A Report on Developments, 1930-1935*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1936), 22-23.

Even though Alabama had a county library law on the books and an extension office, it was unable to create an adequate statewide tax-supported library system. Alabama library advocates wanted to establish a true statewide system but were always hindered by the fact that the Library Extension Division continued to exist as a department within the ADAH with little funding and minimal staff.

When the Library Extension Division was created in 1907, its duties included aiding in the development of public libraries. But, the LED had no authority to match public library funding, nor did it have its own budget to provide funds to carry on its own work or a separate board to direct its library activities. The LED continued under similar conditions for over thirty years.

In 1931 the efforts of the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs and the Alabama Library Association resulted in a legislative bill that would create an independent state agency and appropriate \$15,000 to administer the development of tax-supported free public libraries in Alabama. By the time the bill passed the Legislature it had been amended to provide only \$10,000 to the library agency. Governor Benjamin Miller vetoed the bill, reasoning that he did not believe the State Treasury would appropriate the funding for the agency.

Without separate appropriations and adequate funding to carry on its activities the LED was unable to do much on its own. The Division encouraged libraries and their supporters to seek outside funding for library development activities in the state. In the 1930s outside funding was secured from the Julius Rosenwald Fund to help create a county library demonstration project and to assist the LED with its extension work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

The Julius Rosenwald Fund was created in 1917 by businessman Julius Rosenwald who made his fortune as president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. The Rosenwald Fund's main objective was to improve education for African-Americans in the United States. Grants were given for several types of education-related projects, especially in the rural South, and by the late 1920s the Rosenwald Fund began distributing grants to aid states in need of better library services.

In 1929 the Rosenwald Fund began a program of support for county library services in the South, "[w]hich will serve the entire population of the counties aided; rural and urban, colored and white."<sup>14</sup> The program consisted of eleven counties in seven southern states and each was to provide library services to county residents regardless of race or locale.

The program accomplished its mission by providing matching funds to the selected counties to develop county public library programs, as well as provide additional money and personnel to state library agencies. The five-year program stipulated that funds for the county projects be matched by local money dollar for dollar the first two years. A sliding scale ensued in the remaining years with the fund giving two dollars for every local one the third year, and one for four local dollars the final two years. A few counties in the program had no previously tax-supported public library service, and the Rosenwald program allowed more flexibility with their budgets and also matched all public funding.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ethel M. Fair, ed., *Countrywide Library Service, A Compilation of Articles on Service Organized by Counties and Other Large Units*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1934), 146.

<sup>15</sup> Louis R. Wilson and Edward A. Wright, *County Library Service in the South: A Study of the Rosenwald County Library Demonstration*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1935), v-vi, 165-166.

Walker County, Alabama, was home to one of the seven Rosenwald Fund county library demonstration projects. From 1930 to 1934 the county received \$46,666 from the Fund.<sup>16</sup> The Walker County Superintendent of Education, J. Alex Moore, was instrumental in securing the project funds for the county.<sup>17</sup>

Moore, a local supporter of public libraries, first began a professional library for the area teachers in the 1920s. This teacher's library became the core of the Walker County Public Library. Moore used current state library legislation to acquire matching funds to buy books for the professional library and county schools. In 1930 the Walker County library opened and 17,500 books were transferred from the Superintendent's office to the county library.<sup>18</sup>

During his tenure as the Superintendent of Education, Moore often spoke with local organizations on behalf of the cause of public library development in Walker County. In the late 1920s he enlisted the help of various clubs in the city of Jasper to help collect books through donations and purchases for the future public library.<sup>19</sup>

The Walker Library Project received the majority of its matching funding for the Rosenwald project from the Alabama State Department of Education's state aid for school libraries. Over the five-year program the library received 15.4% of its total income from the state. The Walker County Library was the only Rosenwald library to receive state funding during the program.<sup>20</sup> The existing County Library Law provided

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vi.

<sup>17</sup> Willie Fagan Calkins, "The Walker County Library" (Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1934), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson and Wright, *County Library Service*, 169-170.

the means to secure matching funds from the school or county board of education for each dollar spent on book titles.

The Rosenwald Fund program was designed especially to bring educational opportunities to African-Americans. One stipulation for receiving the grant money for the library project was that library services must be provided for all races. In many areas of the South at this time, libraries were segregated by race. To meet this requirement for the grant, the Walker County Library provided the African-American community library service through branch libraries. This separate access was clearly not equal to the services provided to white citizens, but it was a first step toward providing even a small measure of library service for a population previously ignored. Walker County's black population was approximately 7.5% in 1931, and in July of that year the library had established thirty-four library stations in the county. Six of these served African-American communities.<sup>21</sup> Experiments like the Walker County Library Rosenwald Fund Demonstration Project provided needed money to continue library development in Alabama and set an example for future improvements across the state.

At the end of the five-year project, the Walker County Library had survived drastic budget cuts and even the total loss of funding from the county board of education's budget. Because of the lack of funds the library was closed for a five-month period until a new library board was elected and funding restored to the project. Not only were there budget problems but personnel problems also plagued the county library as four different librarians served the library in its first five years of operation.<sup>22</sup> Even with

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<sup>21</sup> Calkins, "The Walker County Library," 18.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson and Wright, *County Library Service*, 30-31.

these setbacks, the Rosenwald project made it clear that service could be provided effectively and more efficiently through the county library system.

Since the Rosenwald Fund developed only one county system in Alabama, it was obvious other funding was needed to ensure that the entire state would have a future that included public library service. The LED continued to work to provide assistance in developing public libraries across the state. Library supporters in Alabama desperately wanted a fully funded state library agency to support extension work and provide materials for the state's public libraries, but the current political climate did not make it possible to eagerly embrace these ideas.

The Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs continued the fight for a state public library agency. In 1938 the Federation hosted a luncheon for legislators to promote the establishment of a state agency solely for the development of tax-supported public libraries.<sup>23</sup> The group partly achieved their goal when, on March 17, 1939, the Public Library Service Division (PLSD) was established within the Alabama Department of Archives and History.<sup>24</sup> The PLSD was directed to advise public libraries in the state, "receive and administer funds, books, or other property...to carry out the purpose of the Act," and also operate traveling libraries in the state.<sup>25</sup>

Later that same year another bill was introduced and passed, allowing the division to match federal funds for public libraries up to \$10,000.<sup>26</sup> Even though Alabama was

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<sup>23</sup> "Factors Influencing or Affecting Library Development in Alabama." Vertical files, Alabama Public Library Service, Montgomery, AL.

<sup>24</sup> H.R. 327, Session of 1939, *Alabama General Laws and Joint Resolutions*, March 17, 1939.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> H.R. 954, Session of 1939, *Alabama General Laws and Joint Resolutions*, September 19, 1939.

still without an entirely separate state library agency, at least the new Public Library Services Division now had its own five-member executive board, separate from the ADAH board. In October of 1939 Governor Frank M. Dixon appointed the five members. Lois Ranier Green, director of the Arkansas bookmobile service, was hired as the new division's director. Green quickly began working towards developing library service in each of the state's sixty-seven counties. Mildred Harrison was hired as a library field worker for the Division. The two women traveled throughout the state helping counties and towns establish public libraries.<sup>27</sup>

By 1939 there were 15 municipal libraries, three county libraries, and a regional library system operating in Alabama.<sup>28</sup> The state of Alabama was spending six cents per capita on public library services, while the American Library Association suggested one dollar per capita.<sup>29</sup> Not only were Alabama's per capita expenditures for libraries extremely low, but in 1939, fifty-eight of Alabama's sixty-seven counties were without free public library service.<sup>30</sup> Funding at this level was not enough to bring tax-supported library services to all Alabama citizens, and again outside funding sources would made up for the lack of state support.

Supplemental aid came to Alabama in the late 1930s through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. Created by Franklin D. Roosevelt in May 1935 and

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<sup>27</sup> Alabama Public Library Service, *Alabama Public Library Service, 1939-1989: Fifty Years of Serving*, (Montgomery: The Service, 1989), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Hulen Bivens. "Ability With Age: the History of Alabama Public Library Service, 1969 (?)" [photocopy]. Vertical files, Alabama Public Library Service, Montgomery, AL, 3.

<sup>29</sup> "WPA Alabama Narrative Report" May 15, 1939. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Parks Beamguard, "Alabama Public Libraries: How the Story Began, 1970" [photocopy]. Vertical Files, Alabama Public Library Service, Montgomery, AL, 10.

later renamed the Work Project Administration in 1939, the program brought thousands of dollars of federal support and manpower to aid in the development and support of Alabama's public libraries. The government program established various types of work relief programs across the country.

Many WPA projects provided funds to employ white-collar workers and women who were unable to find suitable jobs in the other types of work relief programs. The WPA Library Program was one such program. The goal of the WPA library program was "to assist established library agencies in stimulating local reception of complete and permanent library services as a regular public function."<sup>31</sup> The program was not developed to be a permanent subsidization of local library development; rather it was "designed to help existing library authorities in extending library service supported by state and local funds."<sup>32</sup> During its existence the WPA library project employed over 27,000 workers nationwide and 523 workers in Alabama.<sup>33</sup> These relief workers were responsible for a variety of tasks including mending books, filing, cataloguing collections, creating indexes, and repairing library buildings. Workers also provided training to non-professionals working in librarians.

In Alabama, WPA library projects mainly provided libraries with needed employees. In addition to this work there were also seven WPA library construction projects undertaken from 1933 until 1941 that included new buildings or additions to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Barrett Stanford, *Library Extension Under the WPA: An Appraisal of an Experiment in Aid*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1944), 7, 53.

existing libraries.<sup>34</sup> The white-collar project workers engaged in several library activities including reference work, preservation of library material, children's story times, arrangement of collections, inventories of materials, preparation of union catalogs, book lists, library exhibits, and vertical file collections, and creation of indexes, as well as additional staffing for longer operating hours.<sup>35</sup>

The newly created Public Library Division worked hand in hand with the WPA library project. When the legislature appropriated \$10,000 to the Division in 1939, the WPA contributed an additional \$10,000 to the Division.<sup>36</sup> Division director Lois Greene was classified as a WPA worker, and her salary was paid half by the state and half by the WPA.<sup>37</sup> The PLD continued with its struggle to bring about the development of a statewide public library system, and they worked with the WPA in an effort to expand existing library services to Alabama citizens.

For an Alabama library to receive a WPA worker, the local public library had to apply to the Director of the PLD and certain requirements had to be met by the public library in three areas of basic library operations. Requirements included evidence that the applying library had a desk, shelving for books and magazines, filing cabinet and cases for a card catalog. The library also needed work tables, tables and chairs for patrons, as well as water, heat, and light. Not only did the library receiving assistance have to meet the requirements of furnishings, but they also had to provide materials for the WPA staff to use in their project. The list of requirements for library materials was very specific,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>36</sup> Bivens, "Ability With Age," 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Alabama Public Library Service, *Alabama Public Library Service, 1939-1989*, 3.

requiring everything from shellac to a "fine and rent lock box."<sup>38</sup> The public library also had to provide funding. Since the WPA only provided funding to extend already existing services, those libraries receiving a WPA worker had to have funded a budget for books, magazines, and newspapers. The library was also required to work with the state library office on the approval of book purchases.<sup>39</sup>

These requirements were not the most difficult part of the WPA projects. With only seven trained librarians working in the WPA effort, workers needed to carry out the project were difficult to find. To help boost the number of trained workers for the projects, the WPA sponsored a course to help train new workers. These personnel then assisted other libraries throughout the state. Even though the WPA provided \$316,890 of aid to Alabama libraries in just one year, it proved to be a difficult task to find trained workers to serve in the WPA library projects.<sup>40</sup>

One of the larger WPA library efforts took place in Calhoun County. In 1937 twenty WPA workers joined the county library in various roles, including an assistant librarian and a project supervisor.<sup>41</sup> Three years later it claimed thirty-one rural library stations in various parts of the county. Yet with all the rural stations in the county the only service to Negroes was the main library branch in Oxford.

During the WPA library project thirty-three libraries were established in

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<sup>38</sup> Public Library Service Division, "Public Library Service and WPA," [photocopy], Alabama Public Library Service Division, Program Administrative Files, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Stanford, *Library Extension*, 62-63.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *The Story of Alabama*, 294.

Alabama. However, even with the additional WPA library-sponsored programs and workers Alabama continued without complete statewide public library service. The Alabama Library Association reported in 1943 that forty-five percent of the state remained without public library service.<sup>42</sup> Only eighteen counties across the state had county-wide library service for its citizens, leaving fifty-three percent of the state's population without library service.

Even though Alabama lagged behind other states there was good news to report. In 1943 per capita expenditures for public library services had risen to eleven cents from below ten cents in the 1930s.<sup>43</sup> The minimum standard per capita set by ALA was one dollar. By 1943 only Mississippi and Arkansas spent less per capita for state library services than Alabama.<sup>44</sup>

Another federal work project helped bring library services to northern Alabama. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) helped sponsor a library program serving seven states, including Alabama. The TVA program was an early user of the cooperative program between libraries and adult education agencies in the region. The TVA plan promoted the "library [as] an indispensable part of the education system."<sup>45</sup> In 1936 the TVA experiment in Alabama included Madison, Jackson, and Marshall counties. Marshall County later dropped out of the experiment, and the two other counties

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<sup>42</sup> "Alabama's Library Crisis," *The Anniston Star*, 4 April 1943, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Alabama Public Library Service Division. *Annual Report, September 19, 1944*. W.S. Hoole Special Collection Library, The University of Alabama. Tommie Dora Barker, *Libraries of the South*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> "Alabama's Library Crisis," *The Anniston Star*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Marion Humble, *Rural America Reads: A Study of Rural Library Service*, (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1938), 46-47.

continued participating in the project until it was dissolved due to lack of funding, infrastructure, and staff.<sup>46</sup>

The TVA project was responsible for providing access to public library services for a three-county area near Guntersville through contracting with the Huntsville Public Library. By providing additional funding for the program the Huntsville Public Library was able to extend services to a regional area. This experiment was the first of its nature in Alabama. The regional library provided service through branches such as the one found near the Guntersville Dam.<sup>47</sup>

After the federal funding dried up, many libraries across the state felt the burden of the loss and could no longer provide the services that they had previously offered their populations. The WPA efforts ended in 1943, but the APLS Division did not gain separate agency status for another fifteen years. Many libraries struggled for years after the WPA efforts to provide adequate service to their populations.

At times the WPA efforts added significant amounts of manpower to the local library service. In 1942 Fayette County received nine WPA workers and a trained librarian. Efforts of this type provided labor that would have never been possible without federal funding. When WPA funding was no longer available, services and salaries of the Fayette library were cut dramatically, in this case, to one employee.<sup>48</sup> Often, after the WPA funds dried up, those supporters of the library appealed to any group available for continued funding. In the case of the Leighton Public Library, funding was secured from

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<sup>46</sup> Beamguard, "Alabama Public Libraries," 9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Story of Alabama*. 323

the town and Colbert County to provide a salary for a librarian to maintain the collection and services after 1943.

During the New Deal many libraries that were originally subscription or club programs turned into free public libraries in order to secure WPA assistance. The Moundville Book Club began as a community library but then became a truly free public library in 1940s when it received WPA funding. This sentiment was echoed in a *Birmingham News* article in 1936: "The club has turned the library over to the town and hopes that by June 30, when the WPA program ends, the town will have become so 'spoiled' for the library idea that the authorities will provide a means for its continuance, at least with a part-time librarian."<sup>49</sup> One of the effects the WPA funding had on Alabama was to improve the public's interest in libraries. This interest was seen in an editorial by The Anniston Star newspaper which described the problem as "Alabama's Library Crisis." The editorial made it clear that Alabama was far behind the rest of the country in its provisions for public library service, writing "Mississippi and Arkansas are the only states in the South that spend less per capita for public library service than does Alabama." From 1939 to 1943 the WPA spent approximately \$600,000 on library projects in Alabama.<sup>50</sup> With such a widespread program reaching throughout the state the federal funding made it possible to provide services across the state that were missed when the funding was cut in the early 1940s. With the newly created public interest, development of the statewide tax-supported library system grew within reach. Achieving that result was still a few years away.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 348-49.

<sup>50</sup> "Alabama's Library Crisis," *Anniston Star*, 4.

From the end of the Carnegie library program in 1917 until World War II Alabama saw several gains in the development of a statewide tax-supported public library system. A new trend of county library service became popular in Alabama, and county library laws were established allowing rural areas to receive library services previously unavailable. Private funding continued to be a factor in the movement, and the Rosenwald Fund provided a county demonstration project in Walker County, Alabama. The PLSD was created in 1939 and additional funding for its operation was approved to aid its efforts in assisting libraries throughout Alabama. Federal funding from the WPA brought additional workers into public libraries across the state, helping to promote the idea of public library service. These gains were important steps along the road to bringing public library service to every Alabama citizen. Public support was not always available and administrators and elected officials did not always share the same views regarding the importance of public library service. Alabama libraries suffered from the loss of WPA funding in the 1940s, and many libraries had a difficult time recuperating from this sudden cut in funds and loss of WPA workers. Alabama again fell behind in public library development because of a lack of public support created by a number of factors. However, with the assistance of WPA funding many Alabamians visited their first public library and federal assistance helped bolster public support for continued library development. Overall, Alabama continued the struggle and public library development improved during this era, but over half of the state continued to be without access to tax-supported public library service.