An Informal History of Georgia Public Libraries
1964-1989

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Georgia public libraries traveled many and varied roads on their way to 1989. Numerous librarians have graced our history and worked diligently and devotedly for the improvement of library services in our state. National and state events and laws have brought additional funding and resulting expansion of services. The authors have been asked to write an informal history of public library services from 1964 through 1989. With limited space and time, we have recalled what we experienced, and we have searched our files and talked with other librarians to provide a picture of the earlier years.

In 1963, the American Library Association had approved and adopted a set of standards for library functions at the state level. Overall library development within a state was determined to be of the highest priority. “Total library resources of the state must first be developed as a whole, and on this foundation a strong structure of library service both to individuals and to government agencies can be built.” 2

The Library Services Act of 1956 had made significant improvements possible in Georgia libraries. The goals for the use of Georgia’s initial allotment were the establishment of new regional library systems and the addition of more counties to the existing ones, holding in-service training workshops for librarians and trustees, and improvement of rural library development. 3

The Library Services Act was amended in 1964, when it became the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). The new authorization excluded the restriction banning service to metropolitan areas. That first year of funding, Georgia’s federal funds included $639,185 for services (Title I) and $527,841 for construction (Title II).

The formula for allocation of construction funds was 50/50, with a ceiling of $250,000 for any one project. Between 1965 and 1972, when Title II was not funded by Congress, this federal program provided $3,925,232 to build 49 public libraries in Georgia. 4

The addition of Title III, Interlibrary Cooperation, to the LSCA in 1966 enabled the Public Library Services Unit to begin the Georgia Library Information Network (GLIN). Telephone WATS lines were installed for the use of libraries calling in requests to the GLIN staff and for return calls when information was located.

The organization of libraries within the state in 1965 included 34 regional, 34 county and 11 independent systems. These libraries were being supported in their efforts by Readers’ Services at the Public Library Unit of the State Department of Education. Anne Patterson, a government summer intern doing a study of Readers’ Services, related two examples of the staff’s willingness to provide service above and beyond the call of duty.

Librarians are blessed with an extraordinary wit. A particular gentleman had requested several books on violin making and tuning. Later, a different type of request on the subject of violins came in along with an explanation from the librarian. “Mr. Kellam has made a violin, now he wants to learn to play it.” The state unit is often expected to provide answers to startling questions. Although the public library unit does not ordinarily handle requests not processed through proper channels, the pathos of the following apparently captured the sympathy of a staff member scrawled on a small slip of paper was this: “Please send information about Lonely Hearts Clubs with addresses.” The request was handled with dignity and tact. A tribute to the diplomacy and professionalism of the librarians in Readers’ Services. 5

In 1966, state grants for materials totaled $809,642. For county libraries, the smallest allotment ($486) was made to Taliaferro and Quitman counties. The largest ($40,000) to Fulton County. Grants to regional library systems ranged from Screven-Jenkins’ $792 to DeKalb Library System’s $50,270. Georgia Public Library Statistics 1966 reports that Georgia public libraries, serving a statewide population of 3,943,116, received financial support of $1,55 per capita, owned 1,33 books per capita, and circulated 4,57 books and other library materials per capita. These public libraries were organized into 34 regional library systems serving 127 counties and 32 county library systems. There also existed nine independent, publicly supported municipal library systems and one privately supported library open to the public (Coleman Library in LaGrange). Rural and isolated citizens were being provided library services by 79 bookmobiles and 14 other library-owned vehicles which distributed library materials throughout the service areas. All 159 Georgia counties qualified for state aid during fiscal 1965-66. In addition, 34 regional libraries and six county library systems also qualified for federal aid and special state allotments.

In 1968, Martha Mullins, in A Survey of Library Resources at the State Governmental Level, noted, “In Georgia, it is a point of pride that not one of the 159 counties is totally without library service. In addition, 134 of these counties are members of state-established regional systems.” Ms. Mullins, an intern in the Governor’s Summer Intern Program, interviewed Public Library Unit consultant Roxanna Austin, who observed:

“It is one function of the Public Library Unit to encourage counties to band together so that a regional system can be put into effect. However, participating in a region is completely voluntary on the part of the county, and here one sees that local politics, managed by county commissioners or boards of education, often prevents better library service to citizens.”

She concluded that “in some areas service is good; in some it is superior, but as a whole, library service to Georgia’s citizen’s is not adequate.” 6

During 1970-71, the Public Library Services Unit was expanded to division status with the legal responsibility of giving advice to all community libraries and of supervising all public libraries.

The Georgia Public Library Statistics 1971 reports a population of 4,589,575 served by 41 public library systems. Ten counties were not in a regional or countywide library system, but all 159 counties received state aid. There were 113 bookmobiles and 154 state-paid positions. Per capita circulation was 3.58, volumes per capita was 1.36, and Georgia was spending $2.49 per capita providing library services. State funding for public library construction was provided by the General Assembly and the Georgia State Board of Education in 1973, partly as a response to the cessation of federal construction funds.

In 1974, the General Assembly appropriated a record $5.6 million for the division’s work, putting Georgia at the top in

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state aid nationally, and the following year the Adequate Program for Education (APEG) went into effect, replacing the Minimum Foundation funding of 1951. The new law provided for state aid of not less than 35 cents used per capita for public library support.

A state catalog service had been set up in 1944 with 243 libraries using this service by 1947. Five cents per set of catalog cards was charged against the library's quota of state funds. In a Library Resources and Technical Services article in 1958, Virginia Drewry, library consultant with the Public Library Services Unit, stated that in 1945-46, 38,387 sets of cards were produced. By 1956-57, that number had increased to 213,412.

She concluded:

The centralized cataloging has helped to make catalogs uniform so that in the creation of regions, the problems of the cataloging in the small libraries are considerably lessened. To everyone else, the ease of ordering and using the cards has meant precious time for service. When all vacant positions in the State Department of Education were frozen in 1973, vacancies in the catalog card service could not be filled. The resulting delays may have been the catalyst leading to the demise of the service in 1976.

In 1975, the General Assembly provided funds for subregional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped called Talking Book Centers. County and regional public library systems applied for funds to establish subregional libraries, and thirteen strategically located sites were chosen. After eight years of planning, data analysis, and formulation of recommendations, the Georgia Library Survey was completed in 1975. This regional survey provided a wealth of information on libraries, library resources, services, funding, facilities, personnel, and educational programs. The Division of Public Library Services (DPLS) contracted with Battelle Columbus Laboratories for additional study. The major emphasis of the Battelle study was the potential of the library community as a whole for meeting library and information needs of the total population.

The year 1977 was a busy one for public librarians, who, along with others, were challenged by the Georgia Library Association and the Governor's Conference on Georgia Library and Information Services, the first of the state pre-White House Conferences. The Governor's Conference was held in Atlanta with an attendance of 1,200 library-minded citizens and Mrs. Lillian Carter, the President's mother, as honorary chairman and active participant. The delegates considered the recommendations of the 1975 Battelle study and formulated recommendations for revised state and federal legislation and for the White House Conference.

After years of planning and preconferences, 1979 brought the national White House Conference on Library and Information Services. The Georgia delegation was chaired by Will Peterson from Soperton. Juanita Brightwell, director of the Lake Blackshear Regional Library, was appointed conference delegate by President Carter, who had served as a trustee of that library.

One of the resolutions passed at the 1979 conference called for the creation of a task force including one lay and one professional delegate from each of the states and territories. The task force was to monitor progress on the conference resolutions. Georgia has been represented at each of the annual task force meetings, and Georgia delegates have repeatedly held leadership positions within that organization. By the conclusion of the second White House Conference on Library and Information Services Task Force (WHCLIST) meeting, the future of the organization was in doubt, and many task force members agreed that the third conference would be a make-or-break-it situation. Georgia delegates agreed to host the third task force meeting. The hospitality and superb local arrangements made for an extremely successful WHCLIST III, and the

Georgia conference continues to be remembered by long-time task force members as a turning point in WHCLIST history. WHCLIST was a primary force in obtaining legislation authorizing a second White House Conference.

New Director Named

Joe B. Forsee was named the new director of the Division of Public Library Services, Georgia State Department of Education, assuming his duties on August 1, 1980.

Automation, a topic of great concern even in the 1970s, was being talked about when Forsee arrived. One factor that had made Georgia a leader in library automation was the early development of the Atlanta-Athens Union Catalog (AAUC). Using this tool, libraries could find the locations for needed materials. There had always been great concern about some disaster damaging or obliterating the AAUC card catalog, and DPLS grant was awarded to cover the cost of filming the catalog and providing copies to a number of libraries. Shortly after the completion of the project, the union catalog was discontinued as a project of the University Center in Georgia.

In 1981 the Division of Public Library Services and the LSCA Advisory Council set aside about $100,000 for competitive and development grants to public libraries. Each year since then, between 55 and 50 competitive grant proposals have been submitted, with 12 to 25 being awarded funding. Development grants are given for projects which provide service to the target group statewide or which are unique pilot projects demonstrating an unusual approach to library services and which may be replicated in other libraries.

Public libraries obviously wanted and needed increased funding. The requests for extra funds required the gathering of statistics and documents to support the need. It was apparent that we were comparing apples with oranges and pineapples. In order to study our data gathering, the Directors' Advisory Committee looked at the annual report and defined each of the measures in detail. That led to a presentation to the directors and the adoption of standardized statistical measures and definitions.

During the period from fall 1980 until late 1982, all formula statements for state aid were reconsidered by the Directors' Advisory Committee. The directors en masse reviewed and discussed them. Finally, Forsee made recommendations to Assistant State Superintendent Dr. Cal Adamson, who took the changes to the State Board of Education. That board revised every formula and adopted one for Talking Book Centers for the first time. The TBC formula has been fully funded, while others have not. One of the notable revisions was a change in population base required for library systems to qualify for additional state paid libraries from multiples of 100,000 to 50,000. This revision was not to be funded until 1985.

When Forsee was interviewed, Dr. Adamson had indicated a strong interest in revising the library law. They agreed to approach changing the law after revision of state board policy, which has the effect of law. Criteria and policy revision could be acted on immediately to provide some guidance to library systems, giving the library community time to take a more deliberate approach to statute revision.

Forsee asked the Directors' Advisory Committee for assistance in developing amended criteria for state aid to recommend to Dr. Adamson. A sub-committee worked on various criteria statements which were presented at each directors' meeting over the next several months to achieve consensus. When concern arose over how these would be interpreted, interpretations were added to the revised document. Generally, the criteria revision incorporated all of the old philosophies while expanding requirements to cover new issues and concerns. One of the bigger changes dealt with the base funding required. Requirements such as no reduction in local funds and a system-wide service plan were continued in the new documents.
Most of the work on the revision of the library law started in 1981, about the time we were wrapping up the criteria for state aid. The original charge to the Directors' Advisory Committee dealt with both the criteria and the law revision. Very little was changed from the old statutes; rather, the new statutes carried over the old provisions, expanded and defined them in some cases, and dealt with some new issues that had not existed when the previous statutes had been passed.

As with the criteria for state aid, the Advisory Committee utilized sub-committees to work on sections of the new statutes. At successive directors' meetings, committee-approved sections were presented and explained to all 50 system directors to establish consensus. At the conclusion of this process, an intent document was prepared and submitted through the Department of Education for review.

Early editions of the new statutes were circulated to obtain written response from librarians and trustees. After the Department of Education had had time to review the intent document, a group of librarians visited the Speaker of the House to ask his advice regarding a sponsor for the bill and the necessary strategy that might lead to passage of revised statutes. Speaker Tom Murphy himself introduced the bill, which received only one negative vote during the deliberations that led to its passage.

### Involvement of Trustees

Trustee involvement and training are essential to the success of Georgia public libraries. In the early 1970s, a Georgia Library Trustee Manual was published and distributed, but no general training had taken place for several years. In 1982, Barbara Loar, Marilyn Mason, Mary Lu Mitchell, and Jane Norcross met with Forsee to seek funding for trustee workshops. Forsee agreed to fund some efforts if they would assist in planning them. In 1983, a Georgia Library Association session for trustees featured a number of speakers on a variety of topics.

With funding from an LSCA Title I grant in 1984, Elizabeth Curry edited a new trustees' manual, Georgia Public Library Trustees Handbook, which the DeKalb Library System produced in cooperation with the DPLS. The manual included material from many other states, the national ALTA WILL program, and key Georgia documents. The manual was considered one of the best in the United States when it was published, and many other states borrowed heavily from it when creating their own manuals.

In 1985, a trustee workshop linked to GLA saw the distribution of these new manuals and a review of their contents; in 1986, the trustees were invited to attend a communications workshop featuring Arch Lustberg, a national communications consultant. The Trustees and Friends Section of GLA had presented its first award to Mrs. Joe Frank Harris in 1984; later recipients included Speaker Murphy, Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller, and Representative Terry Coleman.

Also, around this time, a legislative consultant was employed jointly by the Georgia Library Association and the Georgia Council of Public Libraries. For the first time, librarians, trustees, and friends had someone outside the profession to track applicable legislation and coordinate their efforts to support beneficial legislation and favorable appropriation levels. This assistance has been an important factor in successful efforts to increase state aid for public libraries.

In 1985, state-paid public librarians received a 17% salary increase, restoring them to the teacher pay scale. During the previous legislative session, public librarians had been granted a 3% rather than the 10% raise granted to teachers. It was vital to get the librarians back on the teacher pay scale so that the favorable linking of librarians' and teachers' salaries could continue in the future. If Georgia is to attract and retain the most talented public librarians, this linking must continue. Good salaries in the public library area also help other types of librarians in seeking improved salaries.

A significant increase in the number of state-paid librarians also occurred. Thirty-one new positions were created and 20 shared positions were assigned to individual library systems in order to allow a position for each 50,000 persons served, up to a maximum system service area of 250,000 persons. Previously, a position was earned for every 100,000 persons served. This was the first sizeable increase in many years.

The formula for state matching funds to build public library facilities was dramatically increased in 1984 to provide 90% of the first half million of allowable project cost and 66 2/3% of any cost above half a million. This change in formula, coupled with the ability to use state general obligation bonds, paved the way for a boom in public library building. In 1986, about one-half the state-funded construction grant dollars in the country were in Georgia. A facility was truly in reach for almost any community that wanted one. Too, the interest aroused by a new facility routinely translates into improved library services and expanded usage.

Also in 1984, a constitutional amendment was passed which allowed the use of state general obligation bonds for financing the state share of public library construction projects. This was highly significant because it clarified the ability of boards of trustees to handle such projects and provided an "installment payment plan" for the state to use in building state-of-the-art public library facilities.

In the 13 years from 1973 to 1985, there were 78 public library projects funded with approximately $16.3 million of state funds. In 1985, federal LSCA Title II funds were reauthorized and funded, bringing Georgia about a half million additional construction dollars that year.

By 1986, the number of projects and dollars in construction resulted in a review of the formula and policies by the Office of Planning and Budget and the State Board of Education. The outcome of the review was the retention of the formula for any project in a system that was below minimum standards for facilities; the adjustment of the matching percentage for newly established medium and optimal standards, and a $2 million ceiling per system per year. All projects funded with local bond issues passed before fall of 1986 remained eligible for the $3 million ceiling.

Also in 1986, federal LSCA funds were used to match local dollars to fund the first portable library kiosk in a rapid transit station in this country. Located in the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) station at Avondale, the service outlet was a project of the Stone Mountain Regional Library and MARTA. The Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library opened three similar installations a short time later. Materials can be returned at any location, making this project a cooperative effort between systems as well as a national innovation.

### Automation Efforts

Considerable interest in a state-wide automation project for libraries had arisen. The interest was sufficient to foster support for a requested budget package which would place computer terminals in each of the 50 public library systems. Unfortunately, we hit difficult budget years about the same time this support solidified. The only automation funding that was to be appropriated in that period was for the automated circulation system at the Division of Public Library Services.

SIRSI was being installed in a number of libraries in Georgia. West Georgia College and Kennesaw College both installed the system within months of the Division of Public Library Services. Augusta College and Georgia Tech already had it. One of the important aspects of our installation was that libraries in the state could make their own automation choices without the fear that the Division would automate in some obscure way that would make compatibility difficult or impossible. It allowed the Division of Public Library Services...
to maintain library service despite staff cuts.

By 1987, the education information network called for in the Quality Basic Education Act (GENESIS) was being explored for application to libraries as well as schools. The decision was made to give GENESIS hardware and management software to the public library systems, and Uncle Remus Regional Library System was chosen as the library pilot site.

The GENESIS configuration includes management software and hardware to automate payroll, accounting, word processing, and other administrative procedures.

In connection with GENESIS, a standard public library chart of accounts was developed in conjunction with the initial pilot site personnel and DPLS officials. Workshops were held in 1987 and 1988 to assist libraries in learning to use the new chart of accounts. Installations were begun in September 1988. By December of that year, 14 library systems plus the pilot site had installed the equipment and the staffs had undergone training.

In 1988 and 1989, two automation efforts were begun. Telefacsimile transmission of interlibrary loan requests and documents was demonstrated in an LSCA Title III project. The tests have proven successful, and telefacsimile is expected to be heavily used by most libraries of varying type within the next one to two years.

The second development was the creation of a library database for monographs and serials for all types of libraries. The project is coordinated by DPLS and handled as a subset of the Online Cooperative Library Center (OCLC). Training and assistance are being provided by the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) staff. With this approach, any library can access information about library holdings and arrange to borrow materials through the use of a terminal and modem without belonging to OCLC or SOLINET. This arrangement will affect the flow of interlibrary lending requests. Already, a new lending protocol has been drafted. The next year will hold many changes and, we hope, a number of improvements in networking efforts.

Of 53 public library directors in 1970, only four are still active (Elizabeth Moore, Charles Schmidt, Isabel Sorrier, Walter Murphy). There has been a 50% turnover in the directors' positions since 1981. This large number of new system directors is one of the more significant changes to occur in Georgia. Group thought and collective tradition undergo dramatic evolution with so much turnover, and the group may not have been as effective in some ways. At the same time, this has probably caused new ideas to come forward more quickly.

State aid has increased to more than three times the 1980 level, from $11,658,718 to $36,428,400 in 1989. If construction is discounted, other state aid amounts have doubled, going from $8,329,301 in 1980 to $17,178,400 in 1989.

At the end of 25 years, Georgia librarians can be proud of their history and their accomplishments. Looking forward to the next quarter-century, we still have much to do to assure excellent library services for all Georgians.

RESOURCES
3. Files of the Division of Public Library Services.
7. Files of the Division of Public Library Services.
8. Files of Richard Hall, Division of Public Library Services.