
The Governor Morehead School Library

Alice B. Walker

In 1845, North Carolina passed the necessary legislation to establish a school for deaf, dumb and blind children, the ninth state to do so. As early as 1847, when the first buildings were being designed, the planners recognized the need for a library. A room designated "Library and Cabinet" was included in the plans for the first administration building on Caswell Square in Raleigh.

Today, the library at The Governor Morehead School, which is the current name for the school for visually impaired youth of North Carolina, is a well-equipped media center which not only enriches the academic curriculum but also fills a "public library" need for students and staff.

The school serves visually impaired and multi-handicapped children ages five through twenty-one from all over North Carolina. One hundred and fifty-six are currently enrolled. Some of these students are day students, but a larger proportion are residential students who return to their homes only on weekends. A large staff of classroom and special teachers, counselors, administrators, nurses and houseparents completes the population at The Governor Morehead School. The library strives to meet the diverse needs of all of these people. The campus, consisting of academic and administration buildings as well as cottages, a central dining hall and a gymnasium with indoor pool, is located off Raleigh's Western Boulevard near Pullen Park.

Many changes have taken place at The Governor Morehead School since its beginnings as "The North Carolina Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind" back in 1845. The history and development of the library closely parallels that of the school. In the beginning, only white deaf and blind children were admitted, but in January 1869 a black department for deaf and blind was opened in a separate location in downtown Raleigh, thereby increasing the scope of the library population surveyed.

Just as the school changed over the years, education of the blind has undergone changes.

The founders of schools for the blind in the United States turned to Europe for special appliances and methods of teaching. In the 1830s, the common type of reading material in official use in Europe was embossed or raised letters, simplified to make them more readable. One advantage of this method was that it could be read by sighted teachers with no special instruction. Also, it was contended that by using a type similar to that used by the sighted, the blind would be less set apart from others. This method had drawbacks, however, and various raised dot codes similar to the Grade 2 Braille code in use today were adopted by the different schools in the United States. In 1932, after a long and bitter controversy, an agreement was signed by representatives of the blind of Great Britain and the United States that adopted the present-day English language Grade 2 Braille.

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school for the purchase of new books. Although the appropriation was small, the library holdings were gradually increased.

In 1893, the white deaf students were transferred to a special school in Morganton, but the "Blind School" continued to grow in size and scope and there became a pressing need for larger quarters for both black and white departments. In 1923, the white department moved to the present Ashe Avenue campus and a few years later the black department moved to a large campus which included farmland located on Garner Road near Raleigh. It was not until 1977 that the entire school was on one site once again and by that time all of the deaf children were being educated elsewhere.

During these years, the school library had been growing and evolving. Reading materials in Braille, large print and recorded formats were being added to the collection. A graduate librarian was hired in 1943 to organize the expanding collection on a professional basis, and before long the requirements of The Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools had been satisfied. A large new library wing was added to the school building soon after World War II. Inter-library loans between the libraries on the two campuses were in effect until their merger in 1977 when the Garner Road campus, the former black department, was given up.

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The sudden growth spurt of media in school libraries that occurred in the 1960s was felt at The Governor Morehead School also. Tape recorders, phonographs, and movie and filmstrip projectors, as well as other equipment and materials were purchased by the library and circulated to students and teachers. Other important changes were taking place as the library holdings grew. A card catalog of all library materials—print, Braille, and audio-visual—was produced on 5" x 8" cards. These cards contained all of the necessary information in large print on one side with the same information in Braille on the other side. Development of the card catalog enabled even the totally blind students to use the library independently. During this decade of change, "The State School for the Blind and Deaf," the school's

second name, became "The Governor Morehead School" in honor of John Motley Morehead who had been governor of North Carolina when the school was founded in 1845.

The Governor Morehead School Library of the 1980s is an up-to-date media center with the newest technologies available for the visually impaired. Print materials are made accessible by means of electronic reading devices such as closed circuit TV reading machines and a Kurzweil reading machine. The CCTV or video visual aid not only magnifies print but maximizes the contrast and displays it on a TV screen. The user can control the magnification to suit his needs. The Kurzweil machine, on the other hand, scans print material and reads it with a synthesized voice.

A recorded encyclopedia with Braille and print indexes facilitates reference work. The student can find his topic in one of the indexes, select the proper cassette and set the dials on a special cassette player according to directions found in the index. The cassette player then scans the tape electronically to find the topic indexed.

"Talking" calculators are in great demand for math classes. Students can solve complicated problems and check their work much faster than with the abacus, which is also a useful tool for the totally blind.

During after-school hours students can be found enjoying computer games in the library or doing homework for computer classes. Many computer programs can be used with a speech synthesis system which makes them meaningful for visually impaired students. Soon students and teachers will be able to generate Braille copy by means of a Braille embosser interfaced with a computer. A typist who doesn't know Braille will be able to key into the computer and, using a special program, produce Grade 2 Braille.

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In many respects The Governor Morehead School Library resembles other public school libraries throughout the state. Teachers bring their classes to do reference work or to learn library skills. They come to watch programs on the instructional TV channel and to check out

books. A trained librarian and a technical aide are on the job performing such diverse tasks as keeping the Braille catalog up to date, videotaping school projects, editing a newsletter, or providing story hour for the younger children. The library is also a valuable resource center for summer school. A selected group of students from around the state, not limited to those who attend The Governor Morehead School for the regular session, attend a five-week summer session for enrichment. This may be their only opportunity to use a library independently.

From a modest beginning in the "Library and Cabinet" room in 1849 to an entire two-story wing of the academic building equipped with the most

modern technology of the 1980s, The Governor Morehead School Library has grown and continues to change with the times and the needs of the school.

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