

History of The Western North Carolina Library Association

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In 1956 the American Library Association published *Public Library Service: With Minimum Standards*. The Public Libraries Section of the North Carolina Library Association, held a workshop in Charlotte, Feb. 28 and March 1, 1957 for professional public librarians. The purpose of the sessions was to discuss these standards in relation to the conditions existing in the various libraries throughout the State. This evaluation of the public libraries of North Carolina revealed that all of them were appallingly inadequate according to ALA standards. This later led to the establishment of standards for North Carolina libraries.

At the workshop in Charlotte a group of public librarians from Western North Carolina decided they could benefit from further discussion of problems with particular reference to their geographic area. Some of the librarians who were new to the area felt they could learn a great deal from others who had been there longer.

So the Western North Carolina Library Association was born. At the beginning the group did not have a name and the meetings were very informal.

The first meeting was held in Margaret Ligon's office in the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville in the spring of 1957. Dr. Susan Grey Akers, the guest speaker, discussed a special cataloging project she was engaged in for the Pack Library. Then an informal discussion of various cataloging problems in small public libraries was held with Dr. Akers giving advice and helpful suggestions. The business session of this first meeting set the trend for the next few years. Only a Chairman and a Secretary-Treasurer were needed at that time. Joyce Bruner of Caldwell County was elected Chairman, and Martha Barr of Rutherford County was elected Secretary-Treasurer. For a number of years the Chairman was responsible for the programs with suggestions from the group, and the Secretary-Treasurer sent out the notices of the meetings and collected the dues. The dues were 25¢ per member, to be used for postage. When more money was needed, the Treasurer informed the group and each one paid another quarter.

It was decided to meet quarterly at different libraries.

The objective of the organization was to give real help to each other through

discussion of problems and suggestions from librarians who had solved problems successfully and to get help from a specialist talking to the group and holding informal discussions.

The first part of each meeting was devoted to a main topic of discussion decided upon in advance. All the members of the group participated in the group discussion, or a special speaker presented the program followed by an informal discussion.

Staff members were invited to at least one meeting a year. This meeting would consist of a general topic of interest to all. It was felt that such meetings would not only benefit the staff members but would also keep up the morale of each library staff, and the staff members of the various libraries could become acquainted.

It was felt that the meetings should be kept as informal as possible to encourage discussion. Because of this no minutes were kept.

The whole idea of the organization was to help each other to constantly improve each individual library system.

Some of the meetings during the early years of WNCLA which were outstanding were:

a meeting in the Spindale Public Library, Rutherford County, when William Powell spoke on the North Carolina Collection in the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; a meeting at the Canton Public Library, Haywood County, when someone from the Institute of Government helped the librarians with budget problems — how to prepare budgets and how to keep financial records. At this meeting each member brought her own box lunch and Dorothy Avery, the hostess librarian, furnished coffee and cookies; a meeting in Murphy when a spirited discussion of bookmobile service sent each librarian home filled with enthusiasm and grand new ideas. This meeting is also remembered for the time that a carload of librarians ran out of

gas on the top of Soco Gap in the pouring rain; a meeting in Brevard, Transylvania County, when the members gave each other suggestions of Science Fiction books and authors; and a meeting in Morganton when the personnel manager of the Doncaster-Tanner Co. spoke on personnel problems.

As time went on, the public librarians of Western North Carolina decided that for the improvement of library service in WNC, the college and university and the special librarians should be invited to join the organization. The meeting was held in the home of Margaret Ligon in the spring of 1963 when the college and university librarians first attended, and is of course one of the memorable meetings.¹ It was at this time the organization started its momentous project — *The Union List of Periodicals in Western North Carolina Libraries*. This was a tremendous undertaking that has proved to be of great value. Three editions have been published. It includes the periodical holdings of all the public, college, university and special libraries of Western North Carolina. The latest edition is on sale for \$4.00.

Since librarians other than public librarians now belong to the organization, the programs are more diversified in nature. School librarians are invited but they have a difficult time fitting the meetings into their schedules.

The WNCLA meets quarterly at different libraries. A half-hour coffee time begins the day, followed by the program with discussion, then business. Lunch is a social occasion, followed by either business or more discussion. On some occasions the members meet in groups. The college-university members discuss mutual problems, while the public librarians have their group meeting.

As the group grew larger it became necessary to be a little more formal (but

¹For the author it was especially memorable for it was here that she was first introduced to her husband-to-be!

not much more). The organization now has a constitution, an official name, three elected officers: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer. The Vice-Chairman is now in charge of the programs, and the Secretary-Treasurer keeps the minutes, sends out notices, and collects the dues. Membership is now open to all librarians of Western North Carolina, staff members, retired librarians, and trustees. The Western North Carolina Library Association has grown from a membership of 13 to 87.

As a result of a discussion of personnel problems at one of the meetings some of the public librarians decided to help each other with an in-service training project. Four counties had in-service training sessions together, following the ALA guidelines for Service in Small Public Libraries. Each session was held in a different library so staff members could see what was being done in various counties.

During the early period the organization was able to have changes made in

some of the state aid requirements for the benefit of some of the smaller libraries. In recent years the organization requested the State Library to open regional offices so it could be of more help to libraries in isolated areas. This organization has endorsed the North Carolina Library Services Network.

Visiting the various libraries, the fellowship of being together and talking, keeping up with library development in the state, discussing problems and ideas, all have proved beneficial. Each librarian returns home feeling a little better informed and sometimes inspired to try something new to improve service in his library.

Public libraries from the following counties are represented: Alexander, Caldwell, Burke, McDowell, Rutherford, Cleveland, Polk, Watauga, Wilkes, Ashe, Alleghany, Surry, Stokes, Avery, Mitchell, Yancey, Buncombe, Madison, Haywood, Jackson, Swain, Macon, Transylvania, Graham, Cherokee, and Clay.

College libraries and technical institutes represented are: Southwestern Technical Institute, Wilkes Community College, Brevard College, Caldwell Community College, Haywood Technical Institute, Catawba Valley Technical Institute, Isothermal Community College, Warren Wilson College, Western Piedmont Community College, Montreat-Anderson College, Lees-McRae College, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Institute, Mayland Technical Institute, Blue Ridge Technical Institute, McDowell Technical Institute, Mars Hill College and Tri-County Technical Institute. University Libraries are: Appalachian State University, Western Carolina University, and University of North Carolina at Asheville.

Special libraries represented are: Highlands Hospital, Buncombe Medical Society, American Enka Company, National Climatic Center, Veterans Administration Hospital, Oteen, and World Methodist Library.

Past Chairmen are: Joyce Bruner, Kent Seagle, Ainsley Whitman, Kathleen Gilliland, Richard Cole, Margaret Fulk, William Hess, and Richard Barker. The present chairman is Valerie Kneer.

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