

## WHAT A MODERN LIBRARY CAN DO ... To Serve North Carolina's Needs

*By*

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North Carolina is plagued by the chronic contagion of functional illiteracy — the inability of hundreds of our citizens to read and understand the basic written material with which they are in daily contact.

This is pointed up dramatically in some basic statistics that we sometimes prefer to overlook when we brag about the prevailing climate of progress in North Carolina. I refer to our high percentage of school drop-outs, our even higher percentage of military rejections, and our distressingly low per capita income.

Is there a cure for this contagion of functional illiteracy? Or are the skeptics right in their contention that it is a hopeless situation, brought on by an inbred ignorance and mental lethargy among a vast segment of our citizenry — white and Negro, rural and urban — residing in pockets of poverty and hopelessness across our land from the Great Smokies to the sea?

I can answer that. The skeptics are wrong. There is a cure. And the name of the cure is knowledge.

But the problem is: how do you inject the magic drug of knowledge into the mind of a functional illiterate who dropped out of school, is shunned by his peers, knows no trade, cannot make a living, and nurtures a fear born of frustration and rancor over the very mention of the words education and knowledge.

If you expect me to say that the answer is to bring this person, or any of the hundreds of thousands like him, into the nearest public library, then you are wrong. Because it is highly questionable whether there is a single public library, among the more than 330 in this state, which is designed, staffed, equipped, and operated in such a way as to be the catalyst in penetrating the functional illiterate's shield of ignorance with the proper not already oriented, then it is falling far short of fulfilling its proper function in dosages of curiosity and interest. For curiosity and interest are the harbingers of knowledge, and unless the library is able to generate both curiosity and interest in the minds of those not already library oriented, then it is falling far short of fulfilling its proper function in the community.

The public libraries of this state, almost without exception, have not coped with North Carolina's needs in the last half of the century. More important, the librarians and trustees who form the nucleus of a small hard core of library supporters not only are not doing the job, but also are incapable of doing it — unless and until they become angry enough and ashamed enough and aroused enough to go back home to start fighting for the kind of library and library services that are already providing the cure of knowledge in other communities in other states.

### What Can A Modern Library Offer

Not one North Carolinian in thousands knows what a modern library is, and what it can accomplish in this changing society. Do you?

The modern library is a community information center. It is the headquarters for cultural, educational and research activities. It is the after-school study and entertainment center for children, a second chance for repentant dropouts, and a hometown graduate school for adults seeking broader knowledge.

A library is no longer simply a storehouse for books; it is a storehouse for everything man has experienced and recorded, all indexed and computerized for easy access, and attractively packaged on filmstrips, records, and slides as well as in books, pamphlets, and periodicals.

In a modern library you can have immediate access to hundreds of current periodicals, popular, scientific, and technical. You can have almost anything you want to know; and the postwar publishing revolution now makes this information available to you on various comprehension levels — for the novice, student, or authority.

The modern library still checks out books, but it also checks out original paintings, filmstrips, and records. You can still go there to read and study, but if you need privacy for serious research or contemplation you can have your own room in which to work. You go to the modern library to see an art exhibit, or hear a lecture, or participate in a seminar. And if you can't go to the library, the library will go to you, in a modern bookmobile.

If your library does not have the book you need, the modern librarian will get it for you, through interlibrary loan. If you want to take a correspondence course, the library will send you the textbook and study aids. In short, the modern library is truly "The People's University."

### North Carolina Libraries Today

Unfortunately, in North Carolina communities, the modern library is nothing more than a dream locked in a librarian's mind, and the libraries that exist — your libraries — still are little more than aging buildings designed and still used primarily as storehouses for books.

The statistics are grim enough to make a librarian start reading Nancy Drew on her nights off, and if the generally informed citizens of your community are not already aware of them, then it is time you spread the word.

The total combined book holdings of all of the state's public libraries add up to approximately one book per resident. If you eliminate the old encyclopedias, the out-of-date reference books, and the other old dog-eared volumes, there would be only half a book for each citizen.

Because a relatively few determined people have worked hard, new libraries are being built annually, yet the need for more libraries and expansion of existing facilities increases at an even greater pace.

The failure to attract an appreciable number of college students to careers in library science, and an even more alarming failure to keep our library science graduates here in North Carolina, results in a continuing shortage of qualified librarians.

### Steps Toward Improvement

North Carolinians have an excellent guidebook for public library improvements in the Downs Report entitled "Resources of North Carolina Libraries." As a member of

the Governor's Commission on Library Resources, I was privileged to help prepare the foreword and the proposed program of action for the Downs Report. The following brief excerpts are as applicable today as they were when written in 1964:

In measuring the Commission's findings against present needs, one fact becomes obvious: North Carolina libraries just do not have enough room, enough books, or enough librarians.

As for the future, the rapidly increasing enrollment in public schools and colleges, plus the impact of the great economic and social changes taking place throughout the state, can only mean a greater demand for information and knowledge. Such a demand will call for more library space, more books, and more librarians.

The methods currently employed in financing public libraries in North Carolina have evolved through the years on a piece-meal basis, with insufficient organized effort to formulate a clear-cut and understandable financing plan.

The Commission recommends that continued study be given to the development of a plan for joint local-state-federal responsibility for public library financing.

[The Commission also recommended] the formation of a statewide Citizens Committee for Better Libraries. The basic responsibility of this committee would be to assist in the organization, in every county and interested community, of a local committee for better libraries; and to coordinate such activities with existing groups such as "Friends of Public Libraries."

As you know, a statewide citizens committee, under the name North Carolinians for Better Libraries, is organized and functioning, thanks largely to the efforts of the North Carolina Association of Library Trustees, which sponsored it initially, and the North Carolina Library Association, which provided funds for its organizational expenses.

### Intensive Local Effort Needed

The fact that North Carolinians for Better Libraries has a voting member in each county does not mean that some layman has relieved the librarians and trustees of their responsibility in this matter of educating the public on the current status of their library on what is needed to upgrade it, and on what must be done properly locally to make it truly a modern "People's University."

The continued effort of dedicated librarians and trustees through the years has resulted in little more than maintenance of the status of mediocrity in which most of our library programs have long been mired. It must now be obvious, therefore, that librarians, trustees, and the handful of library-oriented supporters are fighting a losing battle. You must have help locally, and North Carolinians for Better Libraries can provide it. But at the same time, no citizens group can effectively upgrade your library without your all-out support and guidance.

Money is the basis for our library problems in North Carolina. In the absence of a sound and understandable plan for library support, such as the unique cooperative system under which our public schools operate, the basic responsibility for library construction and operation has been left up to local government. In some instances the response has

of both public and private institutions and of such professional organizations as the North Carolina Library Association.

1. This study is adapted from *Planning for Higher Education in North Carolina*. Special Report 2-68 (Nov. 1968). Raleigh, North Carolina, Board of Higher Education. Made with the assistance of Robert B. Downs, Dean of Library Administration, University of Illinois, consultant to the Board of Higher Education.

2. See Verner W. Clapp and Robert T. Jordan, "Quantitative Criteria for Adequacy of Academic Library Collections," *College and Research Libraries*, September 1965, pp. 371-80. The Clapp-Jordan formula has seven variables, expressed in terms of volumes, as follows: to a basic undergraduate library collection of 50,750 volumes, add 100 volumes for each full-time equivalent faculty member, 12 volumes for each FTE student, 12 volumes for each undergraduate honors student, 335 volumes for each field of undergraduate concentration or "major subject" field, 3,050 volumes for each field of master's concentration or equivalent, and 24,500 volumes for each field of doctoral concentration or equivalent.

3. The library of the North Carolina School of the Arts is excluded from the remarks in this report because of the special purpose of that institution.

4. "Standards for College Libraries." *College and Research Libraries*, July, 1959, p. 275.

5. See Table IV.

6. Minimum set by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The American Library Association recommends that seating space be provided for 33 percent of the students, while some library building consultants recommend seating space for as much as 40 percent of the enrollment.

7. Adapted from the standards of the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries and the American Library Association. See "Standards for College Libraries," *College and Research Libraries*, July, 1959, pp. 274-280.

8. *The Impact of Technology on the Library Building*, 1967.

9. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1968, the budgets of the public senior institutions for these purposes were as follows: UNC-CH, \$810,000; NSCU, \$318,000; UNC-G, \$128,000; UNC-C, \$185,000; East Carolina, \$336,000; Western Carolina, \$91,000; Appalachian, \$139,000; North Carolina College, \$75,000; NCA&T, \$94,000; Asheville-Biltmore, \$73,000; Elizabeth City, \$27,000; Fayetteville, \$47,000; Pembroke, \$50,000; Wilmington, \$59,000; and Winston-Salem, \$48,000.

## WHAT A MODERN LIBRARY CAN DO (Continued)

been heartening. A good example is Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, where there has been a valiant and continuing effort to provide modern library services. Another is my own little county of Dare, with the highest per capita local expenditures for libraries of any county in the state. In many other counties and cities, however, local governing bodies have been very reluctant to provide even minimum financing for public libraries. Thus, some counties and communities are approaching the maximum extent of their ability to provide library funds, while many others have so far made only token efforts toward this end.

The basic objective for all of us, as I see it, is to make modern library services accessible to all citizens of North Carolina. The success of these efforts will depend to a large degree on whether an appreciable segment of the informed and interested population in each city and county becomes sufficiently familiarized with, and concerned about, the inadequate status of our libraries in today's changing society. And in the final analysis it is largely up to the public librarians, library trustees, and the small hard core of library-oriented citizens to spread the facts, generate the interest, and lead the fight for modern library services in their home towns.