

**BOOKMOBILES OR BRANCHES?****I. IN WINSTON-SALEM AND FORSYTH COUNTY**

By PAUL S. BALLANCE\*

First of all, what is our aim or objective as public librarians? I feel that it is my duty as a public librarian to endeavor in every way possible within the limits of the facilities available, to give the best and most complete library service to all of the citizens of our city and county. I think that those of us who have to serve a concentrated population within the limits of a city of 50,000-100,000 population can give the best service through a central or main library. As the outlying areas within the limits of a city grow and expand, the more desirable it becomes to have units of library service in these areas. I feel that a concentrated area of population within a city, such as some of our larger housing developments, or larger residential areas, can best be served by a branch library. Today, large residential areas are being developed around a central shopping center or area, where everything that one wants may be purchased. Even the chain stores, both food and department, and others are finding these areas profitable in which to locate their stores. Since the greater part of the population of these areas find it necessary to visit these neighborhood centers once or twice each week, I feel that these areas are excellent places for branch libraries. The branch library in these shopping areas has a distinct advantage over the bookmobile. First of all, it can accommodate more people at any one time. Secondly, it can serve as a community center, to bring neighbors together; not only for reading, but for discussions, educational movies, or story hours for the children. It provides a quiet and congenial atmosphere in which to read. Lack of space prevents this in the bookmobile. The branch library can also stock a larger collection of reference materials for neighborhood use than can the bookmobile.

I certainly do not want anyone to get the idea that I do not favor bookmobiles. I feel that bookmobiles have their place in a library system if it serves a large and scattered population. There are some twenty neighborhoods in Forsyth County outside of the city limits of Winston-Salem. These neighborhoods vary in size from 100 people to an incorporated town of 2500 or more. It would not be feasible or practical to establish branches in all of these 20 or more neighborhoods. The larger areas of population can perhaps be best served by branches, similar to those proposed for the concentrated areas of population within the city. Some of these neighborhood areas are from 6-14 miles distant from the main library. These people are entitled to library service because the county contributes 1/3 for the operation and maintenance of library service. Therefore, I feel that it is my duty to take library service to these people, and this can best be done by bookmobile; we can implement the bookmobile by having deposit collections in homes or stores, and these are serviced by the bookmobile. We will soon have our second bookmobile so that we can expand our service to communities which we are not now serving. Also, we can make more frequent calls to all communities.

One would no doubt ask the question, why do you not already have branches? We do have one branch, and that is the Horton Branch for Negroes. This branch does exactly what I said in the beginning that a branch should do—serve a concentrated area of population. The Negro population makes up about 2/5 of the total city population, and these people are concentrated in the East, Southeast, and Northeast sections of the city. I am sure that I am expressing the thoughts of the library board when I say that it was felt that a strong and adequate main library be established before spreading ourselves thin by establishing branches. Now that we have our new main library building, and a new branch for the Negroes is under way, we can think of expanding our services in the way that we feel that the citizens will best be served. It is my thought that the citizens can best be served by a central or main library, with branches and bookmobiles for those who cannot avail themselves of the main library service.

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## II. IN CHARLOTTE AND MECKLENBURG COUNTY

By HOYT R. GALVIN AND REX M. WIEST\*

There is a place for both the branch library and the bookmobile, but there is no simple formula for determining the best type of service for a given area. Generally, the two systems are supplementary rather than competitive in many communities. The following are a few of the advantages and disadvantages:

*Advantages of Bookmobiles:*

1. Moving billboard for library service.
2. Immediate service to new suburban and rural areas.
3. Only means to serve rural residents near their homes.
4. Most customers get the books they desire.
5. Ideal for those too old, too young or too sick to work or go to town frequently.

*Disadvantages of Bookmobiles:*

1. Inadequate book supply.
2. Potential customers can't remember schedule.
3. Inadequate reference service.
4. Mechanical failure stops library service.
5. Delay in filling requests.

*Advantages of Branch Libraries:*

1. Reasonably good book supply.
2. Good reference service with telephone to Main Library.
3. Schedule easy to remember.
4. Rarely closed due to mechanical failure.
5. Comfortable browsing possible.

*Disadvantages of Branch Libraries:*

1. As expensive to operate as large bookmobile.
2. Site may become unsatisfactory in future.
3. More expensive to establish than bookmobile.
4. Distance too great for many potential customers.
5. Parking problems occur at branches.

When Charlotte started operating two large "Mobile Libraries" in 1949, we thought we might succeed in giving complete library service with the units. We installed two-way radio telephones for reference purposes, unabridged dictionaries, encyclopedias, Abridged Readers Guide, etc., but we soon learned these services were not being used enough to justify their monthly cost. In the case of research, the customer would probably go to the Main Library anyway.

We have thought of North Carolina as predominately rural, but industry is sprouting in the cotton patch. Thus, people who work in industry must report for work on schedule and cannot wait for the bookmobile. To some extent, this difficulty can be overcome by having a member of the family select books for the absent worker. In Charlotte, the night schedule of the bookmobile is popular with the entire family since few people are working in the evening.

In a growing urban center, we find residential fringes are constantly spilling over the corporate limits. The only way to serve these new communities is to send the bookmobile. In this way, the bookmobile becomes a traveling representative for the Main and Branch Libraries.

To summarize our opinion on the subject, we think there is no final answer, unless it is based upon a study of particular community needs. Where established residential

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areas exist, and where most people have autos, the branch is likely the best. The branch should be considered in towns of 1,000 or more people. In rural areas and the new suburban areas, the bookmobile is the only possibility.

We should always remember that good library service is more than 1,000 or 2,500 books for lending. The bookmobile has this limitation. The Main Library and the Branch are available for the customer to visit whenever need dictates or time permits. Here he can get reference aid, browse, read, write, dream, think or sleep, and the darn thing won't roll out from under him. In the meantime, the city dweller's country cousins and his friends in suburbia will depend pretty much on the bookmobiles for their library service.