

The Library: Cornerstone for Excellence*

by Thomas E. Strickland
North Carolina State Senator

It is good to be in this place. If one is going to be surrounded, how fortunate that it be by friends.

When Bill O'Shea asked me early in the 1975 Legislative Session to be with you at this session, he made it clear that the invitation grew out of my involvement with libraries as a member of the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support. Many of you will recall that that commission was a creature of the 1967 General Assembly, was charged with studying North Carolina libraries and their needs and was instructed to report back to the 1969 General Assembly with recommendations. I was honored to be appointed to membership on it and I am honored to have been invited here because of that. It is a source of joy for me to spend this evening visiting with and talking to librarians and their associates.

I do mean that sincerely, although—despite your good company—I wish this audience consisted also of North Carolinians of all kinds who need good libraries and don't realize it and of fiscal authorities at all levels who provide North Carolina libraries less than adequate support and won't face up to it. There are many such. Too many!

The Legislative Commission to Study Library Support in the State of North Carolina was composed of Senators Mary Faye Brumby of Cherokee County and Hector MacLean of Robeson County, of Representatives Charles W. Phillips of Guilford County and me from Wayne County and of Chairman David Stick of Dare County. Probably it was only a happenstance that the commission membership literally spanned the State from Manteo to Murphy, but I consider that fact particularly symbolic and appropriate in view of our charge.

A first consensus as we examined the status of library development in our state was that, certain pockets of excellence or near excellence notwithstanding, really good library service did not exist and would not exist in North Carolina until it was accessible to each and every North Carolinian. In fact it was concluded that the real value of excellence was in the sharing of it rather than in the counting and caring for it as though it were a miser's gold. Admittedly we were not librarians, but we had accepted our task willingly and were researching it carefully in the sincere belief that it was of vital import to the future of North Carolina. That made it difficult for us to accept a dog in the manger attitude towards any library resources except in the case of items of unusual value because of their age or irreplaceability that had of necessity to be used under carefully specified conditions.

Admittedly, too, two years were not enough to do justice to our charge. We barely scratched the surface in discovery or examination of all the State's library needs, but it was not for lack of trying, and we did come to a clear conviction that libraries are the cornerstones of excellence in the building of North Carolina. Upon that basis we made what we felt to be important recommendations to the 1969 General Assembly.

We concluded that certain areas of library development and support are primarily local responsibilities although we recognized that local support alone is not capable of doing the entire job. Moreover, the building of North Carolina is the joint responsibility of state and locality, a fact long ago acknowledged with respect to support of other types of public education, so that we felt the State had a clear obligation to participate in statewide library funding. We emphasized state aid

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to public libraries because public libraries are the most accessible to the total population. We never lost sight of the existence or the essential roles of all other types of libraries, however, and we recognized their interdependence as being the key to really effective library service for all North Carolinians.

School libraries or media centers, for example, are essential to curriculum support and the entire learning process. Every school should have one properly equipped and adequately staffed. At the same time every school librarian or media specialist should be actively aware of the supplementary roles of public libraries in meeting the overall needs of the present learners and future leaders of our state. I cannot understand why some school and public librarians act as though competition were an ingredient of their relations with each other.

I am told that only a few weeks ago in this very building, while the Governor's Conference on Reading was going on, the remark was made openly in one group meeting that public librarians had infiltrated the conference. If I understand the meaning of infiltration, it has to do with surreptitious invasion of another's territory for purposes of learning secrets or possibly undermining effectiveness. I find it inconceivable that there could be an ulterior motive for participating as contributor or learner at a conference on reading. The development of reading skills seems to me to be no one's private turf. Ideally it begins at an early age at home. Let us hope it continues as a lifelong process encouraged through a variety of mediums by a variety of educators including classroom teachers and all types of librarians.

Academic libraries, too, are a part of that process for all who continue seeking and growing after secondary school. While academic libraries have special obligations to those teaching and learning in the institutions of which they are a part, they, too, err gravely if they limit their horizons and their services to their own particular enclaves. Each type of library has something to share with the other and some

needs to be met by another in the interests of the people they serve. All need to cooperate, therefore, in a kind of team spirit uniting them against their common enemy who is Ignorance, the progenitor of tragedies. Yes, and I do mean to include herein those special libraries serving businesses, industries, institutions and professions.

We found it to be the case that the needs of various categories of library clientele overlap into the resources of various types of libraries. You may be certain, however, that the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support would not have dared to recommend to the General Assembly that materials be duplicated in the several types of libraries except for those materials in constant demand. Legislators look upon irresponsible duplication of materials or services as inexcusable waste. So also do taxpayers. Sharing of resources across type of library lines by way of interlibrary loans or supplementary services is seen as commendable, and I can assure you that it has produced more revenue for libraries of all types from the General Assembly than has any other effort. The legislator who has never heard of the North Carolina Interlibrary Services Network headquartered in the Division of State Library and serving all types of libraries is the new legislator, and he or she learns fast. If you have sat in on some legislative committee hearings on library requests, you know what I mean.

It is regrettable of course that even demonstrated total resources sharing has not produced full implementation of the recommendations of the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support, but the culprits, if one chooses to call them that, have been declining revenues, increasing costs and some other services that necessarily outranked libraries in certain circumstances. In the meanwhile, the recommendations of the commission are a matter of record and grist for the mill of re-examination of library services and support which I encourage the Division of State Library of the Department of Cultural Resources to seek.

State Aid to County and Regional Public Libraries has increased almost 370% since 1969. The State Library has received budget increases totaling nearly 315% in the same period. These are impressive gains more because we had so far to go than for how far we have actually come. Insofar as I am concerned, we have only just begun to provide adequately for one of the basic supports of civilization.

In the meantime, I would not want to leave you thinking that I think increased financing alone is the only support necessary. Far from it. All of us have a job to do in seeing to it that libraries are not just taken for granted. I believe North Carolina's former First Lady, Jessie Rae Scott, has made that point far better than I could, and with her kind permission I quote from a talk she made in High Point on February 26, 1971:

Thirty days ago three brave Americans returned from an unusual journey. Their vehicle, their attire and their mission were all extraordinary. Moreover, they had been observed throughout their trip by people on every continent and praised for their accomplishments in every language used by civilized man. They were the crew of Apollo 14.

Perhaps it has occurred to you, as it has to me, that their achievements completely overshadow all preparations for them though those preparations were absolutely necessary to them. What comes to mind when Apollo 14 is mentioned are pictures of our astronauts walking on the Moon surface or climbing out of their space craft as it bobbed about on the Pacific. As a matter of fact, I find the typical reaction somewhat akin to that of a young mother holding her healthy newborn infant in her arms. Her joy is such that it renders insignificant the often wearying months before birth.

Because a happy result frequently makes the path to it seem trivial rather than essential, we ought occasionally to pause to reflect upon the path itself. Otherwise we might fail to recognize and appreciate the significance of the path when we are once again in pursuit of a happy result. We need to be conscious, for example, that the path to the awe-inspiring Moon probe wound in great part through institutions that we take too much for granted. Those institutions are libraries. The Moon that used to measure time for man is now being measured by man as just so many days, hours, minutes and seconds away from his planet, and libraries of books, maps, formulas and other information resources logically preserved for their research value and arranged for ease of access have made that possible. Research must

sink its roots deep into such resources if it is to blossom into spectacular results such as we have witnessed in space exploration in the past decade.

The truth is that libraries have something to contribute to all progress, and because they do, we need very much to examine our thoughts about them. We need also to recognize that while there are several types each with its own particular emphases, all types of libraries are, or should be, cooperating parts of a total information team dedicated to the service of the entire community.

There was another phrase in her speech that catches my fancy as being particularly expressive. She quotes the teen-aged son of a friend as having observed that "a good library is the transmission for transition."

I agree with that, and I believe most of your libraries and the State Library linked together in the North Carolina Interlibrary Services Network to be such libraries. Together you are the cornerstone for excellence in North Carolina — a major support in whatever progress our State will make.

You are aware, I know, that the North Carolina State Library has undergone reorganization twice in the past 20 years. The 1955 General Assembly combined the old State Library established in 1812 and the North Carolina Library Commission established in 1909 into the North Carolina State Library effective July 1, 1956. The Library Commission became one of three divisions of the new agency thereby signifying legislative intent to bring into existence a state library agency charged with responsibility for serving state government, for collecting statistics on and coordinating cooperation among all types of libraries and for continuing to develop and counsel public libraries statewide. Now, since 1972, the State Library is a division of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources where it continues in a broad range of responsibilities.

You are aware, too, that legislators have considerable respect for our State Library as a politically realistic and fiscally responsible agency. They can feel its influence and use its services in each of their home counties. They take pride in

the fact that it has the oldest and most used InWATS line in all of state government. They are pleased that it has not dissipated the effectiveness of its limited income by a proliferation of duplicative service units. They are grateful for what it does for them in the Legislative Library and through the libraries of other agencies of state government. They praise its foresight in helping start the trend of employing qualified members of minorities in professional positions in state government. They recognize its leadership in promoting interstate library cooperation.

You know of course that the North Carolina State Library was one of three state library agencies to become charter members of the Southeastern Library Network headquartered with the Southeastern Regional Educational Board in Atlanta and serving 10 states. Why? SOLINET has long-range implications for the North Carolina Union Catalog which is the very backbone of the North Carolina Interlibrary Services Network.

Our State Librarian said in a speech in Atlanta on September 19:

It was logical for us to buy into SOLINET. It was a continuation of an established pattern of interlibrary sharing of resources. It was a safeguard against getting caught with our catalog down and our clientele justifiably up in arms about a preventable retrogression resulting from lack of foresight and long-range planning in our state library agency.... Down the road we envision our North Carolina Union Catalog computerized and along with it a statewide union list of serials on computer. We see

the major public library systems of North Carolina directly tied into SOLINET assisted by funds channeled through the state library agency. We see our present intrastate network continuing to guarantee smaller public academic, school and special libraries access to information stored in SOLINET.

As a legislator I am gratified by this vision of things to come as well as grateful for the progress we have made especially in strengthening public libraries with back-up services and direct financial assistance. If it should become my privilege to serve you in another capacity, I pledge now to do what I can to make more library progress possible for all types of libraries. In the meantime, I thank you for inviting me to this great family reunion. I confess to a longstanding hankering to be adopted into the family of librarians, for I have an enduring love and admiration for people whose vocation is to serve other people, and I have found librarians to be among the most dedicated of such people. I am truly humbled in the presence of so many generous champions of the people and grateful for your outstanding examples of service. You demonstrate to a noble degree that true leadership consists not in creating new worlds to conquer, but in finding new ways to bring order and progress to a world scatter-sown with seeds of chaos. Without libraries and you mankind might well destroy his planet and himself. Thank you for keeping North Carolina in touch with its past, alert to its present and ready to meet the challenges of its future.

Want to see more names or more libraries in the news? Here's the person to give your news items to:

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES:

Leland M. Park
Library of Davidson College
Davidson, North Carolina 28036

COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARIES:

John Thomas
Davidson County Community College
Lexington, North Carolina 27292

SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS:

William Pendergraft
Pender High School
Burgaw, North Carolina 28425

SPECIAL LIBRARIES:

William Lowe
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina 27607

PUBLIC LIBRARIES:

Bernadette Martin
Forsyth County Public Library System
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27101