

CITIZENS' LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA

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While the flappers and their beaux of the "Roaring Twenties" were dancing the Charleston and painting Mickey Mouse, "Oh You Kid" and "23-Skiddoo" on yellow slickers, a more serious element of the population was becoming more and more aware of North Carolina's poor showing, culture wise, in national statistics. Orlando Stone, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina who did some work under the supervision of L. R. Wilson, submitted a master's thesis to the Department of Sociology in 1925 on the reading habits of North Carolinians. Stone's findings indicated that only one-third of the families in North Carolina took a daily newspaper. Considering newspaper and magazine reading together, he found that North Carolina stood in 43rd place among the states. In number of volumes per inhabitant in its public libraries, North Carolina was absolutely on the bottom of the list—48th among the states. Massachusetts, by way of illustration, had two volumes per person while North Carolina had eleven persons per volume. And this was at a time when Tar Heels were boasting that they had enough automobiles in the state to take all the people to ride at one time.

The following year, under the auspices of the American Library Association, a study of the conditions and needs of public libraries in the United States was published. It revealed that 68% of the citizens of North Carolina did not have access to a public library and that the income of the existing libraries averaged only four cents per capita. They owned only six books for every one hundred people. Out of 72 libraries serving the public in North Carolina only 30 were tax supported and there were 46 counties with no public library service of any kind.

During the course of the 1927 session of the North Carolina Library Association this subject was mentioned and it was generally agreed that North Carolina "needs a new awakening of social accounting." Until the final day, however, nothing of importance was proposed concerning the situation. On November 3 the closing session of the last day of the meeting was devoted to a speech by Professor Frank P. Graham of the University of North Carolina. He put the problem clearly before the members of the North Carolina Library Association and urged them "to organize, to press the fight, and put libraries" in those counties which did not have them. Reaction to the challenge was spontaneous. A resolution was immediately introduced and unanimously passed "That the North Carolina Library Association declare for a library campaign for education and promotion of library growth in North Carolina and that committees be appointed to plan the campaign."

The December issue of the *North Carolina Library Bulletin* presented an earnest plea from Anne Pierce, newly elected president of the North Carolina Library Association, for equal book privileges in North Carolina for town and country. "With every librarian, every trustee, and every individual interested in a better and finer North Carolina," she proclaimed, "it can be done. Sell the Public Library idea to North Carolina! Won't you send in ideas, plans, and suggestions for putting over this campaign? One person cannot do it but there is magic in the word 'together' and with North Carolina interested as she now is, may we not count on your support and active interest in making these two years memorable ones in the development of library service in North Carolina?"

While the North Carolina Library Association was working out details of the campaign it was to sponsor, Dr. Graham set out to conduct a one-man drive whenever opportunity arose. Before the spring of 1928 he had occasion to speak on the subject in several Tar Heel towns. Under his direction University of North Carolina alumni groups

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adopted resolutions pledging support to local libraries to the end that North Carolina's "cultural development . . . might be comparable with its material development."

Basic plans for a state-wide campaign were developed during the early months of 1928. A committee was appointed by the North Carolina Library Association to initiate action and a few weeks later the committee, with additional members, met in Chapel Hill. Each member brought the names of people who might be interested. A chairman was selected, a publicity chairman appointed, and plans laid for the campaign. One thousand letters were next sent out to North Carolinians all over the state and, as replies came in, a file by place and a file by name was kept for future use of those who indicated interest in the cause of better library service.

On November 13, 1928, in Charlotte, where the idea had first been proposed the year before, the Citizens' Library Movement, as it was now called, was officially launched. For this first meeting some 200 representatives were present from the district composed of Lincoln, Gaston, Union, Cabarrus, and Mecklenburg counties. It was reported that the campaign had been developing quietly for several months and that all of the civic organizations in the state as well as about 200 individual "library enthusiasts" had pledged their support. Colonel Frank P. Hobgood, a Greensboro attorney and local library trustee, was chosen state chairman of the Movement. For the campaign the state was divided into a number of districts each with a chairman and committee to assist Hobgood, who was to have general supervision of the entire campaign.

The Citizens' Library Movement, while largely originating with librarians, was to be conducted by and for the citizens of the state. It was not a fund-raising campaign but an educational campaign. Today, in one sense, we might also consider supporters of the Movement as forming a "pressure group" since they came to exert influence on members of the General Assembly in favor of certain legislation introduced to promote public library service in the state.

A *Handbook of the Citizens' Library Movement*, prepared by the North Carolina Library Commission and published by the North Carolina Library Association, appeared in 1928. Members of the various committees were listed as well as those citizens who had, up to the time of publication, joined the Movement. It contained concise arguments for better library service and cited cases both at home and outside the state where real progress had been made. The existing public library law was quoted in full.

The president of the North Carolina Library Association announced that winter meetings of a number of state organizations had scheduled sessions on the need for improved library service in North Carolina. Among these were the Parent-Teacher Association, the Parental Institute, and the Conference for Social Service. In addition to this evidence of increased interest in the problem, the growing number of requests for information and assistance directed to the Library Commission was cited.

A progress report on the Citizens' Library Movement in the June, 1929, issue of the *North Carolina Library Bulletin* bore convincing evidence of the importance of the project. Events ranged from a "stirring address" in Winston-Salem to a contest in Union County on "Why Union County Needs a Public Library." President Chase of the University of North Carolina announced in this issue the gift of \$100,000 for the establishment of a library school in Chapel Hill. The Weil family in Goldsboro gave a building and \$5,000 for a library there and Harper D. Shepherd, Pitt County native, gave \$50,000 for a library building and permanent equipment in Greenville. Perhaps more typical of the results expected from the Citizens' Library Movement, however, was the mass meeting in Nash County following preliminary planning by the local Citizens' Library Movement committee. County commissioners, members of the board of education and other county officers, members of all civic clubs, and such groups as the D.A.R. and U.D.C., home demonstration clubs, principals and teachers, and the public in gen-

eral were invited. The topic of the day was public library service for Nash County. The central committee which had laid the plans was enlarged and divided into sub-committees, each with definite assignments for the summer. Full reports were due at a meeting scheduled for the fall and, as a final result, a county library was established.

By September still further progress was reported. Sixteen high schools in the state reported full time librarians, the Library Commission had organized 35 school libraries, Winston-Salem and Wilmington were giving courses in the use of the library to students, a special tax levy now supported libraries in Black Mountain, Weldon, Hickory, and Washington, Union County was engaged in an active library campaign, the Stanly County library reported that its county patrons had increased to 24% as contrasted with 19% the year before, the seven largest libraries in the state reported an increase of more than 400,000 in circulation while in Charlotte the public library circulation was up 30%. More than 1,200,000 books were read by the children in the standard elementary schools of the state during 1928-1929. There now were 279,000 volumes in these schools, whereas five years previously, except in some of the cities, very few elementary schools had even small libraries.

Governor O. Max Gardner was guest of honor at a session of the North Carolina Library Association in October, 1929. In an address on the Citizens' Library Movement he pledged his administration to support improved library service. He regarded the Movement as one of the most profoundly significant undertakings in the state since the compulsory school law—a people's declaration of war against appalling conditions. "I see in this Citizens' Library Movement," he said, "a profoundly significant step in the direction of supplying the higher cultural and spiritual needs of our people."

A group of large taxpayers appeared before the governing body of Charlotte to insist that funds be appropriated for library service to meet the conditions of a Rosenwald grant even though it meant increasing municipal taxes. "One of the most encouraging results of the Citizens' Library Movement," we read in the December, 1929, *North Carolina Library Bulletin*, "is the growing realization that library service costs money, and that a library cannot be run on nothing by just anybody."

Unfortunately, however, that realization came at a most inopportune time. The near-disastrous results of the October, 1929, Crash and the following Depression seem to have all but wiped out the good foundation for library progress laid by the Citizens' Library Movement.

The biennial report of the Library Commission issued in 1930 indicates that the use of tax money for public libraries was not entirely out of the question, however. The Wilson County Library reported an appropriation of \$300 from the Board of County Commissioners, the City of Greenville took over the local public library from the Woman's Club, and the public library in Statesville became tax-supported in 1929. How much credit for this trend can be assigned to the Citizens' Library Movement might be debated, but the Movement was a great state-wide influence and undoubtedly played a large part in the growth of more adequate support from public sources. The Commission's report noted that active library campaigns were under way in several counties, notably Union, Surry, and Caldwell, and concluded that "it is only a question of time when the governing bodies of these counties will make the necessary appropriations."

Reports from various sources for the next few years, deep Depression years, contain little evidence of tangible progress in the library field. The Citizens' Library Movement continued its educational drive, nevertheless. In April, 1930, around one hundred persons had attended a breakfast session of the State Conference of Social Service at which Francis Clarkson of Charlotte presided. The program consisted of a discussion of various library projects over the state.

Towards the end of the year R. B. House of the University of North Carolina pointed out the economic problems of the South in their effect on the drive for more and

better libraries. He noted the stock reply of both public and private sources of funds when approached with the problem. "It will cost money and this is no time to ask for money." "In my opinion," House wrote, "we can meet the economic problem better by indirect than by direct means. Let us begin to enrich the quality of living first and I firmly believe that we will then create more economic riches. For, after all, wealth must be created by intelligence; it is not something already created and simply waiting to be gathered. And intelligence is a quality of the spirit, not a commodity in the open market. . . . I don't believe increased expenditure in business will ever give us better brains. But I do believe increased expenditure on brains will give us better business. But, business or no business, I believe more expenditure on brains will deepen and enrich the quality of life in the South. And if we get this we can forego wealth.

"If the South can turn itself to this task of enriching the quality of life rather than to the hopeless task of equalling the rest of the county in money—gained at all costs," he concluded, "it will do two things: It will renew the one tradition that has given this section distinction—the tradition of humane culture. And it will gain leadership in America."

The Depression at first seems not to have dampened the enthusiasm of the supporters of the Citizens' Library Movement, but rather instead to have presented a challenge and to have served as a horrible example of national situations and conditions to be avoided in the future through a better informed citizenry. North Carolina's example in setting up the first Citizens' Library Movement did not go unnoticed outside the Tar Heel state. Kansas, in January, 1930, set up a Citizens' Library Committee and was followed in the same year by South Carolina, Illinois, and Michigan. Late in 1932 similar movements existed in Louisiana, New York, Ohio, and Texas.

In 1934 the Citizens' Library Movement, through the generosity of a friend, was able to publish the second booklet of the campaign. Entitled *Books and the Minds of Men*, it was prepared by William T. Polk who, in the spring of that year, had succeeded Col. Hobgood as chairman of the Movement. This was a re-statement of the aims of the Citizens' Library Movement and again pictured the lowly position of North Carolina in the field of library service. A forthright statement of causes and remedies was clear enough to be grasped by all. Lack of money and lack of realization of the value of a public library were causes; remedies were more county libraries ("since North Carolina is a rural state and the county is the main unit of society") and more book trucks and book deposit stations to take the books directly to the people who need them most.

"It is not such a difficult thing to start a public library," the reader is assured, "which is merely a collection of books efficiently circulated. All that is needed is a small group of people sufficiently interested and energetic to get it started. Once established, it should if properly maintained increase in size and usefulness as the people realize that it is a cooperative enterprise which gives them good reading for far less than they could buy it individually."

The objective of the Citizens' Library Movement at that time was a system of libraries which would serve every man, woman, boy, and girl in North Carolina and which would provide opportunity and encouragement to educate themselves continuously, to improve their ability to participate as useful citizens in activities in which they were involved, to keep abreast of progress in science and other fields of knowledge, and to make such use of leisure time as would promote personal happiness and social well-being.

The speaking campaign throughout the state continued in full force. R. B. House and George Coffin Taylor of the University of North Carolina joined Frank Graham in the drive. A number of prominent newspaper editors took to the road to spread the word. Chairman Polk was a frequent guest at various civic gatherings to present

the case for improved library service. None of these people were librarians and could not be accused of selfish motives—they were outstanding citizens of the state interested only in better informed Tar Heels. Inside the profession, of course, librarians were active. Each meeting of the North Carolina Library Association had at least one session devoted to the Citizens' Library Movement and Marjorie Beal and other members of the Library Commission were busy organizing and encouraging whenever the slightest interest was shown.

In an attempt to breathe new life into the Citizens' Library Movement, Chairman Polk very clearly laid the whole issue before the public. "The time has come," he said, "for the State to decide whether it wants an intelligent, well educated and cultured citizenship. If so it can find no better means to that end than a good county library in every county in the state. It is giving its young people in its schools and colleges the beginnings of an education. If it fails to give them the means of satisfying those intellectual and spiritual desires it has rightly stimulated—and the public library is the best practical means of doing so—then the State and its leaders—business men, school men, newspaper men, statesmen—will deserve and receive the disappointed contempt of their children and their children's children."

But for the most part this dire threat must have fallen on deaf ears. There was no immediate response and the laborious process of awakening the people to their own needs continued to be the aim of the Citizens' Library Movement for more than half a dozen years.

One recurring theme throughout the addresses on the subject was the importance of the county or a group of counties as the unit best able to provide adequate library service for all the people. Heretofore, the idea of a town or city public library was fairly well understood and the work of the Woman's Clubs throughout the state in providing the first local library service was thoroughly appreciated. This new concept of a broader field of service required constant repetition to make it understood. By 1933 the idea was incorporated in an amendment to the state's library law when the General Assembly gave counties permission to combine for library service. At that time twenty-one counties were making at least token appropriations for county-wide library service. Now it would be possible for one library to serve two or more counties by means of branch libraries, library stations, and book trucks.

Having won this point the Citizens' Library Movement was soon drawing up plans for the next step. Chairman Polk called together members of the Movement from all sections of the state for a one-day meeting to consider proposals for the extension and enlargement of state library service. A number of leaders from different fields spoke and it was concluded that "no one thing would so greatly benefit the State as a library program that will so work as to bring to all the citizens the values inherent in public libraries."

Frank Graham, the originator of the Citizens' Library Movement, again came to the fore. "In order to have real democracy in America," he stated, "we must take account of unequal library opportunity in the town and on the farm, and the consequent need for county-wide library service." In advocating "a great federal-state-county library set-up" he pointed out that "children are children wherever they are born and a true philosophy of democracy, a real democratic policy, would be to tax wealth where it is to furnish books and libraries for children where they are. We will not have democracy in America until we have some such nation-wide mutual aid, some such nation-wide cooperation of federal, state, and county governments in this great job, this great democratic responsibility of making libraries locally accessible not only to the privileged millions, but to the 45,000,000, mainly on the farm, without local access to a public library."

It was in 1936 that the Citizens' Library Movement was first reported as advocating and promoting a request for state aid for libraries from the 1937 General Assembly. A four-page folder on the subject of state aid for libraries presented the matter briefly but graphically. A map of North Carolina was included indicating, county by county, the extent of library service available. Subsequently a bill was introduced into the General Assembly providing for the appropriation of \$150,000 annually to be used "for promoting, aiding and equalizing public library service in North Carolina." When the bill was finally passed in March, 1937, however, the section appropriating funds had been deleted. It did, nevertheless, authorize the Library Commission to accept and administer any money appropriated or granted to it, separate from the general Library Commission fund, for providing and equalizing public library service in the state, by the Federal government or from other sources. Whether or not the lawmakers had an idea that the Citizens' Library Movement might become a fund-raising organization and thus supply the missing money, we do not know.

Governor Clyde R. Hoey spoke at a meeting of the Citizens Library Movement in Charlotte early in 1938 and expressed regret that the 1937 General Assembly had not seen fit to make an appropriation to equalize library service throughout the state. The Governor voiced his approval of the aims of the Movement and pledged his support in securing funds to carry out the current program for state aid.

In the interim between sessions of the legislature, the educational campaign continued. It must have been at this point that pressure was brought to bear from local sources on local representatives. A ten-page pamphlet of questions and answers on the subject of state aid for public libraries issued by the Citizens' Library Movement at this time concluded with a series of "what you can do" suggestions which included letters to the governor, personal contact with legislators, and local publicity.

Educational leaders were called into the struggle. Dean House of the University called attention to the fact that reading matter in public places, particularly on the newsstands, was improving. Edgar Knight said "it is senseless to make it possible for people to read without giving them something to read. Adult education, the greatest movement in the Southeast, is being recognized and libraries are the movement's greatest ally." Superintendent of Public Instruction Clyde A. Erwin announced a program for supplementary reading in the schools in addition to textbook reading. He cited the public library as necessary for intelligent citizenship and as significant in the development of adult education.

When the 1939 General Assembly met the Citizens' Library Movement joined forces with the North Carolina Library Association, and the Library Commission in requesting \$300,000 for each year in the coming biennium to be used in improving library service throughout the state. Both the Budget Commission and the Joint Appropriations Committee heard the request but made no recommendation.

A bill to appropriate \$50,000 a year out of surplus funds, if there were any, in the state treasury, for library demonstrations in various parts of the state, was passed by the Senate but failed to pass the House.

Undaunted by this rebuff, the Citizens' Library Movement again took up the struggle. Their aims were given wide publicity. State aid for libraries, they announced, would result in the equalization of library service to reach all the people, improved and enlarged book collections, especially books of information, better reference service, bookmobiles to distribute books to all rural sections, trained librarians in charge to direct and implement the service, good magazines to help people keep informed and up-to-date, and books for institutions, hospitals, and prison camps.

The theme for the 1939 session of the North Carolina Library Association was "More and Better Libraries for North Carolina." A dinner meeting sponsored by the Citizens' Library Movement opened the session and guest speakers include Marion S.

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Wright, chairman of South Carolina's Citizens' Library Movement, and J. M. Broughton who was destined to be the next governor.

To pave the way for the 1941 session of the General Assembly Charles Whedbee of Hertford, Legislative Chairman of the North Carolina Library Association, visited every legislator to discuss in person the need for state aid and constantly guided progress in each county.

Success came at last. The 1941 General Assembly passed the bill for state aid for public libraries and appropriated \$100,000 for each year of the biennium, 1941-1943. One important sentence in this important bill reads: "The fund shall be used to improve, stimulate, increase and equalize public library service to the people of the whole state."

By September, 1941, 45 counties had received state aid checks, eight more had added libraries, and nineteen others were almost ready for state aid checks. The meeting of the North Carolina Library Association in Greensboro in October, 1941, was opened with a dinner sponsored by the Citizens' Library Movement—one of the last, if not the last, acts of the Movement.

But the Citizens' Library Movement is not dead. Shortly after its success with the state aid movement its members found their attention diverted by World War II. And in 1942 Chairman Polk moved from Warrenton to Greensboro to join the editorial department of the *Greensboro Daily News* where he soon became involved with other work. The Movement now is described by its Chairman as "existing but not functioning, static but not moving." At one time he suggested to members of the Library Commission and others who were once active in the Citizens' Library Movement that a new chairman be designated, but no action was taken.

Chairman Polk suggests that the Movement be revived under the sponsorship of either the North Carolina Library Association or the Library Commission. With the approval of state aid only one feature of the many faceted job of improving library service in North Carolina was attained. It should take very little imagination and even less time to suggest perhaps a dozen or more projects which a revived Citizens' Library Movement could pursue to a successful conclusion.