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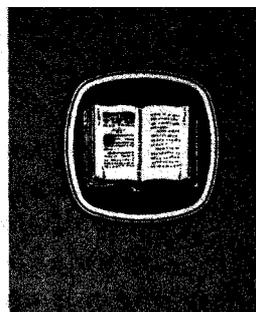
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## OCCASIONAL PAPERS



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### Regional Library Service in Connecticut, Its History and Development

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Concentrated efforts to obtain regional library service in Connecticut have been made since 1938. The last report summarizing the progress was published in 1951, and the many mimeographed speeches and reports of these activities since that time have not been assembled and recorded in chronological form. This paper will bring up to date the development and culmination of the first Library Service Center in Connecticut.

The influence pertaining to legislation fostering the establishment and support of public libraries in Connecticut came from two particular sources: the American Library Association in 1890 issued an appeal to establish an association in each state and in the same year Massachusetts had legalized a library commission.

The Connecticut Library Association was formed in 1891. Through the efforts of this group, the General Assembly for 1893<sup>1</sup> provided for the establishment of the Connecticut Public Library Committee. To eliminate political influence the State Board of Education was designated to appoint five members. Charles D. Hine, Commissioner of Education, was the first chairman and Caroline M. Hewins the first secretary. Paid executive secretaries were Mrs. Belle H. Johnson, 1902-1933, and Katharine H. Wead, 1934-1951.

Committee membership was revised in 1939 to include six representatives of librarians, trustees, and laymen serving three-year terms and the seventh member was the Commissioner of Education.<sup>2</sup>

The C. P. L. C. served as a liaison group between C. L. A. and the State Department of Education. It was in charge of state grants to public libraries, payments first in books, later in cash. Special contributions were made through studies and recommendations of state wide problems--regional libraries, certification, professional training, and pensions.

As the 1893 and the 1939 laws were weak in stating policy making and regulating functions, librarians realized that affiliation with the State Department of Education was the best solution, especially in assistance to school libraries. (It is important to note that the first state school library advisor was not appointed until 1944.) The State Department of Education took over the duties of C. P. L. C. in 1947<sup>3</sup> when the agency became the Bureau of Libraries. Helen A. Ridgway became bureau chief under the new organization in 1951 succeeding Miss Wead. In 1955 the name of the bureau was changed to Bureau of Library Services to conform with the general department terminology.

Connecticut ranks 46th in area, 28th in population, and 2nd in per capita income. Her local and state governmental factors are influenced by the pre-Revolutionary New England town concept: keeping "close to the people." Due to changing times and conditions, economically, socially, and technically, a democratic government must be able to adjust regardless of town lines. The present trend to large-unit organization is inescapable.

There has been little systematic or long-range planning of public library service through state legislation in Connecticut. Most of the libraries have meager resources and untrained personnel. Some towns have two, three, and four separate independent libraries! Of 169 towns in the state, 161 of them have 200 public libraries. Of these, four are subscription libraries and are not eligible to participate in regional library service.

E. A. Wight<sup>4</sup> has written that Connecticut public libraries are distinguished more for their number than for the size of the book collection. Three of the largest libraries own more books than 113 of the smallest libraries combined.

Studies and progress reports of state supplementary library services to organized regional areas in Vermont, the first in New England, and bookmobile services in the Massachusetts area were circulated and discussed at Connecticut library meetings. The areas around Bolton and Newtown expressed interest in the idea of regional service during 1934 and 1935.

The Committee on the Improvement of Library Service in Connecticut recommended in Hartford, on November 10, 1938, that regional library service be inaugurated. Two areas which had the same problems as Vermont were suggested to illustrate the advantages of working together to strengthen the services of each.<sup>5</sup>

Miss Wead, Executive Secretary of C. P. L. C., sent a letter on December 12, 1938, to each librarian stating that money was available for the purchase of books for a book automobile and an experienced librarian to help the local library in extending services.<sup>6</sup>

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Free regional library service was established in 1939 through W. P. A. funds. A regional library board was organized in Bolton to act as co-sponsor with C. P. L. C. Membership consisted of one representative from each co-operating library; a C. P. L. C. representative, and two ex-officio members, the secretary of the C. P. L. C. and a W. P. A. library supervisor.<sup>7</sup> Bookmobile services operated in eight towns in Eastern Connecticut for seventeen months. It was a successful project going from house-to-house and to schools and libraries.<sup>8</sup> When W. P. A. services were being withdrawn interested citizens in the area met on March 25, 1941 to consider the possibility of carrying on bookmobile service. The first Friends of Library Group in Connecticut resulted from that meeting. The Regional Library Board dissolved and was absorbed into the new group.<sup>9</sup>

Previous to the W. P. A. bookmobile withdrawal, the C. L. A., with C. P. L. C. support, sponsored House Bill 1363, in January, 1941, to continue regional bookmobile service and maintain a central reservoir of books.<sup>10</sup> This bill was killed in committee.

Three years later, to strengthen library service throughout the state a plan was devised to expand the activities, personnel, and program of C. P. L. C. by establishing a demonstration stressing regional library cooperation in areas without or with inadequate library service. However, the Middletown area had the interest and desire, hence C. P. L. A. approved that region.

About the same time the State Board of Education had established a curriculum workshop center in Jewett City in July, 1944, where there was need for library service. At the request of the State Board, the Committee voted to combine their plan with the Jewett City center.<sup>11</sup>

Upon her resignation after one year as adviser to C. P. L. C., Betty Jeffrey analyzed the reasons for the failure of the Jewett City Project. Her reports<sup>12</sup> were excellent, stressing the weaknesses, the possibilities, and recommendations for future planning. Three significant weaknesses were: superficial planning, lack of adequate resources, and an unsuitable location. Miss Jeffrey, who seemed to have been a capably trained librarian, is admired for the courage of her convictions to submit critical reports containing excellent constructive recommendations.

A committee of librarians to study a way to increase reading facilities throughout Connecticut through cooperation among public librarians and other interested agencies was requested in 1944 by Alonzo G. Grace, Commissioner of Education and chairman of the C. P. L. C. Additional recommendations for the study were asked by C. L. A. Isabelle B. Hurlbutt<sup>13</sup> was appointed chairman for long-range planning. Another member of the committee was Elizabeth T. Williams of Hartford, formerly with the Vermont Free Public Library Commission. Her experience and knowledge of Vermont's state-wide regional program were valuable.

Miss Hurlbutt and Miss Wead visited one of the regional library centers in Massachusetts. The committee consulted librarians, library board members, educational supervisors, and agents from various state extension bureaus. True to New England tradition the report did not make uniform recommendations for each area "as it felt that librarians, trustees, and other interested persons in the community can plan programs suitable for each region with the help of a library advisor." <sup>14</sup> The recommendations were approved by C. P. L. C. and the State Board of Education: 1.) establish regional bookmobile service; 2.) encourage cooperation of libraries; 3.) appoint a regional library advisor; and 4.) develop metropolitan area library service. <sup>14</sup>

Since 1893 the state had contributed consultant services and an annual grant of \$100 in books or money to local eligible public libraries. (This grant was increased to \$500 per library in 1955.) Gradually regional library thinking and an increased interest developed. As a result of the Hurlbutt Report the C. P. L. C. presented a bill to the 1945 General Assembly authorizing the establishment and maintenance of a regional library program at \$50,000 for the biennium. This bill was never reported out of the Education Committee. <sup>15</sup>

Through the interests of the State Board of Education and at the request of the C. L. A., a survey to determine library practices and to make suggestions and recommendations for improvement of Connecticut libraries was authorized. Wight and Leon Liddell were appointed to work with an advisory committee. Theirs was a printed report written in 1946 and released in 1948 as a State Department of Education, Division of Research and Planning publication. The need of larger units of service and the establishment of five regional library areas with programs to fit the needs of the residents of each region and supplement the work of the local libraries were recommended. <sup>16</sup> For the first time an actual, concise report of the over-all situation in Connecticut was compiled, printed, and distributed throughout the state.

To implement the survey, R. L. Richardson <sup>17</sup> was appointed in 1950 to serve with a technical advisory committee. They formulated a specific program of library improvement and service with estimated financial costs to the state. Four regional service centers to cost a million or more dollars were recommended. After due consideration by the State Board of Education, a pilot program <sup>18</sup> was approved. The program was to initiate one region to operate out of rented quarters and have centralization of technical processes at a cost of \$150,000 for the first biennium.

Active support of the C.L.A. with D. H. Clift as President, helped to submit this proposal to the 1951 General Assembly. It was rejected on recommendation of the joint Education Committee <sup>19</sup> because it was considered too elaborate and too expensive.

The support of the Connecticut Library Association continued.<sup>20</sup> It modified the recommendations of the Richardson Plan<sup>21</sup> to provide minimum service for the entire state,<sup>22</sup> changed location of the first library service center to a more central location, added two auxiliary centers with minimum staff and equipment, and strengthened the scope of the general contract law,<sup>23</sup> and requested three hundred thousand dollars for the 1953-1955 biennium.

The C. L. A. was rebuffed again in 1953 but through the Association's expanding publicity and contacts, the state legislators and their constituents were becoming cognizant of regional library service needs in the state.

In recent years Connecticut has also had a Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation, appointed by the governor. In 1953 a bipartisan sub-committee to study rural public libraries was appointed, with Senator Charles McKew Parr, Chester, chairman. Other members of the sub-committee were Senator William P. Barber, Putnam, and three representatives of the General Assembly: Elizabeth G. Baldwin, Cheshire; Mrs. Florence S. Lord, Marlborough; and Mrs. Helen L. Norton, Durham. Muriel A. Naylor, legislative reference librarian, Connecticut State Library and Helen A. Ridgway, chief, Bureau of Library Services, State Department of Education, served as consultants to the committee. Miss Naylor and Miss Ridgway are also members of the Executive Board of the Connecticut Library Association.

This sub-committee of the Commission studied the library extension service in other states, reviewed past activities of C. L. A., and surveyed the Bureau of Libraries (now renamed Bureau of Library Services.) It made a careful appraisal of the Bureau; qualifications of the staff, budget, book collection, and fiscal needs. It also reviewed the existing library conditions (1953-1954) in Connecticut, and concluded its report<sup>24</sup> with five major recommendations.

These recommendations were: 1.) to expand the book services of the Bureau of Library Services to public libraries and to public schools; 2.-3.) to eliminate the millage limit on the town, borough or city library tax; 4.) to increase from \$100 to \$500, on an equal matching basis with local tax funds, the annual state grant to each free public library; and 5.) to authorize the State Board of Education to establish and maintain a pilot regional Library Service Center to provide supplementary books and related library materials and services to public libraries and to public schools.

Bills introduced in the 1955 General Assembly to carry out recommendations 1-3 were unsuccessful. Bills to implement recommendations 4-5 were passed. The state grant to free public libraries was raised from \$100 to \$500,<sup>25</sup> and a sum of \$80,000 for the biennium 1955-1957 was voted for a supplementary Library Service Center in the Middlesex County area.<sup>26</sup>

For the first time since 1941, a reasonable sum of money was requested and granted for an area wanting and needing a library service center. All types of communication were employed, legislators and constituents had been impressed with the earnestness and reasonable fiscal assistance necessary. Skillful lobbying and political astuteness were evident. Both bills passed the 1955 General Assembly on the last evening of the legislative session within the last twelve minutes before final adjournment of the biennial session at midnight.

This author is firmly convinced that Connecticut's first Library Service Center was finally established by the 1955 General Assembly for the following reasons: first, the realistic choice of an area having strong grassroots interests, desires, and needs for regional library services; second, the close cooperative efforts of the Bureau of Library Services, the sub-committee of the Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation and the Connecticut Library Association; third, the widespread publicity and information disseminated throughout the state; and fourth, the political acumen of the librarians, legislators, civic leaders, and other laymen who guided the legislative program to a successful conclusion.

Sunday, November 20, 1955, marked the official celebration of the opening of a new type of library service in the state. (It had actually opened for service on October 3.) Members of the General Assembly and library and school officials visited Staddle Hill School in Middletown, now converted into a Library Service Center.

Twenty-one towns in the Middlesex County area, including twenty-six public libraries and sixty schools are eligible to share voluntarily in the pilot program.

At last grassroots interests, desires, and needs are recognized in a realistic region. Since the days of W. P. A., the first organized Friends of Library in Connecticut, and the "swap group" -- cooperation among the local public libraries to gather and exchange popular novels in demand and ideas on library service, fulfillment of regional library services in the area has been attained. Cooperation and proximity of the public library in Middletown and of Wesleyan University make the Center's location distinctive.

The pilot supplementary library service center demonstrates: that library services to small towns can be as adequate as that now enjoyed by larger towns; that no person in a service area needs be beyond reach of library service adequate for his needs; that such a program of better library service can be carried out at a cost reasonable to the taxpayer (approximately 2 2/3 cents per year); And such a program will not replace or infringe upon the autonomy of any of the libraries in the area. Rather it is a workable solution of efficiency to their problem of giving better library service to their communities.

The Service Center acts as a "wholesaler" by book delivery service by car and mail from a common pool of ten thousand to twelve thousand locally selected supplementary books ready for use--expectations about two hundred books to each of the twenty-six libraries at least every other month, and to each of the sixty schools three times a year; adult and children consultant service readily available on request; and training workshops on library service problems as desired.

The traditional established and basic pattern of library development in Connecticut is the small community library. Respecting and being cognizant of this factor the Service Center project is organized accordingly. Of the twenty-one towns in the region more than half have populations under five thousand, and all but one under 10,000. They cannot match large communities in library programs or service. Economically they are unable to supply well selected books to meet the needs of all the people in their communities. They need adequate supplies of outstanding fiction and specialized non-fiction books. Yet most of these are too expensive or too limited in demand for a permanent local collection to fill occasional or current school or community needs.

Most of these communities cannot afford employed personnel with specialized training for their public libraries and elementary schools. The librarians expressed the need for help in book selection, weeding the collections, book processing, conducting story hours, reading guidance for adults and children, book displays and exhibits, and organization of adult book discussions.

Public librarians and trustees, and school officials, teachers and librarians should be advised how to evaluate the library needs of the community, to solve problems through available resources and what other boards do in meeting library problems. Through consultant services and workshops these problems are being clarified.

On December 5, 1955, the Center sent a questionnaire to all participating public libraries in the Center area, seeking to find out the kind of books they planned to borrow and the type of workshops they would like. In March 1956, replies from sixteen libraries were tabulated. Science, hobbies, child care, automobiles, how-to-do-it, vocations, art, drawing and painting, games, and plays are subject materials most urgently needed for adult readers. Pre-historic life, hobbies, Connecticut, space books, science, transportation, costumes, foreign countries, geography, pets, U.S. history, holidays, mythology, and nature study are some of the materials needed for the juvenile readers and young people. Weeding the book collection, answering reference questions, and essential records for small libraries lead the workshop interest list.

It is significant that weeding the book collection is the first workshop interest. Stress to relieve the present overcrowding of shelves, a place to pool volumes of older titles only occasionally in demand, and discarding out-of-date materials are pressing aspects of the book selection problem to the librarians. (The first weeding workshop was held May 29, 1956.)

A week before the Service Center was officially opened, fire devastated the public library in Portland, one of the participating towns. John W. Parker, the Center's public library specialist, assisted in selecting and removing books to the town hall for salvage and helped in planning for temporary quarters. Shelving from the Center was also loaned until the books could be returned to the repaired library building.

The success of this pilot project as a demonstration in the Middlesex County area is encouraging the C. L. A. and the State Board of Education to consider the establishment of other similar programs of intensified supplementary library service in other regional areas of Connecticut.

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