



Regional Library Organization And Development In Washington State

JOHN S. RICHARDS

ANY EVALUATION of the development of regional library systems for the state of Washington must begin with an account of legislation enacted by the state legislature in the four biennial sessions between 1935 and 1941. While California had a strong state library and a system of county libraries early in the century, which became a model for other states, and Oregon early developed a strong state library agency which influenced library development throughout that state, Washington had no county libraries and a weak state agency until the legal framework was provided in the years 1935-1941.

It is not pertinent to this article to outline in detail the reasons for the late development in Washington, but a brief history may give background for what has taken place more recently. When Washington Territory was created in 1853, a Territorial Library was provided for at the capitol in Olympia. After statehood in 1889, enabling legislation for the establishment of municipal libraries was passed which quickly led to the establishment of public libraries in Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, and other of the larger communities. During this time the State Library passed through a series of vicissitudes and always under committees or commissions of ex-officio state officers. In 1907 the State Law Library was placed under the jurisdiction of the State Supreme Court. The State Traveling Library was divorced from the State Library and continued to operate independently until abolished in 1929 by the governor's veto of its appropriation. Also in 1929 the legislature abolished the current State Library Committee composed of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Commissioner of Public Lands, and the State Treasurer, all ex-officio, and turned the supervision of the State Library over to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Mr. Richards is a member, Washington State Library Commission, and former Librarian of the Seattle Public Library.

The original Washington Library Association, organized in 1905, had been merged in 1909 with the Pacific Northwest Library Association (P.N.L.A.), when this first regional association had been organized. After 1909 Washington librarians continued to work for library development in Washington through the Washington State section of P.N.L.A. By 1931 the Washington State Library had fallen to such a low estate that Washington librarians reorganized the state association as a base from which to work for needed legislation. The first meeting of the new state association was held in 1932.

The new association, headed by Judson T. Jennings, librarian of the Seattle Public Library, began to get results. In the legislative session of 1935, a bill was passed which provided for county, regional, and school district public libraries and a State Board for the certification of librarians. The budget of the State Library was materially increased.

In the 1939 legislative session, a bill authorizing an independent State Library Commission was vetoed by the governor. In the 1941 session, the State Library Commission bill was passed over the governor's veto, and the County Library Law which had proved to be inoperable in 1940 was revised and amended. The State Library budget was increased by 66 per cent. As a result of the revamping of the county library law, Washington had fourteen county rural library districts in operation by 1944.

During these years while Washington put its library house in order, the concepts of the organization and financing of the American public library were undergoing a change. One of the first, if not the first, statements about the need for larger area service and library systems was outlined in Carleton Joeckel's book, *The Government of the American Public Library*,¹ published in 1935. Librarians were coming to realize the hopeless inadequacy of the original American Library Association standard of \$1 per capita for public library support, and the inability of most small communities to finance an acceptable library program. Joeckel's book was followed by other statements of the case, including *Post-War Standards for Public Libraries*² in 1943, the *National Plan for Public Library Service*³ in 1948, and publications in 1950, resulting from the Public Library Inquiry conducted by the Social Science Research Council. Because of the large rural population in Washington, all of whom were without library service, it was inevitable that Washington librarians should early give consideration to the development of regional systems.

The Washington Library Association (WLA) has consistently studied the problems of library development in the state through periodic self-

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surveys of current status, and statements of goals and steps to reach the goals. These plans have served as a strong basis for action by the State Library in cooperation with WLA, and have always covered the entire spectrum of library service. While this article deals only with public libraries, the professional philosophy in Washington state is dedicated to the concept that *all* library development is interrelated and equally important.

Another major factor at about this time was the importation from California of one of the leading county librarians, Gretchen Knief Schenk, as Washington State Librarian. The choice of a California county librarian by the state of Washington was a deliberate action, as the profession had made a decision that they wished to develop fully integrated library systems. The California scene, particularly Kern County, offered outstandingly successful examples. While the tax structure of Washington has necessitated a different legal approach to the solution of the problem of full integration, the objective of merging administration and service to obliterate lines of jurisdiction to achieve maximum service value for each tax dollar has remained unchanged.

With WLA's success in achieving state funds to aid in library development, a decision was made to invest a portion of the funds in an expansion of the association's program for *public* library development. The resulting document, *A Proposed Regional Library Plan for the State of Washington*,⁴ has served as the pattern for progress since 1950. The surveyor used two major factors in developing regions: (1) the degree of geographic, economic, and social unity existing in a given area, and (2) the amount of money that could be raised by a 2-mill local property tax (our legal ceiling) using current evaluations. These two factors had to be reconciled and modified by the necessity that *all* areas of the state be reached by adequate library service. That these factors were basic is shown by the fact that the twelve regions recommended stand up very well against all current measures.

An encouraging beginning in the realization of this regional plan has been accomplished. Thirteen of the thirty-nine counties are presently enjoying regional service. Ten other counties have rural library districts. Thus twenty-three counties have library systems operating on a single or multi-county basis. Sixteen counties are still without such service.

The Washington legal organizational pattern is unique in that its systems are based on a single or multi-county library district which is a municipal corporation having all the powers and responsibilities of a governmental unit insofar as related to library management. Because of a special tax structure, incorporated towns are not an organizational

part of the library district but participate in the program by contracts which specify that the cities will pay the same millage rate set by the district (not to exceed two mills) and that in return the district will supply library service. Existing collections are handled differently, depending upon the local situation. In most instances the collection is eventually incorporated into the total holdings of the district.

Service is planned and executed on the dual consideration of need and response or use. Total financial ability of the district is the controlling factor of how far and how fast service is developed. Community libraries are combined with bookmobile service as the means to reach all borrowers, with mail service to the isolated or physically house-bound rural patron. Any and all means of delivering books are utilized, even boats and airplanes. The forest service parachutes requested reading to the fire lookouts, along with their groceries and other necessities.

Maximum utilization of the special skills of the professional librarian governs the assignment of staff. The children's program is developed over the entire service area, as are film service, services to groups, and reference service. When a community is large enough to warrant full-time professional staffing, this is done. Intensive in-service training programs are carried on by the professional staff to upgrade the quality of community service.

Books are purchased on the basis of the total needs of the area, with an effort to secure the maximum use of each volume. Shipments are scheduled regularly, with rush requests mailed in between. The books are owned by the system, not by any community or branch, and are not assigned on a permanent basis. When the book begins to be idle, the local librarian sends it back to headquarters where it may be sent on to another community for use. In the course of a year, as many books are returned as are sent, assuring a live and useful collection in each outlet.

Naturally all materials are purchased, cataloged, and processed at headquarters. All repairs and binding are performed at headquarters. Publicity is coordinated. *Any* question not answered by the local librarian is referred on for the reference librarian's attention. If there is a rush, the telephone is utilized. It is all very simple, the smallest fraction is as vital and as important as the large and imposing headquarters. Service, fast and free moving, is as little surrounded by hampering rules as possible. A fluid book collection and a fluid service pattern, with the goal of meeting the patron's needs, describe the basis of organization. An integral part of the organization is interlibrary loan.

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Once the system's resources have been exhausted, contact is made with the State Library where, in turn, if resources are inadequate the request is sent to the Pacific Northwest Bibliographic Center, through which the major library resources of the region are accessible to all libraries in the area.

While public libraries are completely independent of the State Library, the leadership and interest of the Washington Library Association in library development has led to a close, cooperative working relationship between the Washington Library Association, the State Library, and the libraries of the state. The basic library law passed in 1935 contains a preamble, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state, as a part of its provision for public education, to promote the establishment and development of public library service throughout its various subdivisions."⁵ This remains as the guiding policy of the State Library Commission. The state's responsibility was further emphasized when in 1945 the legislature directed the State Library Commission to ". . . make studies and surveys of public library needs,"⁶ and appropriated funds to "provide, expand, enlarge and equalize public library facilities and services and thereby stimulate interest in reading throughout the entire state."⁶ By 1956, when the Library Services Act became federal law, the role of the state in promotion and development of library service was an established fact. Again, the Washington Library Association and the State Library worked together to develop the plan for the utilization of the funds and to secure *new* state matching funds. The decision was made to concentrate on bringing the regional plan into reality as fast as money, time, and personnel would permit.

What has resulted from the planning and the organizational approach? The progress made since 1940 can best be shown with contrasting statistics. In Table 1 it will be seen that while the population of the state has grown 73 per cent in the twenty-three years, the population served by libraries has increased from 55 per cent to over 94 per cent, and the unserved population has decreased from 44 per cent to 6 per cent. Perhaps the most important growth has been that of adequate service, i.e., service which approximates American Library Association standards, from 21 per cent to 78 per cent. With respect to this last comparison, one must realize that the standards of today are higher than those of 1940 and that the 78 per cent today are receiving more and better service than were the 21 per cent in 1940.

The reasons for this great improvement in twenty-two years are in

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TABLE I
*Comparative Statistics on Library Development in the
 State of Washington: 1940-1963*

	1940	Percent of Total	1963	Percent of Total	Percent of Increase
Total population	1,736,191		3,005,100		73
Population served	967,716	55	2,813,755	94	
Population unserved	768,475	44	191,345	6	
Population with inadequate or no service	1,370,608	79	652,991	22	
Population with reasonably adequate service	365,583	21	2,352,109	78	
Circulation	7,175,346		19,381,378		170
Volumes held	1,495,677		5,084,194		240
Volumes added in year			339,924		
Per capita support of served population	\$0.61		\$2.68		
Total number of towns	221		267		
*Incorporated towns served by district libraries	0		138	52	
No. which <i>could</i> be part of district libraries	0		63	23	

*This is a very significant figure as it represents greatly improved library service for these towns.

part explained toward the end of Table 1 where one sees that per capita expenditures for libraries in Washington have increased by 339 per cent or from 61 cents to \$2.68. More than half the incorporated towns in the state are now being served by regional libraries, whereas in 1940 all were struggling along on their own resources usually with completely inadequate budgets and with understaffed and underequipped libraries.

The program for library development in Washington since 1941 has been focused on securing adequate library service for unserved rural areas and on improving service in the communities with inadequate service. No major effort has been directed toward securing library consolidation or close cooperation in the larger urban communities. In the three most populous counties, particularly, there has been only limited cooperation between city and district libraries. With the population limitation now removed from the new federal Library Services and

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Construction Act it may be possible to initiate projects which will stimulate the urban areas toward closer relationships, with a resultant increase in the efficiency of the service. It may be that in achieving these relationships the concept of complete administrative integration will be modified. The objective of the best service possible for everyone will not be sacrificed, but it is recognized that there is more than one path to the objective.

In closing, it should be emphasized that Washington does not promulgate the special district organization as the most desirable solution to the problems of library development. It is being used as a solution to a tax problem but closes the door to the highly effective New York approach. A means of combining the New York program of ongoing aid with the Washington program of getting unserved areas organized is being sought. One of these days the Washington Library Association will find a way to do so.

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