

Delivery Systems and Programs

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OF ALL GROUPS AND "minorities," rural citizens are among the most forgotten when it comes to any type of services or funding proposals, and rural library needs are among the least publicized or attended to in the library world.

It is not easy to define "rural public library service." Once there was a clearer demarcation between country and city, between open countryside and urban concentration. Now, not only has the automobile brought long ribbons of suburban development into fields and pastures and drastically shortened the time it takes to travel from urban to rural areas, but mass communication brings the same television and radio programs into the living rooms of the city dweller and his country cousin, and even the most isolated villager is seconds away from the beamed messages of a passing satellite or from a telephone solicitor in Chicago. Library systems and networks increasingly cut across town, city, county, and even state boundaries, and many, perhaps most, public libraries serve a composite of urban and rural patrons. Thus, to separate *rural* library services as a distinct entity is almost impossible.

A search of the library literature indexed under "rural" brings only an occasional entry for the United States and that is often a recollection of bygone days. The bulk of the articles are in foreign periodicals, with a surprisingly high proportion of them from Russia. Nevertheless, rural America is still very real. True, the number of farmers has drastically declined. Farm dwellers were three-fifths of the rural population (32 million) in 1920, and are now less than one-fifth, only 3.6 percent of the

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total population and still dwindling; meanwhile, the urban population has tripled in the last fifty years. However, total rural population has actually increased slightly in these same fifty years—from 52 million in 1920 to 54 million in 1970; these people live in 2100 basically rural counties which constitute about 90 percent of the land mass of the United States.¹ As farmers flee to the city from the growing financial uncertainties of family farming, city dwellers move back to the country, lured by clean air, lower crime rate, and less abrasive lifestyle, or by the promise of jobs in factories relocated in areas of lower taxes (and lower wages), or in the booming mining and extractive industries. As Ann and Henry Drennan have succinctly brought out in their chapter on rural populations, there are still a number of significant differences in lifestyle and values between rural and urban people. Even if both populations were identical in tradition and culture, the information needs of rural residents and the means of satisfying them would remain distinct due to the sparsity of population and the vast distances between resource centers.

Before considering the various delivery systems and programs useful to or used by (the two are not necessarily synonymous) rural libraries, it might be well to review some of the facts about rural people—facts underlining the necessity for truly adequate library services in rural areas, but sometimes forgotten in concern with urban problems, electronic gadgetry, and national networking.

Although poverty is much more visible in a big city, census figures show that in fact the percentage of persons below the poverty level in metropolitan areas is 10.4, while the percentage in nonmetropolitan areas is 13.9.² Rural housing conditions are considerably below the national average; unemployment and underemployment are chronic in many rural areas, and the percentage of adults who have less than an eighth-grade education is considerably higher than the national average. Rural communities have fewer health, mental health, or other social service agencies than urban areas, and rural citizens must spend more time and money to reach them, yet the proportions of children, elderly, and poor—people most likely to need health and social services—are higher. The shortage of health and mental health professionals is most severe in rural areas.³ Overall, rural residents receive a lower per capita share of the federal funds to deal with these problems than do their urban counterparts.⁴ This is true also of library dollars. Drennan has noted that funds are not allocated to the states on the basis of the rural deprivation differential, but on the basis of populations—a formula which does not address rural social inequities, rural financial

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capabilities, or the status of rural library development.⁵ He cites the fact reported in the 1976 NCLIS report *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Federal Funding of Public Libraries* that the average per capita library expenditure of SMSA residents was \$6.61 in 1974, compared with \$3.01 in rural areas.

Rural libraries must try, as must any type of library, to provide those materials and informational resources which meet the needs and interests of the population they are supposed to serve. In an urban setting one building may suffice to house and disseminate these materials; metropolitan areas may need branch libraries and bookmobiles to bring services adequately within reach of all neighborhoods and fringe areas, but the main library remains an important resource center and is reasonably accessible for research and study.

In a rural setting, where by definition the population is scattered, or gathered in places of less than 2500 population, the fiscal resources of an individual village can rarely support any but the most minimal library, and delivery of services from some central headquarters becomes critical. There are only three basic types of library delivery systems: vehicle, mail, or stationary building. Transmission of requests via electronic equipment, such as two-way closed-circuit television, is a possibility for the future, but not presently a viable delivery system. A vehicle may be anything from a small parcel delivery truck to a 35-foot bookmobile holding 5000 books to a tractor-hauled trailer. The most common type of mail delivery is by title selection from a catalog issued at regular intervals, though libraries have long mailed materials on an individual basis to patrons requesting them. Service from a stationary building could take any form, from a modern, well-equipped library complex, to a storefront run by volunteers or part-time help, a shelf of books at the crossroads grocery, or even a collection deposited in someone's home.

There is relatively little in the literature, as noted above, about rural library delivery services as such. Over the years a fairly large number of articles have appeared about bookmobiles, most of them of a human interest or anecdotal nature. Eleanor F. Brown's *Bookmobiles and Bookmobile Services* remains the primer, though the cost figures and some concepts are dated.⁶ Since the resurgence of books-by-mail in the early 1970s, a number of articles have detailed the initiation of new mail-a-book programs to supplement or replace a bookmobile operation or to reach citizens previously unserved, such as the homebound. Choong Kim's *Books by Mail* provides useful details on the operations of many programs nationwide and offers specific suggestions based on the experiences of practitioners.⁷ Not surprisingly, Choong Kim is as

partial to books-by-mail as the solution to delivery problems as Brown was to bookmobiles. Hu, Booms, and Kaltreider's *A Benefit-Cost Analysis of Alternative Library Delivery Systems*, done in 1974 for the Pennsylvania State Library to evaluate its long-term bookmobile and two year experimental books-by-mail programs, provides a complex economic analysis of costs and presumed benefits of each program. Since their data were admittedly limited and only certain variables were entered in the formulas, its conclusions may not be valid for other situations, particularly more rural ones. Food for thought are several of their findings: "nonusers are often only nonusers of a particular source of books, and...nonusers in the survey (or those comparable) could not, for the most part, be considered nonreaders or uninterested in reading";⁸ "Book capacity [of a bookmobile] is the most influential variable...explaining total circulation....Time spent at stops also has a positive effect on total circulation....it is the duration of stay at each bookmobile stop, not the number of stops, that has a statistically significant effect on the increase in book circulation."⁹ *PNLA Quarterly* published an article in 1976 on the costs of several modes of service delivery, including books-by-mail, bookmobiles, and construction of new libraries.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the costs figured for the three modes of delivery are not easily compared, since they appear to be formulated for different population sizes. Nevertheless, figures for each separate system could be useful to someone planning a similar operation. Richard Brooks provided a helpful breakdown of how to figure bookmobile costs in *Minnesota Libraries* several years ago.¹¹ His figure of \$0.67 to circulate one book contrasts not unfavorably (given five years of inflation) with the data from the survey in this article. He also arrived at the same figure of \$0.67 to circulate one book from the entire Dakota County Library System.

The questionnaire developed for a "Workshop on Bookmobiles and Alternatives," sponsored by the Loose Region of North Carolina in spring 1978, provides interesting data from the fifty-four North Carolina library systems about their bookmobile, smaller vehicle, and books-by-mail operations.¹² The biggest problem with maintenance was overwhelmingly perceived to be generators, while the biggest problem with service was selection and space shortages; the largest concern was publicity. Respondents noted a large variety of stopping places, including factories and businesses, beauty shops, fire departments, and military installations. Unusual or specialized services which have been written up range from a microfiche card catalog of the entire library system carried on the Washington County, Mississippi, bookmobile, to a specially equipped bookmobile of the Hoyt Library in Kingston,

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Pennsylvania, providing service to handicapped children and the elderly in the area, and a Book Boat system utilizing a Presbyterian mission boat to bring service to remote areas of southeastern Alaska accessible only by boat or airplane.¹³ A likely candidate for replication in other areas is the Answer Van, which provides a very popular information and referral service on wheels to the semi-isolated housing developments springing up around rural Pemberton Township in Burlington County, New Jersey.¹⁴

Almost nothing appears in the literature about fixed building sites as a means of delivery to rural residents. So many possibilities exist that an in-depth discussion of the usefulness, costs, and success rate would be inappropriate here. Certain observations gathered over the years, however, may be relevant. Villages and small towns of under 5000 population, for example, are unlikely to be able on their own to initiate and maintain adequate library service for their residents. The tax base necessary to provide adequate funding simply does not exist, nor are the resources or local expertise sufficient to sustain more than minimal service. Libraries inspired by an individual or group of people accustomed to using a standard public library often go downhill very fast once the motivating individual or small group of users leaves town or loses interest. Such libraries often become repositories for the discards from larger libraries and local attics, which are sometimes carefully cataloged and sitting in untouched glory on dusty shelves. Often, for untrained volunteers, a book is a book is a book, and with few ties to the library world or the broader concepts of outreach and service to the whole community, they are likely to perceive a library primarily as a warehouse or a refuge for all stray volumes, however dated or irrelevant. Volunteers are, in any case, unlikely to last long, and even paid (though minimally so) staff tend to come and go, making any training efforts by a state library or other distant agency frustrating and of little long-term effect. It is a truism that those staff with the least training or educational background are also the least likely to participate voluntarily in any workshops or continuing education opportunities.

A different type of building use is represented by deposit collections placed in various types of public facilities. These collections may be handled by state libraries, regional or county systems, city libraries, or other agencies, and are usually serviced by a delivery van or bookmobile. They can be housed in almost any type of building—from post offices and crossroads groceries to nursing homes, churches, and doctors' waiting rooms. Private homes have been utilized over the years, though one suspects that only close friends and next-door neighbors ever come to

use them. Normally, the collections are on a help-yourself arrangement, with provision for sign-out and return. The books are totally at the mercy of the host facility, since library staff may only be able to inspect or exchange the collection once or twice a year. All too often the deposits are neglected by both public and the local caretaker and end up either moldering under last year's garden seeds, stashed in cardboard boxes, or totally lost. A single interested individual—say, a nurse in a health clinic—can make all the difference between benign neglect and active use, by providing the enthusiasm to encourage potential readers to use the collection and the feedback to library staff regarding user needs and interests. However, if and when this individual leaves, the collection is likely to revert to an unattractive and unused pile of old best sellers. Respondents to the bookmobile questionnaire regarded deposit collections as a relatively undesirable method of service, with many books lost and little chance for patron contact or feedback. A few, however, foresaw their expansion in the future, if bookmobile service has to be reduced due to high costs of gasoline.

Such small outlets stand a much better chance of survival and of having an impact on the community if they are tied to a county or regional system. Then there is at least the opportunity for regular consulting from headquarter's staff; regular exchange or enrichment of the collection from the headquarter's shelves; more opportunity for interlibrary loan; shared use of films, records, audiovisual hardware, and other equipment which would be impossible for these outlets to purchase on their own; and access to the system's broader reference and bibliographic tools. Coe has provided a useful overview of rural needs in a cooperative.¹⁵ The number of totally independent small community libraries probably declines each year as more are pulled into some sort of library cooperative, and in most cases, the results are positive for all concerned. The increase of kiosk-type prefabricated structures, relatively inexpensive and easy to set up, is likely to continue and provides a good solution to building and construction complications if a community or system has money to invest in staff and collection.

Fortunately, several recent developments suggest more investigation of rural libraries and delivery systems in the near future. The Clarion State College (Pennsylvania) School of Library Science established the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship in 1978; useful research should be forthcoming from the center, as well as workshops and courses which will allow participants to share concerns and ideas. In summer 1979 the University of Denver Graduate School of Librarianship sponsored a week-long Institute on Training for Library Change,

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providing basic professional training for rural library directors who must respond to changes in their community as a result of mineral and energy developments and choice of rural lifestyle. The thirty participants from five western states are returning for a follow-up week in December; the first session was said to be very well received. ALA's Office for Library Service to the Disadvantaged now has a small subcommittee on Library Services to the Rural Poor and Appalachian Peoples.

In conjunction with preparation of this paper, a minisurvey was made via three questionnaires concerning bookmobiles, books-by-mail, and programming, of a cross section of libraries nationwide which were believed to be involved in either books-by-mail or bookmobile services, or both. These libraries were requested to send any of the questionnaires on to other libraries in their area, as appropriate. A list of the twenty-three libraries in seventeen states replying is included in the appendix to this article. They represent a small sample of libraries serving rural areas, from statewide operations to single-county libraries. While this sample is far from all-inclusive, the responses provide a sense of the scope and direction of rural programming and delivery systems today and suggest a few questions. The data gathered are listed below. Questions are italicized.

RURAL BOOKMOBILE SERVICE

Eighteen questionnaires were returned.

1. *Is your agency a city, county, regional, or state system?*
City, 1; county, 4; regional, 10; state, 3.
2. *How many bookmobiles are in use in your system?*
Total, 57; range, 1-22; average, 3.2; median, 2.
3. *How long have they been in use?*
Range, 4-32 years; average, 16.6 years; median, 16.5 years.
4. *Approximate percentage of your bookmobile patrons who also use one of the following: public library, school library, small community library, books-by-mail, college or junior college library, or no other library service: (12 responses)*
Public library (11 responses): range, 5%-95%; average, 30%; median, 20%.
School library (8 responses): range, 2%-75%; average, 40%; median, 40%.
Small community library (6 responses): range, 2%-20%; average, 11.4%; median, 10%.
Books-by-mail (7 responses): range, 1%-50%; average, 22.2%; median, 20%.

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- College or junior college library (5 responses): range 1%-25%; average, 5.6%; median, 5%.
- No other library service (10 responses): range, 5%-94%; average, 50%; median, 52.5%.
5. *a. Approximate number of people within the bookmobile service area: (17 responses)*
Range, 4,000-800,000; average, 147,458; median, 63,700.
 5. *b. Approximate percentage of these who would be classified as rural:*
Range, 22%-100%; average, 69.7%; median, 75%.
 6. *Approximate number of registered bookmobile patrons: (11 responses; several do not maintain registrations)*
Total, 89,364; range, 105-29,000; average, 8,124; median, 3,000.
 7. *Approximate bookmobile circulation per year: (16 responses)*
Total, 2,790,022 books; range, 4,800-456,000; average, 174,376; median, 41,500.
 8. *Average number of miles traveled by bookmobiles each year: (15 responses)*
Total, 792,256; range, 4,800-456,000; average, 52,817; median, 20,000.
 9. *Approximate total cost of the bookmobile operation, including salaries and maintenance, but excluding any depreciation fund set aside for purchase of new vehicles: (15 responses)*
Total, \$1,018,715 spent per year; range \$4,000-\$350,000; average \$67,914; median, \$45,000.
 10. *a. Approximate percentages of adult and juvenile patrons who use the bookmobile: (12 responses)*
Range, 5% adult/95% juvenile-75% adult/25% juvenile; average, 44% adult/54% juvenile; median, 42.5% adult/57.5% juvenile.
 10. *b. Approximate percentages of adult and juvenile circulation on the bookmobile: (13 responses)*
Range, 25% adult/75% juvenile-83% adult/17% juvenile; average, 51.3% adult/47.8% juvenile; median, 50% adult/50% juvenile.
 11. *In addition to books, does your bookmobile circulate any of the following: magazines; cassettes; records; pamphlets; art prints; free, giveaway materials; or other?*
10 circulate magazines; 8, cassettes; 9, records; 8, pamphlets; 5, art prints; and 7, free materials; "other" included kits, toys, filmstrips, films, patterns, and recipes.
 12. *What percentage of total book collection (on the bookmobile) is paperbacks? (16 responses)*
Range, 0-50%; average, 14.1%; median, 5%.
 13. *Do you provide any of the following services on the bookmobile: ready reference, information and referral, interlibrary loan, direct hookup to central facility via shortwave radio or other electronic transmission, copying service, or other?*

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Ready reference, 3; information and referral, 9; interlibrary loan, 16; direct hookup, 0; copying, 1; "other" services, 0.

14. *Does the bookmobile provide regularly scheduled programs, or occasional programming to community groups? If so, what types of programs are presented (storytelling, puppet shows, book talks, movies/filmstrips, cooperative programs with a local agency, other), and at what audiences are they aimed?*

Regular programs: yes, 5; no, 11. Occasional programs: yes, 7; no, 5. Types: storytelling, 3; puppet shows, 3; book talks, 4; movies/filmstrips, 5; cooperative programs with a local agency, 3; summer reading clubs for children, 4. "Other" included exhibits at schools and scout camps; information on welfare, careers, consumer, crafts, and other self-help topics. Audiences: adults, children, young adult groups, farm clubs, schools, nursing homes, Head Start, senior citizen centers, and Alcoholics Anonymous.

15. *Please describe any innovative programs you have initiated with the bookmobile which have been particularly useful in reaching the rural disadvantaged.* (4 responses)

1. Mailing book requests as soon as possible after returning to home base.
2. Having large-print books for the elderly.
3. Creating on the bookmobile a job information center, a social and health information file, a community information center, a human resources information file, and a government documents collection.
4. Regular contacts and coordination with local agencies; stops at senior citizen lunch programs, health clinics, and community action centers; use of large numbers of easy-reading survival skills materials.

16. *Are books arranged on the bookmobile by Dewey Decimal, subject category, or other system of classification?*

Dewey Decimal, 15; subject category, 3 (1 noted use of standard categories of mysteries, westerns, science fiction, romance); "other," 0.

17. *What are the most requested materials on the bookmobile? List in order of demand, number 1 being highest.*

15 categories were given, and space provided for "other" (which none marked. Average ranking is shown in parentheses:

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|---|--|
| 1. best sellers (2) | cooking and sewing (7.4) |
| 2. light romances (2.2) | 9. teen and young adult (8.6) |
| 3. westerns, mysteries, science fiction (3) | 10. contemporary issues (9.5) |
| 4. juvenile (4.7) | 11. health and family (9.5) |
| 5. sports and hobbies (6.5) | 12. biography (9.6) |
| 6. local and regional history (7) | 13. classics (fiction and nonfiction) (10.9) |
| 7. arts and crafts (7.4) | 14. career and job skills (12.6) |
| 8. homemaking, home repair, | 15. foreign language (14.2) |

18. *Do you charge fines?*

Yes, 4; no, 12.

19. *Do the handicapped have access to your bookmobile via folding ramp, mechanical lift, or other means?*

Yes, 0. 1 noted a ramp being built on a bookmobile still in production; 1 noted the crew took books to handicapped patrons; 1 noted referral to the local library for the blind and physically handicapped.

20. *a. How many deposit collections does your bookmobile maintain? In what types of facilities are they located? List advantages and disadvantages.*

Total, 89. Facilities: elementary schools, schools for the retarded, school libraries, public and community libraries, churches, service stations, groceries, county jails, minimum security facilities, warehouses, offices, post offices, Job Corps centers, rest homes and nursing homes, nutrition centers, private homes, forest service outposts, national monument headquarters, health clinics, and Indian tribal centers.

Advantages (in order of frequency of citation):

1. Always there, easy access for patrons, convenient for children, good for isolated communities, provide reading matter for the people who can't get to the bookmobile, good way to serve the aged and handicapped.
2. Inexpensive maintenance.
3. Well appreciated, good public relations.
4. Good supplement to the collection for small libraries with inadequate book budgets.

Disadvantages:

1. Books lost.
2. Lack of trained staff to maintain; no one wants to be responsible.
3. Low profile, low interest, poor facilities for display, books look uninviting.
4. No contact with patrons; hard to second-guess their interests.

20. *b. Do you anticipate expanded or decreased use of deposit collections in the next 5 years?*

Expanded, 4; might expand, 4; no plans to expand, 1; decreased, 4.
Comments:

"We are presently investigating the possibility of using deposit collections if one of our bookmobiles needs replacing and we do not have sufficient funds."

"The number of deposit collections will probably go up because the cost of running a bookmobile is getting ridiculous."

"No expansion—will initiate books-by-mail."

"Our recent experience, which we expect to continue, is to add stations in the areas of concentrated population (e.g., nursing homes, senior citizens' apartments) and decrease those available to the general public."

"Will add as necessary, due to high bookmobile costs, but experience shows only a few are really viable and need much coordination to work."

"[Direct circulation] seems to work better than deposits. It helps keep books in circulation rather than being stuck in a deposit."

"Probably will have to increase."

"Deposit stations are a lousy form of service."

"Like pouring books down a rat hole—terrible losses!"

21. *a. Does your bookmobile serve public schools?*

Yes, 12; no, 4.

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21. *b. If so, are the stops scheduled during school for classroom use, or for after-school or recess browsing?*

Both, 1; classroom stops, 6; after-school stops, 2.

22. *What do you consider the major advantages of bookmobile service for your area?*

Replies (grouped in order of frequency):

1. Reaches a segment of the population that would not be able to get to a regular library; patrons don't have to travel to the main library; can serve outlying areas where there is little or no opportunity for library service; serve the many low-income or retired people who have only one car or no car; can take the service almost anywhere; the only way to deliver any kind of real service in a rural situation.
2. Patrons can examine books directly; personal contact with patrons is valuable; can know and anticipate needs of patrons; close ties with rural families build over the years.
3. Reach a sector of the population that would not use a regular library; psychologically easier to walk into a bookmobile than into a traditional library building; informality and friendliness appeals to all ages.
4. Excellent public relations; good demonstration of library service in area without any; patrons very supportive and don't mind paying taxes for it.
5. Can supplement the meager resources in area schools and public libraries.

23. *What are the major problems associated with your bookmobile service?*

Replies (grouped in order of frequency of citation):

1. High cost of maintenance and repair; increasing operation costs; high cost of gas; terrain hard on vehicles.
2. Breakdowns disrupt schedule; staff often untrained in preventive maintenance or emergency repairs; maintenance problems; winter weather problems.
3. Stops too brief; difficult to serve working people; difficult to find a time that many people can come in rural areas.
4. Collection limited.
5. Book loss high due to shifting population.

24. *Do you anticipate that within the next five years you will add additional units, replace existing units, cut back on bookmobile service, or disband the service entirely? If the last, how do you plan to serve patrons formerly served by the bookmobile?*

Add units, 2; replace existing ones, 9; cut back, 4; would "keep it the same," 2; "possibly go to all books-by-mail," 1; might disband service entirely and expand the books-by-mail program, 1; "exploring various possibilities," 1.

25. *In light of rising fuel and maintenance costs, potential fuel shortages, general citizen anger with governmental spending, and possible budget cut-backs, do you think bookmobiles are rapidly becoming an obsolete form of library service, or do you see a resurgence of bookmobile activity as an appropriate means of serving isolated communities whose citizens may become increasingly dependent upon services brought to them due to*

restrictions in their personal income, gas use, and mobile lifestyle? Please comment.

Responses included strong support for continuation of bookmobiles, guarded optimism, on the fence, and those who have written them off and see books-by-mail as the future means of delivery for rural areas; several did not answer. Answers are grouped into the following categories:

Strongly supportive of the continuation of bookmobiles: "We see a resurgence of bookmobile service."

"I think it will become more important because people will find it more usable if they don't have so many choices open to them."

"Our bookmobile operation costs about \$10,000 per year for the regular big model. The only alternative to the bookmobile would be 2 or 3 mini-branches in isolated areas; operation costs would be at least \$30,000/year. Patrons in rural areas do not usually have the mobility to use such facilities. Considering patron expense for travel to the branches, we believe the bookmobile is the most economically viable."

Guarded optimism: "As for the bookmobile becoming obsolete, how expressive many of my tax-paying customers are in regard to the bookmobile being one of the few services they are grateful for. I hope finances will permit a continuation."

"In areas as geographically large as ours, bookmobiles still serve a purpose. Much of this function could be replaced by mail-a-book catalogs or kiosk libraries, however. Our bookmobiles currently return to a stop every 2 weeks; this could probably be cut to once a month without any great decline in level of service."

"People here will continue to support bookmobile service. I can also see mail-a-book helping if gas gets too high. However, people prefer to select a book physically rather than read about it and order it."

"Do not see how bookmobiles can be totally removed in this area. Certainly a cutback will come. Probably will be used in combination with mail service and/or homebound service. These isolated communities must have some service taken to them."

"Bookmobiles play a special role in isolated areas, providing a voice from the outside, a warm and friendly concern; their appearance is a social occasion in many small towns. In a state like New Mexico they provide opportunity for browsing and gentle encouragement by the bookmobile librarian, important with rural people such as our Indian and Spanish-speaking people whose backgrounds are nonliterate or who have had very little contact with books or libraries. I hope with careful scheduling they will continue to deliver materials and services across the desert, mesas, and mountains."

On the fence: "Difficult to tell which way citizen interest will go. Biggest problem is the high cost of replacing either bookmobile, should that become necessary."

"We've had no problems getting fuel, but the price has been high. I like to think bookmobiles can be justified because it saves people from using their own cars, but I know many of our patrons use other libraries too. This does

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not consider the problems of the small public libraries and the rural schools, however. We have fairly good citizen support, at least among our users. Even a nonuser told us that she didn't mind spending tax dollars for libraries."

"Bookmobile circulation has fallen off in our rural area recently, apparently for a variety of reasons. One may be that it is now too expensive to drive to meet the bookmobile. Another may be that because so many women have returned to work they are no longer there when the bookmobile visits their community. All of our present stops are during daytime hours. It may be necessary to begin evening and weekend stops to recapture patrons. If that fails we may have to consider alternative service, since it is difficult to justify a service where the cost per circulation exceeds the cost of many paperback books."

"With rising gas prices and the cost of repairing the now 6-year-old vehicle escalating, bookmobile service costs increase each year. Bookmobile routes and stops must be examined regularly to ensure that the many communities receive adequate coverage and that the stops themselves are effective. Studies should begin now to determine if bookmobile service will be feasible in the future and what the alternatives may be."

Obsolete/dying out: "I believe bookmobiles are becoming obsolete. Even the state library in West Virginia tends to discourage bookmobile use. They would rather see small outpost libraries."

One respondent circled the questionnaire phrase "bookmobiles are rapidly becoming an obsolete form of library service."

"Services by mail are more realistic in Alaska."

What do these data suggest? Because libraries varied in size and scope of operations, the responses ranged widely from small county operations to three statewide systems (Alaska, Utah, and New Mexico); this confirms the fact that rural delivery systems are not easily separable as such and are usually tied to a larger county, regional, or even statewide operation. The number of bookmobiles in use varies from one in Fayette County, West Virginia, to twenty-two in Utah. Most operations had been around for a while, with Pender County, North Carolina (thirty-two years) being the oldest, and Arrowhead, Minnesota (four years), the youngest. The average age of 16.6 years may be greater since a few respondents may have misinterpreted the question to mean "age of the bookmobiles themselves" rather than "time span of the operation."

The range of patrons using other library services is quite interesting. Few replied to this question, so the data are spotty but suggest that for a fair number of rural people, the bookmobile is the major or only source of public library service: an average of 50 percent have no other service, only 30 percent use a public library, and 11 percent, a small community library. Only five libraries thought any of their patrons

used a college or junior college library and the average percentage of those who did was 5.6, suggesting that many rural areas still have no college-level continuing education facilities, and/or that some local colleges are reluctant to open their doors to public use. Overlap of bookmobile and books-by-mail services is evident; 22.2 percent used both (obviously in areas where both were available), which is not surprising since these partial services complement each other. School library use seemed low (only eight of twelve marked it at all) and the average of 40 percent using such service is lower than the average percentage of juvenile patrons (54 percent). Some rural schools still have very minimal libraries and few trained librarians, which may account for limited use of school libraries. The number of people in the service area, of course, varied widely from 4000 in the several areas served by the 2 Alaska state bookmobiles, to the 800,000 rural residents in Utah. The average of 69.8 percent rural residents in the service area is not high, considering the sample chosen for the questionnaire survey. However, four systems had a service area which was 100 percent rural.

Registered borrowers varied from 105 in Goshen County, Wyoming, to 29,000 in Arrowhead, Minnesota. Seven did not reply to this question, indicating they do not keep registration statistics. Book circulation was also a broad span, ranging from the 2970 books by the 2 Alaska summer-only bookmobiles, to 1,926,890 across rural areas of Utah; the median of 41,500 is impressive considering these are rural statistics; the average yearly circulation is 21.4 books per patron.

The cost figures are probably not meaningful since there are so many ways of computing the cost of a bookmobile operation if it is part of a larger system. The range from \$4000 (Goshen County, Wyoming) to \$350,000 (New Mexico) is wide, and would have been wider if the biggest operation surveyed (Utah) had answered this question. The 792,256 total miles traveled by the 57 bookmobiles in the survey averages only 13,899 miles per bookmobile—many miles, but about what a passenger car might do in a year. In fact, one criticism of bookmobiles in the past has been the amount of time they are parked at headquarters compared to the time in the field.

The higher average percentage of juvenile patrons (54 percent versus adult patrons (44 percent) shows that in many areas bookmobiles still serve a primarily school-age clientele. The ratio would probably have been even higher several years ago, though no figures could be found to support this. New Mexico, for example, deliberately stopped most school service about four years ago—a policy designed both to encourage development of better libraries in the rural schools and to

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eliminate long lines of schoolchildren pushing though the bookmobile. This system began concentrating on seeking out the adults in the community—a more difficult task since they are not the captive audience the schoolchildren were, but one with gratifying results. Now patrons are primarily adults (except in summer), who seek a wide variety of “how to” materials as well as recreational reading. The closer range of circulation (51.4 percent juvenile to 47.8 percent adult) suggests either that children are reading a lot of adult books or that adults check out more books per patron.

Four operations indicated their bookmobiles carried only books. Only slightly over half carried magazines, about half carried cassettes, records or pamphlets, and only seven carried giveaway materials. More startling, in light of the expense of hardbound books and space limitations of a bookmobile, were the small percentages of paperbacks used. Two operations reported using no paperbacks, two had only 1 percent paperback books, one had 3 percent, four had 5 percent, three had 10 percent, one had 30 percent, one had 40 percent, and two had 50 percent—none had more than one-half paperbacks! Two said figures were not available.

Only three respondents provide ready reference service, though half provide some kind of information and referral (a pleasant surprise), and sixteen provide interlibrary loans. While one had copying service, none had a direct hookup with a central facility and none mentioned any other type of service. Programming provided was quite slim—only five of the eighteen (27 percent) had regularly scheduled programs, and seven (39 percent) put on occasional programs. Apparently many bookmobiles have not kept pace with the innovative outreach ideas and services designed to reach the urban disadvantaged or even the suburban housewife. Often they are at the bottom of the heap, administratively and fiscally, in a large system and perhaps supervisors are not expected or encouraged to experiment with new practices. Maybe the great public rush to books-by-mail is attributable in part to the freshness and popular appeal of all-paperback collections, as contrasted with the somewhat dowdy, hardcover collections (sometimes not even jacketed) found on many bookmobiles.

Only four of eighteen described “innovative” programs to reach the rural disadvantaged; one indicated simply more efficient service; another listed an addition to the collection; thus, only two (11 percent) have directed much attention to this sector—or perhaps some approaches were thought too common or unsuccessful efforts considered unworthy of mention.

The large majority—fifteen of seventeen—use a standard Dewey Decimal arrangement. Since bookmobiles don't normally carry card catalogs, finding books arranged by a numerical classification system can be haphazard for all but the most regular library users, and the librarian must make sure patrons get what they need. For this reason, a category system was designed for some of the bookmobiles in New Mexico, with each section of shelf labeled specifically for one of the approximately twenty-five categories chosen. While this system may not be applicable everywhere, it is surprising that more libraries have not experimented with color-coding or category arrangement.

The listing of materials in order of demand is probably quite typical of small public libraries. It is interesting to note, however, that classics and biography, considered "staples" in even the smallest library collections, were low on the list. Demand for career materials might increase if collections were better, particularly in this era of continuing education and second-career decisions.

Only four (25 percent) of the sixteen respondents to Question 18 charge fines. Most libraries appear to have decided that intervals between visits and short stops make fine assessment an impossible, if not unfair, burden on staff and patrons.

Despite recent national focus on the handicapped, none of the systems has handicapped facilities for their bookmobiles, though one such bookmobile is being manufactured for New Mexico. Most bookmobiles in use were probably built long before this was an area of concern, and sparse rural population has made access for the handicapped less of an issue than in some urban areas.

The eighteen operations maintain a total of eighty-nine deposit collections, or an average of almost five per program, and additional deposits may be handled through other departments in the system. The practicality of deposit collections as a form of rural delivery is discussed elsewhere in this article.

Two-thirds of the bookmobiles serve public schools, suggesting that a good number of rural schools still have inadequate libraries and need supplementary services.

Responses to Questions 24 and 25 indicate both current indecision about the service, and the belief that it is still, for the foreseeable future, an important delivery system for rural areas. While two operations will add units, nine will replace existing ones; two will continue with the same units, and one wrote "no" beside all possibilities given, suggesting that they, too, were keeping the same units. As noted, four are planning to cut back. Though no one said they would disband entirely, one said

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“maybe,” one is exploring various possibilities, and one may go to all books-by-mail. The comments ranged from satisfaction with the operation to serious questionings about its feasibility in a future of high gas and maintenance costs. It is this author’s belief that the future of bookmobiles will hinge not only on this cost factor, but on effectiveness of service and its value to rural patrons. If the bookmobile is still perceived by many as a children’s service or a carrier of novels, its demise may be lamented, but the transition to books-by-mail will be relatively painless. However, if it provides services crucial to rural residents—in terms of information resources useful to their daily lives, including data on agency services available in the area, ready reference and materials circulated in a variety of formats—and if schedules can be revised to be as efficient as possible in terms of reaching the largest number of citizens with the least expenditure of gas, then the public may not allow it to die.

RURAL BOOKS-BY-MAIL SERVICES

Fifteen questionnaires were returned; a compilation of replies follows.

1. *Is your library city, county, regional, state, or other?*
County, 3; regional, 10; state, 2.
2. *How long has your books-by-mail program been in existence?*
Total, 15; range, 5 mos.-7 yrs.; average, 3.7 yrs.; median, 4 yrs.
3. *Who is eligible to receive the service?*
All county/regional residents, 5; all rural residents, 1; all rural residents and shut-ins, 1; all rural route residents and those in towns with no libraries, 5; anyone who can’t get to a regular library, 1; rural residents not living in a qualified library taxing district, 1; schools, libraries, individuals in rural areas, 1.
4. *a. Approximate number of citizens within your service area: (14 responses)*
Total, 1,893,003; range, 9,000-411,711; average, 126,200; median, 85,000.
4. *b. Approximate percentage of these classified as rural?*
Range, 37%-100%; average, 67.3%, median, 70%.
5. *a. How many registered books-by-mail patrons do you have? (14 responses, 3 do not keep registration statistics)*
Total, 19,325; average, 1,757; median, 1,500.
5. *b. Are the actual number of patrons served larger than this figure, i.e., does one family member tend to sign up and receive books for the whole family or do most people sign up individually?*

Sign-up was by family, not by individual, 8 (1 noted that people were "supposed" to sign up this way); sign-up individually, 3; unsure, 1; no registration data, 3.

6. *Approximate percentage of your books-by-mail patrons who have access to no other type of library service, who use a public library, college, or junior college library, bookmobile, school library, or other type of library:* (6 responses)
Of the 5 who checked the first category: range, 2%-75%; average, 21%; median, 10%. All 6 checked the public library: range, 5%-75%; average, 39%; median, 45%. Only 3 specified that their patrons used a college or junior college library: range 1%-50%; average, 19%; median, 5%. 4 noted bookmobile use: range, 1%-50%; average, 35%; median, 45%. 3 checked school library use: range, 10%-50%; average, 25%; median, 15%. Other, 0.
7. *Approximate annual books-by-mail circulation:* (14 responses)
Total, 377,166; range, 700-100,000; average, 26,940; median, 15,026.
8. *Approximate annual cost of the total books-by-mail program:* (13 responses)
Range \$500-\$50,000; average, \$21,408; median, \$15,000.
9. *Number of full-time staff employed in the program:*
Range, 0-5, average, 1.5; median, 1.
10. a. *Approximate cost per circulation:* (11 responses)
Range, \$0.44-\$2.29; average, \$1.12; median, \$1.04.
10. b. *Approximate cost per patron:* (10 responses)
Range, \$0.10-\$13.00; average, \$12.16; median, \$13.00.
11. *Is your book collection a separate entity, or part of the regular collection?*
Separate collection, 13; part of regular collection, 2.
12. *Do you take reserves for titles in the books-by-mail collection?*
Yes, 5; no, 10.
13. *Do you fill requests for information on titles not in the books-by-mail collection?*
Yes, 13; no, 2.
14. a. *Do you produce your own catalog or use a commercial service?*
Produce own catalog, 3; commercial service, 14 (includes 2 using a combination).
14. b. *How often do you issue a new catalog and how many titles does each catalog contain?*
The frequency seemed to be predominantly 1 annual catalog with 3 supplements, for a total of 900-1,200 titles per year. 1 agency produced a catalog every 2-3 months; 1, quarterly; 1, semiannually; and 1, every 3 years. Number of titles per catalog varied from 600-800 for the commercially produced; and for in-house produced, the range was from 75 titles for the catalog published every 2-3 months to 3,000 titles for the 3-year catalog.
15. a. *How have you advertised the books-by-mail service?*

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Responses included radio, TV, county fairs, rural school districts, posters, bookmobiles, libraries, word-of-mouth, newspaper articles, and mass mailing of catalogs to all residents in a given area.

15. *b. What seems to be the best method of publicity?*
Word-of-mouth was most frequently mentioned, followed by public service announcements on radio and TV, and catalog mass mailing. (One frustrated librarian wrote, "I wish I knew!")
16. *What are the main advantages of your books-by-mail program?*
Replies are grouped according to frequency of citation:
 1. Convenience to patron; patron need not worry about library hours or bookmobile schedules.
 2. Reaches those not near a library or bookmobile stop; allows service in sparsely populated areas where bookmobiles or libraries are too expensive to maintain; provides service to working people who can't meet the bookmobile or get to a library during its open hours.
 3. Reaches people who were previously not users, who would not take the time to use regular public library service, or who perhaps feel uncomfortable in a regular library.
 4. Provides service to the elderly, homebound, and shut-ins who could not utilize any other type of service.
 5. Cheaper than bookmobile service.
 6. Very good public relations for the whole agency; patrons very appreciative of the service.
17. *What do you feel are the major problems associated with the program?*
Replies ranked in order of frequency:
 1. U.S. Postal Service.
 2. Not enough use; hard to reach all eligible patrons.
 3. Lack of personal contact with patron; lack of personalized information service.
 4. Limited selection of books; heavy demand for certain titles; hard to guess which items will become high in demand, requiring additional copies.
 5. Costs of postage, books, and service.
 6. Provides only recreational reading; not for serious readers or students.
 7. Inadequate circulation controls; hard to get books back on time; hard to collect fines.
18. *Do you anticipate you will expand the program, keep it the same, or cut back in the next 5 years?*
Expand, 9; keep it the same, 5; cut back, 1.
19. *What areas of the collection seem to be in the highest demand? Please rank numerically. (Average ranking is in parentheses.)*
 1. recreational (1.7)
 2. best sellers (2.2)
 3. "how to" and survival skills (3.3)
 4. juvenile and teen (4)
 5. job training, school, or self-study related (5.4)
 6. local history and culture (5.6)
 7. contemporary issues (5.8)

20. *Do patrons view books-by-mail as primarily recreational reading, as 50/50 recreation and information, as primarily an information service, or other?* Recreational, 8; 50/50 recreation/information, 6; 75% recreation/25% information, 1; information, other, 0.
21. *Please add any comments you may have about books-by-mail in general and its role as a library delivery system in the next 5 years.*
Comments fell into the following areas:

Expansion: "I expect the service to expand considerably—ultimately to make the total holdings of the library system available through the delivery system, to include interlibrary loan and reference."

"Was funded by state and local government subdivision at \$2.00/person in service area. Program will now be expanded to serve 50,000 people."

"This service will expand because of the energy crisis and rising costs of bookmobile operation."

"Books-by-mail will increase rapidly in the next 5 years. It is the best program for reaching rural residents."

"This service will have to increase as rural transportation problems increase. Postal rates will be an increasing problem."

Possible expansion: "If the energy crisis continues and if gas keeps getting more expensive, I think more people will start using this sort of program. One can send a sack of books more cheaply than one can travel 10 miles to the library."

Generally pleased: "Response has been gratifying from widely scattered residents who appreciate the 'library in your mailbox.' Shaped as we are, so 'strung out,' the saving in gas is a big plus for the mail-a-book program."

"This was begun in the absence of bookmobile service until the bus was back on the road. Now we have bookmobile and MAB. Paperbacks are so popular that we can serve both needs with the one paper collection and continually have new items available. Probably will try to keep both services going."

New facets to be added: "We are going to attempt to put out specialized catalogs, i.e., juvenile, local history, 'best of MAB,' etc. We've also had a very minor cassettes-by-mail program which I would like to expand greatly to include popular music."

"For a large state like Alaska it is a necessary way to get library materials to people who want the service. Feedback from mail patrons indicates that a catalog annotating available books and other materials would be the most satisfactory."

What do these figures tell us? Despite the small sample of fifteen libraries, it is hoped that they represent, as do the bookmobile replies, a reasonable cross section of rural operations across the country, from small county operations (e.g., Goshen County, Wyoming; Delaware County, Iowa) to regional systems (Arrowhead, Minnesota; the Texas Panhandle) to statewide operations (Alaska and New Mexico). At 3.71

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years, books-by-mail service is relatively young compared to the average bookmobile operations age of 16.6 years. One-third of the respondents allow anyone in the service area to participate; two-thirds restrict it to basically rural residents and those in small towns without libraries, with allowances for shut-ins anywhere. There seems to be no correlation between the percentage of rural residents in the service area and restriction of service to this group. In any case, people having easy access to a public library would probably be unlikely to use books-by-mail. Choong Kim notes: "Even in the most unrestricted, postage-free, urban BBM program, total BBM circulation is not likely to grow to more than 2 or 3 percent of the library's total circulation....In urban areas where access to library facilities is no problem to most people, the unrestricted BBM program actually functions as an emergency backup library service to those who find library visits impractical, inconvenient, or impossible. Not surprisingly, people prefer walk-in use of library over BBM."¹⁶ In New Mexico, perhaps one or two requests a month are received from urban residents for books-by-mail service. Requests are only honored from those who cannot get to the local library (and if it does not offer homebound services) and a letter is sent to the local librarian stating that a potential patron has inquired about the program. It is surprising how many townspeople are unaware of their local libraries services.

The population of the service area showed a wide range, though not as broad as the bookmobile span, of from 9000 in Holdridge, Nebraska, to 411,711 in Alaska. The percentage of rural residents was practically the same—67.3, compared with 69.8 percent for the bookmobile populations—not remarkable, since a number of operations surveyed provided both services to essentially the same population. The average number of patrons registered, 1757, is considerably lower than the bookmobile service average of 8124—not surprising since the program is so much younger (in each case, eleven libraries supplied this figure; the number who do not keep registration statistics is surprising). The eight of eleven (73 percent) who register borrowers primarily by family further indicates that standard data such as circulation and registration statistics do not tell the whole story. Had this question been included in the bookmobile survey, probably over 50 percent of bookmobile patrons would be found to check out books not just for themselves but for family members and/or neighbors and friends.

The very small number (six) of responses to Question 6 makes the answers statistically unreliable, but nonetheless noteworthy. A considerably smaller percentage of the books-by-mail patrons (21 percent)

have access to no other library service, compared with 50 percent for patrons of bookmobile service. A higher percentage (39 percent versus 30 percent) use a public library. The range of use of college and junior college libraries in the three responses to this category was so great (1 percent, 5 percent, 50 percent) that the average of 19 percent is meaningless, but certainly suggests that few colleges and junior colleges are located in the areas where books-by-mail patrons live. The average percentage of books-by-mail patrons using bookmobile service (35 percent) is higher than the 22.2 percent of bookmobile patrons using books-by-mail. With such small numbers replying this may mean little, and is a function of availability of both services. Does it suggest that where a bookmobile is still available more books-by-mail patrons like to keep that browsing option open? School library use was lower than for bookmobile patrons (25 percent versus 40 percent); probably fewer books-by-mail users are children. The ratio of adult versus juvenile use was not solicited on the books-by-mail questionnaire, so cannot be compared, but it seems generally that school-age children are not heavy users of books-by-mail; young children especially probably need to be attracted by the actual look and feel of a book. Circulation range was wide though again not as broad as with the bookmobiles', from 700 in the newly-initiated Monroe County operation, to 100,000 in the Choctaw Nation; the average (26,940) was not as high as the bookmobile average, but the program is newer and the replies fewer.

Annual costs varied greatly from \$500 in South Mississippi Regional, to \$50,000 for the Arrowhead Library System. Average cost (\$21,408), as expected, is much less than average bookmobile cost (\$67,914)—postage is cheaper than operating a large vehicle, and the overall scope of programs surveyed was smaller than that of bookmobile operations (judging by the other statistics such as registration and circulation). The average number of staff involved (only 1.6) suggests that a supplementary program of books-by-mail for individuals unable to use other library services can be handled by only one or two people. Undoubtedly, the bookmobile average would have been higher had the question been asked. The cost-per-circulation figures are fascinating, as are the costs per patron. Cost per circulation, interestingly, varies less (\$0.44 in Clinch-Powell to \$2.29 in New Mexico) than cost per patron (\$0.10 in Clinch-Powell to \$30.00 in Delaware County). Unfortunately, this question was not asked in the bookmobile survey, however, analysis of bookmobile costs, circulation, and registration data indicates that range of cost per circulation was from \$0.21 in Northeast Colorado Regional library to \$6.80 in Fayette County, West Virginia (average,

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\$1.26, and median, \$0.74). The bookmobile service cost per patron varied from \$3.94 in Northeast Colorado to \$68.85 in Pender County (average, \$20.15, and median, \$51.50).

The great majority (87 percent) who reported using a separate collection for books-by-mail is no surprise, since the most practical way of handling the service is a catalog with multiple copies of each title listed. In fact, Clinch-Powell Regional (one of the two indicating use of the regular collection) is primarily a books-by-mail service anyway, in terms of collection use.¹⁷ Alaska, which seems to provide packets of materials to rural schools, libraries, and individuals out of its regular collection, is apparently thinking of a catalog (and perhaps a separate collection).

Only one-third (five of fifteen) took reserves for titles in the books-by-mail collection, but given staffing levels it may simply be an unaffordable luxury for smaller operations. Still, almost all (87 percent) fill requests for information on titles not in the books-by-mail collection, without this avenue to other resources, books-by-mail could indeed become a self-limiting program. Although most libraries surveyed purchased a commercial service, the national average may be more like 50/50. A representative of the American Companies, Inc., producers of the Mail-a-Book service (and the only national commercial venture in this area) estimated that the company handled about 50 percent of the books-by-mail programs in the United States. Catalog purchase is easier for the library, but does not allow the flexibility of selecting materials relevant to the needs/interests of a clientele. In New Mexico, for example, a page of southwestern books (a highly popular item) and a page of Spanish-language titles are included. Two who have been using a commercial service (Arrowhead and Eastern Oklahoma) noted that they would be doing their own from now on. It may be that a commercial service best serves the needs of those starting a books-by-mail program. Arrowhead appears to be branching out, with special catalogs planned for juvenile, local history, "the best of MAB," cassettes, etc. A problem of any catalog, whatever its frequency and size, is that once an edition is published, the multiple copies of titles in the previous one become essentially inaccessible. Individual titles can be, and are recycled into new catalogs; nevertheless, the "old" collection is basically unused, except as substitutes or to fill requests from someone with an older catalog. As libraries with books-by-mail programs gain more experience, it will be interesting to see what they do with the growing collections of old titles.

Advertisement of a service is a perennial problem for libraries. Word-of-mouth was most frequently cited as the best means of publiciz-

ing books-by-mail. Particularly in a rural area, where people have always depended heavily on friends and neighbors for advice and information, a new service has much greater credibility if it is recommended by a trusted person rather than merely announced on the radio or in a newspaper. This is not to deny the positive effects of standard public relations methods, but suggests that reaching opinion leaders in small towns and rural areas could reap substantial benefits for any library service promoted.

Advantages and disadvantages of books-by-mail as well as general comments by respondents, speak for themselves. Given the economic and energy crunch, it is not surprising that nine of fifteen plan to expand their program to serve a broader clientele as families cut down their gas consumption and bookmobile operations are cut back. The system planning to curtail books-by-mail made the decision on the basis of its member libraries, i.e., that given inflation and with no increase in state/federal funding, the program to suffer should be the one of no direct benefit to libraries; as of this fiscal year, it provides books-by-mail only to the one county with no public library service within its boundaries.

The rankings of popularity of the various areas of the collection produced no major surprises. Since most respondents use the commercial service which would include little local history or culture, it is to be expected that this category would fall near the bottom, and perhaps it is only surprising that it is not last. "Contemporary issues" was also very low on the bookmobile ranking, suggesting that many rural citizens are too busy with their own concerns and needs to be interested in broader national or international issues, or perhaps they are simply disenchanted.

Almost as many (six versus eight) indicated that patrons considered books-by-mail as 50/50 recreational/informational or as a primarily recreational reading service. Though none viewed it as primarily informational, that day may come. Kim notes in a brief discussion of future trends in books-by-mail that: "the purpose of reading may change from leisure reading to practical information. In a number of programs, requests for materials in useful arts, hobbies, crafts, and other how-to-do-it information were the most popular of all the nonfiction requests."¹⁸ Libraries everywhere are probably experiencing heavy demand on "how to" collections, particularly in rural areas, where resources are few and fixing, growing, recycling, and creating are critical skills. It is a challenge to libraries to let the public know they carry these materials, as well as popular fiction and best sellers.

PROGRAMMING IN RURAL LIBRARIES

Eighteen questionnaires were returned; some regional libraries reported for individual libraries in the system, thus numbers may total more than eighteen.

1. *a. Does your library provide programs for children, and if so, what?*
Storytelling: regularly, 18; occasionally, 3; never, 11.
Puppet shows: regularly, 3; occasionally, 9; never, 17.
Summer reading clubs: regularly, 18; occasionally, 4; never, 1.
Movies/filmstrips: regularly, 16; occasionally, 6; never, 10.
RIF (Reading is Fundamental) giveaways: regularly, 1; occasionally, 2; never, 5.
Creative drama: regularly, 0; occasionally, 6; never, 20.
"How to" demonstrations by local experts: regularly, 2; occasionally, 8; never, 17.
"Other" included exhibits, library tours, parent/child training courses regarding educational toys, "Biography of the Month" celebrations, art displays, watermelon feasts, programs for parents while children are at storyhour, community tours, guest speakers, and sidewalk painting contests.
1. *b. Please comment on major benefits and problems encountered in programming with children.*
Problems:
 1. Not enough staff.
 2. Training volunteers.
 3. Not enough "new" ideas.
 4. Transportation to the library for children, except when schools are in the same proximity. Easier, for this reason, to work with groups like 4H and scouts.
 5. Scheduling conflicts with other programs, e.g., vacation Bible school, softball, and summer parks programs.
 6. Fluctuations in attendance, making continued projects (like arts and crafts) difficult.
 7. The "same" group, i.e., no "new" faces.
 8. Hardest to reach the neediest children, i.e., the very rural disadvantaged, even if one concentrates on the places where children are gathered, such as nursery schools and daycare centers.
 9. Parents who bring children late or pick them up late.Benefits:
 1. Reach the nonuser, including parents who bring children to a program.
 2. Children who come for a film show or program stay to check out books and use the library more.
 3. Summer programs keep children reading during the summer.
 4. Lives are enriched, and daycare centers, babysitters, etc. come to the library.

2. *a. Does your library provide programs for adults, and if so, what?*
 Book talks: regularly, 5; occasionally, 5; never, 20.
 Movies/filmstrips: regularly, 9; occasionally, 6; never, 17.
 "How to" demonstrations by local experts: regularly, 3; occasionally, 7; never, 20.
 Continuing education courses through a local college: regularly, 2; occasionally, 4; never, 23.
 Literacy tutoring/training: regularly, 0; occasionally, 2; never, 26.
 Outside speakers on various topics: regularly, 4; occasionally, 7; never, 21.
 Local history: regularly, 3; occasionally, 9; never, 19.
 "Other" included special interest displays, regular discussion groups with adults and honor students from local high schools, art displays, coupon exchanges, take-out programs to clubs/civic groups, daily radio shows (3 minutes), weekly newspaper columns, cable TV (8 shows/mo.), cassette duplication centers.
2. *b. Please comment on major benefits and problems encountered in programming with adults.*
 Problems: poor response, conventional advertising ineffective, attendance not sustained over time.
 Benefits: brought in people who would not otherwise use the library.
3. *a. Does your library provide special programming for specific groups?*
 Young adults: regularly, 2; occasionally, 4; never, 22.
 Senior citizens: regularly, 8; occasionally, 5; never, 15.
 Other groups: mentally retarded, friends of the library, book clubs, homebound, archives society, county historical society.
3. *b. List types of programs offered.*
 Films at nutrition sites and rest homes, book delivery, exhibits, lectures and demonstrations, book talks, poster and essay contests, story hour for mentally retarded children, special section in library for young adults.
3. *c. Comment on major benefits and problems encountered in programming with these special groups.*
 Programs are family-style to appeal to all ages. Senior citizens who had never been aware of libraries before are being reached at nutrition sites. Young adults passed drugs and vandalized, but preventive measures have almost erased the problem.
4. *Does your library, or other agency, provide transportation to any of its programs?*
 No, 4; other, 4 (included volunteers, county vehicle, community action bus).
5. *Please comment on advantages and disadvantages of programming in rural libraries:*
 Advantages:
 1. Draws people to the library; sense of satisfaction to the librarian in making people happy; people who come are really interested.
 2. Few other entertainment sources, thus captive audience; people appreciate anything you can bring them.

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3. Makes library visible; attracts nonusers; once involved, people enjoy the library.
4. Community small enough that librarian knows clientele well; less overlapping of services and better communication.
5. Local newspapers generally advertise programs free of charge and run pictures or text on any newsworthy item.

Disadvantages:

1. Not cost-effective; audience too small to bring in outside programs or speakers.
2. Not interchangeable from one community to another, since interests are so varied.
3. Lack of a permanent building causes low visibility of the library and people don't think about coming for programs; small building limits size of audience, so one doesn't dare advertise too much.
4. Poor turnout; transportation problems; weather; population spread makes it difficult to find central location; sparse population limits audience; fluctuation in attendance prohibits continuing programs like crafts.
5. Lack of interest in programs advertised as "educational," or in cultural activities other than rural interests.
6. People busy with own work except in winter; rural schools very full with activities.
7. Lack of staff time; often one-person libraries; lack of staff expertise; publicity takes much time; staffs feel that adults would not attend, so don't explore possibilities.
8. Lack of funds.
9. New residents expect big-city services and complain.

Rural programming appears to differ only in degree, not kind, from programming in any public library. Typical of both are story hours, movies and filmstrips, puppet shows, "how to" demonstrations, and summer reading clubs for children; book talks, outside speakers, movies, local history projects and talks by experts in various fields for adults; and occasional special activities for young adults, senior citizens, nursing home residents, the mentally retarded, prisoners, etc. The difference probably lies in the number and scope of the programs.

Small libraries with minimal, often untrained staff, few resources and probably no meeting room have neither the time nor capability to plan and put on many programs. The sparse population and long distances to travel work against large audiences or sustained interest. However attractive the program, it must compete with many other chores and activities. Often, however, few other entertainment or social activities are available in rural areas, and once a program has caught on it can be an important community event. Knowing the clientele well can be useful in planning relevant programs.

A relatively new dimension in programming are the projects sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Although most proposals funded are from medium or large urban libraries, several projects they have funded for state libraries in the last few years have encompassed both large and small public libraries across the state, and have implications for systems in which small libraries have difficulty with program ideas and implementation on their own.

The Alabama State Library received \$200,000 to produce six films, ten booklets, and a calendar on various aspects of the history, culture, and literature of the state. A group of humanities scholars were hired as consultants and part of their task was to visit every library in the state to offer help in putting on local programs and assisting the librarian in general to serve the community better.¹⁹ Rather than being a one-time event, it is hoped these ties between the public librarian and a nearby scholar will continue, and that the university humanities professor will be perceived as a source of assistance with programming or other relevant areas of library needs.

The Ohio State Library received a \$174,000 grant to help public libraries around the state plan programming for out-of-school adults in the community. In addition to a group of Ohio scholars willing to help in public programming, the project staff were available for whatever consulting, public relations materials, etc. were needed by local librarians. One of the best programs to date to come out of the project was conceived for the small town of Pomeroy, whose energetic librarian Ellen Bell organized a one-hour riverboat trip for local citizens, with a scholar discussing the history of sites passed. Local agencies such as the senior citizens center were heavily involved in the planning; the event was so successful that future trips are planned involving other libraries in the area and emphasizing folk music of the region.²⁰

A variation on these two projects was the Indiana Library Association's NEH grant of \$118,895 for a "Humanist in Residence" program. Humanities scholars from various Indiana colleges and universities were hired to work six weeks in the summer with an individual public library. Duties included evaluating the collection in the area of the humanities, planning and conducting public programming, providing in-service training for library staff in the humanities, making themselves available to the public in the library as special consultants, establishing an informal interchange with the community, and assisting with any special projects such as a local history program. The smallest library involved was probably Ellwood Public Library, serving a population of 11,000, but the potential exists for work with even smaller towns.²¹

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One of the most exciting NEH library projects, in terms of rural libraries, was at the Alpha Regional Library in Spencer, West Virginia. A \$50,000 grant provided impetus for a large number of local history projects in this very rural, three-county region on the western edge of Appalachia. Five workshops were held for the public on oral history, Appalachian folklore and folk music, genealogy, and the impact of technology; project staff wrote weekly articles for the local newspaper on aspects of local history, scheduled numerous speaking engagements at local clubs, and are now writing histories on two of the three counties. Each county was given 10 slots to bring in outside speakers on local historical/cultural topics; tape recorders were purchased for people to check out and use to make their own oral history tapes; 6000 old photographs were contributed to the library's collection; and a "Celebration Day," with old local movies, folk music and dance, poetry and prose, a bluegrass group, and a rededication of the library took place in July and attracted many people who had never been there before. Emphasis on family history and genealogy proved to be a key factor in attracting and maintaining the interest of local citizens. Spin-offs continue, e.g., the revitalization of the County Historical Society and the initiation of an Archaeological Society.²²

For rural people with a totally oral tradition, standard library programming and print activities will not work. NEH has recently funded a project of the University of New Mexico to increase adult library use at nine pueblos in New Mexico. A major aspect is identification in museum collections of early photographs made at the pueblos, and their reproduction and "return" to the pueblo, so that its people may better understand and appreciate their unique cultural background. In addition to these photographs, which will be exhibited at the pueblo libraries, copies of historical documents will be collected in a vertical file for research and archival purposes; various exhibits of the material culture of the pueblo, including comparisons of past and present, will be prepared; and local folk tales will be recorded and transcribed—all with the purpose of changing the library from a collection of basically print resources into a cultural center for the entire tribe. The local Indian librarians will be trained in collection, archival, museum, and photographic techniques at local museums, at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and at the Newberry Library Center for the History of the American Indian in Chicago, and there they will select documents and photographs to bring back.²³

Other examples of programs coming out of rural situations—or appropriate to them—include that of the Santa Fe County bookmobile,

which traveled in conjunction with a local college's mobile theater company as it performed its summer schedule in the small villages of northern New Mexico; and a school/public library cooperative effort in the small town of Abington, Pennsylvania, where a modest LSCA grant was used to convert a school mobile guidance unit into a summer bookmobile program providing story hours, movies, and books for children around the community.²⁴

Many programs have had an educational slant (though, interestingly, literacy and continuing education programs received the fewest responses on the questionnaire). Rockingham County Library (Reidsville, North Carolina) used a van outfitted with movie projectors, tape recorders, record players, paintings, and books, which traveled to communities, inviting parents and children to come inside for programs, stories, and films—designed in particular to prepare preschoolers and their parents for the first year of school in this predominantly low-income area.²⁵ Selma-Dallas County Public Library (Alabama) initiated Project ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Experience) with federal funds in 1978 on its bookmobile, to reach adults in outlying rural areas who could not read or write at a third-grade level. High-interest/easy-reading materials are carried on the bookmobile and an adult education teacher recruits undereducated adults living or working near the stops and works with them on an individual basis during each weekly visit.²⁶ In a 1973 study on library needs of farm workers, Zonlight urged establishment of Survival Information Centers (SIC) in all rural communities where large numbers of migrant farm workers lived. He felt that normal book circulation activities of a public library were totally inadequate for Spanish-speaking workers with only a fourth or fifth-grade education, and for such basic information needs as: where do I get food, shelter, medical care, legal assistance, work, and learn enough English not to get taken by my boss or contractor?²⁷ He saw SICs as collecting and disseminating data about community resources; providing tutorial assistance in basic English, consumer information, and job skills; and presenting cultural programs of importance to the farm worker group. How many SICs were developed as a result of his work is unknown, but it is clearly a concept complementary to the increasing number of information and referral services developed by public libraries, and to the growing awareness of the need for community analysis if a library is truly to serve its constituents.

Several recent rural programs, though not library-sponsored, would seem to have implications for possible library involvement. From Berea, Kentucky, the Appalachian Mobile Bookstore (another

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NEH project) travels the countryside stocked with over 250 books about Appalachia, from crafts and cookery to politics and strip-mining (many by local writers), records of traditional mountain music, and films from Appalshop about mountain culture.²⁸ Public response has been enthusiastic, and local libraries and organizations have decided to organize their own Appalachian collections. Another program is that of the University for Man, a free university in Manhattan, Kansas, which provides technical assistance and training to small Kansas communities which are establishing free community education courses taught by local residents with such skills as creative writing, appropriate technology, and local history. In addition to the learning which takes place, the courses have proved valuable as a means of gathering rural residents to discuss common concerns and issues and act upon them.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Clearly, on a long-term basis, books-by-mail will cost less than bookmobiles; however much postage goes up it is unlikely to equal the rise in fuel costs, not to mention the other operational costs of maintaining a large vehicle and the need for vehicle replacement every ten years or so. Other costs for the two programs are or could be comparable. Book collection costs could equal out; both programs should utilize paperbacks to the highest degree possible to get the most for the dollar, with the least amount of space consumed per title (in mailing bags or on bookmobile shelves) and the broadest scope of subjects possible. Building space necessary for program operation is roughly comparable, as is administrative overhead and supervision. It is likely books-by-mail would also remain cheaper than maintaining a fixed building site, which involves costs for rent (or construction and land), heat, staff, etc. Buildings, however, offer certain advantages over bookmobile or books-by-mail programs: quiet study space for school children or adults who have returned to school or who are engaged in self-study pursuits; and meeting space for programs and community activities—a real bonus especially in rural areas where public space may be very scarce. Nonetheless, efficiency and effectiveness are not synonymous. While it is clearly mandatory, given escalating costs and increased demand for accountability to the public, to get rid of frills, duplication of effort, excessive paperwork and unused or overlapping services in all areas of libraries, to carry cost-effectiveness to its ultimate is to use no money and to provide no services at all. We must not neglect the needs of any citizen,

for that presumably is why libraries were established. Nor can we forget the needs of the rural disadvantaged, who are perhaps the least vocal of all minorities in this country. In some situations, books-by-mail may be able to fill the gap adequately; in other situations a combination of bookmobiles, books-by-mail, and judiciously selected community sites may be the most appropriate means of delivery.

In all situations, whatever the delivery style, the collection must be up to date and relevant to the daily needs and interests of the communities served. Service must be friendly and helpful, and capable of providing as many dimensions as feasible for the system and appropriate for the population served. Examples are information-and-referral files for agency services within the area and of local individuals with skills to share, the capability for handling ready reference queries, ties to a regional or system headquarters for interlibrary loan and answers to more complex reference questions, and programming to meet the special considerations of various age groups. Rural citizens need good library services no less than urban, and perhaps more; inferior service is sometimes worse than none at all, since it may suggest to those unfamiliar with libraries that a library is only a shelf of outdated books, with a fee for returning them late. The worsening economic situation of the country and the rapidly diminishing resources and mobility of the average citizen may actually be a boon to library use—rural and urban—and may increase public demand for adequate service. Bookstores note that mass-market unit sales of paperbacks are down 10-15 percent from last year,³⁰ indicating customer resistance to increased prices and fewer trips to shopping malls; conversely, people may replace other, more expensive forms of entertainment with library books, and the delivery of books to them will become increasingly significant as they cut down on travel.

It seems appropriate to end this paper with the spirited response to the questionnaire from Louise Boone, director of the Albemarle Regional Library (Winton, North Carolina):

Thank the Lord—someone is finally waking up to the fact that there are vast areas of this great country of ours that are still rural to very rural, and a considerable population inhabits these so-called boondocks. They are entitled to library service just as much as urban and inner-city areas. Delivery is the key problem.

It is my feeling that rural delivery is on the edge of a crisis—the spiral in price of gasoline will cripple bookmobile operation and the spiral in postal costs for mail service. Our urban

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colleagues have cost increases also, but these two costs are vital for effective rural service. The fact that some states that have had strong rural service programs are beginning to look the other way when it comes to funding rural service fills me with alarm.

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20. For further information, contact Mari Herman, project director, at the Ohio State Library, (614) 466-2693.
21. For additional information, contact Elbert Watson, Executive Director of the Indiana Library Association, (317) 923-2197.
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Appendix

LIBRARIES REPLYING TO SURVEY

- Eastern Oklahoma District BBM, P
Library System
801 West Okmulgee
Muskogee, Oklahoma 74401
- Pioneer Multi-County Library B, P
225 North Webster
Norman, Oklahoma 73069
- Public Library System B, BBM
604 East Avenue
Holdrege, Nebraska 68949
- Fayette County Public Libraries..... B, P
531 Summit Street
Oak Hill, West Virginia 25901
- Monroe County Public Library B, BBM, P
700 Fleming Street
Key West, Florida 33040
- South Mississippi Regional Library BBM, P
900 Broad Street
Columbia, Mississippi 39429
- Arrowhead Library System B, BBM, P
701 Eleventh Street North
Virginia, Minnesota 55792
- Northeast Colorado Regional Library B, BBM
325 West Seventh Street
Wray, Colorado 80758
- Delaware County Public Libraries..... BBM, P
P.O. Box 189
Earlville, Iowa 52041
- Clinch-Powell Regional Library B, BBM, P
Center
P.O. Box 269
Clinton, Tennessee 37716
- Four County Library System..... B, P
Club House Road
Binghamton, New York 13903

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- Choctaw Nation Multi-County BBM, P
Library System
Headquarters, 401 North Second Street
McAlester, Oklahoma 74501
- Goshen County Public Library B, BBM, P
2001 East "A" Street
Torrington, Wyoming 82240
- Public Library of Anniston & B, P
Calhoun County
108 East Tenth Street
Anniston, Alabama 36201
- Western Plains Library System B, P
P.O. Box 1027
Clinton, Oklahoma 73601
- Alaska State Library B, BBM, P
Pouch G
Juneau, Alaska 99801
- Pender County Library B, P
P.O. Box 487
Burgaw, North Carolina 28425
- Utah State Library B
2150 South 300 West, Suite 16
Salt Lake City, Utah 84115
- Kinderhook Regional Library B, BBM, P
104 East Commercial Street
Lebanon, Missouri 65536
- New Mexico State Library B, BBM
P.O. Box 1629
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503
- Fontana Regional Library B
P.O. Box 460
Bryson City, North Carolina 28713
- Texas Panhandle Library System B
P.O. Box 2171
Amarillo, Texas 79189
- Albemarle Regional Library BBM, P
Winton, North Carolina 27986

(B — Bookmobile; BBM — Books-by-Mail; P — Programming)

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