

BOOK WAGONS

The County Library with Rural
Book Delivery

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,
OFFICIAL FILE



The arrival of the book truck of the Washington County Free Traveling Library is a great event in the lives of the people of these mountainous districts of Maryland.



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION PUBLISHING BOARD

78 East Washington Street, Chicago.

1921



THE WASHINGTON COUNTY FREE LIBRARY AT HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

Since the county is the unit of government in Maryland, it was not surprising that the group of men who got together to organize a library in Hagerstown in 1900 considered only the organization of a county library. These men had been familiar with the Washington County High School, the Washington County Hospital and the Washington County Orphans' Home, so the Washington County Free Library naturally followed.

By an act of the Legislature the city and the county were enabled to appropriate annually a certain sum for the support of such an institution. The largest part of the income of this library, however, is derived from two endowments: one from the estate of B. F. Newcomer, Esq., a native of Washington County, the other from Edward W. Mealey, Esq., the first President of the Board of Trustees of the Library and to whom more than any other one person, the organization and the success of its early work is due.

The County has not changed a great deal in the nineteen years that the library has been in existence. There have been improvements, but the character is essentially the same. The population of the County in 1900 was something over fifty thousand and today is little more, largely engaged in agricultural pursuits. Hagerstown, the county seat, had half of the county population within its limits in 1900, while today it has thirty thousand people, having drawn practically five thousand from the county. Washington County lies between the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the east and south, and the Cumberland Mountains on the west. Hagerstown is accessible over four railroads and two inter-urban trolleys, and, latterly, by jitneys. But there are still



THE SOUND of the approaching book wagon brings the family from the fields, the barns, and the house. It is an important day when the Washington County (Maryland) book wagon stops at the farm, because the family is allowed to borrow as many as thirty books at a time, from scientific treatises on farming, for father, to colored picture books, for baby. The farmer and his family choose their own books with the assistance of the librarian, while deposit stations in villages and all country schools are supplied with large cases of books from the central library in the county seat.

This little booklet is made up of material furnished by Miss Mary L. Titcomb of the Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Md., and Miss Mary Frank, of the New York Public Library.

many homes of the county people well up and back in the mountains, whose members cannot come often to the city, even for a much coveted volume. From the beginning of the library work an attempt was made to serve these people.

After the central library was established in Hagerstown, seventy-five deposit stations were created over the county: some in country stores, some in creameries, others at the toll-gates, the postoffice, or maybe in a private house. Fifty to sixty books covering a wide range of subjects and fiction were sent from the central library. They were exchanged every sixty or ninety days. From these deposit stations the books were lent throughout the neighborhood, making each station a circulating library whose records were kept in a blank book by the person in charge of the station—the storekeeper, the postmaster, or the collector at the toll-gate. Many of these stations were so far from trolley or railway that it was necessary to use a Concord wagon to transport the boxes of books from the central library to the stations. This gave rise to the idea that a wagon fitted with book shelves going over the mountain roads, stopping at each house, would be a splendid way to take the library to the people. This plan was worked out, and the janitor of the library, a remarkable person, was soon driving over the county, spending two or three days each week in the delivery of books to the farmers. Routes were laid out that laced well over the county and particular care was given to include the less frequented roads. The pikes and state roads, naturally, led more easily to the city, so it was unnecessary to stop more than once at most of the houses bordering on them. Of course, on the first trip along a route stops were made at every house to advertise the library's wares, as well as to become acquainted with the families.

In 1910 when the wagon was destroyed—struck by a freight train on a country railway crossing—there was a period when the extension work was in abeyance. There were not funds for a new wagon. The importance of the work, however, had been so impressive that in 1912 William Kealhofer, Esq., a member of the Board since its organization, gave twenty-five hundred dollars for the renewal of the work, and with part of that sum an International Harvester truck was purchased. The book wagon and the horses passed into history. The new truck had a specially constructed top with shelves for three hundred books, and inside there was room for four deposit station cases. With the new truck the work was enormously increased. With the motor literally making time, new routes were added and year after year the traveling library was able to cover each route three times each year. One of the assistants from the library was sent out with the car on each trip so that the families had the advantage of a professional person with whom to discuss questions of the day, as well as someone to help select the books. There has always been great liberty given to rural borrowers, each family being allowed as many books as it wished to take up to twenty or thirty, since in the spring they must choose the books for the summer and in the autumn the books that were to be their winter companions.

In 1915 the work had grown to such proportions that a new and larger book truck was needed, and this time a Koehler truck was decided on. This truck cost, when equipped for library use, about thirteen hundred and fifty dollars. It can carry five hundred books and six cases for stations, beside the smaller school libraries. There is a limousined front with seats for two passengers beside the

chauffeur. Since a visitor from afar, interested in the work, is not now an unusual pleasure, the extra room has been a great convenience.

During the months when the mountain roads are impassable and the routes are covered but twice, maybe, during the year, there is a frequent exchange of books between the central library and the county patrons by parcel post. The library pays the postage on all books so exchanged.

Gradually many of the deposit stations have been discontinued as the wagon routes have been increased, the work with the schools developed and library centers in the larger villages established. The central library furnishes a small collection of books and pictures for each grade in the county schools. These are sent out in September and exchanged in February. Material that will aid the teacher in her required work is included, as well as books for the children of the grade. Seven of the villages in the county have become so much interested in the library idea that they have either furnished a room to be a branch of the central library or a local tradesman has given space for a book case branch. In both cases there is a library day each week in five of the seven villages with an assistant from the central library in attendance. In two villages local people take charge every day. The work that has been done in these communities is incalculable. Picturesque stories could be written of each of these village libraries. There are both efficiency and economy in the system. Each village has the advantage of being in touch with the best and newest books, for the collections in each village are changed and added to as the assistant thinks necessary. An independent library in any one of these could afford but the smallest per cent of the advantages that it has by being a branch of a well administered county library.

Counties interested in undertaking the extension of their library facilities are eager to know something of the cost of maintaining a book truck in proportion to the circulation of books in the county. In Washington County the annual circulation has reached well into the eight thousands. This does not include the number of times a book is read in a family or in the neighborhood, for each collection of books in a family constitutes a small circulating library, passing from house to house. The work, including repairs, chauffeur's wages, toll, lunches for library assistant and the chauffeur, has ranged from five hundred dollars in one year to nine hundred in another. The year means eight or nine months, as the roads and weather make a twelve month year impossible.

The American Library Association has so definitely recognized the advisability of urging the county library system that it is making the idea one of the prominent features in its work.

Communities that do provide county library laws are assuring themselves of the expansion and development of the library as an educational institution along with the physical and material growth in their localities.



OTHER BOOK WAGONS



Noblesville (Ind.) Book Wagon at a Country School

Apparently it is more exciting to procure a new book than to have a picture taken. These children are pupils at a country school which is visited regularly by the Noblesville (Indiana) book wagon. The long shelves on either side of the motor truck hold enough books to supply a considerable number of farms, schools, and other rural centers.

Indiana has at least three book wagons. Where it is not always possible to have one exclusively for books, there have been occasional happy combinations with other educational enterprises sent out by the state.



Crowding into the county library book truck at a mining town in Minnesota.
Each one may choose the book he wants.

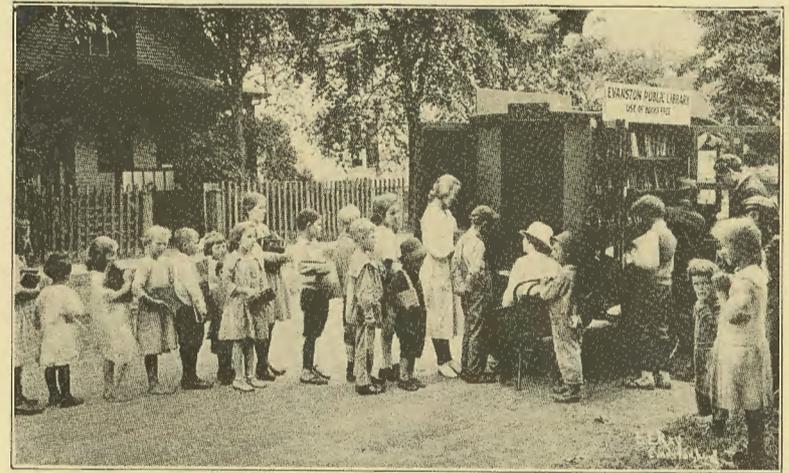
Hibbing, Minnesota, known as the richest village in the world, has an automobile which makes daily rounds of the township. The auto is lined with shelves inside, filled with as many as a thousand books. It has a librarian's desk and can accommodate six persons at a time. In the course of its journeys it visits the mining camps within its boundaries. Here is a fulfillment of America's promise to many foreigners. At these camps Finns and Swedes gather into respective circles and select one of their number to read to them. Once when there was a washout and the book auto was unable to keep its appointment, an Italian was sent out to meet it, his arms full of books. He explained in broken English that he had walked three miles. The men in his gang wanted more books.

In winter the auto ploughs its way through the snow to meet a sled full of school children at the crossroads. The teacher and her children jump out, exchange their books, and dash away with them to a warm fireside.

“Every Trip Confirms My Faith in the Book Wagon.”

New Jersey has a County Farm Demonstrator and a County Home Economics Demonstrator, who carry boxes of books with them in their machines and distribute them to the families they visit throughout the county. In Sussex County, Delaware, there is a librarian who has driven a horse and buggy, and now a car, for the past nine years. Miss Hopkins has “a love for books and a social mind.” She places a case of books on the rear seat, and away she goes to the country, gladdening the hearts of the children, interesting the young folks and occasionally finding a farmer and his wife who are not too sleepy to read a bit after the day’s work is done. She has stayed overnight with her people, helped the farmer’s wife wipe the dishes at ten o’clock and has risen with her at three-thirty a. m. for the day’s work. A year or so ago she introduced an easy method of canning string-beans that delighted the practical hearts of the housewives.

Miss Hopkins says: “Every trip confirms my faith in the book wagon. It preaches no sermons, but its books silently and delightfully influence character and make people think. Let me drive a book wagon and I care not who makes the laws of the State. Oh, for millions of dollars to send the traveling libraries over all the roads of the country!”



The Evanston (Illinois) book wagon supplies only townspeople. It was started because poor transportation made the central library and branches inaccessible to many people. Those reached by the book wagon are chiefly new Americans and their children. The parents may read Sienkiewicz in the original, but the children clamor for Louisa M. Alcott and Mark Twain. Eight commodious shelves insure a varied collection of books. At convenient places the “Story Lady” of the wagon stops to tell about Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and other famous personages.

EVERY COMMUNITY IS ENTITLED TO ADEQUATE
LIBRARY SERVICE

The book wagon illustrates one of the spectacular means of distributing books. Libraries also distribute through branches in important towns and villages and small collections placed in country stores, schools, and churches. Books are often sent directly to individuals by parcel post.

Every community in the United States is entitled to an adequate library service. Most states are promoting this service through State Library Commissions, State Libraries or Library Extension divisions of State Departments of Education.

