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The County Library
With
Rural Book Delivery

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THE WASHINGTON COUNTY FREE LIBRARY AT HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

Since the county is the unit of government in Maryland, it was not unusual 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 interurban trolleys, and latterly, by

jitneys—but there are still many homes of the county people well up and back in the mountains, whose members can not 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 post-office 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 store-keeper, 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 including 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 some one 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 is 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 anyone of these could afford but the smallest per cent. of the advantages that it has by being a branch of a well administered city 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 an-

nual 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 Enlarged Program which is an outgrowth of the War Service of the Association. Any state or county that is seeking advice as it contemplates the formation of library laws to make such a system possible, by a tax or levy, will do well to write to the American Library Association, 78 East Washington street, Chicago, for professional suggestions and information.

Communities that do provide such 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.

**Cost of Car purchased by Washington County Free Library
In 1916.**

1 Koehler Truck Chasis.....	\$940.00
Clock	2.50
Speedometer & Lights.....	38.00
Chains	8.50
Linoleum and Aluminum binding for floor of car.....	7.50
Cost of body fitted with shelves.....	333.00
Vacuum tank	10.00
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Total cost of car.....	\$1339.50

Cost of operating 1919.

Storage at \$10.00 per month.....	\$120.00
Driver at \$4.00 per day—52 days.....	208.00
Oil, gas, and meals for two, \$2.50 per day..	130.00
Repairs	336.83
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Total	\$794.83

SOME OTHER BOOK WAGONS

The Delaware State Library Commission has established twenty-two book wagon routes in the three Counties of the State and reports that it has proved the most satisfactory work of the Commission.

Plainfield Indiana serves three townships in one corner of the County by means of a book wagon. Gas City, Indiana, also runs a book wagon for the town.

The Public Library in Attica, Indiana, does not own a car but for three years, has made monthly trips to all the homes in two townships with a hired automobile.

Hibbings, Minesota, has an automobile constructed to carry 1000 books with a desk for the librarian and space in the interior for six people at a time.

In California forty-four county free libraries have been established but of these three are not yet in operation.

**Extract from a letter from M. J. Ferguson,
California State Library.**

"We do not have, strictly speaking, what you call rural delivery by book truck. We have no book wagons such as you have in Washington County Free Library. Our county librarians, however, in their visits to their branches often do the delivering of books in automobiles, such machines being owned in some places by the county librarian, in others by the county supervisors for use of various county departments, and in other places they are rented for the purpose of visits and book delivery. We do not, however, confine the delivery of books to this method. Books are delivered here in whatever way is practical. Sometimes it is done by express, by parcels post, or pack animals, on sleds in winter and even in some cases by aerial tramway. In short, every known means of transportation I believe except by aeroplane has been used in California and I believe the aeroplane, too, will be pressed into service before much longer."