

American Indian Libraries Newsletter



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Do Native Americans Want Libraries?

Ruth Blank

The answer is "yes." The library at the Indian Center of San Jose, Inc., was founded in 1972 by a group of Indian college students with the support of center administrators. As one member of the original group told it, he was working at the Indian Center and his books about Indians were disappearing from his desk with regularity. Reasoning that if others wanted books about Indians, why not start an Indian community library? A committee was formed and money was sought and received in the form of a \$6,000 grant from Economic and Social Opportunities (ESO) of Santa Clara County, a community action program under the office of Equal Opportunities. Located in a nondescript building in the commercial section of the inner city, the Indian Center of San Jose, as with other urban centers in the United States, was established to provide social services to fellow Indians who either were government- or self-relocated from rural or reservation areas to big cities for better economic and educational opportunities. Libraries were not usually included in the activities or programs of these centers. The decision for the San Jose Indians to start their own library was unique and innovative.

In the Beginning

Back to 1972, the appointed library committee worked for a period of about six months. They ordered all the titles in the stock of a dealer in American Indian books. Ten units of metal bookshelves were purchased. A small room in the back of the Indian Center was lined with sheets of wood paneling. ESO provided an old oak desk, chairs, and a typing table. Close to the end of the funding period, the director of the center and the committee members began to realize that having a library involved more than purchasing books and shelves.

Two weeks before the funding period ended, I received a telephone call from the Indians and they asked for help. The request for my assistance was approached with trepidation. All that they knew about me was that I had attended several meetings on Indian education and that I was a professional librarian. Would they be backtracking by asking the help of a non-Indian? Would they be getting again a white person who would be patronizing, and would they be saddled with yet another "white library"?

For me, this was an opportunity to test and practice my ideas and philosophy of social responsibilities in the library.

I accepted the assignment and worked against the deadline for the funding period—two weeks away. File cards and cabinets were ordered; gaps in the selection of books were corrected (children's books had been neglected); the dozen four-ounce jars of rubber cement were exchanged for a gallon. I rummaged through the Indian Center, acquiring a comfortable rocking chair and a big wooden stand (I still do not know its original function), which I painted red. This became the support for the file cabinets, oversized books, and the back file of newspapers. "Big Red" is still being used very effectively and affectionately. An old kitchen table was made presentable with a plastic cover gaily decorated with bright fringe. An important purchase was a record player and recordings of Indian music. I hauled my children's discarded bulletin boards from home and covered them with burlap. The finishing touch was the mounting of pictures of Indian designs and subjects and placing them on the walls. I used all the ingenuity and decorating experience derived from years of homemaking on a budget. It was a challenge.

The funding period ended. There was no salary for a librarian, but all those books were there and had to be cataloged. I couldn't walk away from that little library. So, I stayed on, put up the sign "Library," and felt like the hostess who planned a party and at zero hour wondered if anyone would come.

The Library Program

Working cooperatively with the Indians, library policy was established. I brainwashed myself by repeating, "This is not your library, this is the *Indians'* library. I am the Indians' librarian and as such I am committed to providing the kind of library and service they want." It was decided that the library would be run as a public library, that is, available to all, Indians and non-Indians, with no charge for use. Books would circulate for two weeks, and there would be no overdue fines. With this in mind, it was stressed to new users that return of books follows the Indian tradition of sharing. Out-of-print, expensive art

books; reference materials; newspapers; records; and filmstrips do not circulate, with the exception of limited loan for special programs.

Urban areas have a mix of Indians from many different sections of the country and tribal groups. In Santa Clara County, south of San Francisco, we have estimated conservatively over sixty different tribes represented. The centers in San Jose and other cities respond to the needs of Indians who find themselves in an alien culture and surroundings. Jobs, counseling, health care, and other social services are needed. Pertinent to the fulfillment of such services is the reality of the intrinsic nature of Indian peoples. Many are family and tribally oriented and feel more at ease among other Indians. They will seek out other Indians whether it be at the center, the "Indian bar," or at powwows. This is important in any consideration of a library for Indian people. The very fact that the library was located in the Indian Center already put it in a plus situation. The library became another area of service and socializing.

The main body of books were selected to give the tribal histories and culture of many different tribes. I found that Sioux Indians were primarily interested in books about the Sioux, Eskimos about Eskimos, Penobscots about Penobscots, and so on. Once beyond the primary interest in one's own tribe, the Indian library user will go on to read about other tribes and then the general history books. The city Indians have close ties with the home reservation and small town from which they came. The availability of newspapers from "back home" contributes to the library popularity.

Sitting in the library, located in back of the Indian Center building, I had plenty of work, organizing and cataloging the books, and wondered how a library could run without money. At the beginning, to fill the silence, I played the Indian recordings. At least I was learning the different styles of tribal music. Gradually, a few Indians wandered in and grouped themselves around the record player. The money spent on the phonograph and a good selection of records began to pay off. Daily the group grew. While listening to music, one or another would pick up a book, thumb through the pictures, get excited when they found pictures of people they knew.

How to Run a Library Without a Budget

Without money for the continuing purchase of books or supplies, the collection still grew. New materials came to the library as donations, either in the form of money or specific books from individuals and organizations.

The pamphlet file was developed by donations of magazine articles, newspaper clippings, and ephemera from Indian organizations. Many of the Indian newspapers came free and have provided an ongoing source for information on contemporary events. A piggy bank was installed on my desk to which was affixed the picture of an appealing kitten. A card noted that the library would appreciate donations of any amount to help library finances.

As the library progressed, word got out to other librarians in the area. Encouragement to continue came in the form of a stipend through the People's Library Project. The People's Library Project was initiated by members of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of Social Responsibilities Round Table. Contributions by working

librarians were made to pay librarians doing needed library services within a social context and where there was no available remuneration.

In this fashion the library functioned and grew for about a year and a half. The library habit caught on with the Indians, and they realized that they needed a better money base to keep the library open with a full-time librarian in attendance.

In 1974, the Indian Center received money from the Office of Native Americans Program (ONAP) to help with their service projects. Through these funds a salary for the librarian was provided and a small budget made available for library purchases. We now could have regular hours, with the library open five days a week, and could purchase audiovisual equipment, more furniture, and more books.

Who Uses the Library

At that time, formal records were started to reflect usage of the library. Categories were established to indicate Native Americans, teachers, students, and the general public. Reference questions from other libraries and circulation were noted on a monthly basis.

Not long after the library opened, teachers and school resource people started coming to the library seeking help with the selection of materials for use in their class programs involving Indians. It became apparent that there was a great deal of ignorance and frustration on the part of teachers as to what to use and where to obtain good teaching materials dealing accurately and fairly with Native Americans. Indian voices had been raised, along with other minorities, for accurate portrayal of their culture and tradition in both trade books and textbooks. The Indian Center Library provided a place for needed help. By word of mouth the word got out; the teachers came. To many, it was and still is a discovery place—not only for curriculum materials but also reading to gain more knowledge for themselves.

Students from elementary school to graduate college level with assignments or research projects about Native Americans use the library. Topics may be about Indian health, contemporary events, arts and crafts, and even recipes for a boys' cooking class. At the college level, almost every department has been represented—social sciences, education, arts, physical education, librarianship, to name a few; where else can a linguistics teacher find a Navajo speaker for his class?

As the library program evolved, and non-Indians began to frequent the library, the unspoken question arose in my

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Librarian Ruth Blank with patrons at the library of the Indian Center of San Jose, Inc., California.

mind whether the library was fulfilling its purpose by also serving non-Indians. The problem was resolved by the reasoning that giving and providing accurate information about Indians to non-Indians was a valid function of the library. The meeting of Indians and non-Indians within the library was a learning experience for both.

The monthly reports and log of library activities show the diversity of clientele and activities. Most significant is the number of Indians that patronize the library. Current figures show a number of about 350 Indians and about one half that for non-Indians using the library. Requests are continuing for Saturday and evening hours. In that eventuality, the "stats" for library use would rise considerably. The library as a component of the Indian Center of San Jose is governed by the working schedule for the whole center, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The New Library

In August 1976, the Indian Center moved from the downtown site it had occupied for five years. The programs of the center were expanding with several government grants, which necessitated larger and better facilities. The move was made to a vacated public school on the outskirts of San Jose. Although not centrally located, the new site offered better parking and quarters more suitable for the new programs. These included a health clinic, employment aid, and educational programs. Four Winds, a residential halfway house for alcoholics (off-campus) had been started a year before.

It was decided that the library fitted in more naturally with the education programs. The fiscal support of the library and librarian's salary was assumed by the educational units. This opened up new vistas of activity for the

library with the development and collection of curricula materials and a program of films in the library to support the tutorial and culture classes held at the center.

Although the library is now under education, it serves all the other departments of the Indian Center. In this activity it assumes the aspect of a company library by responding to the need for information of the in-house type. Once a month, "rap" sessions are held for the residents of Four Winds.

The experience at the Library of the Indian Center of San Jose, Inc., has shown that Indians will use and support libraries given the kind of library and materials they want. Started by Indians five years ago, it has proven its value for the Indian and non-Indian community. Success has been predicated on the library being directed by Indian people and a librarian sensitive to their needs.—*RB, Librarian, Indian Center of San Jose, Inc., San Jose, California.*

New York State Education Department Launches Program to Develop Indian Libraries

Five Indian nation representatives and public officials have been appointed to an advisory committee on Indian libraries to assist the New York State Education Department in launching a program for development of library service on Indian reservations.

The five-member committee includes Elma Patterson, supervisor of Indian services in the State Department of

Social Services, Buffalo; Margaret Jacobs, Akwesasne Cultural Center, Inc., and the St. Regis Mohawk tribe, Hogsburg; Lana Rozler, the Seneca Nations of Indians, Salamanca; Ramona Charles, of the Tonawanda Seneca tribe, Akron; and Stanley Ransom, director of the Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library, Plattsburgh.

The advisory committee will advise on the development of the Indian library program and assist in the development of Commissioner's Regulations and guidelines for the implementation of the Indian Library Legislation enacted by the New York State Legislature last year. The legislation provides an annual appropriation of \$100,000.

The New York legislative appropriation for Indian library development is the first such special appropriation in the nation, according to E. J. Josey, chief, Bureau of Specialist Library Services in the New York State Library. The legislation was based upon successful library service projects begun with National Indian Association and Federal Library Services and Construction Act grant funds. The Akwesasne Library, serving residents of the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation, was opened in 1971 and is now a member of the Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library System.

White House Preconference on Indian Library and Information Services on or Near Reservations—Progress Notes

The Planning Committee for the White House Preconference on Indian Library and Information Services on or Near Reservations held its first meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, November 18 and 19, 1977. This preconference, one of fifty-eight to be held throughout the United States prior to the White House Conference on Library and Information Services, is specifically charged with the consideration of library and information services for American Indian people who live on federal trust land.

The Planning Committee, which is responsible for determining the role and scope of the preconference, approved three goals for the conference.

1. To raise awareness among Indian people of potential benefits of library/media/information services and their relevance to Indian concerns, issues, and interests, especially their value in supporting the development of self-determination.
2. To provide an opportunity for Indian people throughout the United States to reach consensus on a long-range plan to improve and develop library/media/information services on or near reservations.
3. To provide focused input on library/media/information needs and services as they relate to national Indian issues into the White House Conference on Library and Information Services, and to raise awareness of Indian library/media/information needs in the society as a whole.

In other decisions, the Planning Committee decided to hold the preconference in Denver, Colorado, from October 20 to October 23, 1978, and approved a budget. A

development schedule for program elements was outlined, and topics for several background papers were approved.

During the second meeting of the Planning Committee, in Denver, Colorado, February 2 to February 4, the committee divided itself into several working groups to consider program schedule and content, participant selection and information dissemination, budget management, local arrangement, and evaluation.

The Planning Committee is composed of thirteen American Indian people from throughout the United States who have demonstrated concern for Indian library and information services and who represent a cross section of Indian leadership. Members are: Maxine Edmo (Shoshone-Bannock), Ft. Hall Education Council, Ft. Hall, Idaho; Anthony D. Genia (Ottawa/Choctaw), Minnesota Indian Consortium for Higher Education, Hamline University, St. Paul; David Gipp (Sioux), Educational and Technical Center, United Tribes of North Dakota, Bismarck; Joseph Hardy (Navajo), Navajo Small Business Development Corporation, Ft. Defiance, Arizona; Calvin Issac (Choctaw), chairman, Choctaw Tribe, Philadelphia, Mississippi; Cheryl Metoyer (Cherokee), Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of California at Los Angeles; David Risling (Hoopa), Degawidwah-Quetzcoatl University, Davis, California; Joseph "Bud" Sahmaunt (Kiowa), Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Lotsee Smith (Comanche), College of Education, University of New Mexico; Pete Soto (Cocopah), Phoenix Area Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Phoenix, Arizona; Minerva C. White (Mohawk), Native American Special Services, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York; Marilyn Youngbird (Arikara), Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs, Denver; and Virginia H. Mathews (Osage), chairman of the preconference and director of Gaylord Professional Publications, Syracuse, New York. Staff support for the preconference is being provided by the Office of Library and Information Services of the U.S. Department of the Interior, represented by Mary A. Huffer, director, and the Office of Indian Education Programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, represented by William Demmert (Tlingit), director.



Joe Hardy (Navajo), left, and David Risling (Hoopa), right, at the second Planning Committee meeting, in Denver, Colorado, on February 4.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Dr. Metoyer,

I read your editorial in the Fall 1977 issue of the *American Indian Libraries Newsletter* concerning initiating a tribal library. It provided very helpful information. We are in the planning stages for developing a tribal library on the Lummi Reservation and need all the help we can get. Could you please send us more information about planning and developing tribal libraries?

Thank you.

Ann Nugent
Lummi Education Center
4226 Lummi Shore Rd.
Ferndale, WA 98248

Dear Dr. Metoyer:

I guess what I really want to ask of you is some assistance in finding funds for our media center library program. Our program did not get funds for this year, and it is in the dark. The library was funded under the Johnson O'Malley program until Johnson O'Malley changed a few rules and regulations. The media program is now without funding.

All the media staff and myself had to go under the CETA program for salaries in order to keep the library doors open to our schools, tribal programs, and village people. My main concern for this year concerns funding for the utilities.

I just happen to be reading the *American Indian Libraries Newsletter* and read your notes from the editor. I felt that you were the person to write to for advice.

Dr. Metoyer, I would like very much to hear from you. And one last thing I would like to say is thank you very much for your time in listening to the problems with our program.

Irener Easler, Coordinator
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Special News

Robert F. Kennedy Memorial
RFK Resource Center
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The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial is in the process of developing a resource center designed around the areas of secondary education, higher education, and the world of work. The staff is collecting information on programs affecting youth in these broad categories. It has become apparent that most young people are unaware of the opportunities open to them in these areas. Materials currently in the collection include financial aid sources, internships, and contacts for job information. The staff suggests that this is a library service to which most young people are extremely receptive, and it is probably an area which could be specifically addressed to Indian youth.

Attention Directors of Native American Studies Programs!

This newsletter is interested in printing information about the location, services, resources, and issues confronting the Native American Studies Programs in colleges and universities. Do you have special collections of Indian materials? Are you open to the public? Do you have a library facility separate from the parent institution? Please send all pertinent information to Cheryl Metoyer, Editor, *American Indian Libraries Newsletter*, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, UCLA, 405 Hilgard Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90024.

Notes from the Editor

Cheryl Metoyer, Ph.D.

*Self-Determination
and the Library Profession*

"This is just grand!" Those are the words which came to mind as I sat at the conference table with other American Indian educators who were pooling their knowledge and skills in planning the activities of the White House Preconference on Indian Library and Information Services on or Near Reservations. My head was reeling, not because of the Denver altitude, but because finally the spirit of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act is increasing its impact on the library profession.

Librarianship shares the problems common to all those professions that concern themselves with the implications of self-determination. How can the non-Indian library world assist Indian professionals (librarians and other educators) in developing library services? The answer lies within the question, for the key word is *assist*, not *lead*, not *direct*, not *preplan*. In this issue's lead article—"Do Native Americans Want Libraries?"—Ruth Blank honestly describes her role and attitudes in working with the Indian community of San Jose, California. One of the valuable themes of the article is Ms. Blank's recognition of the importance of her professional responsibility to serve and assist in cooperation with the community. Note her understanding of the decision-making process in relation to her role as the librarian.

There is another dimension of self-determination in relation to the library world. Being optimistic, I like to think that the library and information science community is at least aware of the fact that American Indian libraries, including facilities, resources, and services, exist as a special area of the profession. However, I review the literature and I find little information written by Indian librarians



about the exciting accomplishments and problems accompanying American Indian libraries. I am acutely aware of the lack of such printed information because my telephone rings regularly with requests for recent articles written by Indian librarians about Indian library services in various states. The existence and contents of this newsletter attest to the fact that given sufficient notice and proper information, library-related articles can be written by Indian people and successfully completed for publication.

An important facet of the White House Preconference on Indian Library Services on or Near Reservations will involve the presentation of formal papers concerning various areas of American Indian library services, and these will be written by Indian people. I consider this a noteworthy step

in the profession's awareness of the knowledge and writing skills of American Indian educators.

Recognizing that this preconference will not address matters concerning urban Indian library issues, I urge those of you involved in urban Indian library services to write about your programs and submit them to this newsletter. It is important to alert the library world to your activities. I would like to see my desk covered with articles written by Indian people dealing with urban, rural, and reservation library service. The Indian authorship of such articles would reemphasize the reality of self-determination in the library profession.—*CM (Cherokee), Graduate School of Library and Information Science, UCLA.*

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