



# New Hampshire's Single State Library System

MILDRED P. MCKAY

THE SINGLE STATE library system created by the New Hampshire legislature in the final hours of the 1963 session is not new, but it is the result of a slowly evolving pattern of library service. To understand the system, it is necessary to picture the New Hampshire library landscape in which it is rooted. New Hampshire is a very small state but one of the oldest; included among its early libraries is Peterborough, the first tax supported library in America. The state has a proliferation of libraries dating from the nineteenth century and operates under a form of government established during the American Revolution.

Within the state's 9,304 square miles are 235 independent towns and cities. Funds for the services of these towns come from local property taxes, voted by the townspeople at the annual town meeting. Since many towns are small in population and poor in taxable property, the funds are frequently meager. Yet the people are taxing themselves for the support of 229 public libraries which serve all but 5,000 of the state's total population of 606,921.

Of these libraries the ten largest are in small cities, all with a population under 100,000 and most with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. However, they provide library service for 46 per cent of the population, while only 9 per cent live in towns of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants but have 104 libraries. To add to the problem, a majority of the libraries have their own buildings and all but sixty receive some financial support from endowment.

In 1962 the per capita expenditure for all public libraries (except Durham which contracts with the University of New Hampshire) was \$2.07.<sup>1</sup> The combined holdings of these libraries were 2,477,969 volumes, with annual accessions in 1962 of 90,134. It may be hard to believe that the per capita circulation in that year was 6.25, but this was possible because every library, except the ten in cities over 10,000

---

The author is former State Librarian of New Hampshire.

population, borrowed large quantities of books from the state-operated wholesale bookmobiles.

Over the years the State Library has sought and found ways of providing services for the many librarians throughout the state. Briefly, the major services are: (1) access to a small (400,000 volume) but strong reference and subject collection which has good breadth and reasonable depth, especially in bibliographical, periodical, serial, and document holdings, (2) four full-time reference librarians to answer the more difficult reference questions referred by local libraries, (3) a union catalog of the non-fiction holdings of the state's largest libraries, (4) four branch offices which operate bookmobile service to supply current books to libraries and to provide professional contact with every library at least five times during a year, (5) consultant service from the State Library concerned with in-service training programs, surveys of local libraries with accompanying recommendations, pilot projects to demonstrate cooperative advantages to groups of libraries, and programs directed toward upgraded local book selection, and (6) a state-wide public relations program aimed at public understanding and support for good library service.

The state services have developed out of need and have been sought eagerly by most library boards and librarians, resulting in a kind of single-state library system. The weaknesses are obvious. There has been no legally established organization through which local libraries could share in planning services for their use; aid to large town and city libraries has not been adequate; and, most important, local libraries have received these services without reciprocal effort toward betterment.

In 1935, Joeckel explored the single state unit idea and commented that he did not mean ". . . state supervision of separate local units, but actual operation of all the libraries of the state as a single, unified organization, directed by one central authority."<sup>2</sup> Wisely he called attention to the problems of local autonomy and to the possibilities of bureaucracy. He predicted the development of ". . . greatly enlarged units, both of service and of government."<sup>3</sup> And his final sentence pointed out the reason why many varieties would develop. "It would be contrary to the whole history of American libraries to expect that this result will be achieved by uniform methods in all parts of the country."<sup>3</sup>

Governments move forward only as fast as their citizens demand that they offer new or improved services. An understanding of the

### *New Hampshire's Single State Library System*

values and of the essential quality of these services is necessary, and local conditions within the governmental unit usually must be propitious. The time was ripe in the early 1960's for New Hampshire, and general conditions pointed toward the solution of numerous problems which had grown out of practices suitable in the days when the town had to be the all-encompassing provider for its citizens.

Although librarians and trustees realized that there were solutions to the library problems of the state, the citizens were not generally aware that it would be possible to secure better libraries without a tremendous injection of state aid. It was also true that many citizens remained unaware of the great inequities which existed. Therefore, in an effort to bring the facts to the general public, the State Library Commission used federal funds, with the Governor's blessing, to secure a survey of all libraries. The University of New Hampshire's Bureau of Government Research was chosen, and its study<sup>4</sup> reported in layman's terms the inefficiencies and divergencies in quality of service in public and school libraries. This triggered a chain of events which resulted in passage of the legislation<sup>5</sup> which the state is now in the process of gradually implementing.

After reading the report, the Governor appointed a committee of sixty persons, chiefly laymen, to develop a plan of action which would produce more evenly distributed library service of better quality for all the people of the state. The committee made a report which formed the basis for all legal changes. They selected the title *Libraries Are For People*,<sup>6</sup> perhaps because committee members found too many citizens interested in buildings and endowments rather than in quality services and resources.

The committee made extensive use of *Public Library Service*<sup>7</sup> while developing a plan for New Hampshire, especially the system idea with its emphasis on a quality library close to where people reside and which could be achieved through federation. Earlier proposals by library writers which involved the elimination of small units would have been turned down, for local pride in the public library was high even though financial support was necessarily low.

The resulting law demonstrates the committee's acceptance of the system idea and its introductory statement of purpose declares it to be in the public interest to provide ". . . both the incentive and the means by which local libraries can become part of a state-wide system of cooperative library service without impairing the principals of self help and local control."<sup>8</sup> To achieve the cooperative system, the Gov-

ernor's Committee proposed and the law provides for local participation in system activities and services, which are regulated by District Advisory Councils made up of member libraries. This fulfills the need described so well by Blasingame at Allerton Park as "... a feeling of contributing to the total resources of the area or state while retaining the dignity which local responsibility implies."<sup>9</sup>

The three-level system which resulted places the authority for coordination with the State Library Commission, and gives the State Library responsibility for centralized services and the District Office personnel. Intermediate libraries, called Service Centers, provide resources and services to augment those of all other member libraries designated by the law as Affiliated Libraries. Service Centers are to be located to permit use by borrowers from satellite communities without the necessity of travelling more than twenty-five miles. For this they will receive compensating grants, the first specific aid the state has ever provided for libraries serving the largest part of the population.

New Hampshire has chosen the District Advisory Council as the liaison by which cohesiveness and sound management of the system can be achieved. Although the Councils do not have final authority over the use of state funds, which is the responsibility of the State Library Commission, they do have certain legal obligations.

Every Affiliated Library and every Service Center must elect a representative to the Council for its district. The Councils are to recommend action in three broad areas to the State Library Commission. The most important requirement is that District Councils recommend appropriate qualifying standards of performance and resources for each type of library. The Governor's Committee suggested, and it was repeated in testimony at hearings, that the standards should be applied gradually and that adjustments should be made as required by changing conditions. The district staff will be expected to provide professional help to the Councils, to furnish information to the membership on the latest thinking of the library profession, and to give information about conditions in the libraries of the district. Another responsibility of the Councils is to develop cooperative programs among member libraries, with other districts, or with the State Library. In this way it is believed that all the resources of the state will be more readily available for greater use, and services can be improved.

New services required by the districts from state funds or changes in existing services will be reported by the Councils to the state agency,

### *New Hampshire's Single State Library System*

and the location of Service Centers will be determined at the local, not the state, level. The State Library Commission will make the final determination in all except purely district affairs.

It is anticipated that the Service Centers will be the largest libraries in the state and that recommended standards will require professional leadership. If there are twenty-five Service Center libraries, and this is the projection of The Governor's Committee, there should be a sufficient number of knowledgeable people in the district to provide its own sound leaders.

Over the years the State Library staff and its governing board have sought informal opinions and suggestions from trustees and librarians, but there has been no organized method for securing them from all library boards and librarians. State associations of trustees and librarians are not recognized in the law, but both have contributed to the improvement of library service in the state, as they did in working for passage of this legislation. They do not necessarily represent the attitudes and interests of *all* libraries, a hoped-for result of the District Councils.

The smallest community library receiving a grant for the purchase of reference materials or the largest Service Center library with a grant covering added personnel, resources, or services must continually work toward improvement and annually meet established standards. This can be painful to the independent library, but it is hoped that through participation in establishing standards the requirements will become less onerous and better understood.

The Governor's Committee, after weeks of study, proposed standards based on *Public Library Service*<sup>7</sup> and the New Hampshire State Library's version, *How Good Is Your Library?*<sup>8,10</sup> prepared particularly for libraries under 10,000 population. The Committee's recommendations will provide the guidelines for District Advisory Councils and the Commission. It is probable, however, that all interested libraries will be allowed to join as the program starts, with the understanding that standards must be met within a reasonable period.

Nothing in the law requires a library to seek affiliation, but if the patterns of the evolving reference and bookmobile services are repeated, some will join at once, others will wait and see, and few, if any, will remain outside the system for very long.

The qualifying standards may be a deterrent to some libraries with substantial, private incomes and also to those that have almost no funds. It is believed that some of these libraries, where the com-

MILDRED P. MC KAY

munity has the right attitude of service to citizens and sufficient financial ability, will eventually accept the system idea. Where property evaluation is too small to warrant taxing for such a service, it will be necessary to contract with a neighboring library. The law provides inducements for this type of contract and also encourages local cooperation where there are several libraries in one town. These additional grants are conditional on sound cooperative working agreements.

The small (at first not over \$500) matching grants will appeal to librarians and trustees of most Affiliated Libraries, while the economies of centralized purchasing and cataloging will be obvious advantages to town budget officers who are always searching for better service at a minimum expense. Perhaps the greatest pressure to join the system will come from the townspeople when they vote on the library's appropriation, since only Affiliated Libraries and Service Centers may issue the legally established borrower's card<sup>11</sup> which will be good for use in any system library.

The grants for Service Center libraries, while tied to dollar-for-dollar matching based on book expenditures, will be considerably greater. Although starting grants up to \$10,000 were suggested by the Committee, the actual total amount for these libraries will be determined by the legislature after recommendation by the State Library Commission.

Some cities and large towns may decide against joining, but most will appreciate payment for services, especially those they are already giving to non-residents, and will want to encourage the improvement of libraries in surrounding communities to secure a reduction in demand for current and school materials from people living in these areas. From the testimony at the hearings, it is evident that the system and its services and its grants will be welcomed by trustees and librarians of the potential Service Centers.

The services provided by the State Library, in addition to those now available, will include specialists in various phases of library work, centralized purchasing which will be a reality for all libraries in 1965, and central cataloging which is under development at the present time.

Although a small sum was requested from the legislature for the year 1965 to enable the staff of the State Library to lay the base for the system, this request was denied but not ignored. The legislature agreed that \$165,000 of Library Services and Construction Act Funds

### *New Hampshire's Single State Library System*

could be used to initiate certain phases of the program, particularly the employment of district staff, which will be in addition to the present branch office staff already in the areas, and the establishment of centralized purchasing and cataloging.

It is estimated that the cost to the state in the early years of development will be \$350,000 annually, in addition to present expenditures of \$220,000 plus federal aid of \$65,000. Local expenditures in 1962 were \$1,256,956. This figure must rise by 1970 to enable all libraries to meet minimum standards. At that time local participation should be \$2.50 per capita, state costs about \$1.00 per capita, and federal funds, as they always have, will provide that something extra which enables experimentation or demonstration of new ideas.

The proponents of the new laws believe that local community libraries will be greatly improved, that within the range of every citizen there will be a public library capable of rendering a reasonable quality of service, and that this library with the coordinated resources of the whole state and improved local collections behind it can provide a broader and higher quality of books.

This should be a continually evolving pattern of library development responsive to the ever-changing needs of the citizens of the state. It should progress to such a degree that the Declaration of Policy for public libraries which is in the newly-revised statutes will be fulfilled and every public library will become ". . . a valuable supplement to the formal system of free public education . . . [deserving of] adequate financial support from government at all levels."<sup>12</sup>

Unless many people—not librarians alone—had desired better libraries, the legislation could not have been passed. Even the poorest libraries helped to create this desire. The free public library in New Hampshire is a part of almost every town's picture, no matter how small the town. These libraries have existed, no matter how inadequate, and their mere existence has brought books to readers where otherwise no books would be. All of the past, from the example of Peterborough to the pilot project in book selection, has culminated in this new system. The great challenge of the future is in the implementation and the testing of the validity of the new system. Libraries are for people, and New Hampshire intends that its libraries shall be worthy of its citizens.

*References*

1. New Hampshire State Library. *Library Statistics, January 1, 1962 to December 31, 1962*. Concord, New Hampshire State Library, 1963, p. 3.
2. Joeckel, Carleton B. *The Government of the American Public Library*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1935. p. 296
3. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
4. Ford, Joseph P., and Holden, John T. *A Study of Library Service in New Hampshire* (Governmental Series, No. 10). Durham, University of New Hampshire, 1961.
5. New Hampshire, Laws, Statutes, etc. *New Hampshire Library Laws*. Concord, New Hampshire State Library, 1964.
6. New Hampshire, Governor's Committee for Better Libraries. *Libraries Are for People: A Statewide Library Development Program for New Hampshire* (Governmental Series, No. 12). Durham, University of New Hampshire, 1963.
7. American Library Association, Coordinating Committee on Revision of Public Library Division. *Public Library Service; A Guide to Evaluation, With Minimum Standards*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1956.
8. New Hampshire, Laws, Statutes, etc., *op. cit.*, p. 13.
9. Blasingame, Ralph, Jr. "LSA and the Future." In Donald E. Strout, ed. *The Impact of the Library Services Act: Progress and Potential* (Allerton Park Institute, No. 8). Urbana, University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, 1962, p. 9.
10. New Hampshire State Library. *How Good Is Your Library?* Concord, [1958].
11. New Hampshire, Laws, Statutes, etc. *op. cit.*, p. 15.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 17.