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## WEST VIRGINIA'S SECOND REGIONAL LIBRARY

By

KEN BROWN, REGIONAL CONSULTANT  
WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION

On the evening of April 21, 1954 around seventy people attended a public meeting at the county court house in Buckhannon. They had come, at the request of a local commercial association, to see what could be done about bringing rural library service to central West Virginia.

Many were strangers to each other. The Executive Secretary of the Library Commission and a consultant had been invited to discuss possible Commission aid. Two library board members from the Alpha Regional library had been asked to describe the service in their region. And among the audience were representatives from several counties.

The meeting settled few questions but it was important, for it introduced the problem of organizing a regional library and resulted in the appointment by the group of a Regional Steering Committee to begin planning a project.

Contradictory as this statement may seem, what strikes me now as the most significant feature of the venture that followed was the exceeding scarcity of the unusual. Great care was taken in the planning and in the execution. An effort was made to prepare for every emergency that might likely occur. But by and large nothing particularly surprising happened between the beginning and last August, when the County Courts of Harrison and Upshur made the two-county region a fiscal reality. This relatively calm progression should have, it seems to me, a considerable meaning for all of us who want to see more library service for our state.

A step-by-step report would probably have limited value and not a great deal of interest for most librarians. Still, certain facts seem worth mentioning for their own sake or for their significance for future organizational efforts. This account will emphasize those facts at the cost of being fragmentary.

Each new region lays groundwork in learning for the next. The Library Commission's experience with the Alpha Regional Library and the Monroe County Library enabled us to outline a recommended program with considerable assurance and helped make it possible to anticipate most of the problems that have confronted us thus far. On the other hand, familiar patterns had unfamiliar variations, and a few were entirely new.

There were interesting variations. One was the early interest shown by the Upper Monongahela Valley Association, which created the stimulus leading to the meeting mentioned earlier. Several local community organizations gave important support to the project from its conceptual period on, and a few were working on the idea even before that. The UMVA, however, introduced a new voice--that of the regional development group, with its alert and wide-ranging desire to promote benefits for the residents of its membership area.

The introductory effort in this region differed from that in the Alpha region in one very critical respect. The Alpha Regional Library was developed as a demonstration, with the Library Commission furnishing practically all the support during the demon-



stration period. Because of a budget deficiency the Commission was forced to limit its promise of assistance to the present region to bookstock, centralized technical processes services, the loan of a bookmobile, the services of a consultant, special loan facilities, and a few miscellaneous items. This assistance was of course of great value, but it was much less than the earlier region received. While it cannot be said that the Committee here faced greater problems (there were too many variables to permit such a concise comparison), to some they seemed to be taking a pretty long shot at success.

The Library Commission long ago adopted certain policies that it learned are a necessary accompaniment of any assistance to a specific area. Among the most fundamental and undeviating are those concerning local attitudes. Any rural sociologist can give abundant examples of the expert who has gone into a community and campaigned eloquently for a program, only to come out of it dismayed and perplexed by failure. Such failures can usually be traced to a naivete, which overlooks the fact that these sincere but unilateral crusades by-pass obvious democratic principles.

The Library Commission must recognize the parallel in its policies. In its relationship with individual counties it can serve but not coerce, advise and assist but not direct, interpret but not campaign. It can offer material aid, stimulation, and professional leadership; but where that ends and the actual drive to obtain library service begins, the matter inevitably becomes one between the people and their county officers.

Recognition of these facts has been reflected in the Commission's attitude during every phase of the present program. Commission representatives attended the first meeting and

subsequent meetings in this region only at the invitation of local citizens. The Commission consultant came into the region to work with the Regional Steering Committee by their invitation. His report to the Committee, based on a lengthy survey, stated Commission requirements for receiving assistance and included many suggestions and recommendations but no injunctions or demands. And although he conferred regularly with the Committee and gave some physical assistance to their efforts, he did no campaigning and approached County Courts only if the Court requested him to.

The survey mentioned in the preceding paragraph was an interesting elaboration on previous Commission practice. A large amount of the study and planning required in earlier programs occupied an integral place in the organizational period. Here, however, the immediate need to provide the Committee with concrete recommendations for a program to offer to the County Courts made an exhaustive survey the essential first step.

The survey was thorough. Its purpose was to get a reasonable amount of information on every aspect of community life that might perceptibly affect the chances of developing a successful rural library service and to gather detailed data upon which to base a recommended program. This included an analysis of such factors as population distribution, educational level, existing library service, recreational resources, community organizations, transportation and communication facilities, trading patterns, living conditions, economic support, and county finances. Information was collected from printed materials, ranging from the U.S. Census to local bus schedules, and from more than one hundred personal interviews. To get a first-hand knowledge of the communities, countryside, and road conditions, the consultant traveled about

1,500 miles on systematic tours into every neighborhood. The information then was organized and used to support recommendations for a beginning rural library system, tailored to the requirements of the region.

When an agency follows a policy of assistance but not interference with local affairs, the effectiveness of any aid it can give naturally depends upon the initiative of the area concerned. And regardless of the collective interest shown, real initiative will probably not materialize without definite, recognized leadership.

Most of us realize the danger in allowing library service to become associated exclusively with any one person or group, which after all is not leadership. Avoiding this particular pitfall and performing instead the essential functions of coordination, interpretation, and stimulation was, to me, one of the more remarkable achievements of the Regional Steering Committee. The Committee provided a fairly wide circle for interpreting the program and channeling the efforts of interested individuals and groups, while the chairman performed a master-

ful job in the indispensable role of a central coordinator. Yet because of their insight into the situation and association with a variety of other community activities, the effort never became popularly identified as anyone's pet project.

The Harrison-Upshur experience should be wonderfully encouraging to all those who believe--and reassuring to those who doubt--that every section of our state can have library service for its people. Certainly a first appropriation does not guarantee ultimate success. But consider the excellent opportunity to sell library service in this new region, add to that the precedent set by the five counties of the Alpha Regional Library, add to that the gathering movement toward the equalization of assessments, and to these add the tremendous boost that would result from the likely passage of the Library Services Bill. Consider the progress of the past few years and the probabilities of the future--and there is reason to believe that with planning, faith, and reasonably good fortune, every county in West Virginia can have library service within the next ten or fifteen years.

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#### NEW LIBRARIAN AT TECH

Dr. John B. McCraw has been appointed Librarian at West Virginia Institute of Technology. Dr. McCraw received his library degree at Louisiana State University and the Ph.D in history and political science from the University of Texas. The West Virginia Library Association welcomes Dr. McCraw and hopes that he will take a most active role in the work of the Association.



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Library Association activity for the 1955-1956 year got underway at the Executive Board session which was held in Parkersburg on November 11. All members of the Board were in attendance. It is particularly gratifying to me to have such an able group with which to work. This is my fourth year on the Executive Board but each year there is a change in personnel, which factor is good for the continuing vigor of the Association.

First meetings must necessarily be devoted to organizing activities and planning the year's work. As some of you already know the Board did make some committee assignments, and, in most cases, the objectives we hoped the Committee would accomplish this year were often specifically stated. The day, as usual, had too few hours to permit accomplishment of everything on the agenda.

I have already heard from the Chairman of the Extension Committee, Mr. Omar Bacon. This Committee took as its prime assignment the task of aiding the Library Commission to obtain from the 1956 Legislature a budget which will enable the Commission to receive the maximum of Federal funds if the Library Services Bill is passed in the next session of Congress.

The Extension Committee held a meeting in Charleston on December 2 to plan their program. I know each member of the Association will aid this Committee if called on to do so. The problem is to convince each Legislator that it is to his constituents' advantage and well-being for the Commission to receive the slight budget increase needed to meet the requirement on which distribution of Federal funds will be

based. Anyone of you are in an excellent position to take effective action by merely contacting your local State Representative to the Legislature.

In the closing moments of the Annual Meeting the new Executive Board met momentarily to care for some unfinished business. A grant of \$200 was made to Mr. Delf Norona. The money is to be used for publication of his "Checklist of West Virginia Imprints, 1791-1863." In return for the grant Mr. Norona will give the Association credit as publisher of the bibliography. In addition the Association will receive 200 copies which may be sold. Mr. Charles Shetler of the West Virginia Collection at the University Library is editing the publication. A recent letter from Mr. Norona reveals the work is progressing and publication may be expected before the end of 1956.

Association activities this year will continue to accent the thought "More books and better libraries for West Virginia." A year or two ago it was apparent the Association needed re-vitalizing; a long range program aimed at accomplishing the above quoted goal was tentatively formulated. Committees appointed received set objectives to be accomplished. Thus stimulated the Association is taking a more dynamic role in promotion of library service.

Among the many achievements of the past year may be mentioned: 1) West Virginia Libraries, which presented articles of professional value; 2) Publications and Indexing Committee, which will soon complete the index to

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