

“IT COULD HAVE BEEN BIGGER, BUT
ITS RESIDENTS LIKE IT AS IS”:
SMALL TOWN LIBRARIES IN MOORE
COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Ronald E. Bergquist

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Approved by

Advisor: Dr. Claudia Gollop

Reader: Dr. Evelyn H. Daniel

Reader: Dr. Beatrice Kovacs

Reader: Dr. Jerry D. Saye

Reader: Dr. Paul Solomon

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ABSTRACT

RONALD E. BERGQUIST: “It could have been bigger, but its residents like it as is”:

A study of Small Town Libraries in Moore County, North Carolina

[Under the direction of
Drs. Claudia Gollop, Evelyn Daniel, Beatrice Kovacs, Jerry D. Saye, and Paul Solomon]

Large, urban institutions are well represented in American public library history, but the stories of libraries in small towns or in rural areas are not as well represented. During the twentieth century, local citizens in six small Moore County, North Carolina towns (“small” here defined as towns having less than five thousand residents) established and maintained local public libraries. Some of the libraries failed over time, some succeeded, but all of them went through a process of finding their place in their community and governmental environments, environments that were themselves changing with the times. Using newspaper articles, augmented with interviews and direct observation, this is a study of those libraries and the people who created them – in the context of their times and circumstances, and in the context of how they were and are viewed by the profession of librarianship.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of Miss Bertie Goodwyn, Mrs. R.L. Phillips, Mrs. Annette Dewey, and especially to Mrs. Charlene Parker, women whose untiring work and energy sustained public library services for the residents of their home towns in Moore County, North Carolina during the twentieth century. Generations of readers were the beneficiaries of their generosity and the number of people who owe them a debt of gratitude is immense.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the inspiration and assistance of an almost innumerable number of individuals who contributed to this effort. However, space and time render a full acknowledgement impractical and thus three individuals and one group of people will serve to represent all those who were so generous with their time and advice.

Anne Marie Elkins of the North Carolina State Library's Public Library Development Section opened a window through which one discovered the complexity and richness of the public library environment in North Carolina. She provided insight into the policies governing public libraries, the processes through which the public library system has developed, and the possibilities that the public library might aspire to, with imagination and inspiration.

The staff at the Moore County Library must be thanked for their friendship, fellowship, and helpfulness. The hours and days spent in the Local History Room of the Moore County Library were enlivened by the smiling faces, warm greetings, and supportiveness of everyone there. They made a stranger feel at home among them and made one look forward to the long drive to Carthage, knowing that each visit would include interesting exchanges and unexpected discoveries. I really appreciated their patience.

Tony Parker of the Moore County Library System was and is an absolute treasure, not only for this dissertation effort, but also for everyone who ever needs information about Moore County or Moore County history. A man of immense intellectual curiosity and a deeply felt desire to be of assistance to people, Tony Parker has lived a life of exploration and service. It is not an exaggeration to say that if Tony Parker had not so entranced a random visitor to the Pinebluff Public Library with the story of that little building, this dissertation would never have been attempted. Though not a trained librarian himself, Tony Parker exemplifies all the best qualities that the profession of librarianship would hope to see in itself. His inspiration and advice was invaluable for the research of this dissertation.

It goes without saying that I would be nowhere without the support and inspiration of my wife, Dru. However, I am not going to let this opportunity go by without actually saying it. She inspired me to go back to school, supported my desire to explore my research interests, advised me when I needed it, nudged me when I slacked off, and was always there with insight, recommendations, and guidance, as well as long lasting and truly priceless emotional support. I have no idea where I might have ended up had I not met her all these years back, but I know that my life would not have been as interesting, as rich, and as happy had I not had the great good luck to have been able to be part of her life.

PREFACE – WHY I BECAME INTERESTED

During the latter 1990s, while a student at the School of Information and Library Science in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I commuted several times a week between there and my home in the town of Pinebluff, in Moore County, North Carolina. On my return home in the evenings, as I followed US Highway 1 south into Moore County, I was often caught by the first traffic light on US 1 in Moore County, in the Town of Vass. While waiting for the light to change, I gradually became aware of a sign on the southeastern corner of the intersection, next to a local bank. The sign was a sort of thermometer, registering the amount of money being raised in order to support a local library for the Town of Vass. At the time I had wondered, “Does Vass have a local library?” Looking around, I could see some old buildings to the southeast, over near the railroad tracks and some large old houses near the church on the west side of US 1. Vass seemed to have a town center, why wouldn’t it have a local library?

At my home in Pinebluff, we did have a local library, about a four block walk from my house. The sign out front indicated that it had been around since 1909. Inside the library, the walls were decorated with old photos and sketches of the area. Behind the librarian’s desk, one noted a large oil painting of a man with a moustache, wearing a slouch hat and tall boots, a man who looked like he was in a uniform of some sort, perhaps a forester or a scout. The wood carving on the frame hinted that the painting was a portrait of the individual during the period

of time 1880-1884, and other carvings seemed to hint that he had earned a BA in 1879 and an MD in 1887. Who was this man and why was his painting up in the library? What was the relationship between the two? And if Vass was now collecting money to open a library, had the same been done in Pinebluff in the years prior to 1909?

During one visit to the Pinebluff library, a man who looked to be in his 70s came in and asked the librarian for directions to the “Webster Library.” I had lived in Moore County for a while by then, but had not heard of any “Webster Library” in the area. I listened as the librarian directed him to the community of Niagara, just north of the town of Southern Pines. The patron had some questions about the Webster Library and the librarian told him that it had not been used as a library since the 1940s, though it had been a bookmobile stop during the ‘40s and ‘50s. However, it was still there and still recognizable as the “Webster Library.”

What was the Webster Library? If it had once been a library, why was it now was no longer one? And, if it was no longer a library, why is it still there and still known as a library?

Three towns, three libraries. Or at least three libraries of a sort. Vass was seemingly in the process of creating a new town library. Pinebluff had an old, small town library. Apparently Niagara had a building recognizable as a library, even though it hadn’t checked out a book for over half a century. What were these institutions?

Later, curious to know more about them, I looked at the Library Profile table in the *Statistical Report of North Carolina Public Libraries, July 1, 1999 – June 30, 2000*. There was no mention of Vass, Pinebluff, or Niagara in the table. Since it appeared that Vass was in the process of establishing a library, its absence was not too surprising. Since I had heard that the Webster Library, even though it existed, was not actually checking out books, I also was not too

surprised that it too was absent. However, the Pinebluff Library did exist, seemed to have existed for a long time, was checking out books, and was active. Even more surprising, however, there was no mention of Moore County. I could find mention of only one library in the county, that being the Southern Pines Public Library. But the rest of Moore County was not mentioned.¹

Now I really had questions. Maybe the Vass Library didn't yet exist and maybe the Webster Library in Niagara wasn't active, but the Pinebluff Public Library did and was. And Moore County certainly existed, and I knew there was a building called the Moore County Library near the county courthouse in Carthage. Why didn't the *Statistical Report* reflect the existence of the Moore County Public Library in Carthage?

Their absence raised more questions for me and began the process that led to this research.

¹ Library Development Section, *Statistical Report of North Carolina Public Libraries, July 1, 1999 – June 30, 2000* (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2000) 4-5.

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INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH QUESTION

Why, despite almost 80 years of professional advice recommending against small libraries have some small towns remained attached to the idea of a local town library and why have these small town libraries remained small town in outlook and organization?

The North Carolina State Library's annual report of statistics about public libraries in this state notes that there is a library in Southern Pines, in Moore County. It does not mention the existence of libraries in any other Moore County towns. Were one to pass through many of the towns in Moore County, however, one might well notice that there are buildings identified as libraries in at least seven other communities.

Why are they not mentioned? If they are not mentioned, do they really exist as libraries? If they are accounted for, are they accounted for under some other name? They obviously exist in places, why do they not exist in print? Are they not important enough to be counted? Are they not important enough to be recognized?

The answers to these questions may be found in the history of the changing contexts of the small public library – the philosophical context in which the American public library was established, the political context which it has had to navigate, the professional context in which it has been viewed, and the ecological context in which it exists in its own community. In the process of looking at these contexts, one is struck by a large void – the missing story of the small public library and its life in the small town.

One can study the development of the Boston Public Library, the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore, the Chicago Public Library, and the New York Public Library. The city names are well-known. The institutions themselves have been well studied in library history and are robust examples of what a large library has been and can be.

It is a bit more difficult to study the development of the Pinebluff Public Library, the Page Memorial Library of Aberdeen, the Robbins Area Library, or the Vass Area Library. The towns themselves are not well-known. If one happens to live in Moore County, North Carolina, one might know one or more of them, but perhaps only if one lives in the town where they are. But if one were to look at the small and unassuming library buildings themselves, one might be forgiven for thinking that not much has happened here.

Someone, however, has caused something to happen in order to create and maintain these small libraries. Why are they here? How did they come to be here? What great or small social forces caused them to appear? What great or small individual efforts caused them to appear and to endure?

Deanna Marcum, in her *Good Books in a Country Home*, noted in her introduction that

In one small town after another, the public library is a central feature of the landscape; yet, very little is known about the origins of public libraries in rural America. Urban libraries have been the subject of historical analysis, and when libraries in rural communities have been referred to at all, the assumption has been that Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy singularly explains their existence.¹

Is this true? And especially, is this true for these small town libraries in Moore County, North Carolina? Does this assumption work in this context? Whether it is true or not, we still need to know and to appreciate these small institutions.

We know about the big names in libraries as well. We know of the big names associated with the big urban libraries, especially those in the Northeast. We know the big names in North Carolina, but there are not that many of them. Robert Martin wrote a 792 page dissertation on part of the life of Louis Round Wilson and a library named for Wilson sits at the heart of the University of North Carolina campus at Chapel Hill.² However, the individuals who created, sustained, and, in some cases, saved their small town libraries are known to few.

Who outside of Moore County knows of Aberdeen's Bertie Goodwyn; of Carthage's Annette Dewey, of Niagara's Jennie Sargent, or of Pinebluff's Charlene Parker? Very few, unfortunately, will have ever heard of them. In fact, there are probably very few in Moore County, and very few even in Aberdeen, Carthage, or Niagara who know of these women. More than a few people in Pinebluff may still remember Charlene Parker, but awareness of who she was and what she did does not extend much beyond Pinebluff. All of these women, all now gone, were critical to the existence of libraries in their towns. In fact, one can say with assurance that had they not been so involved, some of the libraries in these towns would have faded away into memory.

Who outside of Robbins knows of Theron Bell; who outside of Vass knows of John Wallace? Both these two are still among us and may be more widely known (at least in Moore County) than were Bertie Goodwyn, Annette Dewey, Jennie Sargent, or Charlene Parker. Just as these four women kept their libraries in existence in the early to mid-twentieth century, Theron Bell and John Wallace willed their small town libraries into existence at the end of that century. But they and their libraries are not recorded in the literature on the American public library. They are not even recorded in the lists of North Carolina public libraries.

We need to know and appreciate these people. Their stories deserve telling.

Again, the research question: why, despite almost 80 years of professional advice recommending against small libraries have some small towns remained attached to the idea of a local town library and why have these small town libraries remained small town in outlook and organization? The term “small town” should not be understood as a negative. Much of what makes some small town libraries unique and uniquely inviting to their users is their old-fashioned, small, and local feel – their “small-town-ness”.

In order to find an answer to this question, this research sought to answer a series of smaller questions by looking at the evolution of a set of small town libraries. For the purposes of this research effort, a small-town library is one that exists in a town that has 5,000 or fewer inhabitants. Some of the questions initially posed included:

- Why have some towns remained attached to “their” town library?
What have been the constants in their histories that brought them into being and that keep them in being?
- What supports them – people, organizations, political structure, civic structures?
- They have a past; do they have a long-term future? as they have been? or in new roles?

This study is the story of the development of public library services in six Moore County communities – Aberdeen, Carthage, Robbins, Niagara, Pinebluff, and Vass – from the last years of the nineteenth century to the first years of the twenty-first. Using original material

from library association records, local histories, town government records, and, most importantly, from local newspaper articles, the research illuminates the relationship of these libraries to their social, political, and community settings. To evaluate the historical record in terms of current realities, interviews and informal discussions were held with library staff, library association members, and local governmental officials, using a fairly common set of interview topics. Although these exact questions were not necessarily asked during conversations, some of the topics that were discussed included:

- How do these local libraries relate to the community life today?
- Do local officials feel any sense of ownership or stewardship for their libraries?
- Who are the users?
- Are users satisfied with their libraries?
- Do the people involved with local libraries think much about non-users?
- Do they know who the non-users are?
- Do they know why users “use” and why non-users “non-use”?
- Is the current model of library service sufficient for the community?
- Are there other services that the library might perform in the community?

Additionally, the researcher conducted unobtrusive and direct observation of each of the libraries, attempting to ascertain if the themes detected in the historical record and in the interview results seemed valid to an outside observer.

The goal was to understand how each institution developed; to see how today's institutions are linked to their individual evolutionary paths; to understand how today's small town library is oriented towards its total community, the user and the non-users, the supporters and the indifferent.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The evolution of the American public library has been well studied over time, and many of the studies have focused on the origins of the institution, especially its urban origins. Fewer studies have focused on the origin of the institution as it developed in small-town or rural settings. So, in order to study small libraries, we will look first at bigger themes in general, then these smaller examples in detail.

However, to look at the smaller examples, it will be useful to put them into context and the context used in this dissertation is how such small libraries were viewed by the profession of librarianship. To see the small picture of the specific small town libraries, this dissertation will begin with a view of the larger picture of a context in which small town libraries were discussed and thought about by the profession.

Thus the format of this dissertation follows a specific pattern. After a discussion of the research question, each succeeding chapter begins with a literature review to frame the specifics to follow.

- A review of related research on small town libraries is used to frame the discussion of the specific research design used in the development of this dissertation (Chapter 2).
- A review of the foundations of the American town public library is used to introduce early library efforts in Moore County (Chapters 3 and 4).
- Reviews of several specific contexts in which the profession of librarianship has considered the small town library are used to introduce narratives of the evolution of several individual Moore County libraries (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8).
- The narrative of the evolution of the library in the town of Pinebluff will mark a turning toward more reflection on the ecological or community context in which these libraries existed. Pinebluff's experience reflects back on the preceding contexts and forward to the discussion of commonalities in all these narratives. Pinebluff's story is used to frame the discussion about common community themes of bonding and conservatism (Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12).

The goal of this dissertation is to compare how small time libraries were and are viewed – by the profession from afar and by people who love them from close up.

In this work, long direct quotes are formatted to display the type of quote they are.

The three formats are:

Long direct quotes from books, journals, or manuscripts are framed on the left and bottom by a single line

Long direct quotes from newspaper articles are boxed

Long direct quotes from interviews are set off by a line on the left.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Writing a quarter of a century ago, Michael Harris and Donald Davis were entirely correct when they observed “public libraries have drawn more attention from historians than any other aspect of American library history”.³ However, most public library histories then and now have concentrated on urban libraries. Most public library histories have only lightly touched on small-town or rural public library experience. Deanna Marcum, in a 1991 article based on her dissertation work, noted that public library researchers tended to overlook the phenomenon of public libraries in rural communities because the rural communities are unfamiliar to academic researchers. Scholars study urban institutions because they are more familiar to them and thus, according to Marcum, implicitly assume the rural doesn’t exist. Marcum agreed that it doesn’t exist for typical researchers, in part, because it is too diverse, too regional, too oral and unwritten. For typical researchers, the small-town or rural experience may not exist. For the people who live in small towns or rural areas, their local libraries do exist in fact, and they have characteristics worthy of study.⁴

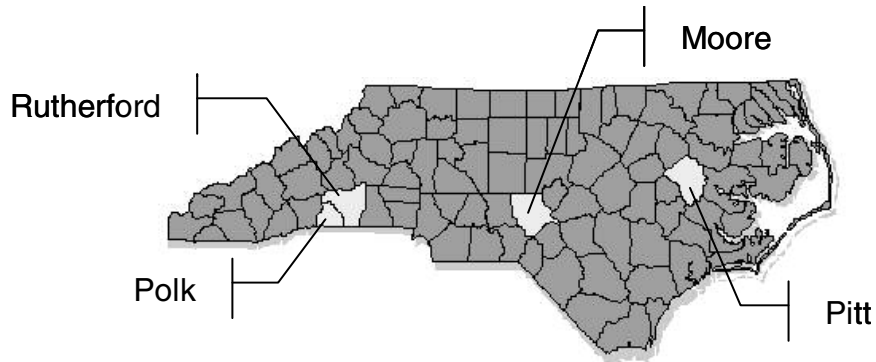
Small town or rural libraries seem to exist in a gray area. The North Carolina State Library publishes an annual *Directory of North Carolina Public Libraries*. The *Directory* appears to list every public library in the state and, to the casual reader, it certainly implies that it is a

compilation of all the public libraries that exist in the state. The 2000 *Directory* indicates that public libraries in North Carolina are organized into fifty-one county systems, fifteen regional library systems, and nine municipal systems. Comparing the data in the State Library's annual report with the situation on the ground, one notes that the State Library's compilation does not actually include every small town public library. In at least three counties, small town public libraries that do not appear in the State Library's compilation actually do exist and do operate as local public libraries. If one were to use the State Library *Directory* as a guide, one might overlook them. However, if one were to visit the towns, their presence is obvious.

- In Moore County, the Given Memorial Library in Pinehurst (a private organization that checks out books at no cost to the public) has been the community library since the 1960s.
- In Polk County, the Lanier Library in Tryon has been the town library since 1890 (despite continuing with a nineteenth century subscription library organizational model).
- In Rutherford County, the towns of Rutherfordton and Spindale (both having less than 5,000 inhabitants) both host two public libraries – a county branch that the State Library lists, and an independent municipal library that the State Library does not list.

Taking the situation in Rutherford County as a particular example, it appears that some small towns have retained local libraries even when larger county libraries exist in the same locality, perhaps because the towns have retained a sense of local singularity and local ownership of their local library institution.

One could cite examples from East to West in North Carolina.



In the East, in Pitt County, the county system gradually absorbed several small town libraries. All, that is, except for the library in Farmville, which has remained an independent municipal library since it was founded in 1932.

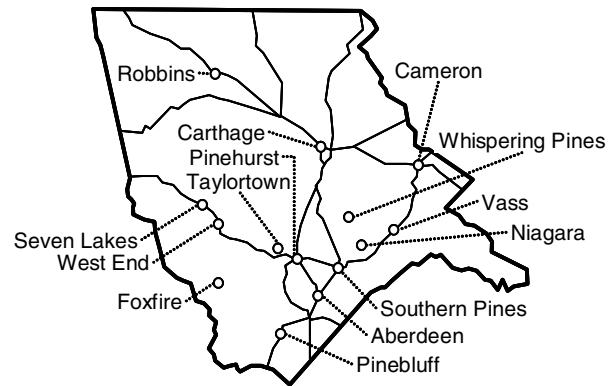
Looking at the history of the libraries in Rutherford County again, one notes that several small town libraries at one time joined the county system, but then pulled back out and went their own way, apparently choosing to forego state funding in order to retain their independence.

In neighboring Polk County, the organization that had created the Lanier Library in Tryon in 1890 helped to set up the county library in the county seat, Columbus, in the 1950s. However, the Tryon library never joined the county system and the Lanier Library continues to this day as a subscription library.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN MOORE COUNTY

The focus of this research effort, however, will be on Moore County, in the south central part of North Carolina. Over the course of the twentieth century, at least seven local public libraries were established in Moore County communities. One library

closed down in the 1940s, but the other town libraries continued on; with starts and stops in some of them, with unbroken service in others. All but two eventually surrendered their local direction and joined the county system (which itself had previously joined the Sandhill Regional System). The two that did not are the libraries in Southern Pines and in Pinehurst. They have kept their libraries separate from and independent of the county library system.



For the sake of this study of the situation in Moore County, a small town is defined as an incorporated community with a population of less than 5,000 residents. Both Southern Pines (10,918) and Pinehurst (9,706) have populations that exceed this definition of a small town. The Town of Southern Pines had originally hosted the county library in its municipal facility, but decided to remain an independent town library when the county system grew larger. The Southern Pines Library will be introduced in this study because it is related to the development of the Moore County Library, but it was not studied in detail. The Given Library in Pinehurst always stayed independent of any larger organizational structure. For at least the past century, both towns have been wealthier as well as larger in population than the other towns in Moore County. They have not felt compelled to join a larger library system and they have retained their own independent libraries.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Aberdeen (population 3,400), Carthage (1,871), Robbins (1,191), and Pinebluff (1,109) all had public libraries. (The unincorporated Niagara community formerly had an operating public library. Even though it stopped checking out books decades ago, it still exists as a library building. Its story will be part of this study.) All are currently branches of the Moore County system (and thus part of the Sandhill Regional Library System), but all began their lives as local town libraries. These libraries in these four communities have more in common with one another than they do with the libraries in Southern Pines and Pinehurst.

Five communities in Moore County do not have their own public libraries. Of them, Taylortown (845) and Cameron (151) are long-established towns, but Seven Lakes (3,214), Whispering Pines (2,090), and Foxfire (474) are newer residential communities, oriented toward retirees and golf courses.

In 2001, the 750 residents of the town of Vass opened their own new town library. Despite the fact that Vass is only 12 miles away on a direct road from the county library in Carthage, the citizens raised local funds to create their own facility, a facility that eventually joined the county and regional system. Though the library, now known as the Vass Area Library, is technically a branch of the county and regional system, it is still, for the people who raised the money to establish it, the Vass Town Library.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND ASSUMPTIONS

This is a look at the evolution of public libraries in several small towns in Moore County, North Carolina, studying (with a nod to Marcum) their diverse, regional, oral, and written records in order to illuminate the historical development of a particular kind of public

library in a particular place and time. Their histories might help us understand why these particular institutions exist as they do, in their current social and political setting. Prior to stating the problem, however, one might well ponder a set of assumptions that together form a foundation for the research.

- Public libraries in small towns are in some fashion reflective of the communities that support them.
- The community that supports the small town public library is generally also the community that uses the library.
- Users of small town public libraries are generally satisfied with their libraries. (This was not known necessarily to be the case, but it was an assumption used as a starting point.)
- Non-users do not use the library for any number of reasons, but in general, their unmet needs or dissatisfactions are not part of the community discourse about the library.
- While the library might have potentially more usefulness to the social and information needs of non-users, it is generally more focused on meeting the needs of the users in small towns. (The “user needs” here include both information needs and other social needs.)

This research sought to discover if these assumptions are valid for the small town libraries included in this study.

¹ Deanna B. Marcum, *Good Books in a Country Home: The Public Library as Cultural Force in Hagerstown, Maryland, 1878-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) xiii.

² Robert S. Martin, *Louis Round Wilson at the University of North Carolina, 1901-1932*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1988)

³ Michael H. Harris and Donald G. Davis, Jr., *American Library History: A Bibliography*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978) 58.

⁴ Deanna B. Marcum, "The Rural Public Library in America at the Turn of the Century," *Libraries and Culture* 26 (1991): 87-91.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Considering the number of small town libraries and the ubiquity of the small town library in the United States, the idea of doing research on them required a response to an unspoken concern – that maybe it had been done already. However, as Deanna Marcum noted, small town libraries have really not been well researched. A glance into Dissertations Abstracts revealed some 730 entries that are associated with study of some aspect of public libraries. Reviewing each of them resulted in a smaller set of no more than 80 that might have some relevance to small town public libraries. However, only a few of these even approximate a study of the life of the small town library. As will be noted during the course of this study, there is a lot of historical material that can be applied to research on public libraries in general, but not much research has been done on small public libraries in small towns.

STUDIES OF SMALL TOWN LIBRARIES

Dissertation length research on Southern small town libraries is even more limited. One might well say that Deanna Marcum's 1991 University of Maryland dissertation, *The Rural Public Library: Hagerstown, Maryland, 1878-1920*, established the baseline for study of small towns and the factors in such towns. William Buchanan's 1993 UNC-Greensboro dissertation, *The Yazoo Library Association's Significance in History: The American Social and Public Library Movements in the South*, studied the role of local organizations in the establishment of another Southern library. Though they used somewhat different methodologies, both sought to understand the motives of the founders in order to understand the role the public library plays in the life of today's town.

Patrick Valentine, the director of the Wilson County Library System, has written several journal articles on the development of small town libraries in eastern North Carolina, highlighting the local conditions that prompted local groups to form their own libraries.

Some research has been done on libraries in small towns outside the Southeast, but not much. A number of dissertations focus on the role of women's groups in library development in the Northeast and Midwest and on the role of libraries to rural education and social capital in Kansas. There are, additionally, a number of dissertations on the evolution of Southern state library associations (in Georgia, West Virginia, and Mississippi, for example) and on how the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) influenced the process in several states. Mary Anders' 1958 *The Development of Public Library Service in the Southeastern States, 1895-1950* is probably the earliest overall study of the South and, though dated, still has historical relevance.

STUDIES OF USER AND NON-USER GROUPS

More than a few researchers have studied the topic of users and non-users, though not necessarily in the same vein as does this research. One particular focus of research has been on library usage by minority communities. Cheryl Knotts Malone is probably the most prominent current researcher on the relationship between African-Americans, their communities, and their libraries. Her 1996 University of Texas dissertation, *Accommodating Access: "Colored" Carnegie Libraries, 1905-1925*, focused on the merge between Northern philanthropy and racial attitudes. Her work was, in a way, a follow-on to observations on race and libraries made by George Bobinski in his 1969 dissertation and was referenced by Patrick Valentine in a 1996 article about the same situation in North Carolina. Malone continues in the same vein as Eliza Atkins Gleason's 1941 *The Government and Administration of Public Library Service to Negroes in the South*.

However, not much has been done in terms of studying why some groups who share fairly similar demographic characteristics often don't share the same interest in their local libraries. Non-users don't use their local libraries for many reasons. In 1970, Charles Evans' dissertation on attitudes toward public libraries came to some conclusions that reinforced Bernard Berelson's 1949 Public Library Inquiry observations.

- Readers were more likely to use the library,
- more educated people were more likely to use the library, and
- more women than men were more likely to use the library.

But he also found what Berelson had noted. In general, whether users or non-users, most people had favorable attitudes about their public library.

Citing 1975 research, John Colson in 1983 pointed out how some eighty-seven percent of adults in New Jersey believed it was "very important that all communities have public libraries," while in 1976, the Gallup Organization indicated that sixty-five percent of adults did not possess a public library card. For Colson, this meant that while a majority of people feel the idea of a public library is important, it is not THAT IMPORTANT to them personally. These numbers again confirmed what the Public Library Inquiry in the late 1940s had shown. Most people don't actually use the library, though most feel some sort of contentment that it exists should they need it. Echoing Jesse Shera's 1949 statement that "the objectives of the public library are directly dependent upon the objectives of society itself", Colson stated that "a library is a function of a community".¹

Thirteen years after Colson, a 1996 Benton Foundation's study noted that other factors are also at play. The study revealed how much the actual library "place" means to people and revealed that the feeling of physical need is not universal. Age plays a role. The Foundation's report noted "Only 49 percent of college-age respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 rated maintaining and building libraries as 'very important,' as opposed to 67 percent of the 25-34 age group and 70 percent of the 65 and older age group." Household income plays an equally important role. "The apparent migration of middle- and upper-income Americans – traditional library boosters – to the super bookstores may also have implications for future library support."² In the late 1960s, Charles Evans, in his *Middle Class Attitudes and Public Library Use*, had found that middle-class people, especially those with more education, tended to use the library more than did lower-income groups, especially those who also lacked education. By the early 1990s, people with disposable income seemed less in need of a library for their recreational reading needs. It seemed that lower-income groups supported library building activities substantially more than did higher-income groups.

STUDIES OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

The relationship of women and women's groups to the development of local libraries has been a topic of interest to researchers. Marcum and Buchanan identified this as a significant factor in the development of the libraries they studied. However, scholars such as Anastatia Sims and Abigail Van Slyck have focused more directly on the role of women and women's groups in library formation. Sims' 1985 UNC-CH dissertation, *Feminism and Femininity in the New South: White Women's Organizations in North Carolina, 1883-1930*, went into great depth on the role of women's groups in the library effort. Van Slyck's 1989 dissertation, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and the Transformation of American Culture, 1886-1917*, looked at the same general topic as George Bobinski had and Cheryl Malone would, but did so from a more feminist and social-

architectural history viewpoint. Some of her later works continue this theme. Other dissertations also discuss the role of women's groups in library formation in Minnesota, California, and Arkansas. The abstract of Delores Hoyt's 1993 dissertation, *The Role of Libraries in the American Turner Organizations*, indicated that she took a different, but interesting view of how German-American organizations affected and were affected by local libraries.

Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama have both actively researched the role of community organizations in the social capital of towns. Fukuyama commented how such organizations have created community strength through in-group bonds while Putnam in 1995 and in 2000 argued that creation of out-group bridges was more vital to long-term community health. Putnam also linked the idea of social capital to the influence of women's groups in the development of local public libraries.³ Catherine Hoy used Putnam's ideas as the basis for her 2001 dissertation for Emporia State. Her study, *An Exploration of the Contribution of Civic Engagement to Social Capital in a Small Kansas Town on the High Plains*, looked at a small town and the relationship of community organizations to its cultural health.

Reviewing the literature, it seems that all the components of this study's research question have been addressed in part, though not in whole. One particular void is the lack of studies in terms of the specific relationship of the public library institution to the small town that hosts it. This study sought to fill part of that void by looking in detail at role and reality of small town public libraries, in one place and over time.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

This study uses a qualitative approach. Charles Ragin's 1994 *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method* suggested that qualitative research can contain the essentials of

the scientific method, except for the testable hypothesis, by use of some set of working assumptions that must exist when the researcher determines what to study and how to study it.ⁱ

In the social research world, Ragin saw three research strategies:

1. qualitative research on commonalities that exist across a relatively small number of cases,
2. comparative research on the diversity that exists across a moderate number of cases, and
3. quantitative research on the correspondence between two or more attributes across a large number of cases.⁴

Colin Robson suggested a similar approach in his 1993 *Real World Research*. While one may choose to study a social topic using any of Ragin's three strategies, one still needs to be sure that the chosen kind of study methodology is appropriate. While an experiment may be best for a quantitative strategy, a survey may be best for a comparative strategy, a case study may be best for a qualitative study. For Robson, a case study is an empirical investigation into a phenomenon using multiple sources of information. His concept of case studies suggests that there are at least six different ways one may approach a case study:

1. individual
2. set of individuals
3. community

ⁱ The working hypothesis for this study was described in the statement of the problem, in particular in the research focus and assumptions.

4. social groups
5. studies of organizations and institutions
6. studies of events, roles, and relationships.⁵

This study's focus on a discrete number of public libraries in a single county describes a case study that fits Robson's guidelines.

Ronald Powell, in his 1997 *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, noted that qualitative methods are "scientific," but not in the same sense as laboratory science. Qualitative techniques are borrowed more from anthropology and sociology (observation, interview, imagery; structured observation) and tend "to apply a more holistic and natural approach to the resolution of a problem".⁶

Robson described qualitative methods as interpretative. In contrast to the "scientific" or quantitative methods that start with theory and seek to prove/disprove it, interpretative methods tend to cause theory to evolve at the end of the process. Robson characterized the difference between the two, stating that quantitative methods are better for hypothesis testing while qualitative methods are better for hypothesis generating. Robson felt that qualitative methods are not a "private and incommunicable art," but are tools that can be systematized and made understandable. But since the main tool in a qualitative method is the researcher, researchers need to systematize and understand themselves.⁷

ROLE OF RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH SUBJECT

The needs of this study called for the researcher to insert himself into the situation under study. If a research topic seems to call for interpersonal relationships between researcher

and research subject, Constance Mellon suggested in her 1990 *Naturalistic Inquiry for Library Science* that the researcher might want to forget about controlling the environmental variables in the study and instead start to consider becoming part of the study environment. “Naturalistic inquiry focuses primarily on describing the characteristics of a social phenomenon. The aim is understanding the phenomenon rather than controlling it”. To understand the phenomenon under study, the researcher needs to be able to focus on viewing the environment and on evaluating experiences within that environment from the perspective of those involved in the environment. Proper preparation for naturalistic inquiry should lead the researcher toward

- understanding that people act toward things based on what those things mean to them;
- understanding that what things mean to people develop out of social interaction; and
- understanding that individuals act toward people, objects, and events not only on the basis of meanings that have developed through past interactions, but also on interpretations made by the individual at the moment of the new interaction.⁸

With such preparation, a researcher may enter the research environment and look at it from the inside. This is an intimate, perhaps obtrusive, and reasonably direct research method. Sometimes, however, the research question is touchy. Intimate, obtrusive, and direct methods might scare off participants and mask facts. In some cases, one might wish to be stealthy, while remaining ethical.

Judith Brown, in her 1996 *The I in Science: Training to Utilize Subjectivity in Research*, went beyond warning researchers to be aware of their own biases to suggesting that researchers embrace their biases and use them in the research process. Brown noted that “all research occurs in the context of a relationship between the researcher and the participant(s) ... the researcher affects the social system and the social system affects the researcher”.⁹ The key to integrity of research is integrity of researcher and researcher integrity begins with an acknowledgement that the researcher enters the research arena with a set of beliefs that affect how observations are perceived and evaluated.

And one makes meaning based on the how one views the situation. Brown quoted M.J. Mahoney’s 1976 *Scientist as Subject: The Psychological Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company) when recommending that researchers sensitize themselves to themselves. Researchers need to understand that they will “recognize” patterns, events, and behaviors in the research situation through the lens of their own (perhaps unconscious) paradigms.

Roughly restated, Brown suggests that researchers cannot avoid using their own paradigms, so they might as well train themselves to recognize what they are doing. For Brown, such recognition requires awareness – awareness of self and awareness of the total research arena. Awareness of self can help to mitigate the likelihood that the researcher’s values and emotions will inadvertently, heedlessly, or negligently influence a study.¹⁰ Awareness of the total research arena calls for an open perspective.

THIS QUALITATIVE STUDY

This study progressed in a deliberate order, starting with an in-depth historical study, followed by a series of interviews, interspersed with a set of personal observations. The reading

and interpretation of the historical sources was heavily influenced by earlier cited studies of communities and community groupings.

The bulk of the study, however, was the in-depth historical study.

HISTORICAL STUDY

Ronald Powell noted that while there is little consensus on whether historical research is true scientific research (lack of precision and objectivity are the main objections), there is agreement that historical research has much to contribute to the field, especially if it gets beyond descriptions and attempts to interpret “reconstructed facts to provide a clear perspective of the present”.¹¹ Reflecting back again to Ragin’s strategies and goals for social research, historical research seems to be a way to give voice to people and places that are not usually well-represented. Quoting Tyrus Hillway’s 1964 *Introduction to Research* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), Powell identified six types of historical research that can be useful to give voice:

1. biographical research
2. histories of institutions and organizations
3. investigation of sources and influences
4. editing and translating historical documents
5. studying the history of ideas
6. compiling bibliographies¹²

Powell also cautioned the historical researcher to be aware of hidden meanings and hidden dangers. One also must understand the special problems inherent in historical research:

- deciding how much data is enough
- improperly selecting data
- relying too much on secondary sources
- investigating an overly broad problem. “This is difficult to avoid because historical issues tend to be complex.”
- failing to evaluate historical data and their sources – external criticism (is it what it purports to be?)
- failing to interpret the data – internal criticism (if it’s real, is it credible?)
- reading the present into the past even though the historical data may not support such an interpretation.¹³

Despite these cautions, Powell thought historical research is an appropriate method and “there continues to be a need for more historical research that considers libraries and other information systems in broad contexts”.¹⁴

Historical research may be a useful tool to bring to life libraries and people that do not get much coverage in scientific or quantitative research approaches. James Ollé’s 1971 *Library History* pointed out that much of what has been done in library history research has been done in a select niche. “One of the themes of library history is ‘privilege’ – the privilege of being literate enough to profit from books and the privilege of being wealthy enough to buy them, or borrow them from a subscription library”.¹⁵ Library history research that focuses on those who are

“privileged” is much like library service research that focuses on “users,” figuring that it’s too hard to capture the needs and thoughts of non-users. Those who are “privileged” have things (both in terms of written records and in terms of self-confidence that allows them to interact with researchers) that are easy to share and easy for the library history research to use. Those who are less privileged are easy to miss. Ollé cited the masterworks of Shera and Ditzion as examples of this problem of chronicling the privileged and overlooking the less privileged. For Ollé, these were masterpieces of regional history. While he felt that some good work had been done on big libraries (such as studies of libraries in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and Denver), not much exists on small ones.¹⁶

Michael Harris’ 1986 article in *Library Trends* called for a reorientation of library and information science research. Citing Elfreda Chatman’s efforts to document the information worlds of the unobserved and unserved, Harris urged a move away from positivist, scientific method research and a move toward holistic research, research that is actively historical rather than ahistorical; research that is impressionistic rather than deterministic. Calling for more research on the overlooked parts of library history, Harris called for “historically informed scholarship” that looked at libraries in terms of their “foundation in specific historical developments and in a particular historical situation.”ⁱⁱ Sounding like Ragin, Mellon, or Judith Brown, Harris felt library historical research could be, and should be, reflexive and empirical; socioculturally embedded; and guided by the researcher’s values and knowledge. Where Jack Glazier (in Powell’s book) warned researchers to be aware of their own biases in research, Harris anticipated Brown by suggesting that researchers should avoid being reluctant to examine their own domain assumptions (or paradigms).¹⁷ For Harris, as so for Brown, a serious researcher

ⁱⁱ The latter part of this quote from Harris is actually a Harris quote from chapter 1 of Francis Hearn’s 1978 *Domination, Legitimation, and Resistance: The Incorporation of the Nineteenth-Century English Working Class* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press).

with integrity could, and should, conduct historical research that is not value-neutral, but rather is honestly valued and free of pseudo- paradigmatic or unchallenged paradigmatic values.¹⁸

MICROHISTORY

This particular historical investigation is a form of microhistory. Microhistory is an approach that seeks to discover broader understanding of issues by focusing on narrower and more specific incidents and subjects. The idea of studying the seemingly ordinary and unimportant past has both supporters and detractors. A conference of historians held at the University of Connecticut in 1999 noted that “Proponents of the approach ... say microhistorical studies provide a prism through which one can glimpse the fundamental experiences and mentalities of ordinary people that broad analyses of nations so often miss. Detractors say microhistory directs attention toward a small detail at the expense of big and important historical questions”.¹⁹ Europeans seem to have taken up the microhistory approach with more enthusiasm. A Google search on the term in early 2005 returned about 3,310 responses and a cursory look at them reveals that the concept is routinely discussed in European academic circles. Online scholarly databases are a bit more restrained (EBSCO’s *Academic Search Elite* returned 46 references; InfoTracs’s *Expanded Academic ASAP* returned 30; and Web of Science’s *Social Science Citation Index* returned 65), but they all generally cover the same ground. The original idea seems to have originated as an Italian qualitative reaction to what was perceived to have been an overemphasis on statistical analysis of the past. German scholars who felt that large social truths could be discovered in a study of small details of earlier ordinary situations evolved a version of microhistory called *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of “everyday life”). A book review of a microhistory of rural England stated that such an intensive study of a small and limited topic can lead “to a better understanding of the nature and causation of issues of more general historical importance”.²⁰

A book review by Robert Ross in the January 2001 issue of *The Journal of African History* succinctly pointed out the benefits and risks of a microhistory approach.

The benefits of microhistory are well-known, as are its perils. The former lie in the advantages which can be gained from the detailed investigation of individual life histories that open up avenues of investigation into spheres that are difficult to approach in other ways, notably those which, in the cultural world in question, are considered private, and thus beyond the purview of the official world. The perils come from the difficulties of relating the details of the stories presented to the wider trends of which they are supposed to be exemplary ...

This research has hopefully brought the two of them together.

MATERIALS USED

In the middle of the twentieth century, Louis Shores, then the Dean at the Florida State library school, read a paper at the first meeting of the American Library Association History Round Table. Urging budding researchers to concentrate on library history, he told them the field lay wide open to those with diligence and imagination.

You know better than I what resources are available. Legal documents for most libraries' origins exist. The charter, if there is one, provides a starting point. Annual reports of the librarian and public library board or college library faculty committee minutes are rich in primary materials. Nor should the library's records be overlooked. ... Hidden in the books, themselves, are often forgotten inscriptions and dedications to the library, to say nothing of the annotations vandalizing public property. In short, the true library historian will overlook nothing in the library or the community that might even remotely contribute to the story of an institution of historical significance.²¹

In the course of this research, I found that while many of the resources Shore listed did exist, most did not. Formal documentation was hard to come by, either because it had been lost over time, or because not much of it had been created. Much the documentation of the

past, therefore, was reconstructed through the reading of the public record in the local newspapers.

The historian (and librarian) Daniel Boorstin has written about the challenges of finding the historical record this study sought to find. According to Boorstin's *Hidden History*, we are limited in what we can discover about the past by what we can find of the relics left for the present. Boorstin's hypotheses about what survives seemed borne out by the research findings in this study.

- Survival of the Durable, and That Which is Not Removed or Displaced. *The most important historical record turned out to be microfilmed local newspapers. Most of the paper record (if ever it existed) seems to have disappeared.*
- Survival of the Collected and the Protected: What Goes into Government Files. *The libraries in this study seemed not to have been considered important enough for government agencies to have kept records of their activities in their files.*
- Survival of Objects Which Are Not Used or Which Have a High Intrinsic Value. *Some of the decoration in the libraries under study led to the discovery of some of their historical record.*
- Survival of the Academically Classifiable and the Dignified. *Since these small libraries were the work of "small" people, there seems to have been very little effort exerted in saving and classifying their work.*

- Survival of Printed and Other Materials Surrounding Controversies.

Since these small libraries were marginal institutions, even in their own localities, they seemed to have sought to avoid controversy and thus avoided notice.

- Knowledge Survives and Accumulates, but Ignorance Disappears.

But sometimes knowledge disappears as well, simply because individuals are ignorant of its value and of the need to preserve it.²²

Documentary efforts began in the University and State archives, followed by a study of the primary source documents (both organizational and personal) of libraries, library associations, and small town governments in Moore County. This involved looking over reports, minutes, and clippings held by the Moore County Library System as well as the same for local libraries prior to their incorporation into the county system. Most of the local libraries were begun by women's clubs which, in some cases, morphed into local library associations. Unfortunately, while several important documents remain in existence, in general the founding organizers did not leave a detailed written record. In one case (in Pinebluff), a 1970 fire that destroyed the library also took with it some of the old records. In other cases, record-keeping was not all that important to individuals as they conducted most of their affairs face-to-face. Of the current local libraries, all but Niagara reside in incorporated communities and their relevant local government records should have been useful. Again, and again unfortunately, the written record turned out to be very sparse to non-existent. However, the unofficial county historian opened up the local history clipping collection at the county library, a resource which helped to gain a better understanding of the social structure from which grew Moore County's local public libraries.

While researching the local history clipping files, the best historical source was almost inadvertently discovered. Over the course of the twentieth century, Moore County was served by weekly local newspapers in at least five different towns. The microfilm records of these newspapers turned out to be the best source of historical record and provide the backbone to this historical study.

The historical research was supplemented by personal discussions and interviews – with local individuals mentioned above, with library staffs, with library association members, with library patrons, but (and unfortunately) not with representatives of non-user communities. Some of the topics of discussion included:

- Why are you members of the library association?
- Why do you do this work?
- What does the library mean to you – as a town politician; as a member of a community organization; as a member of the library staff?
- What role does the place of the library play in your sense of local community?
- What does the library do for your community?
- What roles do you see it playing?
- What other roles do you think it could play?ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ Here I used the topic areas used by Thomas Childers, Nancy Van House, and George D'Elia in their studies of public library roles, supplemented with other ideas of possible new roles the library might play in these specific localities.

The number of interviews conducted turned out to be fewer than had been anticipated. Part of this was due to the fact some people with first-hand historical knowledge had passed away recently. Part of it was due to the fact that almost all members of elective town government and of local library associations held full-time other jobs and were uninterested in sparing any of their free time.

However, another reality was that many people were seemingly suspicious and anxious about the concept of participating in a formal research effort. Almost no one who was approached for information about the topic hesitated to respond. People liked their towns and liked their libraries and wanted to talk about them. There was, however, a distinct unease with the concept of being a research participant in the formal sense. People who would talk long and willingly to the researcher were seemingly hesitant to sign an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form. Some were willing to read the form, but refused to sign; some were unwilling even to read the form. In almost every case, however, where an individual refused to read or sign an interview release form, they were immediately thereafter more than willing to just talk.

The fact that this research was being conducted for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was apparently a not necessarily positive aspect in the minds of potential interviewees. One felt quite clearly that an estrangement exists between some small-town North Carolinians and their flagship state university. The reason for such estrangement was unclear. Everyone seemed proud of Carolina, wanted their kids to go there, and felt a sense of ownership. However, they did not always seem to trust the motives of a researcher from Chapel

Hill (even when they clearly trusted the same individual when he was perceived as just an interested observer).^{iv}

Finally, all the libraries under study were visited often in order to observe them, to obtain a feel for what they are and how they operate. Brown's advice about observer subjectivity was taken to heart and researcher bias and paradigms were consciously not permitted to color the observations (at least as much as humanly possible).

^{iv} The specific interview questions used may be found at the appendix.

¹ Gallup Organization, *The Role of Libraries in America* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Dept. of Libraries and Archives, 1976) 52; Jesse H. Spera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1692-1855* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949) 248; and John Calvin Colson, "Form against Function: The American Public Library and Contemporary Society," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy, & Comparative Librarianship* 18 (1983): 112-113.

² Benton Foundation, *Buildings, Books, and Bytes: Libraries and Communities in the Digital Age; a Report on the Public's Opinion of Library Leaders' Visions for the Future* (1996). 11 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/kellogg/buildings.html>>.

³ Francis Fukuyama, *Social Capital and Civil Society*. (Prepared for Delivery at the IMF Conference on Second Generation Reforms), (1 Oct. 1999). 11 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm>>; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, (Jan. 1995). 11 Nov. 2005 <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html>>; Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000).

⁴ Charles C. Ragin, *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1994) 33.

⁵ Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner Researchers* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) 42, 52, 147.

⁶ Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, 3rd ed. (Greenwich, CT: Ablex Pub., 1997) 47.

⁷ Robson 18-19, 308

⁸ Constance Ann Mellon, *Naturalistic Inquiry for Library Science: Methods and Applications for Research, Evaluation, and Teaching*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 5, 14-15.

⁹ Judith R. Brown, *The I in Science: Training to Utilize Subjectivity in Research* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996) ix.

¹⁰ Brown 2.

¹¹ Powell 165.

¹² Powell 167.

¹³ Powell 176-177.

¹⁴ Powell 174.

¹⁵ James G. Ollé, *Library History*, 2nd ed. (Hamden, CT & London: Archon Books & Clive Bingley, 1971) 51.

¹⁶ Ollé 124.

¹⁷ Jack D. Glazier, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Research," *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* 3rd ed., Ed. Ronald R. Powell, (Greenwich, CT: Ablex Pub., 1997) 235-249.

¹⁸ Michael H. Harris, "The Dialectic of Defeat: Antimonies in Research in Library and Information Science," *Library Trends* 34 (1986): 522.

¹⁹ Walt Woodward, *Historians to Debate Value of New Historical Approach* (11 Oct. 1999). 11 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.advance.uconn.edu/1999/991011/10119912.htm>>.

²⁰ Melanie Nolan, "The Place of the Few Among the Many." *Making History E-Journal* (Auckland, New Zealand: History Group of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage) 13 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.mch.govt.nz/history/making-history/dnzb.html>>; Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *The Contours of Social History. Microhistory, Postmodernism and Historical Sources* (2001). 13 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.akademia.is/sigm/contours.html>>; Barry Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 13 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.cambridge.org/uk/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=052157028X>>.

²¹ Louis Shores, "The Importance of Library History," *An American Library History Reader: Contributions to Library Literature*, Ed. John David Marshall (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1961) 5-6.

²² Daniel J. Boorstin, *Hidden History: Exploring Our Secret Past*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 3, 5-13.

ORIGINS OF THE INSTITUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Jesse Shera wrote one of the classic studies of how the public library originated in urban New England. Shera was especially influential in identifying how the public library became a way to advance popular education by providing access to useful books.¹ For Shera, and for nineteenth century Boston (the focus of his research), such an institution, however, did not arise in the community because of an outcry for it from the people.

The public library, as we know it today, came about through the effort of small and highly literate groups of professional men – scholars, lawyers, ministers, and educators – who sorely needed books for the performance of their daily tasks and who, through their efforts, convinced their respective communities of the social utility of supporting a public library.

In his 1949 *Foundations of the Public Library*, he listed a number of factors that motivated these groups. Among them were

- Their community had the economic ability to create such institutions.
- They had interests in scholarship and historical research, and had an urge to conserve the records of the past.
- They were eager to advance the reputation of their community. They were especially eager to have Boston achieve national distinction as a guardian of cultural heritage and patron of libraries.

- They were convinced of the social importance of universal public education.
- Their time was one in which the self-education and the Lyceum movement was popular.
- Business and labor both felt a need for a place where vocational tools could be found.²

When the public library movement came to the South in the latter part of the nineteenth century, some of these same factors played a role. However, the establishment of the public library in the South came in response less to the “effort of small and highly literate groups of professional men ... who sorely needed books for the performance of their daily tasks”; rather it came in response more to the desire of groups who “were eager to advance the reputation of their (communities).”

ORIGINS OF THE INSTITUTION IN THE SOUTH

In the last years of the 19th and the early years of the 20th centuries, women’s clubs all over the South took on libraries as special projects and led the way in establishing them in their communities. In her 1958 dissertation, Mary Edna Anders identified the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta as the start of the women’s clubs library movement. The Women’s Building at the Exposition included a model library and provided printed materials advising women how they might develop libraries in their own communities. Additionally, a Congress of Women Librarians was held as part of the exposition in order to “stimulate library growth in the south” and to “discuss practical questions of library economy.” The success of the Congress led the American Library Association (ALA) to meet in Atlanta four years later.³

In North Carolina, the Federation of Women's Clubs took the lead. From their own funds, they either built local libraries for communities or maintained traveling libraries for rural areas. When the General Assembly authorized the creation of the North Carolina Library Commission in 1909, the Commission urged civic associations to form local library associations. The Federation took up the challenge, stating its policy was to "foster library development throughout the state." In order to help the Commission do its work, the Federation gave its collections of traveling libraries to it.⁴ By 1928, there were 72 public libraries in North Carolina, 30 supported by taxes while the remaining 42 were "association libraries or libraries under the auspices of organizations".⁵ Women's Clubs performed library services both in large cities and small. In large cities like Durham, the city paid for the salary of the librarian, but local organizations provided the workers. In smaller towns like Wilson, the Women's Club ran the library as if it were a community public library, with small levels of support from the city council.⁶

Clubwomen were the workers in this endeavor, but their husbands and associates played a role as well. Patrick Valentine noted that the early public library efforts were in large part underwritten by wealthy philanthropists, partly because there was no particular interest in seeing taxes used to support an institution that was not seen as a valid component of local governmental responsibilities.⁷

EVOLUTION OF IDEAS ABOUT PUBLIC LIBRARY ADEQUACY

Over time, however, library supporters and professionals became convinced that public libraries needed to become governmental entities and that town, county, and state officials should provide financial support for local public libraries, thus becoming one of the 44 "traditionally local services" that the state of North Carolina authorizes (but does not mandate)

for both municipalities and counties.⁸ However, as local public library funding switched from private philanthropy to public financing, library professionals realized that local funding was not robust enough to support an “adequate” level of public library service.

In his 1949 *The Public Library in the Political Process*, the sociologist Oliver Garceau noted that library professionals tended to see the strong link between local libraries and local political structures as a limiting factor, recognizing that small town financial resources were too limited to be able to support “good” public library service. As he put it, “librarians long ago stopped talking and thinking about Public Library service as a matter connected exclusively with local government” and had begun as early as 1915 to think about ways to escape local limitations in order to obtain funding and direction for public libraries.⁹

The idea that the county was the “natural” unit for library service and the idea that \$1 per capita was the minimum essential level of tax support necessary to sustain the public library became the professional mantras in the 1920s. A 1927 pamphlet designed to provide guidance and advice to library advocates in rural areas noted that “Like the consolidated school, the county library is able to give a high quality service to scattered country people, as well as to the villages”. It also noted that the \$1 per capita recommendation was not being met by appropriations in many counties. “The county library plan should not be judged by partial service county libraries”.¹⁰

By the early 1930s, however, the professional attitude toward small public libraries evolved to looking beyond the county. Adequate service could not really be provided unless at least \$1 per capita was provided for such service, and both small towns and poor counties probably could not provide adequate levels of funding for adequate service. The profession’s

answer was larger service units. Tommie Barker's 1936 report to the ALA on the condition of Southern libraries stated

As much as people may desire library service, librarians are facing the fact frankly that in most areas the local resources are not there to support it, and are thinking and talking more and more in terms of state aid and a state system of library service. Along with the move towards state aid goes the recognition of the further fact that the average county in the southern states is not a desirable unit for public library service as it is small in area and population and wealth.

Citing Carlton Joeckel's 1935 *The Government of the American Public Library*, she recommended that small libraries be consolidated "into larger units of service".¹¹ She also anticipated (and perhaps was suggesting) regional demonstrations funded by the Federal government, perhaps by the TVA.

After World War II, library professionals took the lessons of national planning used during the Depression and the War and sought to apply them to public library issues. In its 1948 report, the North Carolina Library Commission recommended that those interested in public libraries acquaint themselves with national level planning for larger service units.

The book, A NATIONAL PLAN FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE [caps in the original], published in 1948 by the American Library Association, points the way for larger units of library service and for complete library coverage for the United States. It is recommended for reading and study to North Carolinians who are concerned with improved library service in their State.

It also chided local people for going their own way, not listening to the counsel of the profession. "Several small, poor counties are attempting to operate individual county libraries when more efficient and more economical service could be rendered by the regional library plan of two or more counties working (together)."¹²

In his 1983 history of North Carolina public library growth, Thornton Mitchell identified 1956 as a watershed year. “It probably was coincidental that the merger of the State Library and the Library Commission, the publication of the ALA standards for public library service, and the enactment of federal aid for libraries all occurred in 1956”.¹³ The 1956 standards did indeed articulate a consolidating concept and urged small libraries to band together into “systems.” In North Carolina, such systems became Regional Library organizations. Between 1941 and 1975, county libraries in 49 of North Carolina’s 100 counties joined together into fifteen multi-county regions.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN SMALL TOWN NORTH CAROLINA

At the start of the twenty-first century, one could find somewhere around 400 public library facilities in the state. Of these, 382 are branches of some larger municipal, county, or regional library system. Things have changed a lot since the start of the twentieth century – many small libraries have disappeared, many have been subsumed into larger organizations. However, in more than a few North Carolina counties, many of the branches of county or regional systems seem to have a double life. They began their institutional life as the “town library” and, despite their organizational subordination to a larger system, still retain that position in their host communities. This research tells that story.

¹ Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library* v.

² Jesse H. Shera, "On the Value of Library History," *Library Quarterly* 22 (1952): 240-251. Reprinted in *Reader in American Library History*, Ed. Michael H Harris (Washington: Microcard Editions, 1971) 5-13.

³ Mary Edna Anders, *The Development of Public Library Service in the South-Eastern States, 1895-1950* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1958) 44-50.

⁴ Elizabeth House Hughey, "Public Libraries in North Carolina," *North Carolina Libraries* 13 (1954): 11-16.

⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission of North Carolina July 1, 1926-June 30, 1928* [pamphlet] (1928) 8.

⁶ Louis R. Wilson, "Library Development in North Carolina," *Library Journal* 48 (1923): 21-23; and Patrick M. Valentine, "The Struggle to Establish Public Library Service in Wilson, North Carolina, 1900-1940," *Libraries & Culture* 28 (1993): 287-288.

⁷ Patrick M. Valentine, "Steel, Cotton, and Tobacco: Philanthropy and Public Libraries in North Carolina, 1900-1940," *Libraries & Culture* 31 (1996): 272-298.

⁸ Charles D. Liner, ed., *State and Local Government Relations in North Carolina: Their Evolution and Current Status* 2nd Ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Government, 1995) 37.

⁹ Oliver Garceau, *The Public Library in the Political Process*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949) 201.

¹⁰ League of Library Commissions, "Rural Public Library Service: A Handbook for Rural Leaders" [pamphlet] ([Chicago]: League of Library Commissions, 1927) 7, 9.

¹¹ Tommie Dora Barker, *Libraries of the South: A Report on Developments, 1930-1935* (Chicago: American Library Association. 1936) 37, 98-99.

¹² North Carolina Library Commission, *Twentieth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1946-June 30, 1948* [pamphlet] (1948) 5-6.

¹³ Thornton W. Mitchell, *The State Library and Library Development in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of State Library, 1983) 76.

WE WANT A LIBRARY IN OUR TOWN

We read of Mr. Andrew Carnegie's great gifts to large cities, and we praise and thank the wonderful philanthropist, but a library of fifty-two volumes sent to the little towns in Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia becomes a white winged messenger, quickening the thought, elevating the opinions, broadening the knowledge and widening the mental horizons of the little town.¹

The author of these thoughts, a Mrs. E. B. Heard of Middleton, Georgia, was addressing the Seaboard Air Line Railroad in an 1899 letter to thank it for helping women throughout the South, women who were attempting to create libraries in their towns. Mrs. Heard, and many others like her, were not professional librarians, but they were women who liked to read and thought that the addition of libraries in their towns would be beneficial to all concerned. But why was this interest in libraries so evident to people like Mrs. Heard? Perhaps it would be worth a review of why libraries were becoming an item of interest in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries.

BROADER CONTEXT – PHILOSOPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

Historians commonly agree that the first people to establish the institution we now know as the American public library were a product of their New England region and of their urban or village communities. “In terms of chronology, the founding of American public libraries and British public libraries were coeval. Indeed it is the Boston Public Library, founded in 1852, which can claim to be the oldest free municipal library supported by taxation in any city in the world”.² The New England model spread south and west, so that by the turn of the twentieth century “... nearly every Northern State had taken similar action, those which were

socially descended from New England being in the lead ...” in the creation of tax-supported public libraries.³ Jesse Shera, in the introduction to his 1949 *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1692-1855*, said “... much of what is said here with reference to New England is equally applicable elsewhere as economic and social conditions began to approximate those of the northeastern Atlantic seaboard”.⁴

The institution developed in the context of a society that seemed agreed that it wanted such an institution. In a 1983 *Journal of Library History* article, John Colson noted that the nineteenth century public library idea evolved out of a concept of neighborhood (or community) – Colson quoted Jeremy Belknap, “A few neighbors joined together” – and that public libraries are a function of community.⁵ It follows easily that it would have begun in urban communities and in village life.

However, the issue of how that community is defined and what were the values that the community sought to institutionalize in the public library has been one of the great divides among historians of the American public library. Greatly simplified, this divide can be characterized as being between a classical view that sees positive and humanitarian motives having led the public library movement and a revisionist view that sees the same movement in somewhat less glowing terms. But before we address the divided view of the original values, we will look at a general area of agreement about what the public library was to do for its community.

WHAT – LIBRARIES AND SELF-EDUCATION

A foundation of the classic view of the origins of the public library is that the public library is the People’s University, the place where the members of a community may go to

educate themselves in order to move up the social ladder. This concept was one of the original conceptions of purpose for early public libraries and has remained a constant through to today. Jesse Shera noted that a “class of professional and amateur scholars who desperately needed libraries” also knew that they needed to find a way to have public tax monies build those libraries. Thus educators and scholars who needed libraries for their own purposes sought public support for libraries by advocating their utility as tools for public self-education.⁶ Robert Lee in 1966 agreed in principle with Shera’s assessment, but was more generous in his assessment of motives. In his view, “The Boston Public Library came into existence, not because the people demanded a library, but because a small number of learned and influential citizens expressed the need for providing *equal educational opportunities for adults*” [italics added].⁷ Lee acknowledged that he and Shera had slightly different perspectives, feeling that Shera was correct when discussing how the public library operated (“the early *practices*”), but that he had not been as accurate in assessing why the public library had arisen. Writing some twenty years after Shera, Lee saw the public library as having moved through four major development phases, each tied to its role as a tool for education.

1. The public library began as a single-purpose institution in which education for adults was the central aim.
2. Next, it became a multipurpose institution in which education, recreation and reference were the primary objectives, with recreation and reference eventually taking precedence over education.
3. Then it entered a period of appraisal in which attempts were made to revitalize its educational objective.

4. At the time of his writing, it was placing major emphasis on its informational and educational objectives and less on its recreational objective.⁸

Melvil Dewey took a similar view. Wayne Wiegand's 1996 biography described Dewey seeing public libraries as tools for the masses to use to educate themselves beyond the limits of the formal schooling of his day. However, for Dewey, self-education did not necessarily mean self-guided. The public libraries were to be structured to allow the masses to build their own educational pace, but only within the limits fixed by printed texts of the dominant culture.⁹

In the South, the limits of formal education were even more constrained than they were in Dewey's New York. The public education tradition had not been well rooted in the South. In the nineteenth century, prevailing social attitudes held that private education was preferred over public education. Francis Simkins and Charles Roland pointed out in their 1972 *History of the South* that the influential classes held the attitude that one gets what one pays for and it was not the duty of the state to provide for education any more than it was the duty to pay for food or shelter. Even though in the early nineteenth century North Carolina was the second state in the union to make constitutional provision for schools, the funding of such schools was left entirely to the locality, with the result that smaller localities could afford only meager educational opportunities. By the first decade of the twentieth century, this attitude began to change and the state took an interest in addressing educational inequities. In North Carolina "... the movement for consolidation of small rural schools into larger graded units was inaugurated, followed by setting up of rural libraries".¹⁰ The first rural libraries were school

libraries that were to be available to the public. The concept of a public library independent of the school, but providing support to the school's mission, began to grow.

Louis Round Wilson and Edward Wight, in a 1935 review of the efforts of Northern philanthropy to expand educational opportunities in the South, highlighted the public library's role as a supporter of education. Discussing the aims and uses of public libraries, they quoted the "Standards for Public Libraries" in the November 1933 *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, noting that the "public library is maintained by a democratic society in order that every man, woman, and child may have the means of self-education and recreational reading".¹¹

The ALA remained true to this concept. At the end of the Second World War and with the experience of Federal aid to public libraries having been provided through Depression Era projects, professional librarians were feeling empowered enough to be considering plans to make the public library a stronger educational institution. Leading lights of the professional community had been working since 1942 to create plans for making the library the public institution that would guide the American people to new levels of intellectual and political sophistication in the complex post-war world. Accordingly in 1946, the ALA commissioned the Public Library Inquiry to provide the facts needed to support the ambitious planning. Although there was a lot more to the background of the Public Library Inquiry, Robert Leigh pointed out in his 1950 *General Report of the Public Library Inquiry* that one of the basic assumptions about public libraries that structured the research was that public libraries existed to provide adults the opportunity to learn.ⁱ Approximately two decades after the Public Library Inquiry, the ALA

ⁱ The conclusions and consequences of the Public Library Inquiry are important and interesting, but are a topic for discussion at another time. For now, it is enough to say the researchers who conducted the Inquiry did so with a clear understanding that the public library was thought to be an educational institution. See, for example, Nevin Douglas Raber, "The Beginnings of the Public Library Inquiry", in *The Public Library Inquiry and the Search for Professional Legitimacy*, Diss. (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1992) 85-105.

supported another look at the library functions of the states and again stated at the outset (in fact, in the first line of the book) that “library services, which are extraordinarily diverse, are part of the general apparatus of education and the advancement of knowledge”.¹²

Such attitudes were constant throughout the twentieth century in North Carolina library circles. The North Carolina Library Commission pushed for public library support by emphasizing its supportive role as a place where the citizenry could educate themselves. In its 1938 report to the governor, under the heading of “Equalizing Opportunities,” the Commission stated

To be great and to remain free, Americans must be educated. Books are the universal medium of education whether in school or outside – books are needed to explain the economic picture and the changing world. The success of our democratic form of government depends on citizens being intelligent and well informed, – depends on widespread education. Schools are but the beginning of education, the public library carries on and gives permanent value to the work of the schools. Our educational system is incomplete until public libraries are within the reach of every one.¹³

As public libraries became more accepted as part of the civic landscape after the Second World War, supporters of enhanced support to public libraries continued to emphasize the public library’s educational role. In its 1963 *Standards for North Carolina Public Libraries*, the North Carolina Library Association defined the public library as “an educational institution which exists to provide people of all ages and all interests with the means of continuing education”.¹⁴

Near the end of the century, national-level attention and interest in the educational role of the public library was evident in the outcome of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Pointing out why it was necessary that a national-level look at public libraries be undertaken, the educational role took its place at the forefront. Kathleen de la Peña

McCook's 1994 *Analysis of the Recommendations of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services* stated "(the) strongest national policy direction being debated today is renewed attention to the need for every American to learn continuously. Mastering basic skills, achieving literacy and numeracy, and developing patterns of critical thinking are crucial to survival in a world where change is the basic driving force of our daily lives".¹⁵ Accordingly, the first of four major focus areas for the Conference was on the role the library and information service should play in lifelong learning.

If there is any one WHAT about the American public library that seems to have been consistent from its earliest days to the present it is that the public library is a place where education can (and perhaps ought to) take place. The issue of WHY the public library was created as an education support institution is not a similar situation of general and common agreement.

WHY – THE CLASSICAL VIEW

The classical view may be quickly and succinctly stated by a partisan of the revisionist view. Michael Hope Harris, in his 1975 "speculative essay" on *The Role of the Public Library in American Life*, referred to the myth of public library origins as a warm and comforting story of humanitarian and liberal reformers who built an institution for the self-betterment of the common man and that there has been a continuing idealistic commitment to the public library as the "People's University".¹⁶ In their 1978 *American Library History: A Bibliography*, Harris and Donald Davis cited the 1940s era works of Jesse Shera, Sidney Ditzion, and Gwladys Spencer as "classic" and "remarkable tours de force" that set the benchmark for analysis of the environment out of which grew the public library movement.¹⁷

Jesse Shera saw the public library as one of several means through which social institutions exercised social control by setting standards and expectations.ⁱⁱ He tended to see the public library in a good light, however, as an organization that sought to advance popular education by providing access to useful books.¹⁸ Such an organization, however, did not arise in the community because of an outcry for it from the people, but rather because a small group of influential men convinced a smaller group of wealthy men to support the concept.

James Thompson re-stated the classical thesis in his 1977 *History of the Principles of Librarianship* when he stated that the nineteenth century public library movement was prompted by shared beliefs.

Belief that universal education is essential for the welfare of the republic; belief in the power of books as a deterrent from vice and a source of education and culture; ... (and) a slowly growing conviction that only a free library would meet the needs of modern society; a library which should ignore the distinctions of class which had long retarded a sense of community solidarity and had left the intellectual wants of many to the mercy of charity; a library offering equal privileges to all the residents of the community maintaining it.

Echoing Shera, he additionally acknowledged that such beliefs had originated in “enlightened” groups who had to popularize them if the institution was to succeed. Quoting a citizens’ committee in Boston in 1841,

For such an institution to accomplish its whole purpose, it must be in the highest sense popular. That is, it must have directly engaged in its formation and use the whole people. ... If such work is to be done all are to come to it as having an equal or a common interest in it. ... This institution can only exist through the enthusiasm of the people, and it can be created by that in a

ⁱⁱ Shera saw the public library as an agency rather than an institution. To Shera, a social institution is basic and primary, like the family or the state. A social agency is derived and secondary, and the public library, as with the public school, is therefore a social agency. In a way that anticipated the views of later revisionist historians, Shera felt that social agencies were the means through which social institutions exercised social control by setting standards and expectations. Shera’s terminology is logical and attractive, but the “social agency” term never seemed to take hold. Accordingly, we will continue the prevalent norm by referring to the public library as an institution in this paper, rather than as an agency.

moment.¹⁹

The other great classical voice was Ditzion's.ⁱⁱⁱ Although Ditzion published his *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* two years prior to Shera's work, he noted in his preface that Shera had completed his own dissertation. Ditzion's work focused on the key personalities in the development of public libraries in New England and on their motives. His assessment of their motives was so completely taken with their essential goodness and so lacking in irony that it proved an irresistible target for later revisionist historians. His work is full of examples, but one will suffice to provide a sense of Ditzion's viewpoint.

The real ideological force which fostered the public libraries must be looked for in those islands of communal spirit which rose out of the political and religious backgrounds of democratic America and persisted amid the powerful currents of rugged individualism. This was the spirit of common humanity which fostered abolition, women's rights, the peace movement, prison reform, the mitigation of severe penalties for crime, and the establishment of institutions for the care of the afflicted.²⁰

He did, however, anticipate Shera when he implied that it was the relative wealth of New England cities that made it easier for them to accept taxes to support both schools and libraries, especially if public libraries were sold as a way to keep the region ahead of other towns, states, and regions.²¹

Ditzion was not totally oblivious to the two-sided nature of reform and of reformers. He noted that the post-Civil War reformer

was more particularized in his activities and not always as democratic (as the pre-Civil War ones). His reform sometimes was an attempt to impose upon his neighbors moral and religious prejudices of his own. Such reform, exemplified by some aspects of the temperance crusade, might very well have

ⁱⁱⁱ Ditzion may well have been a dedicated follower of Melvil Dewey in more than one way. On page ix in the preface, he said his book was a break from past focus on "... factual accounts of progress in library *technics*, services, organization and administration." [emphasis added]

been an outright denial of democratic principals [*sic*] insofar as it aimed to deprive others of free expression and action. “Philanthropic” reformist philosophies were at times designed to maintain the social stratifications of the status quo. For library interests humanitarianism was too often a tactical approach to the sympathies of persons of influence. It was, to be sure, psychologically sound to appeal to human and social values shared by Americans in all walks of life.²²

Ditzion seemed aware that the interest groups who pushed for public libraries for everyone really were hoping that “everyone” would adopt the ideals of the interest group. He chose to focus, however, more on the ideals and less on the motives of these interest groups. He was not alone in that appreciation of the duality of ideals and motives. Marion A. Wright, a South Carolina lawyer and one of the founders of the Citizens’ Library Movement, wrote in the *ALA Bulletin* in 1936 that “Libraries exist for the use and benefit of the average man. He pays the freight and, in the last analysis, he controls their destinies. ... There can be no permanent establishment and support of public libraries except as they spring from public demand and have behind them public sanction”.²³ But he also noted that the “average man” perhaps needed some guidance. “The underlying philosophy of the Citizens Library Movement is the underlying philosophy of every civic movement in a democracy. It is that *permanent growth and improvement must grow out of an informed public opinion, and that the duty is upon those assuming leadership to create such informed public opinion*” [emphasis in the original].²⁴

Wright was writing during the rise of fascism and articulated a common theme among those then attempting to encourage public libraries. Libraries could help educate the public through reading; a reading public is an informed public and an enlightened public and America needed an enlightened public. William Polk, writing in the same journal two years later argued that free government is based on free speech; free speech is based on free thought; free thought is based on free reading; therefore the state has a vital interest in free reading.²⁵ As World War II

drew closer, the North Carolina Library Commission in 1940 quoted a paper on “Local Rural Government and the State” which included the comment that

You who are extending libraries into the countryside, who are helping adults as well as children to acquire reading habits, who are displacing superstition and prejudice with science and tolerance, are strengthening our national defense in a most fundamental way. Libraries are arsenals of truth, a weapon scorned by dictators, but one which has always finally stopped the march of tyranny.²⁶

Ditzion’s book was published right after World War II and the title reflects the sense of self that librarians had in that day. If knowledge had been one of the weapons in the struggle with fascism, the library had been the storehouse of democratic knowledge.

WHY – THE REVISIONIST VIEW

Thirty years after Ditzion, however, such uncritical appreciation of motives was no longer in vogue. The experiences of the Korean and Vietnam wars, the struggle for civil rights, and the Watergate affair had affected the intellectual environment and led many practitioners to reflect on their profession’s basic beliefs. For historians of the public library movement, the times seemed to call for a re-examination of the motives of the early era. Speaking in 1977 in commemoration of the anniversary of the founding of the American Library Association, John Hope Franklin articulated the perspective that perhaps it was not all idealism that had motivated the founding fathers of the public library movement.

There was a certain ambivalence, however, in the stance of those pioneers in the promotion of America’s cultural growth. On the one hand they reflected a profound understanding of the importance of educational institutions and libraries in strengthening and promoting America’s intellectual growth. ... On the other hand these efforts were almost invariably represented by and intended for special interest groups rather than the general public.²⁷

Dee Garrison, in her 1979 *Apostles of Culture*, was unsparing in her assessment that the early public library advocates, the ones Ditzion had celebrated, had been motivated by a “cultural arrogance limited only by their moral sincerity”. Their desires to see the establishment of public libraries were based on their romantic ideas of reform, general democratic principles about loosing the limits of access to power, and a genteel liberalism about the common man’s needs. In Garrison’s view, this missionary impulse was a frustrated desire on the part of the public library boosters for greater status and standing, based more on culture and knowledge, than on money and family. This genteel outlook was closely associated with a long existing New England-based tradition of moral elitism. By the early decades of the twentieth century, when the old elites had been superseded by a new social-economic elite, those interested in public libraries took to guardianship of conservative library ideals as their *raison d’être* and as what they took to be the mark of genteel superiority, hoping that mass taste would follow theirs.²⁸

Harris and Gerald Spiegler directly took on the classical view in a 1974 article. In their perspective, the progressive interpretation of the American public library equated the establishment of the public library with the rise of popular democracy. This interpretation also saw the library movement as having been populated by an enlightened middle class led by liberal and humanitarian intellectuals. Looking at the same era through new lenses, revisionists like Harris and Spiegler saw instead a public library milieu that was established by upper-strata authoritarian elitists who either had no faith in the common man, or who lived in mortal fear of him. In their review of the writings of the same people that Ditzion had celebrated, Harris and Spiegler instead identified a set of (mostly negative) characteristics of authoritarian elitists, frightened people who feared the radical abolitionists of their day and feared the populist mood the abolitionists engendered. The revisionists concluded that social control was the key desire of

the original founders of the Boston Public Library and of their New England public library movement.²⁹

Harris in 1975 more fully fleshed out the revisionist viewpoint by asserting that the basic purpose of the public library movement was to

- To educate the masses so they will follow the “best men,” not the demagogues, to “stabilize the republic,”
- To provide access to the world’s best books for that elite minority who will eventually lead the nation, and
- To induce the people to pull themselves upward by their bootstraps.³⁰

In a way agreeing with Garrison, Harris felt that the librarian class that came to run the public libraries exemplified these control issues. Passively focused on technical issues, they sought to create a structure within the public library that would please the elites who controlled the institution through their control of library boards.³¹ He encapsulated this viewpoint using a 1934 quote which, slightly modified and with added line breaks, states that:

Public libraries are established for the people,
and supported by the people,
but run by independent boards,
or individual librarians,
who have ruled according to their own idiosyncratic idealism,
not necessarily to social needs.³²

In a 1976 *Libri* article, Harris characterized public librarians as crusaders whose crusades were attempts to put the profession of librarianship in league with conservative social status. In Harris’ view (a view shared by other writers as well), from 1876 to 1890, the public

library crusaded against the evils of fiction and low culture; from 1900 to 1920, against the dangers of immigrants; from 1917 to 1919, to save American democracy from Europe; and from 1939 to 1950, to save American democracy from Fascism. After each crusade, librarians lapsed back to the quiet mechanics of the role as custodian of books.³³

Ditzion certainly provided Harris and like-minded colleagues with useful quotes with which to make their points. Take, for example, Ditzion's perspective on what Harris described as the crusade against the evils of fiction and low culture. "The library was a fairy wand of social reform. It would even encourage more domestic habits of life by competing with the 'low immoral' publications of the day".³⁴ Ditzion seems to have believed this and there is no sign of irony in his prose; whereas Harris, in a later age, would take this with a certain level of skepticism. Ditzion's description of how to serve new Americans certainly could be read by a Harris as evidence of the early public librarians as being people who regarded immigrants as a danger to the republic. "The profession evidently concerned itself seriously with the civic education of foreign-born populations in cosmopolitan centers. *There was a patent weakness in giving the new citizen the ballot* – which he had not enjoyed in his native country – without giving him also the means of developing an intelligence with which to direct its use" [italics added].³⁵

After reading Ditzion's commentary on how librarians participated in the events of the late nineteenth century, one certainly comes away sort of agreeing with Harris that librarianship was not at all fond of the common man and was, in fact and in concert with the conservative elites, afraid of them. Discussing the struggles of the early labor movement, Ditzion cited 1894 and 1896 *Library Journal* articles in noting:

| The latter decades of the nineteenth century, marked as they were by some of
| the most serious strikes in our national history and by an increasing

dissemination of socialistic doctrines, provided an opportunity for the profession to sell its agency as a steadying social force. Whatever threat to democratic government might come out of these struggles could certainly be warded off by the spread of "... the knowledge of the learned, the wisdom of the thoughtful, (and) the conscience of the upright".³⁶

More than a few dispassionate observers might have taken the great labor struggles of the era as symbols of resistance to oppression rather than as socially destabilizing socialist agitation.

To be fair, however, it is clear that Ditzion was well aware that whatever their personal beliefs, public library supporters had to be cognizant of who was the major force behind the funding of public libraries.

In general the profession's reaction to social conflicts indicates that it had not yet discerned where its strongest support lay. On the one hand, wealth had shown itself to be favorably disposed by erecting library buildings and by contributing funds for other purposes; on the other, the voting populace had demonstrated its power to vote libraries into being. The most advantageous position to assume, therefore, was a neutrality which favored liberal principles.³⁷

However, that "neutrality" had to recognize the reality of social and political power. "The increased dissemination of various socialistic doctrines, a normal phenomenon during capital-labor struggles, was both cause and effect of severe class tension. In periods such as this, the class which held the reins of the economic system spared no effort, device or method in building up its conservative defense".³⁸

It would seem that Ditzion's characterization of "socialist doctrines" betrays a certain conservative attitude, an attitude he revealed throughout his consideration of the public the

library was to serve. For example, his appreciation of the voters mentioned above seems to indicate that such voters needed guidance. (The italics in the quote below have been added.)

On the political front, the strongest threats to democracy were understood to be from *ignorant classes who would vote for the wrong parties* either because of their own untutored choice or because of the scheming leadership of city politicians. America would be the victim of its own humane spirit if it did not educate and inform its “illiterate blacks and foreign born.” The European habit of thought which placed the lower orders in permanent ignorance and subjugation was ill-adapted to the American scene where the populace had already achieved political power and would misuse it unless given proper direction. *Unless the correct books were put into the hands of the people*, they would be easy prey for such false and foreign philosophies as were destructive of the foundations of our republic.³⁹

What in 1947 could be written without a sense of irony could thirty years later no longer be taken at face value. Without speaking about Ditzion, Shera, or the progressive appreciation of the origins of the public library, Dan Lacy in 1977 asserted that not only did librarians support a conservative status quo, but the very provision of public libraries was a conscious decision to restrict knowledge and thereby restrict power from the feared and despised part of the population.

(The nineteenth century pattern of restricting knowledge/power persisted into the twentieth century.) ...Everywhere the well-to-do had a more abundant access to better schools and larger libraries than were available to the poor. ... From the first-rate schools, the great universities, the library-served cities came most of those who made up the American establishment – the leaders of professions, the masters of industries, the counselors to rulers. In the other environment lived the poor. Those who were cut off from full access to knowledge were cut off as well from power and prosperity. Ignorance, poverty, and powerlessness bred each other in an endless cycle. ... In part this isolation and subordination of the poor and nonwhite were due to the lack of means to do better. But in part it was a deliberate choice of those with power.⁴⁰

Wayne Wiegand, in a 1986 commentary on John Colson’s 1983 article about the disconnect between the public library and its community, took the revisionist view when he

asserts that Colson “ignores the concept of a cultural hegemony, and the possibility that libraries have deliberately been structured to serve a narrowly defined community”.⁴¹

Harris summed up his basic thesis in his 1975 “speculative essay” in which he articulated the goal of the revisionist approach by asking for a new look at the purpose of the public library, free from dependence on an idealized history.⁴²

WHY – THE AMALGAM VIEW

The revisionist viewpoint struck home, and found some concurrence with its points, but did not sway everyone to its view. The philosophical foundations of the American public library may be as positive, progressive, and enlightened as the early classical historians portrayed them. Alternatively, the foundations may be as negative, reactionary, and benighted as the later revisionist historians saw them. However, one’s view of the past is conditioned by one’s own times and how those times affect the reading and understanding of the words of the past. More than a few “counter-revisionists” took exception to Harris and his ilk. Harris indicated that two of the critiques were particularly persuasive (though one suspects he was not so persuaded as to alter his basic perceptions).

Richard Harwell and Robert Michener, in a 1974 *Library Journal* article, took Harris to task for being too much a captive of his own times and attitudes. Cautioning the historian against “(reshaping) the facts of the past in the light of the present,” they felt revisionists were being unfair and simplistic by not acknowledging the then-contemporary conditions when they compared acts of the past in terms of what they would mean in the present. Looking back to the nineteenth century milieu, they supported Ditzion’s and Shera’s view that the early public library pioneers were indeed idealists, if not in the sense Harris would use the term. They felt

the early public library advocates were creatures of their intellectual environment, still influenced by 18th century Enlightenment liberal principles (which were not the same as late twentieth century liberal principles). Harwell and Michener agreed with Harris that the public library pioneers were indeed not of the common folk, but disagreed with him on their view of their relationship with the common folk. To these two authors, the early public library pioneers sought the American middle ground, rejecting both the privilege of inherited aristocracy and the sentimental romanticism of populism in favor of “the American democratic order”. They did, however, concur with the revisionists that the public library, created by Enlightenment liberal principles, too soon fell into the hands of “bureaucratic nitpickers who emphasized organization and routines over purpose.”⁴³

Phyllis Dain took the same tack in another *Library Journal* article written in the year after the Michener and Harwell articles appeared. She had perhaps a more focused assessment of how partisans paint situations in blacks and whites, while realists recognize the varying shades of gray in the image. Her view of the development of the American public library recognized that “... there was neither a Golden Age from which we have fallen nor a benighted era from which we have risen, only a complex past that helped to shape your libraries and ourselves as librarians”.⁴⁴ She accepted Harris’ contention that the original founders of the public library movement were indeed elitists, but she did not see this as rendering them less worthy of praise. In her perspective, their elitism was a fact of life for thinking people of their times, but she felt they took a progressive approach by seeking to open opportunities for the lower classes to educate themselves about middle class values. Though not one of her references, Samuel Green was a contemporary of the early pioneers and echoed her points when he considered some of their motives in a 1913 remembrance.

Both Mr. [Justin, librarian of Boston Public Library] Winsor and Mr. [William Frederick, second President of ALA, following Winsor] Poole believed that when the habit of reading is formed, the taste of readers improves and they naturally turn to the better class of books. They held, too, that much might be done and should be done by librarians to raise the standard of the reading of users of libraries. . . . Perhaps Mr. Poole and Mr. Winsor had too high hopes of raising the character of the reading of users of libraries who remain comparatively stationary in respect to education and, in the absence of the exercise of the thinking power, fail to improve in taste.⁴⁵

In her view of the past, Dain took a more kindly view of Harris' *bête noir*, George Ticknor, than had Harris, noting that Ticknor

was aristocratic and conservative, interested in the moral uplift and social control of the masses during a time of disturbing transformations, but to choose the free public library as the means would open opportunities for people rather than close them. It was an expression of the 18th century rationalists' faith that the lower classes could be integrated into society through education. This combination of conservative motives and ameliorative means, together with a wish to develop resources for scholarly work, may make Ticknor something less than a liberal and democrat, but it also makes him something other than a simple reactionary.⁴⁶

Harris, while probably able to concur with the last sentence in the above quote, felt "conservative motives" less worthy of praise. Dain was less unsparing in her assessment, feeling that no matter how conservative the original motives had been, the public library movement had resulted in a learning and reading environment that even a revisionist could agree could be conducive to eventual accomplishment of progressive goals.

Public libraries, despite their regulations and screened collections, have still maintained a noncoercive and individual orientation toward their users. One of the intriguing things about libraries is that they can be open-ended, democratic institutions that can lend themselves to whatever purposes their users may have in mind, and in the struggle to fulfill that potentiality the concept (or myth) of democratic accessibility is very useful as an ideal. Because it has not been powerful, the library has generally been immune from close scrutiny. Its use is voluntary, and it has not been circumscribed by law to particular practices or programs. Partly by virtue of its own powerlessness and relative insignificance, the library can find room to maneuver, to experiment, to offer the chance of people to get from it the means to

In a similar back and forth, Harris had lumped together the conclusions of the 1949 Public Library Inquiry into the elitist category. Robert Leigh, in his 1950 General Report of the Public Library Inquiry, adjudged that the public library was a failure as a public institution and that it would be well to direct the energies of the public library toward civic opinion and culture leaders. Looking at the half-empty elitist glass, Harris felt that librarians agreed with this thought, but "... their rejection of his proposal seems to have been based more on their fear of public disapproval than on any real commitment to serve the total community equally"⁴⁸ Dain, on the other hand, looking at the half-full practical-measures glass, said yes, the Public Library Inquiry had confirmed the public library's elite quality, but had also called for federal aid and had outlined a network to make such aid and thereby library resources available to everyone. The situation is not a simple black and white, Manichean choice.

The public library, like all socially sanctioned agencies, is and has been an instrument to serve the needs of an existing society to which it is tied by economic, political, and ideological bonds. The question we need to investigate is what this means and how it works out. The result will be multidimensional. Conditions change within the social systems and influence its institutions. Those institutions, like the society they serve, are not uniform and unchanging nor are they without conflicts, ambivalences, and paradoxes.⁴⁹

HOW – THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

One of those "conflicts, ambivalences, and paradoxes" has been the level of service the public library provided for groups that did not look like the original founders. Dee Garrison's 1979 book reviewed the early years through a lens focused on the roles of class and gender. In Garrison's view, the sense of genteel elitism, and the fact that women came to dominate the profession, led to the gradual marginalization of public libraries as social-political institutions.

Though not the only one to point out an even more significant conflict, ambivalence, and paradox, Dain concisely identified that “another important aspect of the relationship of the library to the lower classes and one barely touched on by historians is that of service to nonwhites by a profession that has been predominantly white, if not plainly racist, in orientation and composition”.⁵⁰ Rosemary DuMont, in a 1986 *Journal of Library History* article, saw it as a sort of benign neglect in her general accounting of the profession’s willingness not to directly address the topic, for the most part.⁵¹ Her observations rang true during a study of the minutes of the North Carolina State Library Board during the period 1956-1967. During a period of intense interest and activity concerning civil rights, the Commission members rarely mentioned race or civil rights issues except in a procedural manner.⁵²

Dan Lacy saw it as a power issue in 1977. The late nineteenth century economic changes required a new society in which workers needed to be literate. “A steady flood of technical, market, and financial information was needed to keep it going.” The society responded with an effort to expand access to knowledge to create these now-needed literate workers, such as schools, newspapers, postal service, and libraries. However, this effort did not expand outside the white community and knowledge was withheld from blacks and browns in order to withhold power from them.⁵³

Harris, as might be expected, saw the lack of interest in service to non-white populations as a consequence of the profession’s allegiance to the values of their patrons. In a 1976 *Libri* article, he asserted that public libraries were insensitive to needs of lower and middle classes; preferring to satisfy the donors, the socio-cultural elite; that they always valued stability, order, and moderation over human rights; and that they were authoritarian and elitist to those they perceive to be lower on the social scale.⁵⁴

As if anticipating Harris' comments, Dain in 1975 had written that such assertions might be the result of looking at the past through today's glasses. Libraries then and now had to serve their customers and such attitudes were, for better or worse, typical of the attitudes of the day.⁵⁵ The record, unfortunately, supports Lacy's, Harris', and DuMont's viewpoints that public libraries and those who supported them tended to gloss over the civil rights of the non-white population. DuMont quoted Lucretia Parker's 1953 master's thesis at Atlanta University that noted that no southern state actually had a law mandating segregation in public libraries, but there were only 39 cities in the south (including four in North Carolina) offering integrated service in 1953.⁵⁶

One of the most consistently progressive voices in the public library movement in the South was Louis Round Wilson. He hardly took pen to paper without commenting on the lack of library service for non-whites. His 1924 "Program for North Carolina Libraries" acknowledged the issue of lack of access by non-whites.⁵⁷ In a 1928 article, he called for the "Promotion of Library Service for Negroes".⁵⁸ In a 1943 review of the work on the North Carolina Library Association, he noted that while public library service had been greatly expanded, "... library service to Negroes has not been so general or so extensive as that to whites".⁵⁹ However, despite his humanity and progressive ideals, Wilson was a person of his times. As Harwell and Michener had noted in 1974 when discussing free public libraries, the early libraries were "as free as the times permitted".⁶⁰ Wilson and those like him were probably as free to consider blacks and whites as equals as the times and their upbringing permitted. While Wilson continually urged expansion of public library service to Negroes, nowhere in the references mentioned above can one find an advocacy of all races sharing a common library

resource. His efforts seem to be focused on adequate, equal, even good, but essentially separate, service.

Acknowledging the warnings of Dain, Harwell, and Michener about reading the record of the past in light of today's attitudes, it is still instructive to read what the record has to say. Wilson, in his 1943 review of the first forty years of the North Carolina Library Association, noted that the organization had its beginnings in 1904 when it was advised by Miss Anne Wallace of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta and Mr. A. H. Hopkins of the Carnegie Library of Louisville ("the two most progressive library centers in the South at that time"⁶¹). Miss Wallace had discussed the library movement in the South in 1907 and noted that, under the category of Retarding Influences, "In addition to the large class of illiterate whites that every section has to carry, the South is burdened with the extra tax of the heaviest Negro population in the United States".⁶² Granted, this was only 42 years after the end of the Civil War and some 58 years before the passage of the first Civil Rights Act, still the phrasing hurts modern ears. If a representative of one of the "most progressive library centers in the South" regarded a significant part of the citizenry as a "special burden," especially without providing a nodding acknowledgement about why this situation existed in the South, one may tend to think that maybe the revisionist viewpoint is the more valid.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

After reading much of what has been written about the evolution of the public library in America, one is left with the impression that it is a particularly American institution. The American-ness of the institution has little to do with the inner workings or the holdings of the public library, but rather has more to do with the intellectual soil from which it springs. The American public library is a part of its community (whether a geographical, political, sociological,

socio-cultural, or social-philosophical term) because its founders were members of that community. The classical-revisionist divide among public library historians when they assess the motives and ideals of the original public library founders finds echo in general American historical assessment of the motives and ideals of the national founders. The revisionist historian Page Smith, in a 1978 look at the development of the United States Constitution through a study of the evolution of the judicial branch of government, identified the basic divide in existence at the outset of the American national experience. He characterized the 18th and nineteenth century American political class as having been divided into two Consciousnesses. One was an older Classical-Christian Consciousness, a cosmopolitan and universalist outlook that was an offshoot of 18th century Enlightenment ideals; the other a Secular-Democratic Consciousness, a less worldly, more provincial outlook. Most of the framers of the Constitution were of the first consciousness; many of the common citizens of the new nation shared the values of the second. According to Smith,

it was the conviction of most of the framers of the Constitution ... that all men, of whatever class, were tainted with original sin and therefore, given the opportunity to exploit their fellows, would cheerfully do so ... The men who framed the Constitution, far from having any sentimental illusions about the “goodness of the people,” perceived them as another kind of power, a power disposed to hasty and intemperate actions, a power as ready to appropriate the property of the wealthy as the wealthy were to exploit them.⁶³

If one were to follow the logic of the revisionist point of view, the public library was founded in terms of the Classical-Christian Consciousness, a consciousness that feared and wanted to control the passions of the masses, the representatives of the Secular-Democratic Consciousness. However, if one were to look at the result of how that logic played out, one would have to concur with Dain’s perspective. The founders may have been elitists, but they chose to sponsor an institution that would provide a means for the masses to “ascend” from one

consciousness to the other; an opportunity to acquire power and wealth that they would then want to protect as much as the founders did. As Smith said when he considered the American government

Although it seems to me from all the evidence of history and from personal experience as well that the Classical-Christian Consciousness has all the better of the argument on an abstract level, in the practical political realm my sympathies lie quite unabashedly with the Secular-Democratic Consciousness. The reason for this is that, while acknowledging the intolerance, prejudice, and indifference to many of the most fundamental human rights that often characterize the Secular-Democratic Consciousness, my suspicion of all excessive concentrations of power in the hands of “the few” by far outweighs my ineradicable skepticism about the goodness of “the many.” Thus I would recommend thinking like a Classical-Christian and acting like a Secular-Democrat, and that is, in a real sense, the system that the Constitution and its most original component, the Supreme Court, has fastened on us for better or worse.⁶⁴

It would seem that is also what the system of the American public library has fastened on us for better or worse. One wonders if the patrons of local public libraries are cognizant of this statement of political philosophy made by the edifice where they go to check out books.

LOCAL CONTEXT – PROTO-PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN MOORE COUNTY

Nearly 30 years after the end of the Civil War, the Sandhills region gradually began to recover from that trauma and local people began to have enough financial resources to start thinking about libraries. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, libraries of a sort were opened in the towns of Aberdeen, Southern Pines, Carthage and Pinebluff. All of these were proto-public libraries in the sense that their governance and their locations were not continued into the public library systems that developed in the twentieth century. However, the proto-public libraries in all three towns do have some connection to the more lasting and stable institutions that were to succeed them.

The area around Aberdeen, a Seaboard Air Line Railway stop a mile south of Southern Pines and some six miles north of Pinebluff, had been settled by Scottish settlers prior to the Civil War though it was not a town as such until the railway came through. In 1898, Levi Branson's *Moore County Business Directory* characterized it as a transportation, industrial, and trading center.⁶⁵ Carthage, some fifteen miles north of Aberdeen, dates from the early nineteenth century and had been the county seat all that time. The towns of Southern Pines and Pinebluff, however, came later and were early versions of planned communities. Both were established as part of a late-nineteenth century effort to populate the Sandhills Region of the state and thereby bring in some needed economic stimulus. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Sandhills Region had been heavily timbered, with most of the longleaf pines either cut for lumber or boxed for turpentine. Seeking to attract new residents, John Tyrant Patrick, the State Commissioner of Immigration and the Chief Industrial Agent for the Seaboard Air Line Railway, helped to found and lay out the town of Southern Pines along the track of the railroad.^{iv} He then sought to advertise the area as a health resort and sought Northern investors to purchase winter homes in the new town. The effort to attract Northern investors could be seen in a newspaper called *The Yankee Settler*, published in Southern Pines. Its 3 March 1898 issue

^{iv} The term "Chief Industrial Agent" seems to imply that the individual was sort of a seeker of business for the railway, and especially in the South. The following description comes from a 1908 article in *Century Magazine*, a popular monthly published between 1881 and 1930.

"More than any other part of the United States, the South has been marked by a neglected aspect of things. This general behind-the-times effect has been one of the greatest drawbacks to the progress of the South. The management of this railway, aware how heavily its possibilities were handicapped by such conditions, set actively out to better them. It recognized that the value of the property was dependent upon the character of the tributary population; that increased popular intelligence meant increased prosperity, and consequently increased earning capacity for the railway. A broad scheme of development was therefore entered upon, and the work of lifting the population of six great States to higher levels of life, and consequently to vastly heightened productive efficiency, was undertaken along several important lines of coordinated effort. The office of Chief Industrial Agent was created, and the entire work was intrusted [sic] to a man of uncommon energy, breadth of view, and executive capacity. This official thoroughly appreciated the situation, and threw himself heart and soul into his task."

Sylvester Baxter, "The Railway Beautiful" in *Century Magazine* (New York: The Century Company, April 1908) found at <http://www.catskillarchive.com/rrextra/arrybeau.Html>.

mentioned the impending meeting of the village improvement society in Southern Pines, the term “village” seemingly more familiar than “town” or “city” for recent Northern arrivals.⁶⁶

Patrick, however, had moved his interests some seven miles south where, in 1884, he purchased 772 acres, which had been cleared of usable lumber, from Luther and Mary Speare, and twenty-two acres, including a millpond, from Peter Blue. The acreage was to become Pinebluff and the millpond was to become Pinebluff Lake. Patrick’s connection with Southern Pines became less important and he became most known for his efforts to develop Pinebluff. As he had done in Southern Pines, Patrick laid out Pinebluff in a series of blocks divided by wide streets, with each block having a communal center park location.

To entice new settlers to the Pinebluff, Patrick advertised in Northern newspapers and published brochures extolling the terrain, the climate, and the healthful advantages of the pine-scented air. As had been the case with Southern Pines, Pinebluff’s location alongside the tracks of the Seaboard Air Line Railway, along with Patrick’s position as Industrial Agent for the Railway, were used to help develop the location as a winter resort. As had also been the case in Southern Pines, the names of Pinebluff’s east-west avenues (Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New England, and Boston) illustrate the areas from which Patrick hoped to attract settlers. Early residents of Pinebluff included the Couch family from Tilton, New Hampshire, the Achorns from Boston, Massachusetts, and the Fiddners from Danbury, Connecticut. Patrick sought out potential residents who could help the community develop. In 1888, Patrick gave Levi S. Packard, who had been the Superintendent of Schools in Saratoga, New York, five blocks for nothing, hoping the arrival of his family would attract other buyers.⁶⁷ He also, no doubt, expected that Packard would help establish a school in Pinebluff. Packard did do just that, establishing what was called the Packard School in his newly built house.⁶⁸

The Seaboard Air Line Railway and Northern immigrants became part of the foundation for the earliest libraries in Moore County. Prior to 1900, Aberdeen, Carthage, Southern Pines, and Pinebluff were noted as having libraries of some sort. The first three libraries were offshoots of the railroad's efforts, but Pinebluff's was a home-grown endeavor.

S.A.L. MAGUNDI – THE SEABOARD AIR LINE FREE TRAVELING LIBRARY SYSTEM

“S.A.L. Magundi” Clubs were organized along the route of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad to serve the literary and cultural needs of isolated communities. The Railroad published a promotional newspaper entitled the *S.A.L. Magundi*; the unusual title of the club was probably taken from Washington Irving's *The Salmagundi Papers*. “Salmagundi” came to be known as a potpourri of ideas and the term was used in the names of organizations of the late-nineteenth century throughout the United States. The first three letters of the word conveniently formed an acronym for Seaboard Air Line, thus the name of the club in connection with the Railroad is seen as “S.A.L.” Magundi.⁶⁹

The Seaboard Air Line Railway did more than inspire literary clubs along its route; it also provided them books to read. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Eugene B. (Sally) Heard of Middleton, Georgia was in the habit of loaning her own books out to local children to read. She felt that there was a desire for reading, especially among people in smaller, rural communities and she sought to find a way to meet that need. In 1898, Everitte St. John, the vice-president of the Seaboard Air Line Railway was in Georgia on railway business when Mrs. Heard invited him for a visit to discuss her ideas about library service to rural communities. Apparently, St. John liked what he heard and he offered to have his railway carry books to any location along its line, free of charge, if Mrs. Heard could obtain the books and manage the program.⁷⁰ Mary Edna Anders, in her dissertation, indicated that St. John might have offered more: “... the Company would provide free transportation for the books anywhere on the railroad and would furnish funds to employ a librarian and to purchase incidental materials.”⁷¹

Mrs. Heard took up the offer and set to spreading books along the line. Working closely with John T. Patrick's network of Industrial Agents, she sought out local individuals who would serve as librarians for the crates of books she would have the railway deliver to them. At first, she seems to have sought donations of books directly from publishing houses by directly contacting them and soliciting support. She also wrote to Andrew Carnegie, telling him of her efforts. Carnegie sent her at least one check for \$1,000, a donation that provided her solid underpinning for the endeavor.^v Possibly in an attempt to entice Carnegie to contribute more to the effort, Mrs. Heard had, by 1901, begun to refer to the books on the railway as the "Andrew Carnegie Free Traveling Library." Her 5 January 1901 letter to Carnegie stated "The 'Gospel of Wealth' is gloriously manifested in your generosity to the free traveling libraries, which bear the name of 'Andrew Carnegie'."⁷²

By 1901, she was on the masthead of the *S.A.L. Magundi*, listed as an officer of the railway, in the Industrial Department as the "Sup[erintendan]t. Traveling Libraries." The special "Free Traveling Libraries" issue of the paper in January 1901 included correspondence between Mrs. Heard and President McKinley as well as with governors and other state officials, and with individuals who were managing the books she was having delivered to them. The effort had been noticed outside of the Southeast and the State of Wisconsin seemed interested in developing a similar program.⁷³ Her effort continued after her death and the railway delivered crates of books to small towns in the Southeast until 1955.^{vi}

^v The context of an exchange of letters between Mrs. Heard and Carnegie in January 1901 seems to indicate that Carnegie's January 1901 check was not the first. In "Another Thousand Dollars (\$1,000) from Andrew Carnegie 'To Help on the Good Work'" in *S.A.L. Magundi*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (Portsmouth, VA: Seaboard Airline Railroad, January 1901) 1.

^{vi} The Hamlet branch of the Seaboard Air Line Free Traveling Library closed in 1955. This library, which had opened in the spring of 1920, was housed in the Railway YMCA and was maintained by the railroad and the YMCA. In North Carolina Library Commission *Sixth Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission 1919-1920*. (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1921) 10.

ABERDEEN'S FIRST "LIBRARY"

The railway was directly responsible for Aberdeen's first library. Aberdeen had a S.A.L. Magundi club and an 1896 photo of its members revealed a group composed of seven men and sixteen women. This group, which included merchants, educators, and their family members, created Aberdeen's first library in association with the Seaboard Air Line Railway. Mary Page, who donated the building that would later house Aberdeen's lasting public library recalled that "A literary society, called the Salmagundi, started a small circulating library for its members, which was housed between where the bank and the Methodist church now stand. ..."⁷⁴ It was a small wooden building owned by the Page family, in the center of town near the railway station. The building, though quite small, was apparently too large to simply serve as the library and the library therefore shared the space with several businesses, including a barber shop.^{vii} The books probably included crates of volumes dropped off at the railway station by the Seaboard Air Line Railway's traveling library service.^{viii}

SOUTHERN PINES' FIRST "LIBRARY"

Southern Pines' proto-library dates from 1892 or so when a local "Musical and Literary Club" set up a circulating library for the public in spaces provided for them in a store in the center of town. However, these efforts seemed fragile and transient. As had been the case in Aberdeen, more solid help came from the Seaboard Air Line Railway and its system of traveling libraries. By 1900, the railway was dropping off crates of 60 or so books to be used as

^{vii} "The library building was bought by T.B. Creel and moved to Sycamore Street on the exact location of the present Aberdeen Supply Company." Richardson, 72. The building is still visible in 2005, still serving as part of the feed store that lies parallel to the railroad tracks in Aberdeen.

^{viii} Richardson's book includes a photo on page 72 of a man looking at crates of books. The caption reads "The first library at Aberdeen arrived on the Seaboard Air Line. A local boy was in charge of checking the books in and out." The image, however, was originally published in the 1 January 1901 edition of the *S.A.L. Magundi* with the caption "J. B. Upham, Editor of Youth's Companion, Boston, Mass., examining books of the Carnegie Traveling Libraries on exhibition in the Educational Department of the late Industrial Convention held in Jacksonville, Fla. Seaboard Air Line Railway." Aberdeen probably did receive books from the S.A.L. Traveling Libraries, but the picture in the Richardson book was not of the Aberdeen books.

a lending library for the town. A Mrs. Charles Stevick was the manager of the traveling library and checked them in and out from spaces provided for her in the King's Daughters Hall on Connecticut Avenue. The King's Daughters, a charitable and service organization, had a reading room in their Hall and Mrs. Stevick was the librarian of their club book collection as well as of the Seaboard Air Line Railway Traveling Library Collection. Over time, the King's Daughters organization gradually took over the complete management of the combined book collection and it served as a proto-public library until the current Southern Pines Public Library was founded in the 1920s.⁷⁵

CARTHAGE'S FIRST "LIBRARY"

The county seat of Carthage was not on the main north-south Seaboard Air Line Railway tracks as were Southern Pines, Aberdeen, and Pinebluff, but it too received a traveling library collection. In 1901, Mrs. E. J. Tyson (probably a member of the prominent Tyson family of Carthage, owners of the Tyson Buggy Factory) sent a letter to Mrs. Heard thanking her for the delivery of books to Carthage. "I believe you can never fully realize how very much we have enjoyed the library sent up – especially the young men, boys and girls. We cannot thank you enough. I will return it in two or three weeks, and would be glad (one and all of us) to get another as soon as possible thereafter."⁷⁶ There is no indication where the books were kept, but as the Tysons had a large house in the center of Carthage, it is entirely possible that Mrs. Tyson operated the library out of a room in her own house, or in one of the family's factory buildings.

PINEBLUFF'S FIRST "LIBRARY"

Despite the fact that John Patrick was so closely associated with the Seaboard Air Line Railway Traveling Libraries, Pinebluff seemed to have developed its first library on its own, through local effort and local contributions. However, the "local" contributions were from

“locals” who were actually people from up North, either having winter homes in Pinebluff or, more rarely, in the town to stay.

An undated (but probably 1903) advertising brochure for Pinebluff listed “Twelve facts which render Pinebluff a desirable place for permanent residences.” The tenth fact was that “(Ninety-five per cent) of the residents are wide-awake, well-to-do, up-to-date people from Northern cities and towns, with progressive ideas and the good of the community at heart.” To re-emphasize the point, the brochure concluded with “Pinebluff is settled almost entirely by Northern people, who have found the summers here to be as superior in actual comfort as the winter to the corresponding seasons North.”⁷⁷ These “Northern people” seemed to have come to Pinebluff carrying a love of books and reading. David S. Packard, Levi S. Packard’s son, included clippings from the *S.A.L. Magundi* in a folder of his notes on Pinebluff history. A clipping from the June 1899 issue included an article about Pinebluff. In the article, titled “Where Health Is Found; Progress in Pinebluff,” mention is made of “A literary club has been formed where the youth of both sexes gather to the edification of all its members.” A photo clipped from the *S.A.L. Magundi* annotated with the date 1900 shows 16 members of the Literary Club (eight women, eight men, and one dog).

David S. Packard remembered that the earliest library was probably a casualty of fire. In a discussion of the fires which periodically set the pine forests and pine buildings ablaze, he mentioned that one of the early fires had burned a library building that “proprietors didn’t [*sic*] have the desire to rebuild,” probably a reference to the private owner of the building that had been used as a library.⁷⁸ He also recalled that his family was part of the establishment of that initial library. “It may be that my mother, Mrs. L.S. Packard, initiated the idea of a public library here. I know that she used to mention in a casual way in letters to some of her old friends in her

native town, Plattsburgh, N.Y. and in other communities where she had lived after her marriage, that she was getting contributions for a library, and that she got them.”⁷⁹

The 6 October 1899 issue of the *Aberdeen Telegram* noted that Pinebluff had its own Village Improvement Association and that during their regular weekly meeting on the Tuesday prior, “A library of three hundred books has been donated to the town through the association.”⁸⁰ The “library” was probably not a library as one is now understood. In another undated (but circa 1903) advertising pamphlet for Pinebluff, an attempt to attract new settlers included the comment that “A Union Church will probably be built during the Winter of 1903-4. Pinebluff has a good public school and a library and reading room.”⁸¹

Pinebluff’s Village Improvement Association seems to have morphed into a more formal organization, the “Village Improvement Society”, and the new group was involved closely with the idea of establishing a library of some sort. A scrap of an undated article from an unknown newspaper discussed Pinebluff’s “Public Hall and Library”. The article seemed to be quoting from the articles of incorporation of the Society and indicated it to have been something started by Dr. John Warren Achorn, a dermatologist from Boston who had a home built on four acres at the corner of Boston and Pear in 1901. The article did not mention anything specific about a library, but the title of the column seems to indicate that there was some interest in a library as part of the effort.⁸² Achorn had stepped in to lead Pinebluff’s efforts to develop itself after Patrick retired from his efforts after 1903.⁸³ Records of the Society indicate that at its first meeting on 16 March 1912, they talked about building an Assembly Hall. David Packard’s handwritten notes indicate that “Mr. Achorn gave land for a [sic] Assembly Hall. Sold ice cream & cake to buy victrola for dancing at craft house on Boston Ave.”⁸⁴ Less than a year later, the minutes of the 4 January 1913 meeting indicated that the Society was working with the by-then

established Pinebluff Library Association to use the assembly hall to raise money for their respective endeavors.^{ix}

PINEHURST'S FIRST "LIBRARY"

The *Third Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* indicated that an early library had been started at Pinehurst as well. This proto-library, begun in 1904, was not a community library in the same sense as were those in Aberdeen, Southern Pines, Carthage, and Pinebluff. Instead, it was a reading service to guests at the Pinehurst resort. "It is open every afternoon from 3 to 6 for the circulation of books to subscribers who are the guests of Pinehurst and at half rate to the employees of the village. The reading room is free to all."⁸⁵ A subscription library with 1600 volumes in 1913, the resort reading service was fairly substantial for its time, but was restricted in its service and could not be considered a truly public library, even for its time and place. This proto-library service was to remain the sole Pinehurst library for decades to come.

RURAL AREAS' FIRST "LIBRARIES"

Early in the twentieth century, the North Carolina Library Commission was attempting to spread reading materials to rural areas, areas not served by any of the proto- or public libraries then in operation. Their September 1915 *Bulletin* described the service offered and the requirements for obtaining it.

... A traveling library is a collection of thirty-five or forty volumes which is sent to a community by the Library Commission for a period of three or four months, during which time the books are loaned to the people of the community to be read. At the end of this period the library is returned to the

^{ix} "Reporting for the Committee appointed to look into the matter of renting the Library Club House to be used for a public recreation room, Mrs. Akins said she believed the Library Association would put the Club House in good order, furnishing it with tables, etc., and putting up curtains, the Library Association and the Improvement Society to share the proceeds equally."

Commission office and from there sent to another community to be read in turn by the people there, while another library containing a different collection of books is sent to take its place in the first community. ... A traveling library can be obtained by any community in which there is an organized club or association with ten or more members. ... The only expense attached to the use of a traveling library is the cost of transportation from Raleigh and return.⁸⁶

Through 1918, such traveling libraries were being operated near Cameron in the northeast part of Moore County, near West End (in the western part), and in the rural areas around Aberdeen.⁸⁷ The *Sixth Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* in 1921 added Highfalls (in the northern part of the county), Jackson Springs and Samarcand (in the west), Vass (in the east), and “Pinebluffs” (in the south). None of the women who were named as local “librarians” were later noted in conjunction with the founding and operation of more stable and long-lasting Moore County libraries.⁸⁸ Though the service was eventually extended to a few more rural communities, the effort seems to have died out by the mid-1920s and any effort to provide books for rural communities would have to wait until the advent of the Moore County Library in the mid-1940s.

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- ²⁰ Sidney H. Ditzion, *Arsenals Of A Democratic Culture; A Social History Of The American Public Library Movement In New England And The Middle States From 1850 To 1900* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947) 68
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WE WILL GIVE A LIBRARY TO OUR TOWN

The first established public library building in Moore County was a gift to the town by a single benefactor. Today, there are three library buildings in Moore County that were donated to their towns by philanthropic individuals or foundations. One of them, the Webster Library of Niagara, will be the subject of a further discussion later in this paper. Given Memorial Library in Pinehurst was donated to the town in 1963 by the Given Foundation of New York City in memory of long-time visitors to Pinehurst. The library, while free and open to the public, remains a private organization. It has never affiliated with any governmental agency and thus remains outside the purview of this study.¹ The third library, however, has a story that is compelling and instructive.

Of all the public libraries in Moore County, the Page Memorial Library in Aberdeen takes pride of place in being the oldest continually used library building and oldest library organization in the county. When Page Memorial opened in 1907, the character of Moore County's public libraries was changed. Previously the books had been mostly temporary deliveries by the Seaboard Air Line Railway and the library facilities had been shared, loaned, or transient. Aberdeen's Page Memorial Library was different. Here, the library building and books were given by individuals, but owned by a library organization. And Aberdeen's public library was created, not because the "public" had caused it to be created, but because one woman and her family wanted it. Before looking more closely at the Page Memorial Library, it would be well to consider philanthropy and libraries first in a broader context.

**BROADER CONTEXT –
PHILANTHROPY AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Phyllis Dain noted in a 1996 *Libraries & Culture* article that public libraries should be seen as being as much “third sector” as governmental institutions. Dain characterized the first sector as the private sector, the second as governmental in origin, governance, finances, and mode of operation. The Third Sector was the nonprofit, non-governmental, and philanthropic sector. Public libraries, in their origins, certainly came from the Third Sector and, in their current state, are still oriented in this fashion. In fact, as governmental appropriations continue to be reduced in real terms, the role of the philanthropic sector is more important than ever.² A glance at the (admittedly neither complete, nor completely accurate) statistics for North Carolina public libraries reveals that the third sector contributes almost seven percent of the public libraries’ operating income. For the Neuse Regional Library System, almost a third of its operating income in the years 1999-2000 came from the third sector. The Johnston County Library System depended on the third sector for twenty-two percent of its operating income.³ Donors, therefore, play a role in three parts of the public library ecology:

- the political environment – how they affect the decisions of the governing boards
- the economic environment – the provision of money to provide service, and
- the sociocultural environment – what they want their library to do.

William Fletcher noted in the late nineteenth century that public libraries seldom evolved out of governmental actions. In his day, interested individuals started libraries with gifts and then offered them to the community. “Seldom has such a proposition been rejected by an

intelligent community. The library has already quietly won its way to the hearts of the people, more especially of the common people, who will be found ready to undertake its support on condition of its becoming public property”.⁴ Haynes McMullen’s 1987 study of New England public libraries concurred that they were almost always established by third sector philanthropy while Ernestine Rose’ 1954 study of the role of the American public library traced the evolution of public libraries as an evolution “by more or less perceptible degrees” from third to governmental sector leadership.⁵ In the South, the well-to-do not only had their own funds that they could put into libraries, they also moved in social circles where they could influence others with money and power to join the effort. The Seaboard Air Line Railroad Free Traveling Library System is a clear example.

PHILANTHROPY AND LIBRARIES IN THE SOUTH

One would not be stretching the facts too much to state that most public libraries in the smaller North Carolina towns would not exist had not wealthy individuals and families donated buildings and property for them. The majority of library systems in the state have at least one library named for a benefactor and examples abound in all areas of the state of libraries becoming reality after something was donated for that purpose. Some examples include:

- The Asheville Reading Club was established by wealthy residents in 1879. In 1899, George Pack donated money to the club to buy a downtown building for a public library.⁶
- “At Spray in Rockingham County Mrs. R. Frank Mebane equipped and offered to maintain a library for a year and will continue substantial help if the community will agree at the end of that time to enlarge the service”.⁷

- The “Sheppard Memorial Library at Greenville, the gift of Harper G. Sheppard, a former resident but now of Pennsylvania, opened on October 17, 1930”.⁸
- “Mrs. S. Clay Williams gave her home place in Mooreseville [*sic*] and \$15,000 for the erection of a library building. Additional funds for furnishing and books were given later. The library ... was formally opened December 12, 1939”.
- “The Richardson family of Greensboro gave \$250,000 to purchase the old First Presbyterian Church and additional property for a Civic Center to honor the memory of Mrs. Richardson’s father Dr. J. Henry Smith. The church building was renovated for the Greensboro Public Library which opened in the new quarters April 1939”.
- “Mrs. T. E. Johnston of Lumberton gave a library building to Maxton in memory of her father, to be known as the Gilbert Patterson Memorial Library”.⁹
- “Mrs. Laura Ellison Brown of Washington, North Carolina willed \$100,000 for the construction and equipment of a public library to be built on the property where the Brown home now stands. The library is to be known as the George H. and Laura E. Brown Public Library”.¹⁰
The George H. and Laura E. Brown Library on Van Norden Street in Washington was opened to the public in December 1953.¹¹

- “Miss Elizabeth Davis of Farmville has given money for a public library. Her brothers and sisters have given the lot, on which the library will be erected”.¹² “The new Farmville Public Library was opened in the spring of 1954. This was made possible by the generosity of Miss V. Elizabeth Davis who gave the lot, building and unlimited time and interest in planning and supervision”.¹³
- “The children of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob S. Mauney presented, on November 5, 1947, an unusually attractive memorial library and teachers’ home to the city of Kings Mountain”.¹⁴
- “In 1946, the family of the late Burton Craige of Winston-Salem presented to the Rowan County Library Board and the Rowan County Commissioners the site of the old Boyden home in Salisbury and \$75,000 toward a modern library building which is now under construction”.
- “A combined community and library building in Swan Quarter was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. R. H. George of Bradford, Pennsylvania, winter residents of Hyde County. This building provides the library a permanent home after five locations in eight years”.¹⁵
- In the early 1950s, Canton got a new public library from donations of a lot and money from the Champion Foundation of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company.

- In the fall of 1952, the Anson County Public Library moved into the remodeled Huntley home on second block of East Morgan Street in Wadesboro.¹⁶

The Good-Will Free Library at Ledger in Mitchell County was a unique example of philanthropy evolving into a free public library and then devolving back into nothingness. Charles Hallett Wing, a university professor from Boston and a part-time resident of the town, built a free public library in Ledger in 1887 and equipped it with books cast out of public and university library collections in and around Boston. By the early part of the twentieth century, it was the largest public library collection in the state. In 1909, it had 12,000 volumes and checked out 800 of them to a total of 50 borrowers (in a town of 52 inhabitants).¹⁷ In that year, Wing gave the library to Mitchell County on the condition that they county would maintain it for 8 more years. The county kept it open until 1926 when they finally let it close and sold off the building and the property.¹⁸

If philanthropy in North Carolina provided service to towns in which wealthy donors lived and socialized, there were also examples in other parts of the South of philanthropy aimed at other social groups. In Georgia, the underserved African-American community received at least some library service through the benefactions of philanthropy. The Marblehead traveling libraries were the idea of a Massachusetts philanthropist, James H. H. Gregory, who was interested in “Negro education.” Administered by Atlanta University, this service existed from 1910 to 1930 and loaned 3,000 volumes to communities and schools in small collections of 40-53 books each.¹⁹

In South Carolina, a white textile worker, Willie Lee Buffington of Saluda, South Carolina, established the Faith Cabin library movement which provided book collections for rural black communities in South Carolina and Georgia during the segregation era. Buffington provided the funds for the building and books, while the community was responsible for housing the collection and operation of the library.²⁰ In the Faith Cabin situation, the community was the black community, and funds used to house and operate the library came from donations, not taxes. Though not public libraries in the classical sense, they must certainly have seemed like public libraries to the patrons who used them.

CARNEGIE LIBRARIES

At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum from the Good-Will Free Library and the Faith Cabin libraries are the Carnegie libraries. Oliver Garceau felt that Carnegie libraries were a symbol of a community's desire for monumental self congratulation rather than interest in public library service. He felt a Carnegie grant was a way for a small town to get something for nothing and that they took the grant to establish public monuments more than public libraries.²¹ Such "monuments" are fewer in North Carolina than in some neighboring states. In part, this is so because while library supporters in Georgia (for example) actively sought Carnegie philanthropy (and obtained relatively many grants), North Carolina library supporters pursued Carnegie in a more casual approach (and thus obtained relatively fewer grants).²²

While recipients may have seen Carnegie libraries as good things, such an attitude was not universal. Garceau's attitude is typical. However, George Bobinski's 1969 book on Carnegie libraries acknowledged that many small village and town libraries exist only because of Carnegie and such towns have formed their only concept of public libraries from them. In

Bobinski's view (and he is not alone), the gift of a Carnegie library led to "benevolent apathy on the part of the public" and he saw the Carnegie donation as a hindrance to the development of better public library service in towns which received grants. In what sounds like a conservative attitude toward welfare, Bobinski wrote "It is probably true that Carnegie's gifts to small communities have made it difficult to break away from this pattern of local municipal control for more efficient and economical regional library service crossing city and county lines. It is now recognized that small localities cannot operate successful public libraries, even if they tax themselves heroically".²³

Abigail Van Slyck, however, saw Carnegie philanthropy through different lenses. Bobinski and like-minded colleagues seemed to resent the money spent on the "imposing edifice" if the service provided from within did not meet their standards. Van Slyck, on the other hand, felt that the Carnegie library, especially in small towns, served more than library needs. The Carnegie Corporation preferred more efficient open floor plans for its libraries, but deferred to local desires in the final decision on architectural decisions. Library efficiency and service might work in a larger urban setting, but if a town was so small that the Carnegie library was likely to be the only library, other considerations came into play.

If local library leaders favored plans that seemed foolish or deliberately ostentatious to (the Carnegie people), it was because library efficiency per se was not their primary concern ... The open plans (Carnegie) proposed could accommodate neither the variety of functions a small-town library needed to house nor the range of social classes that it was expected to serve.²⁴

Carnegie money did have a social effect that Bobinski seemed to overlook. In North Carolina, Carnegie grants to Charlotte and Greensboro paid to provide public libraries for black citizens. The Brevard Street Library in Charlotte was the first public library for black citizens in the South and the Carnegie Negro library in Greensboro was the only North Carolina black public library to obtain significant Carnegie money.²⁵ Considering the mood of the times in the

first half of the twentieth century in the South, it seems unlikely that these public library services would have been provided at all had not Carnegie philanthropy been a reality.

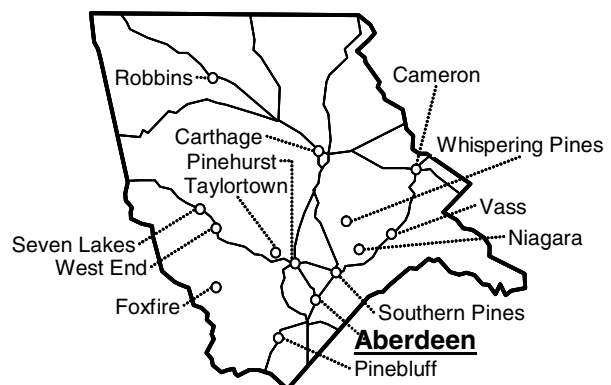
That it took philanthropy to provide library service to a population group that represented between a fifth (in North Carolina) and half (in South Carolina) of the total population leads to another aspect of the public library ecology. People and groups who donate public libraries, tend to feel they “own” the public library, especially in smaller localities. They feel such ownership because they were the groups interested enough to establish libraries and to pay for them. The story was the same in Moore County.

LOCAL CONTEXT – MOORE COUNTY LIBRARIES DONATED BY PHILANTHROPISTS

PAGE MEMORIAL

In late 1905-early 1906, Miss Mary E. Page, the daughter of Allison Page, one of the leading businessmen in Aberdeen, announced that she was planning to build a library “...finished and furnished complete...” for Aberdeen and present it to

the town.²⁶ Miss Page, who had moved from Apex to the area of Aberdeen with her family in 1881 when she was 12 years old, wanted the library to be built in memory of her father and to benefit the town of Aberdeen. Since a library was to be built, a managing organization was created to maintain and operate it. The first meeting of the Page Memorial Library Association was held on 12 December 1906 where a president, secretary, and treasurer were elected. Since, as the first Page Memorial librarian was to point out, “When Page Memorial Library was opened, February 2, 1907, there were not more than five hundred white people living in Aberdeen”²⁷, the



56 members of the library association represented a fairly significant segment of the people who would potentially use a library. The group, equally divided by gender, included twelve married couples and, in four cases, the children of the couple as well. Seven of the 56 founding members had also been members of the S.A.L. Magundi literary club in 1896. Miss Page, who was not in the 1896 photograph of the S.A.L. Magundi, was a member of the Library Association.

Nine more individuals, four women and five men, were to join the Association by their second meeting two weeks later on the day after Christmas, during which Miss Page was elected, along with a Methodist pastor, the “Rev. Mr. Caviness,” and the librarian, Mrs. Esther P. Jones, as the Executive Committee for the organization. The group also finalized an organizational constitution which stated that the Association’s “object shall be to raise funds for the running expenses of the library, for the purchase of books, and for the promotion of social and mental activity in Aberdeen.” Six members of the Page family donated money to the Association for the purchase of books, and one of the new members also contributed some cash to the effort. Members also donated magazine subscriptions for the new library.

It would seem logical that the heart of the initial Page Memorial Library collection might have come from the older library, which stood across the street from the new Page Memorial. However, a review of the library accession book reveals that the collection was instead a new combination of donated and purchased books. Three individuals – Miss Page’s brother, the publisher Walter Hines Page of New York City,ⁱ a Miss Caroline A. Thompson of

ⁱ Walter Hines Page seemed intent on helping his sister’s library efforts, but was not interested in actual participation. According to Anastatia Sims, Page had “fled to the North to escape southern provincialism”. The U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain during the First World War, he returned to Aberdeen only to be buried, after his death in 1918.

Anastatia, Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) 101.

Northampton, Massachusetts, and a J. McN. Johnson of Aberdeen – were cited for having contributed a considerable number of books, though Miss Page herself contributed a significant portion as well.²⁸ Mr. Johnson seems to have had a particular interest; 25 of the 35 books he contributed were works of Honoré de Balzac and the other ten were volumes of Presidential Papers. Miss Thompson donated both books and bound copies of *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's* magazines.

However, the Page Memorial Library was primarily a donation by the Page family. The cost of the building had been paid by Miss Page and of the 200 books on its shelves on opening day, 82 of them had been donated by members of the Page family.ⁱⁱ In fact, of the first 600 volumes added to the library through 26 August 1907, members of the Page family donated 178, with 108 of them coming from Walter Hines Page.

As had been the case with Mr. Johnson's contributions on opening day, other contributors during the first few months the library was open indulged their individual passions with their donation. A Mrs. Grace Powell of Parkersburg, West Virginia, gave the library thirteen volumes of John L. Stoddard's lectures about his world travels.ⁱⁱⁱ The first 600 volumes also included 273 books bought from booksellers with money donated by members of the Page family. Most of the purchased books came from John Wanamaker in Philadelphia and included some classics, some compilations on American and English history, a selection of current fiction, and a few self-help non-fiction titles.²⁹

ⁱⁱ "The attractive little building was completed in February, 1907, at a cost of \$2,000, and was given by Miss Mary Page, as a memorial to her father." North Carolina Library Commission, *North Carolina Library Bulletin, Volume Two 1912-1916*. (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1916), 18. According to Economic History Services (<http://eh.net/hmit/ppowerusd/>), Miss Page's contribution would have been worth a bit over \$40,000 in 2005, though it is hard to imagine that the Page Memorial Library building could be built for that cost today.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stoddard was apparently a world traveler who, like Mark Twain, made a living giving lectures on his impressions made during his travels. The first 13 volumes of included lectures about places in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and South America. See http://www.a2zcds.com/Products/Lecture_John_Stoddard_CD_249.htm.

Miss Page may have fully intended that the library “was to have been given to the town,” but her initial conception of “the town” of Aberdeen did not seem to mean that it would be given to the corporate and political entity that is the Town of Aberdeen.³⁰ Instead, it seems that her (and the Page Memorial Library Association’s) conception of “town” included only those town residents who joined the Library Association. Page Memorial moved more closely to the modern understanding of a public library within in few years after its opening, however. It was mentioned in the *First Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* as a “free” public library.^{iv} Since the Commission clearly indicated that other public libraries in the state were “subscription” libraries, something must have changed in the Aberdeen situation. A clue that a change had been made may be seen in the *Second Biennial Report* statistics on North Carolina public libraries where one notes that the Town of Aberdeen was contributing \$50 a year to the library. Since the annual income from Association membership and donations was only about \$100, the assistance from the town government was significant and may have been cause to open the circulation to all eligible town residents.³¹ According to a 1945 article in *The Sandhill Citizen*, “membership in the association was [originally] held by the payment of a small annual fee, but this plan and the association were disbanded when later the town made a small appropriation.”³² However, a 1949 article in the same newspaper announced an upcoming meeting of the “Page Memorial Library Association.” It appears from the context of these and other contemporaneous articles that the “Association” had evolved fairly early on from an association of members whose dues gave them access to the books in the library to an association of friends of the library whose interests lay in supporting it.³³

^{iv} “The library is free to all white residents of Aberdeen.” In North Carolina Library Commission. *North Carolina Library Bulletin, Volume Two 1912-1916*, No. 3, June 1913 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1916) 18.

The small appropriation appears to have come from general town revenues as there was no specific library tax levied on the citizens of Aberdeen. However, Miss Page and the members of the Association who continued to act as library trustees retained control over library operations and town government did not seem to intrude. Miss Page did not deed the library to the town until some time in the early 1940s.³⁴

PERSONAL CONTINUITY

Miss Page donated the building, was a member of the library's Executive Committee, donated books to the collection, and solicited donations for the endeavor. Her connection to Aberdeen's Page Memorial Library was typical of the close connection between particular individuals and the progress of the library. Although she was never the librarian, Miss Page kept her hand in library affairs for the next forty years. In 1944, she was noted in the *Sandhill Citizen* as the person who announced new donations of books to the library.³⁵ It appears that despite the fact that a librarian "ran" the library, Miss Page was the person who logged in the new books. A 1945 article noted that "[donated] books may be left with the librarian, who will in turn give them to Miss Page, to be properly catalogued and stamped with library labels, a process given, either by Mrs. Jones or Miss Page, *to every book ever to enter the library* [italics added]."³⁶ Her direct connection with "her" library ended only with her death at the age of 92 in 1961.

Miss Page, however, had any number of indirect connections to the library and its daily operations. The first librarian, Mrs. Esther R. Jones, was Miss Page's cousin and lived with Miss Page from 1907 until Mrs. Jones' death in 1932.³⁷

The second librarian, Miss Bertie Goodwyn, worked with Miss Page from the start of the Page Memorial Library. Miss Goodwyn had been involved with libraries in Aberdeen from

the earliest days. A member of the original 1896 S.A.L. Magundi Club that had been instrumental in the creation of the first Aberdeen library, she was one of the 1906 charter members of the Page Memorial Library Association, and she succeeded Mrs. Jones as the librarian around 1917.³⁸ Along with Miss Page and Mrs. Jones, Miss Goodwyn represented Aberdeen's library at regional and state library meetings where she was accorded the professional respect of being the "librarian" even though she does not seem to have had any formal training.³⁹

Though she could serve as the unpaid librarian, Miss Goodwyn, unlike Miss Page, did not seem to have a substantial inheritance to support her. She seems to have worked as a salesperson in an Aberdeen department store owned by her brother.⁴⁰ Her sales job, however, provided enough flexibility for her to open the library four hours a week, from 3 to 5 on Tuesday and Friday afternoons.⁴¹ She was also a participant in local book clubs. She was, for example, a member of the Thursday Afternoon Book Club, a women's organization that included both female members of the Library Association as well as several wives of male members of the Library Association.^v Miss Goodwyn's participation was probably both a mark of her social standing and also a way for her to continue to lobby the book clubs to support the library.⁴²

^v "The club was originally known as 'The Thursday Afternoon Book Club', but in later years the name was changed to that of the Walter Hines Page Book Club, honoring the name of the late Ambassador to Great Britain." In "Society and Personal News Items; Walter Hines Page Book Club Celebrates Golden Anniversary", in *Sandhill Citizen* (Aberdeen, NC, 24 October 1971) 4.

Miss Goodwyn held the position of librarian all through the 1920s and 1930s and was still in the job as late as 1945.^{vi} In that year, she was noted as having an assistant, Mrs. Ella Juat.⁴³ Miss Goodwyn seems to have retired from the librarian position in 1946, during a period when the library was nearly forced to close its doors, though she was still active with library groups. A “newly formed Library Committee” was announced in a 24 October 1946 article. The new committee, whose focus was on needed renovations to the library, included Miss Goodwyn as Vice President.⁴⁴ Mrs. Juat was noted as her successor in the 1947 North Carolina Library Commission report.⁴⁵ An article in the 29 January 1948 issue of *The Sandhill Citizen* noted “Mrs. Juat, faithful librarian, is always at the library on Tuesday and Friday rain or shine.”⁴⁶ Mrs. Juat may have been the first librarian to receive a salary because she was never mentioned in the newspaper as much as Miss Goodwyn had been. Instead, articles that mention the library through the late 1940s-early 1950s seemed to always mention the names of members of the Library Committee and never the librarian. The only mention of the librarian between 1948 and 1955 was a short item in 1949 noting that the Sandhill Book Club was giving \$15 to the library “to help pay an assistant to the librarian.”⁴⁷

Mrs. Mabel Bethune succeeded Mrs. Juat some time before 1955 and held the position at least through 1962.⁴⁸ A Mrs. Shirley Thompson seems to have succeeded Mrs. Bethune somewhere around 1965 and she was in turn succeeded by a Mrs. Lobbregt around 1970.⁴⁹ Mrs. Lobbregt was the last person to serve as the librarian of the independent Page Memorial Library.

^{vi} The dates that these individuals actually held the position of “librarian” had to be derived from mentions in the local newspapers. An undated one-page listing of “Librarians of Page Memorial Library” discovered in the files of the library shows seven names as the “Librarians from 1907 to 1987.” While the names and titles (“Miss”, “Mrs.”, and, in one instance, “Mr. & Mrs.”) are listed, there are no dates. The listing seems to have an error in it, however. It lists a Miss Ila Blue as the librarian between Mrs. Bethune and Mr. & Mrs. Lobbregt, but contemporaneous newspaper accounts mention a Mrs. Shirley Thompson as the librarian after Mrs. Bethune, while a 1940 newspaper article mentions Miss Ila Blue as the librarian for the Aberdeen school library, not the Page Memorial Library. Additionally, the *Statistics of North Carolina Libraries* in the annual *Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* listed A.L. Burney as librarian in 1939, 1940, and 1941. Burney, however, seems to have been the Chairman of the Library Association, but not the librarian. He was replaced as Chairman in 1946 when he moved to Southern Pines. (See “Lockey to Name Library Head,” *Sandhill Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 May 1946: 4).

In 1984, its independent existence came to an end as Aberdeen's Town Board agreed to join it into the Moore County Library System and thus become a branch of the Sandhill Regional Library System.⁵⁰

EVER SEEKING FUNDING

Page Memorial Library was a jewel in Aberdeen's crown when it was built in 1907. However, after 77 years as an independent, semi-private-funded local library, Page Memorial became part of two larger systems in 1984. That change was probably the inevitable conclusion to the library's seven decade history of having to beg for funds. Miss Page was quite generous in 1907 and in later years, but while her assets may have been large for her time and place, they were not infinite, nor were they on a par with some of the truly large philanthropic gestures towards public libraries in North Carolina and elsewhere. Miss Page gave what she had and her library had to seek additional funding where it could find it. As noted previously, the library had begun to receive an annual allowance of \$50 from the Town of Aberdeen at some time between 1907 and 1912. This provided some basic operating funds, but Page Memorial was always seemingly short on funds.

The supply of books was always dependent on donations and on finding ways to obtain funds for purchase. Perusing the newspaper reports about the library, it seems as if the situation remained fairly stable until the Depression years. Starting in about 1938, announcements of new books in the library tended to emphasize how many of the new books were individual or club donations. Typical, for example, was a March 1947 article that highlighted the nine books purchased by the library, and the 32 books that had been donated.⁵¹ A July article in the same year mentioned that the library had purchased two of the 87 new books on the shelves; 85 had been donated by individuals.⁵² In the Annual Report to the Library

Association in 1948, the librarian reported that during the year ending December 1947, individuals had donated 391 books to the library, while the library had purchased an additional 99 volumes.⁵³

While individual book gifts remained a significant source of new books well into the 1960s, donations of books to the library by clubs were also a way to increase and improve the collection. The Walter Hines Page Book Club contributed a memorial shelf in the library in 1945 “dedicated to the memory of those who have so selflessly given, and in honor of those who are now bravely fighting, in this, the bitterest of wars.”⁵⁴ A gardening club added books on gardening to the memorial shelf in 1951, in memory of a club member who had recently passed away.⁵⁵ In 1957, just after President Eisenhower had ordered federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce school integration orders, the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated a shelf in the library “to the memory of our deceased Daughters.” The shelf contained biographies and histories about the Civil War and Confederate personalities.⁵⁶

The library, while no doubt thankful for the donations, would probably have preferred to have such donations in cash instead of books, so that they could decide on the titles needed to stock their shelves. On at least one occasion, they did gently suggest that concept. “The library is grateful for the gift of books, but would like to have them recommended by the donor. Just being a book does not make it suitable for the library. The library wants the books you consider suitable for your own library.”⁵⁷ It did not seem to have much effect; donors probably figured that the books they gave were “suitable” for their own libraries.

The town’s annual appropriation seems to have been needed for building maintenance, so book purchases had to come from either donations or from other monies. One

way the Page Memorial Library sought to raise money was by acting as a clearinghouse for magazine subscriptions. It seems to have earned a commission of sorts on magazine subscriptions and money raised in this fashion was used for new books. The practice seems to have been begun as a way to buy magazines for the library, but by 1938 it began to be used for books as well.

For thirty one years, those in charge of the Library have procured the magazines on the reading tables by taking subscriptions for magazines and using the commissions for this purpose. Miss Mary Page is now ready to send in subscriptions, to any or all periodicals, at the same price any one can get them for themselves, and the commissions are used to get the magazines and anything over is spent for books for the library.

The tone of the item in the newspaper indicated that the Library was in dire need of some cash. “It is a small thing for each person to give but all the subscriptions to all the magazines taken in Aberdeen would amount to a good sum for our Library. Isn’t it time to show our pride in and loyalty to our Library? Won’t you see or telephone Miss Mary Page right away and add all you can to the support of the Library?”⁵⁸

The appeal seems to have worked. Ten years later the library was still reminding people: “When you give your Christmas gifts of magazine subscriptions this year, or renew you [*sic*] own, don’t forget to do it through the Page Memorial Library. For years the library has been doing this and has greatly benefited.”⁵⁹ In 1954, the practice earned the library a bit over \$100 that they could use on new books. By 1960, the library was earning almost \$400 a year from subscriptions, and the practice continued at least through 1967.⁶⁰

But money was always tight. The library got by on the town’s annual appropriation, on donated books, on commissions from magazine subscriptions, and on donations from local book clubs.

1954 was a typical year, one in which the Aberdeen Woman's Club gave the library \$34.50 while the Sandhills Book Club and the Walter Hines Page Book Club each gave the library \$25.⁶¹ The \$25 annual contribution was a staple. In 1958, the Sandhills Book Club again gave \$25 to the library while they gave twice that much to the guidance department of the local high school.⁶² A 1954 society column got right to the point. "Page Memorial Library services [sic] the town and the community of Aberdeen. The library association would like to serve in a bigger and better capacity ... The library is hoping to have some contributions from individuals and clubs. To date this year, The Walter Hines Page Book Club has given \$25 and the Woman's Club \$50."⁶³

The library seemed to be part of the background of life in Aberdeen, and the clubs often saw other more current issues as more in need of funding. The Cardinal Book Club in 1968 gave the standard \$25 to the library, but \$75 to the Aberdeen Playground Fund.⁶⁴ Sometimes the background was so understood as to be overlooked. In the same year, the "Walter Hines Page Book Club ... voted to donate \$10.00 [to pay for the salary of a lifeguard at the town lake] at this time since the \$25.00 yearly donation to the Page Memorial Library has not been paid and the club has no fund raising plans."⁶⁵

The clubs were not the only groups to sometimes overlook the library. In 1973, the town board voted to pay "the annual appropriation for the Page Memorial Library for the year 1972 (which was overlooked) in the amount of \$400.00 and for 1973 in the amount of \$400.00, making a total payment of \$800.00."⁶⁶

Some residents suggested that the library had more value than was being shown by its lean income numbers. A letter to the editor in 1976 noted that the hours of the library (two

afternoon hours a day, two days a week – a standard that had been constant since 1907) precluded working people from being able to use the library. The writer noted that “Many of us gladly pay the Southern Pines Library a yearly fee to borrow books. Surely we would do as much for our home town.”⁶⁷

One common thread in all the discussion of funding Page Memorial Library was that never was there any indication of having a dedicated library tax in Aberdeen. It was not as if the idea was brought up and rejected. If it was ever raised, it never reached a level of awareness sufficient to generate a comment in any of the local newspapers. This was true despite the fact that some of Miss Page’s brothers had been the mayor of Aberdeen and that, over the years, many of the members of both the Library Association and the various book clubs had been the spouses of mayors and town commissioners. A library tax was seemingly never discussed openly. Page Memorial Library would survive on contributions, subscriptions, and a small annual stipend from the town.

But while it might survive, it could not thrive. By 1965, it was borrowing books from the Moore County Library to augment its collection.⁶⁸ The citizens of Aberdeen regarded Page Memorial as their town library; the county library regarded Aberdeen as just another bookmobile stop. Part of the reason for the county library’s view was that the continued existence of Page Memorial was, from the view in Carthage, problematic.

UP AND DOWN

When the Page Memorial Library opened in 1907, it was one of the most imposing buildings in town. Its look and image were impressive enough for it to be highlighted with an article and a photograph in the early *Bulletins* of the North Carolina Library Commission,

probably in the hope that Aberdeen's model would inspire other towns to do the same. It obviously inspired the people in Aberdeen. The librarian described it in glowing terms in an article in the *North Carolina Library Bulletin*:

It contributes to the sightly appearance of the town. Occupying an excellent site the building is attractive and the grounds show signs of care. The interior is neat, tasteful and home-like, with its large fireplace, its reading tables with orderly rows of current copies of magazines, its low open shelves filled with books in bright bindings, it is a place of great charm ... Our library is a source of pride and pleasure to the town, and is used constantly and increasingly by the citizens, young and old.⁶⁹

"Constantly and increasingly" may have been true in the early years, but the library never altered from its original model. It maintained a constant and not increasing schedule of being open two afternoon hours a day, two days a week. In fact, nothing much was altered in the Page Memorial Library model through the 1920s and 1930s, even as the world was changing around it. To attempt to offset the economic ravages of the Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) tried to inject money into local library projects, but it seems that the only WPA library project that took place in Aberdeen was with the Aberdeen school library. It appears that the WPA paid the salary for the school librarian, but Page Memorial does not seem to have been engaged with any federal relief efforts.⁷⁰

Time and circumstance, however, must have been altering the small group of people who had established and operated the library. As funding became more an issue, so did maintenance of the building. After what appears to have been a long period of slow and genteel decline, Page Memorial Library finally hit a crisis point just after World War II.

In late 1946, a reorganized Library Committee met to discuss plans to restore the library. For the first time, there was no mention of Miss Mary Page. The group sought to

address issues including necessary repairs to the library building, more book shelves, better lighting, and “other renovating which will make the Library more attractive and comfortable.” This meeting must have been prompted by a crisis. The committee noted that they had obtained a gift of forty books from the Southern Pines Library Association and were directing the Book (sub-) Committee to “purchase new books, especially a large number for children, as well as for adult reading, and some necessary supplies for the Librarian.” That they had to accept a gift from Southern Pines must have been galling. The sense of crisis may be sensed in the final lines of the article: “It is hoped that with the reopening of the Library, the community will recognize its value and addition to the town. This is your library ... use it, enjoy it, contribute to it.”⁷¹

After that 1946 nadir, the Committee did get people to contribute to it. Over the next year people contributed books, time, and money. By June of the following year, the Library was able to hold an open house. “Everyone seemed pleased with the nice appearance of the library.” The Committee publicly thanked those who had helped by cleaning and by cataloging the books and creating a card catalog. Others were thanked for contributing the new lighting and for having it installed at their own cost. The town was thanked for paying for roof and window repair.⁷² More small improvements to electricity and water were added in the following year.⁷³

Its situation stabilized, Page Memorial settled back into normal rhythms. The only change occurred in 1958 when they decided to open for one hour on Saturdays and attempted to use this time as a reading hour for children.⁷⁴ This experiment was discontinued after two years because not enough children were coming in during that extra hour.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the same factors that led to the 1946 crisis were still there. The library still had to depend on donations of time, effort, and money and the town did not provide institutional or organizational support.

Page Memorial Library remained a small club, not a part of local government. As a club, it succeeded by the efforts of its members and those efforts, while well-intended, were not enough. The slow, genteel decline set in again.

The second crisis occurred in the early 1970s. Apparently, the book clubs were doing all they could, but the condition of the library began to embarrass the Aberdeen business community. An article in a local newspaper announced that the Aberdeen Jaycettes had decided to take on the restoration of the library as their 1971 project. The article was blunt:

Page Memorial Library ... is barely visible through the ivy and the gigantic trees ... Due to a lack of funds, the library is open only on Tuesday and Friday afternoons. The interior of the building is badly in need of repair. The walls need plaster and paint and the bathroom needs running water. More shelves are needed to hold new books and the very old ones now piled on tables. Other than a dictionary and a set of encyclopedias given last year by The Sandhill Book Club, there is no reference material for the school children of the community to use.

It seemed as if the Library Committee was happy to turn the restoration project over to the new club. The Jaycettes laid out a four step plan:

1. Seeking volunteers to work at the library so that it could be open Monday through Fridays.
 2. Clean up and beautification efforts on the grounds.
 3. Interior renovations to include plaster, paint, plumbing, and shelving.
- Interestingly, it appears that previous efforts to account for the books in the library had been less than fully successful since “A card cataloguing system needs to be installed in order to account for the books in the library.”

4. Obtain reference books for the library.⁷⁶

In September 1971, the Jaycettes approached the Aberdeen Town Board to request its approval for their plans. They said that the Library Committee had approved their desire to perform the necessary maintenance. Possibly concerned with financial liability issues, the Town Board told the Jaycettes that they would have to bring an estimate of the repair costs back to the Board for approval.⁷⁷ Since there were only 18 individuals in the Jaycettes, they had to have help to do what they wanted to do.^{vii} However, many of the older clubs who had supported the library in the past were starting to fade away. The “Aberdeen Woman’s Club is giving 100 percent moral support to the Aberdeen Jaycettes in their project of renovation and improving Page Memorial Library ... the club members, *most of whom are retired* [italics added], pledged their moral support to the Jaycettes in their library project and to help them in other ways, if possible to continue their annual contribution to the library.”⁷⁸

They did receive more than moral support from several areas. The town paid for repairs to the roof, a Pinecrest high school class helped with the outside shrubbery maintenance, and volunteer firemen did interior maintenance on plaster, plumbing, and heating.⁷⁹ The Sandhill Regional Library System assisted in technical matters. Jack Prillman, the Regional Librarian, helped with plans for the library and to clear out old and outdated books, disposing of discards themselves and sending old children’s books to an Aberdeen middle school. Mr. Prillman also offered cataloging assistance for newly donated books.⁸⁰ The rest they had to do themselves. They did attempt to institute the Saturday morning reading hour for children, they

^{vii} “There are 18 members in this auxiliary of young married women who are the ‘fighting source’ behind the Aberdeen Jaycees.” See “Society and Personal News Items; Jaycettes to Sponsor Children Story Hour”, in *Sandhill Citizen* (Aberdeen, NC, 14 September 1971) 4.

solicited donations for and held several rummage sales to raise money to buy books, and they kept their issue alive in the newspaper society columns.⁸¹

However, there was only so much that 18 women could do, especially since Page Memorial Library, despite having been deeded to the Town of Aberdeen, was not perceived by the Town Board as a central public service. The Town Board, for example, forgot to pay the annual appropriation for operating funds in 1972, the year after the Jaycettes project. In fact, the Jaycette project seemed to run out of steam after its year. There was no further mention of it or of any Jaycette interest in the library after late 1971. The pattern of genteel decline seemed to start again.

In 1975, during National Library Month, the local paper published an editorial cartoon depicting “a good library” as the cornerstone to “a community’s cultural growth.” However, it did not follow up this suggestion with any editorial commentary about the library and, in 1979, when it published a map of downtown Aberdeen in conjunction with Fourth of July celebrations, neglected to mark the location of Page Memorial Library, despite the fact that the route of the Fun Run passed in front of the library two times.⁸² The only notice given to the library was by the Town Board when they voted in 1981 to install a fan and repair the roof, which was leaking again.⁸³ Despite the occasional letter to the editor about the need for better library service, Aberdeen’s interest in Page Memorial Library was waning again and this time there might not have been a new group of women who would save it from just fading away.

TRANSITION TO A NEW MANAGEMENT MODEL

That decline was arrested in 1984, however, when the county library took interest in Page Memorial. Despite the fact that in 1971 the Jaycettes had trimmed the bushes and the

Regional Library had offered it help, by 1984 the bushes must have grown back and again masked the library from observation (if only metaphorically). An item in *The Sandhills Citizen* told the story.

Last year, an inquiry for information from a woman 20 miles from the Moore County Public Library made Librarian Helen Causey think seriously about setting up a library in Aberdeen, closer to the people of southern Moore County. It had been in her mind for a while before that, but this caused her to think seriously about the project.

Originally she thought rented space in one of the town shopping centers would be ideal, but at a Moore County library board meeting in January, she found out from Tony Parker that a library did indeed exist in the town, the Page Memorial Library on Poplar Street, but it was only open four hours a week. Erected in 1906 [sic], and owned by the town, it is a one-room library, one of the oldest continuous operating libraries in the area.⁸⁴

Helen Causey, the new county librarian, whose first library job had been in the Southern Pines library, who herself had been raised in Southern Pines, and whose mother had been raised in Aberdeen (two towns whose municipal limits adjoin each other), was unaware of the existence of Page Memorial Library, an institution that had been in place for 77 years at that time.

Having discovered it, she leaped into saving it. Page Memorial Library would join the newly formed Moore County Library System, and, by extension, would join the Sandhill Regional Library System. She proposed the union to the Aberdeen Town Board, offering to increase opening hours from four to 24 hours a week, to pay the salary of a library assistant, and to augment the local collection with books from the county library. The town would remain responsible for maintaining the building. There must have been some residual interest in keeping the library in Aberdeen because the town board accepted the offer, even though it called for the town to increase its annual library funding from \$400 to \$1,400. In return, however, the

county would add over \$5,000 a year in operating funds. The agreement was made on 11 June 1984.⁸⁵

By the end of the first year of the new relationship, Ms. Causey had remade Page Memorial Library. For decades it had been starved of funds. Its operating hours and its collections reflected the interests of the book clubs and other groups who had long supported it, though that support had evolved over time from financial to mostly moral. Despite regular discussion of the need for more children's books and more school reference materials, not much had been done. Ms. Causey's first year report indicated that her efforts to weed, classify, and update the collection had resulted in a book sale of removed works, with the proceeds used to purchase an encyclopedia and other reference works. The entire first year effort seemed focused on making Page Memorial more useful for and attractive to children. Page Memorial was not as robust and as attractive as she might have wanted it, but Ms. Causey's efforts had at least arrested its decline.

Ownership and money were still issues, however, and both could be seen in play in a small item in her report. She noted that only 4-5 of the original 14 chairs in the library were usable. However, they were "so in-keeping with the building we hated to replace them with modern chairs." She convinced the Friends of the Moore County Library to donate the money to repair the chairs. It probably would have been easier to simply replace them with new chairs, especially since the money for them came from outside Aberdeen, but it seems that Ms. Causey was sensitive to the feelings of the people who had been trying their best to maintain Page Memorial over the years and saw no need to cause hurt feelings.⁸⁶

Virginia Kimbrell, who in a 1976 letter had asked that the library be open more hours in the week, noted the improvements. In a 1985 letter, she commented that “the pleasure of reading was instilled deeply [in me in my youth] and has followed me all my life” and “We learn to appreciate many of the good things that enter into our lives because we remember having to do without so much ... Having our local library open 20 hours each week instead of four has meant a lot to me, especially since we have been able to obtain many new books.” Happy as she was with the expanded hours, she could still see problems.

But, how sad it is to see the lack of equipment to provide the minimum needs in good working condition. Would you believe that there is only one electrical outlet in the entire building? ... There isn't even a fan, much less an air conditioner, to cool the building. Our library is a beautiful, useful building, and a great asset to our town. Flowers and green grass have made that corner of town most attractive. Our town commissioners have voted a sum of money to revitalize our downtown area. That is wonderful. Perhaps some of our kind citizens would be willing to help us revitalize our beautiful library.⁸⁷

Some of them did. As had been the case with the library, Aberdeen's downtown was in a state of genteel decline and efforts were made to revitalize it. As part of the effort, the library was helped when the Town Board paid for air conditioning.⁸⁸ In 1992, the Town paid for some extensive renovation to the library in an effort to restore its original luster.

A top priority was the repair of the roof and gutters that had caused some water damage to the walls and windows on the north side. During the preservation process, particular attention was paid to the 85-year-old windows and woodwork in the building. Several windows had to be rebuilt but great care was taken to preserve the old wavy glass and as much of the original woodwork as possible. Some of the original woodwork was stripped of old paint and darkened varnish and refinished to its natural state. Care was taken to preserve the primary architectural assets of the building has made a tremendous difference in the overall look of the facility.⁸⁹

In 2005, the library still looks a lot like it must have looked in 1907. It is in the original building, with the original doors, original windows, and only slightly modified general floor plan. The single room has 12 foot ceilings and tall windows, allowing a lot of light to illuminate the area. However, as has been the case time and again over the past 98 years, the design of the gutters is causing roof leakage problems once more, and there is visible damage to the walls and windows on the north side.^{viii} Water damage and a weak ventilation system leave the room with a strong musty odor. Bookshelves line the exterior walls and are completely full. Most of the collection is adult fiction. The non-fiction and reference sections are very small, cramped into the northwest corner of the room, across from the children's and young adult section cramped into the northeast corner. The current librarian would like to expand the children's collection, but there is no room for expansion. As Ms. Kimbrell pointed out in 1985, there are still no electrical outlets beyond the librarian's desk in the center of the room. There are, however, several Gates Foundation computers on the south side of the room and they are well-used. The librarian has the time to provide personalized book finding services for users, obtaining books from other libraries in the regional system and calling users at home to tell them that their books are available.

Page Memorial Library in 2005 feels like a monument. It stands proudly on the corner of Poplar and Main in the center of town, opposite the Page Memorial Methodist Church, and just down the street from the old railway station. There are no parking spaces near the library, but the lack of activity on the streets of Aberdeen means there are always angle

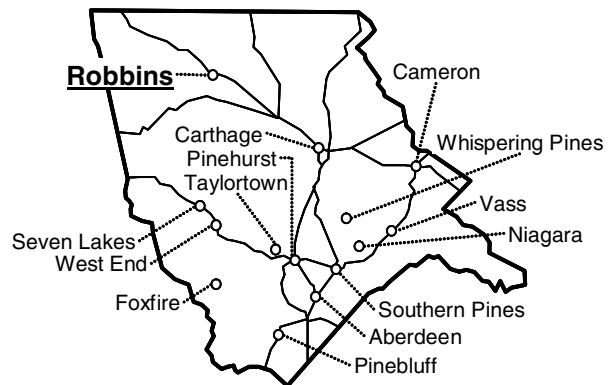
^{viii} The rain gutters on the building are constructed not on the end of the eaves as is normal in contemporary construction, but within the roofline of the building, much as in the same manner as they are at Manning Hall, the home of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Since the gutters are out of sight, they are out of mind and fill up with leaves over time. Once filled with leaves, they cannot carry away the rain water, which overflows the gutters and runs down the inside of the plastered walls toward the book shelves.

parking spaces nearby on Main Street. The fact that there are always parking spaces available tells one something about downtown Aberdeen. It is a pretty place, but despite efforts to revitalize it over the past decade or so, downtown Aberdeen and Page Memorial Library have the same feel. They both seem to be barely holding on, anchored in the past, but with no firm connection to the future. And the present, for both of them, looks iffy as well.

ROBBINS

EARLY YEARS

The story of the library in the town of Robbins bridges the themes of philanthropy and club/community involvement. In fact, the name of the town itself reveals a bit of both. The area was originally settled in the late 18th century and went through various names in the 19th before settling on the name Elise, after the name of a local school, the Elise Academy. Near the end of the century, the local postmaster attempted to register the name of the local post office as Elise, but was rebuffed by the U.S. Post Office Department. The Department thought that Elise was too similar to the names of other towns in the state and insisted on a new name. According to local histories, the Department sent them a list of recommended names. The Postmaster was sitting on a coil of rope in the general store when he read the names and when he came to the name Hemp. "... Mr. Horner checked the word, and said, 'We'll name it Hemp.' So on May 28, 1900, Mr. George Horner was appointed the first postmaster for Hemp."⁹⁰ So, Hemp it was.



Or at least it was until 1943. In 1930, a New York businessman named Karl Robbins had bought the Pinehurst Silk Mill (later the Robbins Cloth Mills) in Hemp and the business prospered. Robbins invested in a number of community efforts over the next decades, notably contributing Hemp's matching funds, thereby allowing Hemp to receive a Works Projects Administration (WPA) grant for a Community House in 1940. In 1942, Hemp citizens began to think about honoring Robbins and in 1943 they petitioned the North Carolina Secretary of State for permission to rename Hemp as Robbins. The town was renamed by mid-April 1943, but was then caught up in suits and injunctions filed primarily by citizens of Carthage. Some of the hostility from Carthaginians to the Hemp name change was tinged with anti-Semitic feelings. The suits, however, failed and an article in the 9 December 1943 issue of *The Moore County News* noted that the new name would continue to be Robbins.⁹¹

The first library in Hemp must have predated 1936. In that year, the new town hall was completed. A two story brick building, near the railroad tracks and near the expanding Pinehurst Silk Mill, the town hall housed the mayor and town clerk, the jail, the fire department, the library, and a community hall.⁹² The town, however, did not seem to incorporate the library into its governmental structure. The Hemp Library, as was the case in other Moore County towns, was funded and operated by a local Woman's Club. The relationship to town government must not have been close, for when the WPA Community House was built, the library moved to new quarters there.

The library was established on June 15, 1941, mainly as result of the ceaseless work and interest of Mrs. C. C. Frye, sponsored by the Hemp Wooman's [*sic*] club and the Lions club, with the assistance of the W.P.A. ... Only a few months ago the library was moved to new and more adequate quarters at the community house and it is here where Mrs. Grace Byrd feels right at home handling all the work with great efficiency and charm.⁹³

The Hemp Library seemed to have been a successful affair in the early 1940s. When the WPA began to cut back on local funding in 1942, the Hemp Library managed to retain funding while the larger town of Carthage commented sadly that it was to lose its funding. “There is a loophole somewhere in the defense program, however, that will permit funds for library work under the head of recreation, provided the circulation meets a certain figure ... The Hemp library, which has had a larger circulation than ours all along, can meet this requirement and will continue to obtain a paid worker ...”⁹⁴ Despite their best efforts, it appears that the Robbins library eventually had to close, probably in 1943. It was to reopen on 12 November 1944, in conjunction with the establishment of the new Moore County Library a week prior.⁹⁵

One of the key founders and supporters of the Hemp Library was W. Stuart Evans. A teacher and administrator at Elise Academy, Evans was also the recreation director for both the town of Robbins and for the Robbins Mill, as well as being a charter member of the Hemp/Robbins Lions Club. With students coming to his school from rural areas in the northern corner of Moore County, Evans must have been sensitive to the need for library services to the unincorporated areas of the county. However, Evans must have also noted early on that local library efforts, even in incorporated areas such as Robbins, could not continue indefinitely relying solely on the support of clubs and philanthropists. Accordingly, he was one of the individuals who worked to create a county library that could provide reading materials to rural residents.⁹⁶

By 1945, the county library bookmobile was in operation and was visiting the Robbins Library every Friday with books to augment its collection. The visit to Robbins was less like a bookmobile drop, however, and more like a day at a county library branch. The new county librarian spent her entire Fridays at the library in the Robbins Community House.⁹⁷ It seemed as

if the arrival of the county librarian also marked the end of club involvement with the Robbins Library. The library was only to be open this one day per week, and since the county librarian was there to keep the doors open, there seemed to be little interest (or time) for volunteers to assist her. By 1948, this situation had to change. Robbins residents apparently liked having their library open at least one day a week, but the county librarian had no extra staff to manage it. The clubwomen came back to the library. In her annual report, the county librarian reported that “The Robbins Woman’s club is assuming responsibility for keeping their library open during the vacation period, at least, with new books for adults and children being added to their own basic collection from the county library stock.”⁹⁸

This seemed to become the new model. If the people of Robbins wanted a library, they would have to do something to keep it open. The county librarian provided new books and some assistance, but clubwomen had to pay for it. The county librarian’s annual report in 1949 noted that while the Carthage Town Board paid \$180 per year to keep the Carthage Library open one day a week, in Robbins the cost was born by the Woman’s Club.⁹⁹ In 1950, the county librarian was to report “The branch in Robbins is in the Civic Center and is open Friday afternoons with Mrs. Herbert C. Davis at the desk. She circulated 3,945 books in 1949-50.”¹⁰⁰

The Community House project seemed to have come to a crisis of sorts in the mid-1950s and the library moved back to the Town Hall in December 1956, to be open now on Thursday afternoons. The clubs that provided the support to keep the library open clearly sought to garner more local interest and support from the library. An item in the newspaper noted “The public is urged to inspect the new quarters and to make use of all the facilities available. It is a big asset to any town to have a public library.”¹⁰¹ Usage must have remained less

than desired as the newspaper continued to urge more usage: “Take advantage of the pleasant hours one can have by reading a good book ... Use your town Library.”¹⁰²

Women’s Club members continued to solicit support for the library wherever they could find it, but seemed to concentrate on looking for donations of time, money, and interest solely from civic organizations. While the newspaper reported library topics being discussed at many different club meetings, it was never noted as being a topic of discussion at town board meetings though the 1950s and into the early to mid-1960s.¹⁰³

The simultaneous establishment of the Sandhill Regional Library System and the Moore County Library System in the 1960s, however, must have given some hope to Robbins’ clubwomen that the situation might change. Although there was no sign of a political change in newspaper reports of town board meetings, by 1969 someone must have gotten to the town board and prevailed upon them to request help from the county. The Moore County Library Board of Trustees reported in the spring of that year that they had received “a letter from the Robbins’ Town Board requesting that their library be operated by the Moore County Library as a branch.” They felt that Robbins had met the requirements for a branch, namely that “the town requesting the branch is of a certain size” and “if the town provides an attractive location for a library and supplies its heating, air conditioning, lighting and furnishings and puts its operational funds through the county library’s budget”, then the county could provide funds to keep it open at least 18 hours week.¹⁰⁴ At about the same time, the *Moore County News* published a special edition on the various libraries in the county. Included in the edition was a photo of the Robbins library, a one room facility with what looked to be somewhat less than 1,000 volumes. The caption read “The Robbins Library is currently housed in one room of the City

Hall, but soon will be moving into its own building.” Such a move does not appear to have occurred.¹⁰⁵

Although “The Library Board found that the Town of Robbins had met all the requirements for a branch library ...” something must have gone awry. Most likely, the town of Robbins was willing to offer the space for the library in its town hall, but would not or could not provide the required operational funds for the county system to use. At a Women’s Club meeting in 1972, “... Mrs. Margaret Shields announced the club had been asked to give assistance to the Robbins Library. The president appointed a committee to look into the needs of the library and report back to the club.”¹⁰⁶ It appears that clubs again took over operation of the library and the town gave them a bit more space on the second floor of town hall to operate.¹⁰⁷

Little as this was, it seemed not to last. The library seemed to have shut down some time in the mid-1970s and library service for Robbins continued to be provided by the Moore County Bookmobile. The town apparently wanted to have its own library, but funding remained a problem. Since the Robbins Library seemed not to have become a branch of the Moore County Library, its books still belonged to Robbins when it was compelled to cease operations. Accordingly, it seems that the library in Town Hall was closed and the books were moved to a “...depository located in downtown Robbins in the old Tar Heel Drug Store.”¹⁰⁸

In 1979, the town thought to raise money by selling the old Community House for cash. An article discussing the pros and cons of such a sale pointed out that the town had up to \$8,000 in a “library fund.” At a town board meeting in January 1979, a citizen suggested that the town might take the funds from the Community House sale and combine them with the library

fund to build a combination library-recreation hall. According to the author, “His proposal was not then examined in much depth.” In fact, the idea was passed over in favor of spending any money gained from the sale of the Community House to fix the town water system.¹⁰⁹

ROCK BOTTOM AND A NEW ACTOR

Shortly thereafter, the fortunes of the Robbins library took a new turn. At another town board meeting held, in part, to discuss the sale, the idea of a library was again tabled. However, a new committee was formed in order to recruit a new doctor for Robbins.¹¹⁰ Four years later, Dr. William Lee Bell, his wife Theron, and their 17 month old son arrived to open a family practice in Robbins.¹¹¹

Theron Bell was from High Point, North Carolina, and had grown up with the idea that one always had a local library to go to. What she found in Robbins was no local library and so had to drive her children to libraries in Carthage or Seagrove. But Robbins had had a local library for some time, even if there was no longer one available by the early 1980s. Mrs. Bell was not satisfied with the services of the bookmobile, nor with the necessity to drive 17 miles to get to the Moore County Library in Carthage. She might well have been able to manage the drive, but she felt that the lack of a library in Robbins put too much burden on working parents in the north end of the county.

In the early 1990s, she established the Robbins Area Library Committee, eventually composed of twenty individuals. The group was chaired by Theron Bell and included both political figures, such as the mayor of Robbins, and local library figures.^{ix} In the latter group were included the then-Director of the Sandhill Regional Library System, William G. Bridgman,

^{ix} Theron Bell was herself an elected member of the Robbins Town Board of Commissioners as well.

the then-Director of the Moore County Library System, Helen Causey, and several members of the Friends of the Moore County Library. This was a well-connected group.

They then set about finding ways to open a library in Robbins. As had been the case in previous attempts to open or keep open a library in Robbins, the town did not seem ready or able to provide public funds for such a purpose. The group would have to use an older funding model to achieve its goals.¹¹²

This would require raising money locally from donations and obtaining political support for county funding from the county commissioners. By 1992, they had convinced a local bank to provide them some space to use for fund raising purposes. Theron Bell had also engaged the county librarian in the effort and had gotten county newspapers to provide a continual flow of publicity. A photo in the 16 July 1992 edition of *The Pilot* showed her and the librarian, Helen Causey, opening the space in downtown Robbins where the organization would begin “accepting books and cash donations ...” A photo in the 6 August 1992 edition showed her selling raffle tickets at a dollar a ticket to win a signed copy of a book, the proceeds going to the new library fund. The group urged town government to reach out to county business and a photo in the 13 August 1992 edition showed the Carolina Telephone Company’s Southern Pines Community Relations Team presenting a \$1,000 check to Mrs. A. A. Vanore of the Robbins library committee.

Their efforts to raise money from sources large and small paid off by fall 1992 when they convinced the county commissioners that they were serious. The county then committed to provide enough funds to bridge the gap between what they had raised on their own and what

they needed to create a match for a federal library construction grant. A September newsletter from the group reported

The Robbins Area Library Committee has worked diligently to bring this important project to fruition. Already they have secured a federal matching grant of \$139,700, raised an equal sum from donations and have secured a beautiful site for the building. This has definitely been a community project and we appreciate all their good work and your donations.¹¹³

Philanthropy played its part as the “beautiful site for the building” was a lot donated by Theron Bell and her husband, on the hill behind his medical practice near the center of Robbins.

By fall 1992, a design had been agreed upon. Construction began shortly thereafter on a 2500 square foot building. As construction progressed, the library committee continued its efforts to secure contributions, asking for donations of books, magazine subscriptions, and cash.

Construction was completed in February 1994 and the Robbins Area Library held its Grand Opening on 3 March 1994. Theron Bell, who had spearheaded the drive and was by now a member of the North Carolina State Library Commission, presided over the dedication. At the ceremony, the old philanthropic model came once more to the fore as the mayor presented Mrs. Bell with a check from the Robbins Foundation of New York (the Karl Robbins family foundation). The \$15,000 check was to go for purchase of books for the new Robbins Area Library.¹¹⁴

The effort to build political support from the county commissioners paid off again shortly after the opening when the commissioners agreed to use county Data Processing Funds to buy computer equipment for the Robbins Area Library. The Chairman of the Board of

Commissioners used the grant to offer “one final congratulations to the northern Moore community for seeing the library project through so successfully.”¹¹⁵

ROBBINS LIBRARY TODAY

The Robbins Area Library is not immediately noticeable to a visitor driving through Robbins, coming, for instance, from Carthage and heading towards Seagrove or the North Carolina Zoo. One almost has to know where to look to see it because it sits on a hill, on a side street, off a street that intersects the main thoroughfare of the town. Once one knows where to look and sees the sign, its appearance is quite obvious. A red brick building, somewhat in a classical style similar to the older buildings at any old university (such as at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), the library has a white columned portico out front, centered on the building, with three large multi-paned windows to each side, sheltering the entryway from the weather. It looks like an academic place; it looks like what one might expect a library to look like.

The entryway provides clear evidence that this building did not just appear here as a gift from above. There are a series of plaques on the wall of the entry passage that mention the contributors who made, and continue to make, the library a going concern. Ranked in terms of the amounts donated, the largest group includes the 249 engraved names of “Contributors”, names which include individuals, couples, families, and businesses. There are also 18 “Sponsors”, which include memorials as well as more families and businesses; 14 “Patrons”, mostly memorials and more businesses; and seven “Benefactors”, composed of two foundations, two banks, two doctors, and a north Moore County organization. At the top of the giving pyramid are four “Angels”, each of whom have contributed over \$10,000 to the library. The four include the Robbins Foundation (which continues to make an annual donation); the

County of Moore (which contributed a lot of the matching funds necessary to obtain the Federal construction grant); the parents of former Senator and Vice-Presidential candidate, John Edwards; and the family of Theron and William Bell.

As one continues into the main room of the library, the feeling that this is a familiar physical space continues. It is a large single room with a tall ceiling, well lit from the large windows. The place is new and has modern appliances, but it immediately reminds the visitor of places that have been around a long time. One can see that it is new, but the feel is of an older, more settled, model of a library. It is comfortable. The layout of the room places the librarian in the center and provides two well-lit reading nooks to the rear and the right of the librarian, one for adults and one for children. A separate nook near the entrance contains a set of Gates Foundation computers which are in near-constant use. A glance at the collection reveals that it is mostly adult fiction. The non-fiction section is mostly history and biography, and the reference section is fairly limited. It feels like a good place to come to find a book for pleasure reading, or maybe to read a magazine or newspaper in a comfortable surrounding.

While the library facility has the look and feel of an older library model, the patrons display a different model. The librarian mentioned that maybe half of the patrons are Hispanic and she has tried to expand the Spanish collection in the library. At present, most of the Spanish language books are for children, but the librarian is trying to increase the amount of adult Spanish books, both fiction and non-fiction. She has noted that Hispanic children, who are exposed to English in school, tend to drift towards checking out English language children's books. The majority of the Spanish language books checked out of the library are checked out by Hispanic adults.

Of the patrons who stopped by the library on a rainy day in June 2005, about half of the adults went directly to the computers, the remaining half stopped at the desk to chat with the librarian about goings-on in town and about reading. At least one of the patrons was a government employee. When asked about the amount of local political interest in or support for the library, the librarian said that, for the most part, town officials are removed from library operations. She only interacts with them when there is a maintenance issue. Her sense was that the remove was both operational and emotional. Her feeling was that town officials were not readers by inclination and were inclined to ignore the existence of the library unless they needed to be there for representational reasons. She was satisfied with the level of support the town provided for the library facility (they have a contract with the county that requires such support as a condition of county funding), but the feeling for the library did not go much beyond that. In a way that was reminiscent of the travails of the public library in Robbins over the decades, the librarian felt that local town officials really did not care whether there was a library in Robbins or not.

One of the town officials cares, however. As well as being the chairman of the Sandhill Regional Library System Board of Trustees, Theron Bell is also a Robbins town commissioner. It is clear from a look at how she organized the group who created the Robbins Area Library and how they interacted with donors and political agencies that she is skilled at dealing with the many interest groups that must be energized in order for a local library to succeed. However, like the Robbins Area Library building itself, Mrs. Bell is an example of an older model of library supporter. The model that comes to mind is Miss Mary Page of Aberdeen. Miss Page had donated Page Memorial Library to the Town of Aberdeen in 1907, but did not actually sign over the deed to the property to the town until the late 1940s. The Bell

family donated the land for the Robbins Area Library and the building was presented to the Town of Robbins. The property on which it stands, however, remains in the hands of the Bell family.

Theron Bell cares about the Robbins Area Library. But then, Mary Page cared about Page Memorial Library too.

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² Phyllis Dain, “American Public Libraries and the Third Sector: Historical Reflections and Implications,” *Libraries & Culture* 31 (1996): 56.

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⁴ Fletcher 28-29.

⁵ Ernestine Rose, *The Public Library in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 14-15.

⁶ Valentine, “Steel, Cotton, and Tobacco: Philanthropy and Public Libraries in North Carolina, 1900-1940” 275.

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¹⁰ North Carolina Library Commission, *Seventeenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1940-June 30, 1942* [pamphlet] (1942) 16.

¹¹ North Carolina Library Commission, *Twenty-Third Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1952-June 30, 1954* [pamphlet], (1954) 26-27.

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¹⁸ Robert G. Anthony, Jr., “Bringing Boston Books to the Carolina Mountains: Charles Hallett Wing and the Good-Will Free Library at Ledger,” *North Carolina Libraries* 56 (1998): 16-18.

¹⁹ Anders 60.

²⁰ Dan R. Lee, “Faith Cabin Libraries: A Study of an Alternative Library Service in the Segregated South,” *Libraries & Culture* 26 (1991): 169-182.

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WE ARE THIS LIBRARY, WE OWN IT

Aberdeen's Page Memorial Library had been preceded by a proto-library provided, in part, by the railway. The county seat of Carthage, some fifteen miles north of Aberdeen, also had a railway provided proto-library and also had some citizens wealthy enough to have the ability to create a permanent library. In Aberdeen, Miss Mary Page and her family donated the library building and most of the books, and created a library organization to manage it (though Miss Page kept a hand in its operation for decades). In Carthage, on the other hand, the library was the creation not of an individual, but of an organization. Carthage's public library was an outgrowth of women's clubs. In Aberdeen, the Page-provided library has remained intact, in the Page-provided building, for almost a century. In Carthage, the club-created library lived a peripatetic existence for the 57 years of its existence. The libraries in both Aberdeen and Carthage grew out of similar milieus. Why did they develop in different ways? Perhaps one should attempt to answer this question by looking at how clubs and small town public libraries have related to each other over time.

**BROADER CONTEXT –
THOSE WHO OWN – THE SERVED**

In 1939, Wilhelm Munthe, a Norwegian librarian looking at the American public library scene, noted "There is nothing *a priori* about the concept, library. Any particular library organization is a product of the social milieu in which it has grown up".¹ The social milieu in which the American public library has grown up began with select social groups in the Northeast and has evolved both geographically and socially as more public libraries came into existence. In

each case, the groups that were most active in the formation of a public library were also the groups who felt empowered to define the purpose of the individual library and were the groups who were best served by the structure they created. In the case of the Boston Public Library, the need for equal educational opportunities for adults was understood by that group to be equal opportunities for the associates of the “learned and influential citizens.” As more than one observer noted, this “... assumed that the culture of the upper-class few ought to be the culture of the people as a whole”.² This meant that such public libraries were founded on “the concept of a cultural hegemony, and ... that libraries have deliberately been structured to serve a narrowly defined community”.³ The basic public library “prototype concentrated on the social and psychological needs of the middle-class as it emerged. ... (and, as such) continued to serve the book-reading middle class (in the twentieth century)”.⁴

This fact was also true in the South. The early public library founders were a select slice of the public. As the region struggled to create a wider base of public library services, the President of the University of North Carolina called a conference in 1933 to stimulate interest in libraries. “Leaders in education, culture, social welfare and religion were invited to consider the status of libraries, books and reading in the South and the relation of the library to the other agencies that make for a civilized society, and to help develop a long-time program for the further extension of library service”.⁵ The Citizen’s Library Movement had been started six years prior to the 1933 meeting and took as its goal to get “important community leaders” interested in lobbying for public libraries.⁶ But the fact that public libraries were the outgrowth of the interest of what may be assumed to be the educated and relatively wealthier part of society does not come as a surprise. These were the groups who had the time and money to be concerned with public libraries and, in the beginning, were the groups who funded the

institutions that were to later become public. That libraries were founded by self-selected groups and that those groups fairly felt that their ideals were worthy ones for the library to aspire to also comes as no surprise. “The task of promoting libraries might fall on the shoulders of a few enlightened and inspired individuals, but the seeds such individuals scatter have to fall on receptive ground if they are to come to fruition”.⁷

Arthur Bostwick credited modern public libraries to the fact that “their advocates have been active men; those who dislike them are passive”.⁸ In the South, these “enlightened and inspired individuals,” these “active men,” were often enlightened and inspired, and active, women.

Although he was certainly not the only one, the European observer, Wilhelm Munthe, noted that “public libraries are to a marked degree an urban phenomenon”.⁹ Deanna Marcum’s study of the development of the Hagerstown, Maryland public library revealed that the small-town or rural experience was slightly different. She noted that public library researchers tended to overlook the phenomenon of public libraries in rural communities because the rural communities are unfamiliar to academic researchers. She cited an education researcher who said scholars study urban institutions and implicitly assume the rural doesn’t exist. Marcum agreed that it doesn’t exist for typical researchers, in part, because it is too diverse, too regional, too oral and unwritten. However, the small town experience is at once both similar and different from the urban experience. Hagerstown, not unlike larger urban areas, developed its own library out of intense individual interest. There had been no outcry from the community for a public library. It was true that urban public libraries were inspired by and headed by scholarly men. In Hagerstown, as in other small Southern towns, the public library was a creation of women of elite local families who created it through their clubs.¹⁰

Munthe also observed that “the major reason for the great unevenness of the development in the United States is that the library problem has been left entirely to local initiative, which decreases in effectiveness with the regularity of a natural law, in proportion to the size of the area and the density and economic condition of the population”.¹¹ No matter the locale, groups interested in establishing public libraries to serve their interests faced similar problems. Patrick Valentine succinctly characterized the situation in his description of the establishment of public library service in Wilson, North Carolina. Wilson faced same kinds of problems faced elsewhere in the South (public disinterest in libraries in general, an unwillingness to tax for library service, and a near-total disregard of the black public), but possessed the same assets that existed in other Southern towns; namely, a small group of relatively prosperous and determined women who did it themselves until the city or county took it over.¹²

This unwillingness to use taxes for library services meant that the early public libraries were essentially either donations or subscription libraries paid for by women’s groups. Such groups often started the effort to establish public library service, especially in rural areas, by developing traveling library systems in order to make books more widely accessible.¹³ In Wilson, North Carolina, the women’s club ran their library as if it were a community public library. William Buchanan’s study of the development of public libraries in the Yazoo delta of Mississippi revealed a similar pattern. At the start of twentieth century, the local library association “developed an acute sense of its role in the community, opening its doors to general users (for a \$1 annual fee), expanding its hours of operation, and extending library privileges to the city’s white school children”.¹⁴ The library in Wilson, North Carolina started similarly as subscription library, but the city council later gave it money to make it free for locals to use (white locals, of course). Public funds were expended, but with little public oversight. It did not

become a totally public affair until 1936-7 when the town was able to acquire some state and local funding and assume fuller responsibility for the library.¹⁵

In North Carolina, the 1930s saw many women's club subscription libraries evolve into true public institutions. In its annual report for 1932, the North Carolina Library Commission noted that "the Fayetteville Library, which has been a subscription library serving a small clientele, became a free library after the bank failure in January 1932 and has greatly increased its usefulness." Additionally, "the Sanford Library was made free to the children under fourteen years of age and the Oxford Library reduced its rate of subscription. It is to be hoped that within the next two years all libraries may become free libraries for the old fashioned subscription library should be outgrown in this day of progress." For the most part, women's clubs shared this hope. According to Mary Edna Anders' dissertation on the development of Southern public libraries,

leadership of the library movement shifted from club women to librarians as the latter became more numerous ... The federated clubs, desiring to be relieved of the responsibility of the traveling library systems they had established, supported the state library associations in campaigns to obtain legislative acceptance of library extension service as one of the legitimate responsibilities of state government.¹⁶

Women's clubs did not completely remove themselves from the effort, however, and remained a key part of the North Carolina Library Commission's efforts to expand public library service to unserved areas. The commission was still working with Federated Women's Clubs into the 1950s.¹⁷

Small town libraries in the South may well have developed a different relationship to their communities because of the active role of women's groups in their founding. Abigail Van Slyck, a professor of architecture and women's studies noted that women tended to see the

library as a sort of extension of reading in the home and as a place for moral or community values. In her study of Carnegie Libraries, she noted that typical Carnegie library design

had a domestic scale and the coziness that played such an important part in the Victorian ideal of home. Library users were at once in a public institution and in the bosom of an extended family. In short, the architectural products of nineteenth-century philanthropy worked in tandem with the cultural assumptions that supported benevolent activities.¹⁸

Her review of the letters sent to the Carnegie Corporation seeking grants to establish local libraries revealed that, in direct contrast to women writers,

most of the men who wrote to the philanthropist saw the library as an integral part of the commercial life of the town and pursued the library grant as part of a larger agenda of commercial boosterism ... For many men, then, the library's true value could be measured in economic terms, rather than in moral ones. For them, the library did not stand apart from the commercial values of the community; it was intricately tied to the town's commercial success.¹⁹

For women's groups, their town's community library was less an extension of the commercial community of the town than an extension of their social community of women and families.

Such closeness to the community and to the community's library was not always beneficial. Since they had done so much to create the library, they felt they had a right and a mission to exert control. Munthe in the 1930s noted that in the average small town the "library is controlled by a library board, whose meddling in the administration of the library is in inverse proportion to its size. As censors of book purchases the board suffers as a whole from the same degree of narrow-mindedness and bigotry that characterizes the town".²⁰ Oliver Garceau, a Bennington College sociologist involved in the Public Library Inquiry in the late 1940s, was especially concerned that library boards in the South were dominated by a particularly "narrow

social stratum”.²¹ Thirty years after Garceau, John Colson was still concerned that library boards in most locales were not at all similar to or representative of the members of the local political organizational community, but rather were typical of a small slice of the community. His main concern was that these library board groups were too complacent in their satisfaction with the status quo.²²

However, the complacency with the status quo perhaps had some value since it was the complacent status quo interest that created and sustained the public library in the community. As Garceau had noted, in many small towns, “only the zest for reading kept (small town libraries) alive because that was the only reason they were organized”.²³ Others noted that the complacent status quo was also a statement of faith in the community. In Haynes McMullen’s 1987 study, New England public libraries

were almost always established by small groups of people at some cost to themselves, (and because of that) the founding of each library can probably be considered as an expression of faith in the usefulness of that kind of collection. ... The date of founding of a library may be the date when interest in that particular library was at its height.²⁴

Although she was more focused on urban than on small town libraries, Ernestine Rose, in her 1954 *The Public Library in American Life*, felt the librarian was more able than library boards to extend the library to the community. “The integration of local libraries with their communities and their intensive use as community centers developed gradually and naturally as librarians became more conscious of social needs, and of their own responsibilities in relation to them”.²⁵

John Colson in 1983 asked if the community is really only those who are interested enough to be active in the library. Everyone pays for the public library through taxation, but

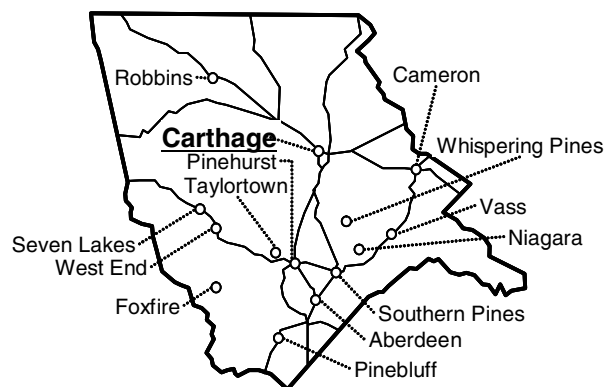
perhaps only the active groups really “own” it. Deanna Marcum noted in 1991 that in the Hagerstown experience, the public did not ask for a library and farm families did not seem to care if they had any books at all. However, women’s groups established the institution and philanthropists added their money to the effort in a belief that it was a place for self-education, especially for farmers.²⁶ Colson wondered that if most adults don’t use the library (as the Public Library Inquiry stated and other studies continue to confirm), is the library “owned” by a community composed only of those who create and sustain the library, or is it actually “owned” by those who unconsciously “feel” a need for the library, if only an inchoate feeling?²⁷ Neil Harris, a professor of history at the University of Chicago, seemed unconcerned about the distinction in a 1981 *Journal of Library History* article. He felt that despite the fact that such public libraries can be seen as statements of private conceit and library boards may be seen as contrived assumptions of power, the institution of the public library remains an asylum of community and historical experience. Though things could be better, the small self-selected groups that “own” it have not done badly by it.²⁸

LOCAL CONTEXT – TWO TOWNS IN COMPETITION

CARTHAGE

EARLY YEARS

The story of Carthage’s library begins much in the same way as had Aberdeen’s, but the pattern began to diverge fairly quickly. As had been the case in Aberdeen, the railway had provided books for Carthage’s proto-library somewhere around



the turn of the twentieth century. People in both towns seemed desirous of having their own, permanent libraries. In Aberdeen, Miss Mary Page took the lead, donating the building and getting members of her family to donate most of the initial book collection. The Page family had become the most important commercial family in Aberdeen. In Carthage, the Tyson family held a similar position. It had become quite well-off in the nineteenth century through the construction of horse-drawn carriages and their factory was turning out 3,000 buggies a year in the early 1890s.²⁹ Mrs. E.J. Tyson had been the person responsible for the Seaboard Air Line Traveling Library in Carthage and members of the Tyson family were engaged in the creation of the Carthage Public Library, but they did not donate as much, nor take as commanding a role as had Miss Mary Page in Aberdeen. The Carthage Public Library was begun as a group project.

In the June 1925 *North Carolina Library Bulletin*, Mrs. L.P. Tyson stated that “The library was founded on December 17, 1912, by the Carthage Civic Club, which later became the Woman’s Club.” She may have been referring not to the actual founding of the book collection, but rather to the establishment of a semi-permanent location for it on that date.³⁰ Miss Meade Seawell, who had been involved in the Carthage library for all her life, indicated in her 1970 memoirs that it had been begun in 1905 as a form of sharing of well-stocked home libraries. As had been the case in Aberdeen, the first Carthage public library “was formed by private subscription and the members of the Civic Club gratuitously served as librarians, or custodians of the books.”³¹ Apparently, the initial subscription library ran into difficulties and was taken over by the Women’s Club and transformed into a free public library. Mrs. Annette Dewey, the librarian during the period just after the Second World War, indicated that their intervention resulted in the library Mrs. Tyson spoke about in 1925. “Realizing the importance of having

adequate library facilities, the Woman's club finally assumed all responsibility of the project and a library was established upstairs in the Page Building – now the Lee Building.”

Mrs. Dewey remembered the founders as special people.

(The) members of the Woman's Club, which was a study club with strong cultural motives, zestful activities and commendable determination, secured the financial aid of their husbands and other citizens who were interested and established the first library ... members of the club were from the best and noblest of Carthage citizens, and they were women who were not afraid to face difficulties involved in order to build advantages for present and future citizens of their beautiful town.³²

They did provide a service to book seekers in Carthage. Mrs. Tyson was especially proud in 1925 that “perhaps the best feature of the Carthage Library is that it is free and no one has ever been kept away on account of fees.”ⁱ

Not being afraid to face difficulties and having the resources to overcome them are two different things, however. From its start, the Carthage Library lived a peripatetic life. The Woman's Club solicited donations for the collection, sought membership in the library association, and provided management of the endeavor. The club however, did not have its own club facilities. Thus, nor did the library. The library moved from location to location for all of its life. According to Miss Seawell, “[the] moving, I'm told, was always to space granted free of rent.”

The first library space was upstairs in a building near the center of town that later became a garage. In this location, “members of the club served in turn as librarian to save the expense of having a regular librarian.”³³ At some time just prior to the start of the First World

ⁱ No one may have ever been kept away on account of fees, but race was another matter. In their annual reports to the North Carolina Library Commission at least through the 1930s, the Carthage Library reported “no service to Negroes.”

War, it moved to the second floor of a building directly across from the county courthouse. The second location must have been an improvement. “[A] spacious, quiet hall, made attractive by easy chairs, pictures, bright draperies and native pottery, the library is a most beguiling place in which to spend the afternoon.” By the mid-1920s, the library was open three days a week and the librarian was paid for her services.³⁴

Others remembered the library as a wonderful place. A 1969 letter to the editor of the *Moore County News* reminisced about the old location.

I remember that ... it was a sizable collection when I was a young school girl, and that it played a great part in my life. It was housed above Shields Drug Store in a large room: large enough to act as a meeting place for most of the town's social activities, such as Halloween, music recitals, concerts and club parties and even dances. Somewhere off was another room with locked door that was a source of awe and curiosity for us youngsters, as it was a “secret” room where the Masons purportedly met.

The book collection was a large one, comprised of fiction, but with enough books on travel, history, and literature to whet my curiosity and interest. Only after I had gone to college and was preparing to teach high school English did I realize just how fine a reading background this library had given me.³⁵

The 1920s seem to have been the high point of the Woman's Club Library. Mrs. Dewey intimated as much when she noted that “Many names of active members are on record and much good work was done from 1924 to 1929.” The club looked for ways to improve and expand service. In the early 1920s, Mrs. Tyson mentioned that they had donated enough books to the Carthage School library to permit the school to escape losing its accreditation. By the late 1920s, they also sought to help county schools by providing books for a traveling school library.³⁶

FROM THE PEAK TO THE NADIR

But 1929 also marked the start of nationwide economic problems and neither Carthage, nor the Woman's Club, was able to escape them. They began to run short on money and the people who owned the location of the library began to need paying customers for the space. In early 1930, funding problems apparently compelled them to have to close the library for a while. In February 1930, "making all possible plans to reopen the library in the clubroom," the club sought to "secure the necessary funds" by charging attendance for showing a movie in the school auditorium.³⁷ They also sought to enlist the help of the school board, perhaps in gratitude for their earlier attempts to help the schools. In March 1930, they asked the school board to provide some money for books. "[The] board was very nice, and said they were allowed \$300 in their budget for libraries each year, and that they thought there would be some left over and if so, they would be pleased to give what ever [*sic*] amount they could to the Carthage library, it being the only free library in the county."³⁸ In August, the club received \$100 from the school board to purchase children's books for the library.

By summer of 1930, the library had moved to a room in the basement of the County Courthouse. At least the library was still in the center of town and was again open.³⁹ But things were not going well. An assistant librarian solicited more interest in the library with a long article in the paper.

Carthage, to be sure, has had a library for twenty years or more; but for that luxury the citizens may thank ... the Woman's Club which assumed the doubtful privilege of carrying on the good work, and of keeping the library functioning somehow through the medium of chicken suppers, ice cream parties and card socials. The town fathers have not yet seen the necessity of aiding the club in its struggles toward a free library beyond providing it a reading room in the basement of the court house. Somehow it is always left to the women to carry out the petty and unimportant things of civic life; such as feeding undernourished school children; aiding and supervising Clean Up Weeks; Town Beautification Week; and maintaining the local town library.

But even the offer of an ill-lighted basement room is not without its compensations. Space, usually at a premium in small town libraries, bothers us not at all; light and heat are provided free; and during the summer months the airy basement room is the coolest place in town. The mercury drops with each step you take down into the cool depths of the court house! The room itself is beginning to look inviting; small yellow topped tables, each with its pot of zinnias; scalloped yellow valances at the windows, gay colored magazines lying here and there – and the color of the book-lined walls – all these help make the library a cheerful spot.⁴⁰

By 1932, the funding problem had become a full crisis. The Woman's Club had been attempting to provide funding for school lunches and books for school children, in addition to running a lending library, and something had to give.⁴¹ In August of that year, Mrs. R.L. Phillips (who was the first regular librarianⁱⁱ) got a front page item placed in the *Moore County News*.

The Carthage public library is facing a crisis in the history of its service. Although the list of borrowers is growing daily, the necessary funds wherewith to run this organization has decreased to practically nothing. To meet this situation the libraries are asking each active borrower to make a yearly contribution of twenty-five cents.

We feel sure that no one will be deprived of the use of the library by charging this extremely small fee; and yet it will give the library a small cash contingent fund from which to purchase necessary library supplies; postal cards for all overdue notices; and to rebind books that have become too badly worn to circulate longer. None of this money will go towards purchasing new books or paying the librarian's salary. Small children under the age of sixteen will be charged a yearly fee of ten cents.⁴²

ⁱⁱ According to Annette Dewey's recollections in 1954.

Mrs. Phillips' requests for county funding had not been successful and it did not appear that the town was providing any assistance either, despite the fact that the mayor was the husband of one of the key library clubwomen. With no money coming in, the library struggled on with volunteer help. But the situation for the town and county were not good either. In December of 1932, the *Moore County News* published page after page of homes, businesses, and farms being sold for non-payment of taxes. The club women would have to make it on their own.

Mrs. Phillips sought out other ways to help her library. Since she did not have funds for new books and since book donations had slowed appreciably, she worked with the State Library to borrow books from Raleigh. She had success by 1934 when the State Library loaned Carthage a selection of children's books for a one week period. Normally open only on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, the library remained open in the late afternoon each day the books were there to allow parents the opportunity to view the books.⁴³ The assistant librarian, Miss Katherine Shields, went even farther, using her own assets to buy books and sponsor a youth reading club in her home.⁴⁴ Shields also worked with Raleigh to borrow special interest books for the library.⁴⁵

All during this period of financial trials, it appeared that not everyone in Carthage was paying attention to the library. The Woman's Club was obviously doing all it could to keep the library going, but was seemingly not receiving much assistance. At the same time, the social section of the *Moore County News* continued to report on the activities of local book clubs. From the end of the 1920s, there seemed to be nothing in common between the book clubs and the library. In all, there were more mentions of the Book Reviewers than of the Woman's Club

library, but there were no mentions of any book club interest in the library. The newspaper tried to help with occasional articles obviously prompted by Mrs. Phillips or Miss Shields:

Most of us take our library, as well as other civic institutions, entirely too much for granted. We want the use of the library in order to borrow books – but we seldom consider it our duty to return these books promptly, or else pay a fine on them. We are apt to complain that “there is nothing new to read in the library,” but very prone to forget that we might contribute many good books that we have bought, read, enjoyed – and are now through with. Children’s books and books of the teen age are especially needed.⁴⁶

Help was to arrive in the form of New Deal funding. In 1938, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) proposed to provide jobs by funding the building of a Community Building in Carthage. The original concept for the “community house” included the library, along with a meeting room, a kitchen, and a playground.⁴⁷ The WPA also provided a small salary for a librarian and some funds “in order to give employment to women who needed work in 1937, 1938, and 1939 books were cleaned, mended and made durable for future use.” The library remained in the courthouse until 1939 when “the county needed the space occupied by the library and the books were moved to the Law Building, stacked and remained there until the building was burned and many of them were destroyed. Thus the library was closed for a season but not long.”⁴⁸

The loss of the books, along with a threat of losing WPA funds, must have spurred others into action. A November 1939 article in the *Moore County News* announced that the Jaycees would go around to families in Carthage, asking them to donate books to the library. The article solicited both books and support. “Patronage, however, has dwindled to such an extent that the town is in imminent danger of losing the WPA-paid librarian. The Jaycees have the idea that if they can add an appreciable number of good books to the library, and persuade a greater number of folks to avail themselves of the library’s facilities, this loss can be avoided.”⁴⁹

By Spring 1940, the library had moved into the Community House and was open five afternoons each week. Lack of usage was still a threat. “The public is urged to patronize it, so that it can stay open. Unless it receives some support from the townspeople, the WPA will withdraw the worker whom it is now paying to keep the library.”⁵⁰

The fire and the temporary closing of the library appear to have been the last straws for the Woman’s Club, and it seems to have retired from the scene. After having been the primary, and often the sole, support for the library for 35 years, the Woman’s Club seemed to have collapsed. According to Meade Seawell, “[when] the Woman’s Club ceased to be, the library was taken over by a few patriotic citizens and a voluntary Carthage Library Committee was formed.” The board seems to have met as early as March of 1940 and was active in the move of the library from its temporary (burned) storage location to the Community House.⁵¹ In September of the same year, the voluntary group became more formalized. According to Annette Dewey, friends of the library met at the Carthage Hotel and elected Miss Meade Seawell president. Though the library was not well funded by any measure, the new organization had, for the first time, been able to obtain some support from the Town of Carthage. “The library was to be supported by donations from different sources. The town commissioners contributed \$12.50 a month for books and supplies, and the WPA furnished a worker. Other funds for supplying new books, etc., were to come from civic organizations [*sic*] of the town.”⁵²

But financial support needed public support as well and the public did not seem to surge to the new library. Articles in the paper in late 1940 asked for more patronage and in 1941 reminded citizens that it was in a new location. “Some, according to inquiries, think the library is still in the basement of the courthouse, and for those it will be a pleasant surprise to visit the library in its new home.”⁵³ This lack of patronage finally had a negative outcome in 1942 when

the WPA cut the funding for the librarian's salary. Mrs. Ruth Tyson lamented in a June 1942 article that had circulation been higher, Carthage would have been able to keep both a librarian and the services of a WPA bookmobile. But since circulation did not meet the needed levels, both were lost. Mrs. Tyson did not sound optimistic.

The Carthage Library board will find some means to keep it open after July 1, but just how they will do it is still unknown ... It is to be hoped that the board can find a way to keep the library a growing concern in spite of the war. More than ever we will need the influence of good reading for children and for ourselves. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."⁵⁴

The library, however, managed to struggle on, remaining open to the public six hours a day, five days a week. It continued to solicit donations of money, books, and furnishings to make the room in the Community Building more attractive.⁵⁵ However, it finally could no longer operate with almost no support and closed in late 1942. When it reopened on 4 November 1944, it reopened not with the direct support of the Town of Carthage, but as the de facto Carthage Branch of the Moore County Library.⁵⁶

CARTHAGE, A BRANCH OF THE MOORE COUNTY LIBRARY

As early as 1928, members of the Carthage Women's Club had seen their library as being more than the Carthage town library. In February of that year, a topic of discussion at a club meeting was how to expand the club library. The librarian, Mrs. R.L. Phillips, mentioned that their library was "the only library in the county which is open to the entire county without a fee." State law had recently changed and county government could provide operating funds for a free county public library, even if it were operated by a club. Mrs. Phillips had tried to get the county to provide such aid, but had not been successful.⁵⁷

The Carthage Public Library had for years offered its services to anyone living in Moore County, acting as the de facto Moore County Library, if only to gain greater circulation and interest. The members of the Woman's Club had seen the Carthage Library as the county library since at least the late 1920s, but the realization that there were not enough patrons in Carthage to attract funding for the library must have caused the new directors to more fully embrace this concept in the early 1940s. The actual Moore County Library was established in 1944, but it did not have a physical location, so the Carthage Library continued to regard itself as the county's library, if not the County Library.

The ending of the Second World War sent the Town of Carthage and the Carthage Library back into financial straits. Funding for the Community Building ceased and the town seemed unable to pick up the tab. In 1946, a joint VFW-American Legion group who had operated the facility told the town board that they could not continue to act as custodians. The facility was closed for two weeks in the summer of 1946 while the town sought other ways to keep it open. One of the ways of funding the Community Building might have been with public funds, but this idea did not seem to occur to the board. Instead, the board sent "letters to a select group of Carthage citizens asking for monetary contributions toward the up-keep of the community house."⁵⁸ That did not seem to work either and the Community House was closed again. Contributions for library patrons and some support from the county librarian enabled the room that housed the library to remain open one day a week, on Thursdays.⁵⁹ Sarcastic commentary in the newspaper about the Carthage Town Board's cheapness in not wanting to spend \$75 a month to keep the building open as, in part, a place for children and the library prompted the Town Board to publicize the town's dire financial straits.⁶⁰

With donations slowing to a trickle, no strong club support for the endeavor, and funding from the town becoming ever more problematic, the Carthage Public Library began more and more to look toward county government for sustenance. The county had rescued it in 1930 with the offer of space in the county courthouse, but the relationship to the town had been reestablished ten years later when the library moved to the Community House. Now that the town could no longer keep the Community House open, the library needed support where it could find it. It had obviously obtained some county support when it had reopened in 1944, but by 1946 the link to county government was firm.

In fact, it seems as the Carthage Public Library looked more and more toward the county government for support, it also looked more and more toward the county library for governance. In 1947, Mrs. Annette Deweyⁱⁱⁱ took over as the Carthage librarian, but the appointment was announced, not by the Carthage Library Committee (which seemed to have become inactive shortly after its establishment), but rather by Mrs. Avery, the Moore County librarian.⁶¹ This was probably because Mrs. Avery regarded Mrs. Dewey as a county employee, despite the fact that the Carthage Town Board was paying \$180 a year to the county library to keep the Carthage facility open at least one day a week.⁶² While working closely with the county librarian to get books from the traveling bookmobile, Mrs. Dewey tried to energize Carthaginians to use their library. She tried to interest children in the library, attempting to make it inviting and welcoming for them on the one day a week that it was open. She was disappointed in their parents, however. “I have wondered why more adult readers do not patronize their library. That has been one disappointment to far. They may give me a big surprise some day. That would be fine.”⁶³

ⁱⁱⁱ Mrs. Dewey, a Carthage native who had lived for years in Amarillo, Texas before returning to live in Carthage in the late 1930s, was to remain the Carthage librarian until her death in 1956.

Her work did seem to give her surprise. Over the nine years that she ran the Carthage Library, circulation continually improved. She managed to place articles in the newspaper extolling the collection and the library's potential for readers. By 1952, her efforts were being routinely recognized. The county librarian noted

The Carthage library in the Community House, open all day every Thursday, has had a record circulation since October 1, 1951 ... There has scarcely been a Thursday when fewer than one hundred books have gone out from this small library and usually the number is well over that figure: 195 on a November Thursday and 206 last week! Much of this success is due to the faithful and untiring work of Mrs. Annette B. Dewey ...⁶⁴

Mrs. Dewey's connections with the Moore County Library enabled her to borrow books from Southern Pines, to be delivered by the bookmobile to Carthage, for her patrons. Her efforts to obtain books from the State Library in Raleigh and the University library in Chapel Hill must have contributed to the ever-increasing number of borrowers using the Carthage library.⁶⁵

By that time, however, Mrs. Dewey was no longer the librarian of a self-standing community library. The relationship had become formalized, at least in the sense of how the various parties regarded each other. The county librarian reported to the Moore County Library Board that "[in] Carthage, the branch library is located in the Community house and is open all day every Thursday with Mrs. Annette B. Dewey in charge."⁶⁶ Mrs. Dewey was the Carthage librarian, but she was a paid employee of the Moore County Library. The Carthage Public Library had become the Carthage Branch of the Moore County Library. Despite the fact that the Moore County Library at that time did not have a main library facility of its own, it regarded Carthage's long-time library as a subordinate, and the Carthaginians seemed resigned to that relationship. The Town Board paid it no attention. In fact, the vice chairman of the Moore

County Library Board, Mrs. J.L. McGraw, was the wife of the long-time mayor of Carthage, but she apparently did not wield enough influence with town government to cause it to feel a sense of ownership for its library.

By 1953, it seemed that the Town of Carthage was content to see itself as merely the host for a county library. Citizens in the town must have reckoned that the town board would never have the resources needed to support a library and so sought to have the county take over completely.

The group agreed, Miss Edwards said, on one common ambition – that soon the county seat should have its own library building, spacious enough to house the county’s excellent collection of books, but meantime the community building, which is the center of so much that is cultural in Carthage, is a good substitute. Heat has been provided in the section used by the library. The county commissioners and Carthage commissioners have shown interest in better reading accommodations, and a meeting to discuss the existing situation was held in the early spring. The Sorosis Club has done much to increase interest in the local library.⁶⁷

When Mrs. Dewey died at the age of 72 in 1956, one of the last links to the Town of Carthage passed away.⁶⁸ Despite the fact that she was a county employee, she regarded herself, and was regarded, as Carthage’s librarian. She had social and personal contacts with much of Carthage society and deep family roots in the town. Though there were still other individuals in Carthage who could remember the original Woman’s Club Library, Annette Dewey was the last one who was still working with the Carthage Library. With her death, another link back to the original Carthage library was severed and the library in Carthage became less and less Carthage’s own library.

The Carthage Library was still in the Community Building in 1956, however, so the Town of Carthage still seemed to have some sense of ownership for it. In 1958, that tether to

the town was weakened again when the county paid for the renovation of the Riddle Building in downtown Carthage to serve as the first actual Moore County Library.^{iv} The actual move of the library took place in early 1959 when members of the Carthage Jaycees provided the labor to move book stocks to the Riddle Building. The focus of all the articles about the move was on the move of books from Southern Pines to Carthage, but books must have also been moved a few blocks within Carthage as the library in the Community Building was never mentioned again after the move.⁶⁹

The new county library was not much of a service improvement for the residents of Carthage. It had a larger collection than the old Carthage Community House Library, but staffing problems compelled the Moore County Librarian to open the new facility only on Mondays, since she had to be on the road with the bookmobile on the remaining four days of the work week.⁷⁰ By November of the year of the move, however, the county was able to fund the library so that the Riddle Building facility could be open on Mondays and Fridays.⁷¹

As the county took more responsibility for the library in Carthage, the town seemed content to step farther and farther away from the library. The Riddle Building was across from Town Hall, but there was no mention of library activities or issues in reports of town board meetings. Carthage citizens certainly continued to use the library to some extent, but they did not seem to feel any ownership for it. Meanwhile, library consolidation was in the air and Carthage was about to become part of a new experiment.

^{iv} From 1944 until 1959, the Southern Pines Library had provided office and book storage space for the Moore County Library, but the county library did not have its own location where people could browse the collection. The Carthage Library had acted in that role, but it was not really the same thing as a county library.

In 1962, Moore County had joined with Richmond and Montgomery Counties to form the Sandhill Regional Library System. Though the Moore County Library had become a branch of the Regional Library System, it felt itself to be in a leading role since the Moore County librarian, Miss Hollis Haney, was appointed as the director of the Sandhill Regional Library System.⁷² Leadership of the regional library system seemed to call for a better facility than the Riddle Building and County Commissioners were petitioned for help. Since the establishment of the regional system had made the county eligible for federal library construction grants, the idea took hold. In June 1965, county commissioners agreed to submit a request for federal funds for a new library since “the present library, now in a rented building downtown, has long been inadequate.”⁷³ When groundbreaking took place in 1968, the mayor of Carthage was in attendance, but he was significantly outnumbered by county officials.⁷⁴ The new county library (and headquarters library for the Sandhill Regional Library System) opened on 19 January 1969. The Carthage Jaycees were thanked at the ceremony for having again provided the labor to move the books. In 1959, they had moved them to the Riddle Building; in 1969, they moved them from the Riddle Building to the new Moore County Library.⁷⁵ The new library, though still in Carthage, was now adjacent to the cluster of county buildings lying south of the courthouse.

The Moore County Library building had been opened and the Carthage Public Library disappeared into history. In a newspaper article printed just prior to the grand opening ceremonies, the then Sandhill Regional Library Director (he was also the Moore County Library

System Director^v) clearly stated the new reality. “Now that the Moore County Library has moved ... just one big problem remains, ... to get it across to people that this is not just the ‘Carthage Library’ any more. It belongs to everyone in Moore.”⁷⁶ At the ceremony, there were a lot of congratulations for planners, for the Friends of the Moore County Library, for the efforts to create a county library. The guest speaker spoke of the importance of a good library to a town. No one mentioned the Woman’s Club of Carthage, no one mentioned the struggles they had gone through to establish a library in the town. No one mentioned Mrs. Phillips or Mrs. Dewey. The Carthage Library was gone.

CARTHAGE AND THE ITS PUBLIC LIBRARY TODAY

In 2005, there is no Carthage public library. The Moore County Public Library is in Carthage, but it does not seem to be of Carthage. Other towns in Moore County who have their own libraries pay a small amount annually to the Moore County system for purchase of books and periodicals. Carthage does not contribute such a fee, apparently feeling that their “hosting” of the county library is sufficient. Most, if not all, of the staff at the county library facility are from towns other than Carthage and do not seem to feel a sense of solidarity with the town. In fact, the lack of perceived support from the town seems to have generated a low level sense of hostility towards the town among the staff.

One can walk out from the county library facility and within a few minutes pass by every one of the former library locations. The location of the original Woman’s Club Library is now a building populated with law offices doing business at the Court House across the street.

^v Miss Haney resigned as the regional and county library director in 1965 to take up duties as Director of the Neuse Regional Library System and was replaced by Mrs. Eugenia Babylon. In 1968, in some sort of organizational change, Mr. Vince Anderson (who at the time was a consultant at the North Carolina State Library) took over as Sandhills Regional Library Director and Mrs. Babylon became his assistant. See “Mrs. Babylon Will Replace Miss Haney as Library Director,” *Sandhill Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 13 Dec. 1965: 7, and “Vince Anderson Named Director Sandhill Regional Library,” *Sandhill Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 4 Jul. 1968: 7.

The second home of the library was in the basement of the old Court House. This building is still in the center of downtown Carthage and is totally consumed with county business. The actual court rooms have moved across the street to a new court facility built on the location of the old Carthage Hotel. The third home was in the Community House about three blocks west of the Court House. Still a handsome stone building, it is sadly continuing to fall on hard times, looking unused and displaying a “for lease” sign in the front yard. The final location of the Carthage Public Library is the Riddle Building about two blocks east of the courthouse. The building has gone through a number of transformations and is now a retail establishment, with no sign that it had ever been a library.

If one stops in to a coffee shop near the courthouse, one can look at a number of old images of downtown Carthage and be impressed (or depressed) by the changes. The original library was on the northeast corner of the courthouse square and across the street from the Carthage Hotel, the center of life in Carthage for a century. The hotel, however, is now gone, having been dismantled to make way for the bunker-looking new courts building. This eastern end of the courthouse square feels totally consumed with court matters. It could be anywhere in the county seat, or anywhere in the county. One knows that it is the physical center of Carthage, but one does not feel that it is the psychic center of town life.

The old images on the wall in the coffee shop provide a feel for what Carthage has been and what has been lost over time. During the time that the library was in the courthouse or in the Community House, during the time that the Carthage Hotel was taking guests or hosting dinners for the Friends of the Library, the Ginsburg Department Store was located on the northwest corner of the courthouse square. The picture of it in the coffee shop shows a large multi-story building occupying nearly a full block. Looking at the site today, one sees the

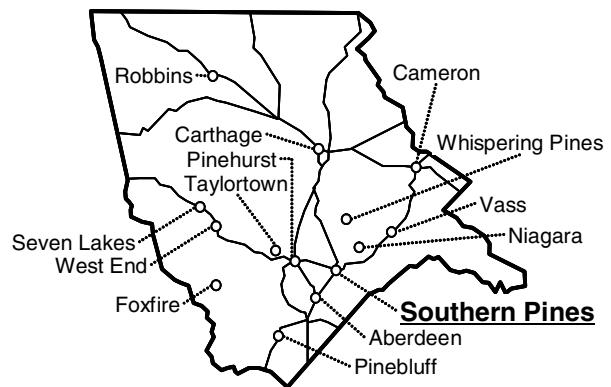
parking lot of a small Piggly Wiggly food store. Ginsburg's was closed and the building demolished, replaced by the far smaller and far more modest grocery store. However, today the Piggly Wiggly is also closed and the parking lot is abandoned. The center of Carthage used to have a substantial presence; it does not feel that way now.

Carthage feels a lot like Aberdeen. Both feel like they are withering away. In Aberdeen, the historic Page Memorial Library is one of the last anchors of downtown and stands as a hopeful indicator of town rebirth. In Carthage, the town library has disappeared and the county library feels like an appendage of county government, not like the center of life for the town. In both towns, the library exists because the region and the county library systems continue to keep them alive. In both towns, local government seems to have forgotten about the library or to have decided that a library is not necessary to the town's recovery.

SOUTHERN PINES

At the outset of this study, we said that we would not study the library in the town of Southern Pines. Southern Pines has a population that exceeds our definition of a small town and that, more importantly for this research effort, it has kept its library separate

from and independent of the county library system. That said, however, we do need to at least introduce the Southern Pines library experience, if only because it has come up, and will come up, so often in discussions of other libraries, and because it might well have been the heart of the county library system. Accordingly, we will transition from the story of how Carthage



evolved into the county library by introducing the county library's original host, the Southern Pines Library.

As noted earlier, Southern Pines had a proto-library that grew out of the Seaboard Air Line Railway traveling library efforts. By the early 1920, the towns of Aberdeen, Carthage, Pinebluff, and Niagara had their own public libraries, but Southern Pines, the largest town in the county, did not. It appears that the efforts to provide a book-lending service out of the King's Daughters organization had come to closure. Since Southern Pines was advertising itself as a "literary" place where well-heeled northerners might want to winter, the newspapers began to suggest that a library might be something a progressive town like Southern Pines might well need.

As early as 1921, the *Sandhill Citizen* ("successor to *The Southern Pines Tourist*; Devoted to the Winter Resorts ... and General Development of the Sandhill Region ...") was raising the issue.

No, Dear Reader, the struture [*sic*] on the east of Pennsylvania avenue is not the town library. Yes, I know that books therein peep out from bales of hay, but we have no library. The late Mrs. Gould struggled almost without aid ... to carry on and provide such a benefit for our town, but her lamented death seems to have halted all efforts to serve our visitors in this way and they will miss it as we all do ...⁷⁷

The paper tried to appeal to the town's pride. "That library question seems to worry every stranger. Of course it does seem queer to them, to find out upon inquiry that every surrounding town has such an institution and that we, who boast of civic pride, run around in circles when the word is mentioned."⁷⁸

The tweaking must have paid off because shortly thereafter meetings began to be held on the topic. The newspaper columnist continued to offer advice on how to proceed.

... but just by the way, the best way to start anything is to start it. This applies to libraries as well as to other things. Therefore, in this meeting, appoint a chairman ... Then go out and recruit your company, seek all the backing and assistance that you can secure but do not affiliate with any other organization. Stand on your own feet and make your own growth. This includes the Town Government, they have never made any effort to found or maintain such an institution nor is it reasonable to ask them for such service. They have many other things to attend to and provide for the town.⁷⁹

This attitude of going it alone has continued to be the ethos of the Southern Pines library to this day, though town government is now more engaged than it was at the beginning. A meeting was duly held on 28 December 1921 and a library concept was decided upon. The original secretary, George W. Monroe, reported in a letter to the newspaper that the group decided that they wanted a “free” public library, or “free” in the sense that it was to be a library “owned by no one club, society, or faction, or under city direction.”⁸⁰ The group thus organized itself as a voluntary civic organization and set to rounding up funds for the endeavor. It appears that they already had a space for a library on Pennsylvania Avenue, so they concentrated on soliciting donations of money, books, magazines, and furniture. The committee had secured enough funds to authorize the hiring of a librarian to catalog the books and keep the reading room open nine hours a day, Mondays through Fridays.⁸¹

The library was opened on 27 March 1922 in the rear of the Patrick Building on Pennsylvania Avenue. By the end of the summer it had about 4,000 volumes, a thousand from the original Kings Daughters collection and the rest apparently donated. The town must have become more interested in the library because it was to move in late 1922 from its original

location to “rooms in the Municipal building offered for Library use by the Mayor and council.”⁸²

The efforts of the library publicity committee reached beyond Southern Pines and, in November 1922, they were to host a meeting of the Seventh North Carolina Library District,^{vi} attended by librarians from the State Library Commission and Duke University, as well as local librarians and supporters from Aberdeen, Niagara, and Pinebluff.⁸³

The library continued to grow through the 1920s and was apparently a source of great pride for the town. By 1930, however, the global and national economic situation had struck home in Southern Pines as well. A letter to the editor in spring 1930 solicited more membership in the Southern Pines Library Association. Clearly, the entire concept of this local public library was based on a few people contributing enough money so that everyone in the town could have access to a library. The “few”, however, were seemingly too few by 1930. The President of the Library Association pointed out, the library

... is running, and has always run, on a shoestring. Small as are its expenses ... each year the Library Association is just able to meet these expenses. This is undignified and unfair to the small group of public spirited people who, at the sacrifice of much time, maintain the library for the benefit of the whole community.

Trying to urge more interest in the library, he sought to engage the readers’ sense of civic pride. It is clear that he (and probably all the other members of the Library Association) truly believed in the concept of the local public library. “A library is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is not a liability, it is an asset. A good library is one of the greatest advertisements any town can have, especially a resort town.” At the time, there were 166 members of the

^{vi} This district included the counties of Lee, Cumberland, Harnett, Robeson, Richmond, Anson, and Moore, according to “Librarians Hold District Meeting,” *Sandhill Citizen* [Southern Pines, NC] 26 Nov. 1926: [1].

library association, most paying dues of a dollar a year. Only 22 paid the “sustaining” level of five dollars a year and only four paid the “patron” level of \$100.⁸⁴

The newspaper chimed in with similar words, chiding the residents for their lack of support. An editorial sought to have every permanent resident family become a member of the library association, arguing that the town was relying far too much on the generosity of winter residents to sustain the library. Some of the full time residents must have noted that the part time residents included “the colony of writers ... that has brought fame to this section” and figured that they were more able to sustain the library than were those engaged in the service industry.⁸⁵

Continuing concern with the financial condition of the library was reflected in editorials through the next few years as the newspaper tried to help solicit new membership and more community support for the library, but at the end of 1931, the membership had only grown to 197 total members. The library, however, managed to remain open each day of the week and continue to grow. It appears that the Association was able to count on the deeper pockets of a few residents because in the midst of the pleas for money, it was able to purchase a new location on Broad Street for a new library, the old spaces in the municipal building having grown too confining.⁸⁶ The new building was not to open, however, until December 1939 and then only with WPA assistance.⁸⁷ The building was to remain in the hands of the Library Association for the next twenty years, until it was turned over to the town in 1958, “becoming a public library.”⁸⁸ The Library Association, however, continued to operate it.

During the 1940s, the Southern Pines library was to offer administrative and book storage space for the fledgling Moore County Public Library. The Town of Southern Pines was

very helpful to the new county library, contributing \$500 a year to help pay for salaries and utility costs.⁸⁹ According to the County Library Board, Southern Pines was very supportive of the county endeavor. “The Southern Pines library was turned over to the county to be used as headquarters on November 4, 1944. The stock of books of this library was at this time placed at the disposal of the county.”⁹⁰ Although they cooperated in some fashion in using both book collections, the county library primarily used the Southern Pines facility only as a storage depot for its bookmobile operations. The Carthage Library continued to regard itself as, and call itself, the county library.

By the mid-1950s, it must have become apparent to all that the Southern Pines library did not feel a part of the Moore County Library and the pull of Carthage must have accelerated the feelings of separateness. However, the final reason for the move was Southern Pines plan to charge a fee for library cards. In a proposed agenda for the 29 October 1958 meeting of the Moore County Library Board, the county librarian laid out the issues. The county library had to pay rent for their space in Southern Pines, a space that was perceived to be inadequate. The state library had told the county librarian that “books and services paid for with state and federal funds should be pulled from libraries charging fees (state regulations stipulate ‘free library services equally available to all’).”⁹¹ The split became finally official in 1959 when the county’s book stock was moved from Southern Pines to Carthage and the Carthage Town Library became the de facto Moore County Library. The Southern Pines Library continued to serve solely the town of Southern Pines.

By not becoming the headquarters of the county library, the Southern Pines library seemed willingly to forego the possibility of financial support from county government. The Library Association seemed to be satisfied with its own way of securing funds through dues and

bequests, but still had to continually ask for contributions.⁹² Never, through the 1950s and most of the 1960s, was it suggested that the library was a community asset and might best be supported by community, rather than private, funds.

The old funding model seemed to run out of steam by 1969, however, as it was in that year that the Southern Pines town council voted to send town funds to the Library Association for operational expenses. Twelve years later, this modified library operation model was to change again when the town board rescinded its 1969 vote and instead voted to move library operations under the purview of the town manager. The Southern Pines Library had transitioned from a privately funded and administered organization to a partially publicly funded, but privately administered organization, and finally to a public organization.⁹³ The Southern Pines Library Association morphed into a support organization as the Friends of the Southern Pines Library and worked to continue to raise private funds to augment the public monies.⁹⁴

Southern Pines remains the largest, and one of the wealthiest, towns in Moore County. Buoyed by the more robust town tax base, the library has remained apart from the other library efforts in the county. It remains, however, the example that all the other libraries use when they want to point to a large, well-stocked, well-supported library. Southern Pines residents enjoy the free public benefits of arguably the best library in the region. By virtue of being Moore County residents as well as Southern Pines residents, they also enjoy free public access to all the libraries in the five county Sandhill Regional Library System, a system that incorporates the smaller town libraries of Moore County. The reverse, however, is not the case. Residents of the other towns in Moore County may have their own smaller local libraries and may be able to use all the regional library system resources, but must pay an annual fee to be able

to check out books from Southern Pines. This relationship remains a source of envy and some irritation.

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WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE; WE NEED HELP FROM GOVERNMENT

So the Moore County Library building is in Carthage. So the library of the Town of Carthage wanted to be the county library. But wanting to be a county library and being able to obtain funds from the county for that purpose are two different things. Additionally, it took a lot of effort even to be allowed to solicit county funds. The story of that effort highlights how public libraries in Moore County, though they might have begun as club offerings, had to become politically involved if they were to survive.

The public library institution may have been established in America for progressive or for conservative reasons, for enabling or for controlling reasons, for all segments of society or for select segments of society. It was not, however, established in a void. The public library exists in a political context and that political context can be as specific and unique as the locale of a particular public library. To understand the political context in which public libraries exist in North Carolina, one must seek to understand where the public library sits in the governmental structures that exist in this state.

The North Carolina Constitution does not designate public libraries as “a necessary expense,” and therefore does not empower local governing bodies to levy any taxes specifically for the support of public libraries.¹ North Carolina public libraries have, therefore, had to survive by seeking and finding support wherever it could be found in the political structure.

But what does it mean to use the term “public library,” at least as it pertains to the political context in North Carolina? Daniel Boorstin observed in 1977 that public libraries are

treated by the citizenry and by political decision-makers as a sort of “municipal service.” They are seen as a secondary service institution, an organization that serves the municipality, if not necessarily the people.² As municipal services, they have been, as Oliver Garceau described them in his 1949 study of the role of the public library in the political process, “inextricably enmeshed in the jungle of local governmental jurisdictions and the resulting confusion of tax resources”.³

“Enmeshed” is probably a good way to describe the position the public library occupies in the political structure. In the early days of the public library movement in New England, the public library was more accurately at first a voluntary association of people who contributed to a general fund for books, owned in common and available to all members. Libraries evolved into more formal structures such as proprietary libraries (only those members who owned shares could use the enterprise) or subscription/association libraries (only those members who paid a set annual or quarterly fee could use the enterprise). The term “public” was understood to mean that the social/proprietary/subscription/association library was open to anyone who could pay the fee to use it. Such paying structures had their limitations, however. Membership fees or contributions alone could not keep pace with costs, and new funding sources needed to be found. The most likely source was the taxpayer, through the venue of some sort of governmental agency.⁴ The New England social/proprietary/subscription association public library had evolved a board form of government to run the institution. When tax monies were added to the structure, library boards had to be responsive to elected bodies, but they retained much of their older character and were not necessarily under partisan control. From the outset, library boards were primarily focused as agencies whose role it was to guard private endowments and to authorize the spending of public monies. Such a structure and role

continues in North Carolina public libraries to the present day. Because public libraries were (and are) perceived as useful and interesting, but not “necessary” or vital, serious politicians showed and show a lack of political interest in them and the semi-independent board form of governance continues to the present day.⁵

This cursory discussion of the public library board structure is probably a decent way to introduce North Carolina’s public libraries. In this state, the State Library reports that public libraries are organized into nine municipal systems, fifty-one county systems, and fifteen regional (or multi-county) library systems. The story of how each of these structures developed is one of dedicated public library advocates wending their way through the political world, seeking ways to acquire the means to establish these systems.

But even before North Carolina public libraries were able to tap into the taxpayer for the upkeep of the institution, the Southern public library remained “public” in the same sense as Garceau identified the New England social/proprietary/subscription association libraries as public. Speaking of Southern public libraries in 1917, May Crenshaw noted that while “in the strict meaning of the word, a public library is one supported only by public funds, I have used the term in its broader sense, and have included libraries supported by public or private funds, requiring only that there should be general collections, circulating free of charge to all”.⁶ As Louis Wilson and Edward Wight pointed out in 1935, anyone could organize and operate a public library, but to be able to act as a public institution, it must be more than group of well-meaning individuals. “In order for the library to have a legal entity (to own property, to incur debt, to make contracts, to sue and be sued), it must have recognized standing before the law.” Once a library has recognized standing, it may attempt to obtain part of its support from a

governmental unit. Having obtained such support, it is, in Wilson's and Wight's definition, a public library.⁷

Obtaining such support has been a political struggle, in part because the society has not been in agreement about the utility of the public library. As Wilson pointed out in 1924,

North Carolinians have not been believers in books as tools. Bankers, manufacturers, farmers, laborers, housekeepers of the state have not recognized them as absolute necessities, and, consequently, have stood in the way of their advancement not only in the fields of educational and cultural development, but the primary fundamental economic concern of winning bread and butter.⁸

To better understand why the effort to establish public libraries as one of the fundamental responsibilities of government is still ongoing, it is useful to understand the political structure in which the effort is undertaken.

BROADER CONTEXT – NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN NORTH CAROLINA

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

Local governments are created, their functions are defined, and they may be abolished by the state government. All power to provide governmental services on the local or community level is vested in the state as sovereign, ... Thus all units of local government can exercise only those powers and perform only those functions which the state permits through legislation. ... the state created counties as subordinate units of government and provided for the selection of local officials to carry out these responsibilities as agents of the state.⁹

Local governments in North Carolina may not do what they feel is in the best interests of their citizens without first getting the state's permission. The state, therefore, decides what it wants government to do and then authorizes lower level governmental bodies to do what the state wants them to do. If a lower level body wishes to do something for which the

state has not granted permission, it has no legal basis from which to operate. This reality is an outgrowth of the political development of this state. In the Colonial Era, the states of the Northeast were populated with immigrants from Britain at an earlier date than were the states of the Southeast. As a consequence, the original political structures that grew in the Northeast were local in nature. In New England, the towns were sovereign until such time that enough towns were settled to require a higher level of governmental organization. However, as the immigrant population grew more southward, a higher level governmental structure led the way.

In effect, four models of state-local relationships evolved in colonial times, and then morphed into state governmental structures. In New England, the model was the town plan, in which the towns were the institution of local government. In New York, the model was the town-county plan in which the town remained the institution of local government. In Pennsylvania, there were fewer towns, so the county structure related to the township (a sub-county governmental unit made up of less concentrated populated areas than a town) in terms of higher level and local governance.

In the South, the governmental structures preceded the immigrant population. Accordingly, the state level took the lead in governing and used the county for lower level tasks. The difference between the northern and southern colonies was one of centralization. In the northern colonies, the towns, townships, and counties served as institutions of self-government while in the southern colonies, they served as a lower-level arm of state government. Political power was highly centralized in the South and local government was, in effect, a gift from the state rather than an organic outgrowth of local experience.

In North Carolina, this centralized concept remains in effect to the present day. During the Reconstruction Era, an attempt was made to decentralize political power and grant more local control. The Pennsylvania county-township model was imported to North Carolina and institutionalized into the 1868 state constitution.ⁱ The attempt at power decentralization did not take, however, and since about 1900, North Carolina has operated on the old colonial model of strong central control with the state regarding the counties and municipalities as extensions of the state rather than as independent local self-governing units.¹⁰

In North Carolina, units of local government derive their authority from the state. Under this state's system, counties act as agents of the state to administer those services that must be made available at the local level. Municipalities provide additional or higher levels of service. Although North Carolina is still one of the less urbanized states, the growth of population in the counties outside of urban areas has compelled counties to provide more and more urban-like services.¹¹

Public libraries are one of the forty-four “traditionally local services” that the state authorizes for both municipalities and counties.¹² There is little wonder, then, that Oliver Garceau felt in 1949 that citizens of the rural South looked to the county to provide library services. “Local loyalties, habits, and institutions in the South centered around the county”.¹³ In the aftermath of the Civil War, however, the state was deep in debt and the reactionary elite that took political control after Reconstruction became extremely conservative on fiscal matters, refusing to fund anything that was not regarded as absolutely necessary. According to one of the classic histories of the South,

ⁱ The townships remain only as vestiges of the Reconstruction Era Constitution and now serve only as boundaries for voting precincts and as locales to register property deeds. They have no governing authority, nor any political meaning.

Economy became an obsession of the (reactionary elites) ... this determined avoidance of previous extravagances led to the belief that low taxes were to the greatest governmental advantage ... when returning prosperity made heavier taxes feasible, parsimony had become so fixed that little heed was given to the social needs which governments customarily meet in progressive communities.¹⁴

In terms of social needs like public libraries, what heed was given did not come until late. The state did not generally encourage public support of libraries until 1909. It did not generally permit municipalities to even ask their citizens to approve tax levies for libraries until 1911. It did not permit counties to purchase public library services from existing municipality libraries until 1917. It did not permit counties to ask their citizens to approve tax levies for libraries until 1927. And it did not consider providing aid from the state level to public libraries until 1941. “Thus public library service in North Carolina has passed through the successive stages of private financing, municipal aid through appropriations, municipal ownership, county aid through appropriations and finally county ownership”.¹⁵

However, as the General Assembly gradually permitted decentralized responsibility for public libraries, it encountered the problem of dealing with differentiated levels of service at the lower governmental levels. This awareness had first become a reality at the time the state considered public schools and public roads and highways. If the state wanted commonality of service across the state, centralized direction would seem to be called for. If the state wanted commonality of service, but decentralized responsibility for providing such service, then the state would need to at least define acceptable standards and then deal with local governmental bodies on the topic of unfounded mandates (state-directed standards without state-provided resources necessary to meet such standards). The state decided on the centralized approach for schools and roads, but left public libraries decentralized. The story of the development of North Carolina’s public library systems is one of seeking adequate funding.

SCHOOLS AS A MODEL

The decision to have the state fund and direct public education was the solution to the problem of the uneven levels of educational opportunity afforded to children in poorer or more rural areas. If the school system was to be supported by the tax base, either the inequities had to be accepted or some device had to be found to have the wealthier areas of the state to help pay for education in the poorer areas. Local hostility to having to pay for services rendered in another locality seemed unable of being overcome, so the decision was made to have the state fund education and avoid the resentment of the wealthy feeling they were being made to pay for the “paupers.” As the state became more concerned with equality of educational opportunity, it directed that schools be extended into previously ill-served rural areas with the passage of a rural school law in 1907. When the automobile allowed for more mobility, the state in 1918 compelled tiny rural school districts to consolidate into larger districts and to centralize services. And, partially since the automobile was to play a role in centralizing schools services, the state started to consider control of the road system as well.¹⁶ In response to the crisis of the Depression, the state made major fiscal changes in 1931 and 1933, taking primary responsibility for schools, roads, and prisons from county government and centralizing it under the state.¹⁷

Public libraries, however, were not centralized and thus were left to support themselves with the revenues they could raise locally. As was the case in other areas of the South, the prevailing attitude about the values of books and the virtues of low taxes led to low services. Kenneth Johnson’s 1971 article on the development of Alabama public libraries could easily have described the North Carolina experience. The state assumed no responsibility for library services. Counties and municipalities could use tax revenues for libraries, but only under strict constitutional limitations. And always “underlying these conditions was the extensive poverty which led many persons to prefer low taxes rather than libraries”.¹⁸

TAX VOTES AND CLOSURES

Were a municipality or a county desirous of using tax monies to support a public library, it had to call a referendum specifically for that purpose and a tax could be authorized only after approval by the voters. The voters were not always easy to sway. More than one referendum was voted down and no tax was authorized. On other occasions, the voters closed down a public library. This occurred both in wealthy and also in poor counties. On 27 June 1939, Mecklenburg County residents voted down a proposal to increase the library tax to five cents per \$100 dollars assessed valuation of real estate and the Charlotte Public Library system was forced to close three days later. The effort to reopen the library continued however and on 25 May 1940, voters approved a tax of four cents per \$100 assessed valuation and the library was able to reopen with the start of the new fiscal year on 1 July 1940.¹⁹ Three years later Alexander County had a public library that was supported by funds from the Works Project Administration. When WPA money was terminated at the end of March 1943, voters were asked to support the library through taxation. On 27 April 1943, they rejected a three cents per \$100 assessed valuation tax for their public library and the library closed on 20 June.²⁰ Alexander County was without tax supported public library service for the following 25 years.

EVOLVING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NORTH CAROLINA'S POLITICAL CONTEXT

JUST DO IT

William Fletcher in 1894 said that one did not need governmental sanction to establish a public library. "The way, then, to start a library is to start it, not to make great plans and invoke State aid at the outset; but in a simple way to make a beginning from which the library may grow".²¹ Whether they read his words or not, women in North Carolina took his advice to heart. In the last years of the nineteenth century, women's clubs all over the South took on libraries as special projects and led the way in establishing them in their communities.

But, as the twentieth century progressed, the women's club libraries began to run short of funds and library advocates began to look for a different funding model.

CITY

If public libraries were to be supported by more than private funds and philanthropy, laws would have to be passed enabling municipalities to use tax funds to support them. However, laws authorizing tax funds to be spent for public libraries did not mean tax funds were appropriated for that purpose.

The first tax-supported public library in North Carolina was in Durham when, after two years of lobbying effort by Durham citizens, the General Assembly incorporated the Durham Public Library in an act passed on 5 March 1897.²² The site for the first Durham Public Library was donated by two local citizens, and funds to operate it were given by the Woman's Board. Not wishing to be left behind, other cities adopted Durham's model. Raleigh's library was chartered in 1899 and the Olivia Raney Library (donated by a local businessman) opened in 1901. Charlotte and Greensboro followed suit in the following year. Charlotte was chartered by the General Assembly and moved into a Carnegie-donated building in the same year, while Greensboro (which was chartered at the same time) began life in a few rooms donated in City Hall before moving into a Carnegie building two years later in 1904. Winston-Salem's Carnegie library also opened in 1904 and Wilmington got its charter in 1907.²³ Led by women's organizations, smaller towns also petitioned the General Assembly for incorporation. In one example, the Pinebluff Library Association, a women's group in a Moore County town of only about 100 inhabitants, became incorporated in 1908 and opened its association library as the town's public library the following year. This association library was the town's public library for

over 40 years before a tax referendum vote was taken and the town assumed part of the financial responsibility of operating its public library.

By 1910, when the Library Commission compiled its initial statistics about North Carolina public libraries, it counted 26 public libraries in the state. All but one was a municipal library, although many of them were actually association or subscription libraries operated for the municipality. Only one, the Good-Will Free Library in Ledger (Mitchell County), was listed as a county library. It had no legal status as a county library, however, because it was entirely a private operation funded and operated by a resident of the town.²⁴ Except for the residents of Mitchell County, few people living outside these 26 towns had access to public libraries.

CITY & COUNTY

In 1905, the General Assembly failed to renew the Scales Library Act of 1897 which had given permission for municipalities to establish tax-supported public libraries. In its absence, civic associations were urged to continue their work. The General Assembly seemed to support the idea of public libraries, however, and created the North Carolina Library Commission in 1909 with a mission to stimulate the growth of libraries. The Commission stated in 1910 that

The ideal library is one supported by taxation. Unfortunately, there is not a public library law on the statute books and, therefore, a town can not [*sic*] establish the tax-supported free public library. Under these circumstances local library associations serve as the best means of creating library sentiment in a community and of making a library beginning.²⁵

Without benefit of law, some municipalities provided funds to civic organizations to keep libraries open, while some counties added additional funds to association-run municipal libraries in order to have the association libraries start to expand services to county residents. In 1917, the General Assembly belatedly authorized such behavior and explicitly authorized counties to

cooperate with municipal public libraries. By 1924, Forsyth, Guilford, New Hanover, and Durham counties were providing funds to city libraries to provide countywide service.²⁶

COUNTY

But the counties were not yet able to operate their own public library services. The county was long recognized as the most important sub-state governmental organization in the South and was the one that had the potential to bring library services to rural areas. The ALA, at its 1923 meeting, had expressed “its belief that the county is the logical unit of library service for most parts of the United States, and that the county library system is the solution of the library problem for country districts”.²⁷ California had actually been the first state to base its development of public libraries on the county, but the role of the county in Southern political structures made it even more logical in the South.²⁸

The Southeastern Library Association, meeting in Tennessee in 1926, had outlined a program for the development of library service in the South. In its six-point program, the second point was the “extension of library service to rural areas through the development of county libraries”.²⁹ More focused on its home state, the North Carolina Library Commission was convinced of the need to establish county libraries and actively attempted to compel towns to look to the county for service. In its biennial report to the Governor in 1928, it stated

North Carolina has 72 libraries serving the public. More than half of these are inadequately supported and so poorly administered that they give the wrong impression of the function of a public library. ... There are 412 incorporated places in the state, eleven of these have a population of from five to ten thousand, only three of these are without public libraries. There are ten places with a population of ten thousand and upwards, all of these have public libraries. ... It is obvious that a library unit which will give service to the rural residents is what is needed in the State. To meet this need the county unit has been adopted, and the establishment of small town libraries has been discouraged except where it is evident these libraries would serve as nuclei for county libraries later.³⁰

Lobbying paid off in 1927 when the General Assembly amended the 1917 law to permit counties as well as municipalities to have the power to hold referendums for special library taxes. The law permitted a maximum tax of ten cents per one hundred dollars property

valuation. The law included in its provisions an indication that any attempts to secure funding mechanisms for public libraries would have to work their way through a thicket of political considerations. Illustrating both the fact that the public library must operate in a political environment and also the power of local politicians, the law specifically excluded Richmond County from its provisions, thereby not allowing Richmond County voters the opportunity to decide if they wanted to tax themselves for a public library.³¹

A factor in getting the General Assembly to move was the possibility that counties may have been able to obtain philanthropic funds to establish countywide service. The Julius Rosenwald Fund had been established in 1917 by the President of Sears, Roebuck & Company to support a number of causes, most notably the construction of schools for African-Americans in the South. In 1929, the Fund decided to expand its services to county libraries on the stipulation that any service they funded must be made available to all elements of a county population – urban and rural, black and white. The Fund would provide cash on the basis of matching amounts from the assisted counties, one for one in the first two years, one from the Fund to three local dollars in years three and four, and one to four in the final year of the five-year project. Additionally, the Fund required that an assisted county must centralize all county libraries under a trained head librarian.³² Both Davidson (scheduled to receive \$20,000) and Mecklenburg Counties (scheduled to receive \$80,000) were accepted as demonstration counties for the project. “Davidson County ... was the first county in the South to receive a proposition from the Rosenwald Fund for county library development”.³³ The Fund eventually funded eleven demonstration counties in states across the South.³⁴

Things did not work out as planned by both sides. Due to the Depression and consequent shortages in county budgets “...the two counties, Mecklenburg and Davidson,

which were chosen as county library demonstrations for the Julius Rosenwald Fund failed to meet their obligations and consequently lost the aid”.³⁵

However, the combination of the Rosenwald Fund experiments and the authorization by the General Assembly had a beneficial effect on spreading the county library model throughout the state. Although in 1936, it was unfortunate that the vast majority of the state’s population lived on farms or in small towns where there was no public library service, it was fortunate that at least 38 of the 100 counties had “some appropriation from the county commissioners for library service and have made their books available to the people of these counties”.³⁶ Two years later, five more counties joined the list of those providing public libraries. Considered from the negative side, things had improved. In 1910, 62 counties had had no public libraries at all within their borders.³⁷ Twenty-eight years later (and eleven years after counties were authorized to provide tax support to public libraries), that number had been reduced by 23. However, residents of those 39 counties still had neither county nor municipal libraries, nor any publicly supported libraries at all within their counties.³⁸

STATE AID

Obviously, giving the counties the ability to tax themselves to establish public libraries was not the same thing as giving them the ability to afford to establish public libraries. As Wilson and Wight put it when discussing the Rosenwald Foundation grants,

Counties are typically numerous in the southern states – and consequently, small in size and population and low in assessed valuation. ... (this leads) to the conclusion that in the seven demonstration states from one-half to two-thirds of the counties cannot provide, out of purely local income, sufficient support for adequate library service, and to that extent must be considered ineffective units for library development.³⁹

If municipalities did not want to provide library services outside urban areas and counties could not afford to provide library services to rural areas, the next logical step was for the state to do the funding. The public school model had worked in 1907 when the General Assembly had decided to have the state fund education instead of the counties, and it was again lobbied to use the same model for public libraries. But the same support that had caused public school funding to be centralized was not there for public libraries. The sense of ownership held by the organizations that had created municipal and county libraries was too strong to be replaced by centralized direction from the state level. North Carolina's public libraries remained local in income and outlook.⁴⁰ However, even the most dedicated local booster understood that local funding had its limits. The North Carolina Library Commission noted in its 1930 report that "There has been however a most encouraging change in the attitude in the state toward libraries, the people are beginning to realize libraries cannot be operated on nothing and run by just anybody".⁴¹ By 1937, lobbying had led the General Assembly to pass legislation calling for state aid for public libraries, but no money was appropriated for the task.⁴²

The turning point came in 1941 when the General Assembly not only passed a bill for state aid to public libraries, but also appropriated \$100,000 per year for the period 1941-43. The desire of local libraries to remain independent led to the decision to have the North Carolina Library Commission act as the fund administrator. The Commission decided to offer the money to the counties in equal amounts and 76 counties developed acceptable plans for countywide library service and qualified for grants. The remaining 24 counties did not and the money that had been scheduled for them was reapportioned to the 76 that did. According to the Commission, eight of the 24 left-out counties had no public libraries at all within their borders, some thought the money was insufficient for their needs, and "a few lacked leadership." The

Commission was pleased with those who did get grants and noted in its 1942 report that “More than a million people or one-third of the population have access to public libraries who did not have such service before State Aid became a reality”.⁴³

The success of the 1941 State Aid encouraged the General Assembly to increase aid levels in 1943 when the annual appropriation was increased to \$125,000. In 1942, 79 counties qualified for aid and in 1943, 80 counties got aid. Most of the aid went to purchasing books.⁴⁴

North Carolina was the first state in the Southeast to provide state aid to local public libraries and served as a model. Within two years, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, and the eastern part of Tennessee were also receiving state appropriations for support.⁴⁵

FEDERAL AID

But it was not only state aid that was helping smaller libraries keep their doors open. Oliver Garceau had pointed out in 1949 that librarians had long despaired of convincing local governing boards to provide adequate funds. “Librarians long ago stopped talking and thinking about Public Library service as a matter connected exclusively with local government.” According to Garceau, the library community had begun to consider the Federal government as a possible funding source as long ago as 1915.⁴⁶ But Federal funds would not come to local public libraries solely because it was a good idea. Federal aid, rather, was to come in consequence of larger social and political movements. At the end of the First World War, the American Library Association gave 6,000 books to the North Carolina Library Commission. This 6,000 was North Carolina’s share of the books purchased for support of the war effort. “Twenty-five hundred were divided among the public libraries of the state in inverse ratio to the number of volumes in each library”.⁴⁷

Federal aid became critical during the Depression. In 1935, the ALA directed a committee to look into the idea of a permanent program of Federal aid for libraries (though not into any idea of a permanent Federal library agency). The committee, chaired by Louis Round Wilson, reflected a push by public library supporters in the Southeast and Southwest to seek Federal aid because localities in these two regions could not or would not support public libraries. The committee focused primarily on finding ways to get aid directed to the establishment of library services for rural areas, but found itself unable to agree on a common approach. The committee identified two strongly supported attitudes about how libraries ought to be funded. One view held that local enterprise and local initiative was critical to successful public libraries. The other view held that while local support is fine, library needs had exceeded local capacity and larger levels of support were needed. No consensus was found, but they did agree that aid would be sought from Federal sources.⁴⁸ The most successful incorporation of Federal aid came through the WPA.

When the Depression hit the South hard, the Federal government sought to alleviate unemployment by providing work in public projects that would not compete with commercial enterprises. Elaine von Oesen's late 1940s study of the Works Projects Administration efforts in North Carolina noted that the WPA shied away from political conflict with already existing county and municipal library structures and instead concentrated on extending public library services to unserved populations, predominantly those in the rural areas of the state. In the entire nation, four states had more people working on WPA library projects than did North Carolina, but in North Carolina it was the library projects that took first place in WPA efforts. No other state had as high a percentage of WPA employees working on library projects as did North Carolina.⁴⁹ The WPA paid salaries for library workers, funded the construction of public

library buildings, and initiated multi-county library cooperation. In the eastern part of the state, for example, the Beaufort-Hyde-Martin Regional Library System was established through WPA, not local, efforts. County and town libraries were loathe to give up any control (real or perceived) and clung to their sense of local ownership, even when they could not afford to provide decent library service. The WPA tended to ignore county boundaries and sought to help small libraries work together, independent of any particular political jurisdiction. Established public library systems did not want to join into cooperative ventures, so the Federal agency turned elsewhere. In the BHM example, six towns in the three counties each had small libraries sponsored by clubs. The WPA enabled the libraries to remain open by paying the salaries of the library workers, but on the condition that they work together. The governing bodies of the towns and counties in question saw the WPA money as a temporary thing and did not perceive it to be a threat to their political control and thus did not hinder cooperation between libraries. The first successful regional cooperative models, therefore, were created almost by stealth, by people who wanted libraries, but had had no previous direction from local governing bodies and thus had no predisposition to resist the WPA's lead.⁵⁰

WPA efforts were not uniformly successful. As noted earlier, voters in Alexander County did not feel that the library services provided by WPA money were worth paying for themselves. In 1943, when the WPA funding ceased, voters rejected a tax referendum and the county's public library was closed, not to reopen for a quarter of a century.

Efforts in library construction, however, were more successful and led to the creation of library systems in both municipalities and counties. Between 1934 and 1940, library buildings were constructed with a combination of local and WPA funds in Warrenton, New Bern,

Leakesville, Hamlet, Wilson, Southern Pines, Statesville, Madison, and Vanceboro. WPA money also funded library facilities for African-Americans in several eastern counties.

In comparing the construction efforts of the WPA with those of the Carnegie Foundation, one notes a difference in direction. Patrick Valentine in a 1996 article on the role of philanthropy in North Carolina public libraries noted that in comparison to Georgia's systematic approach to extending public library service through the active seeking of Carnegie grants, efforts to obtain grants for North Carolina public libraries was a casual affair.⁵¹ In the case of seeking and using WPA grants for library buildings, the effort was extremely directed with the North Carolina Library Association's director clearly leading a systematic effort to use WPA money to extend public library services. The obtaining of Carnegie grants had been a local responsibility; the provision of WPA grants was a centrally directed effort.

The successes that the WPA and the Tennessee Valley Authority had in fostering cooperation between library systems (the TVA had shepherded the Nantahala Regional Library system into life in 1941 by paying libraries in the western part of the state to work together) did not go unnoticed by library professionals. In a post-World War II survey of the state of libraries in the Southeast, Wilson and others noted that no Southern state was providing enough funding support for public libraries. "(The amount of state funding) is still far below the national average and further yet from the minimum necessary for acceptable service. This miniscule amount indicates quite pointedly that public libraries are not regarded as performing essential services entitling them to adequate local support".⁵² Considering the realities of the Southern tax base, the authors concluded that Carleton Joeckel and Amy Winslow had it right in their 1948 *National Plan for Public Library Service* (Chicago: ALA) when they suggested that Federal aid should account for fifteen percent of public library revenues.⁵³

Continued lobbying efforts succeeded with the Library Services Act of 1956 “which inaugurated, at a very low level to be sure, Federal aid to states for the development and expansion of public libraries in rural areas”.⁵⁴ Renewed and then expanded in 1964 (as the Library Services and Construction Act) to include urban libraries and also construction, it was again expanded in 1966 to include interlibrary coordination. As was the case with state funding, Federal aid was channeled to local public libraries through the agency of the North Carolina State Library who used it as they did with state funds – as a stimulus for raising matching local funds.⁵⁵

As had been the case during the Depression, public libraries were beneficiaries of Federal aid during the administrations of strong Democratic presidents who were pushing a strong social agenda. With the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, those social agendas were reversed and the administration tried to choke off the flow of Federal money to public libraries. Kathleen Molz’ 1977 review of the effort to gain Federal funding saw such grants-in-aid as the solution to equitable funding of public libraries. Though Molz tried to avoid blaming Republicans for the reduction in Federal funds, a sense of hostility flows through her article.⁵⁶

Molz, however, did identify the basic problem of funding and the reason for the perceived need of Federal, state, and local funds. “... the issue of tax support for libraries in this country has been from the beginning fraught with contradictions and ambivalences both from those who sought it and those who made provision for it”.⁵⁷ Or, it is perhaps exactly as Garceau characterized it in 1949. Public libraries are undercapitalized plants with underpaid staffs. Everyone is for it, but no one wants to pay for it.⁵⁸

LOCAL CONTEXT – THE MOORE COUNTY LIBRARY

The Moore County Library has become, over the latter half of the twentieth century, the backbone of small town libraries in the county. But its evolution was tied right into the evolution of funding models in North Carolina. Until state aid became a reality, there was no lobby for a county-wide library service. The local libraries in Aberdeen, Carthage, Pinebluff, Robbins, and Southern Pines were felt to be adequate. Carthage regarded itself as the de facto county library and offered its books to readers in the unincorporated areas of the county, but there was no real sense that the county itself was behind the effort. When state money became available in 1941, people in Moore County began to take more interest. The Moore County Library, while based in a fashion on the local libraries in Carthage and Southern Pines, was really an act evolving out of two non-local models.

The first model was the WPA. In 1939, the WPA proposed to run a bookmobile service to rural areas of Moore County. The local libraries in Carthage and Robbins had provided book service for town readers, but did not have the resources to reach out to the unincorporated areas of northern Moore County. Some residents in smaller towns and communities might have been able to come into these two towns to use the library, but shortages of time, money, and transportation had to have been a severe limitation for most of them. Residents in smaller towns and communities in the southern end of the county were similarly out of luck. The town libraries in Aberdeen and Pinebluff might have been willing to allow non-residents to use the facility, but they did not reach out to them.

The WPA's initial bookmobile itinerary, in March 1939, planned for the bookmobile to run five days a week. One day was spent in the southern part of the county, with stops from

Niagara, through Southern Pines and Pinehurst, to Aberdeen and Pinebluff. The other four days were spent in the more rural western and northern reaches of the county, with stops at schools, churches, and some private residences.⁵⁹ The *Moore County News* tried through articles in the newspaper to excite interest in using the service.⁶⁰

The bookmobile seems to have had an initial run in 1939, but then was stopped for some reason. It returned in 1941 for a three month sequence of book deliveries, following roughly the same itinerary. This time, however, the bookmobile was based in Carthage and ran its daily loops starting and ending in Carthage.⁶¹ It seems to have been welcomed by readers, and local leaders in Robbins and Carthage seem to have regarded it as a model for expansion of library service.

The second model was based on a level of state tax support for county libraries, after the Library Commission achieved its goal of convincing the state legislature to support county libraries by using state grants. When state monies became available in 1941 for county library service, local leaders seem to have consciously modeled their concept for a county service on the WPA bookmobile. In April 1944, the County Commissioners appointed a committee to look into organizing a county library service and to seek to obtain state funds to help the effort. A letter to the Chairman of the Moore County Commissioners from Julius Amis, the State Supervisor of Rural Libraries (and formerly the coordinator of WPA library services throughout the state) dated 26 May 1944 included a draft plan that the committee had developed.

Handwritten notes on the letter indicate that Ms. Amis had met with some of the members (mostly from the western and northern areas of the county) at the home of Mrs. John McGraw in Carthage. Their plan sought to use books provided by the State Library, augmented by books loaned by the existing town libraries, to supply a bookmobile that would service the schools and

isolated communities in the rural areas of the county.ⁱⁱ The plan sought operational funds of \$2,000 annually from the county and anticipated \$1125 from the state. It also anticipated that the county librarian (who might be shared with an adjoining county) would operate out of Carthage, while seeking a location for a permanent county library facility.⁶²

OPERATING OUT OF THE BACK OF A “CHEVVIE”

With agreement that state monies would become available, the county library was thus established. Aberdeen and Pinebluff had their own libraries and the librarian, Mrs. Dorothy Avery, based her operations around the libraries in Southern Pines, Carthage, and Robbinsⁱⁱⁱ. She used the books stocks from Southern Pines for the bookmobile and used the libraries in Carthage and Robbins as bases of operations on Thursday and Friday of each week, respectively. Though the original plan had been to purchase a bookmobile vehicle, that did not happen and Mrs. Avery delivered books using her personal automobile. She must have been able to obtain some official support, however, as there was never any indication that she was limited by gas rationing.⁶³ Mrs. Avery seemed to enjoy her work and offered to deliver specific titles to individual readers if a patron wanted to request a title by postcard.⁶⁴ Book readers remembered the WPA bookmobile model which had been “equipped with a set of revolving shelves which [held] about 800 books” and supported Mrs. Avery’s request for a county vehicle built for the task. The awaited vehicle finally made its appearance in 1948 and Mrs. Avery was able to retire her “Chevie.”⁶⁵

ⁱⁱ Southern Pines, Aberdeen, Carthage, Pinehurst, and Robbins were included. Pinebluff was not. It is not clear if Pinebluff was just overlooked or if it had been asked, but declined, to participate. The plan for bookmobile service, however, also did not include Pinebluff.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mrs. Avery came to Moore County from Morganton, NC. “Mrs. Avery received her training at the Carnegie Library School in Pittsburgh, Pa., a department of Carnegie Institute of Technology, and her experience in the libraries of Pittsburgh and as librarian of the Morganton public library.”

“Bookmobile Has Started Career; Dream of People Interested In Cultural Side of Life Becomes Reality,” *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 22 Apr. 1948: 5.

For its first four years, county bookmobile service was concentrated in the very rural northern and western areas of the county, because these areas had the least access both to the local libraries in Robbins and Carthage and to reading materials in general. Many of the founding members of the Moore County Library Board were also from these areas and had first hand understanding of reading needs of these isolated locations. The county also provided supplemental book materials via the bookmobile to the Aberdeen library, probably in exchange for Page Memorial having offered a portion of its collection for the bookmobile in 1944. In 1948, bookmobile service began to expand to other, previously unsupported communities in the southern end of the county. In July of that year, the bookmobile began its first runs to the Roseland area, in the southern end of the county, and also began to provide supplemental support to Pinebluff through its local library.⁶⁶

In that same year, the bookmobile began to provide service to black residents of the county. The 1948 annual library report noted that a “big summer schedule is being planned with the children and young people in view, and the bookmobile will also make stops to serve groups of Moore county’s colored citizens.”⁶⁷ In 1949, the librarian reported “Since there are so many Negro schools in the county, the Bookmobile has not reached them all but is trying to get a new one in on each three weeks’ schedule.”⁶⁸ Whether because the State had pressured the county to provide such service or because the State suggestion had provided cover for the county to do what it had wanted to do, the bookmobile delivered reading materials to black schools and to black readers at locations outside of the main towns in the county. According to the librarian’s annual report in 1950, “Service to Negroes is stressed by the State Library Commission and the bookmobile goes to a number of the colored schools and also makes several stops especially to allow colored readers to borrow books.”⁶⁹ Although the Carthage Public Library, then located in

the Carthage Community House, was the de facto county library at the time, it was still a town library. There was no official county library and thus the county did not have to face the issue of providing full library services to black residents.

Mrs. Avery was to resign as the Moore County librarian in 1956 in order to move on to a library job in Canton, North Carolina. The library board solicited help from the State Library Commission to find another professional librarian to take her place and, in late 1957, Miss Hollis Haney arrived from Oklahoma to take up the job, this time as the librarian for both Moore and Richmond Counties.⁷⁰

The old library model (a bookmobile delivering books out of stock stored in the Southern Pines Library) continued to be followed throughout most of the 1950s, but eventually the county library and the Southern Pines Library decided that each needed its own space. After her arrival, Miss Haney quite soon identified the need for a true county facility. Her notes for the agenda of an upcoming library board meeting in late 1958 focused on the need for the county library to remain in close contact with county officials. She understood that county officials provided the funding and she felt that co-location would permit the library to be a reference tool for county officials, thus enhancing the library's value to them. She clearly wanted county officials to get to know her and to see her working for them on a routine basis. She wanted to be located in Carthage instead of Southern Pines for that reason.

She also identified a possible additional funding stream from the state and invited a member of the State Library staff to present a proposal for a multi-county regional library setup. It seemed clear that although she was the joint librarian for both Moore and Richmond Counties, Miss Haney saw the regional headquarters and the new Moore County Library as

being one and the same.⁷¹ Her efforts at cultivating political support in Carthage paid off and, on 1 December 1958, the County Commissioners approved the Library Board to solicit bids to renovate the Riddle Building in Carthage to become the new county library facility. It was clear in the phrasing of the approval that the Riddle Building was understood to be an interim solution to a new county library facility. No mention was made of the idea of a regional library, but the seed had been planted.⁷²

THE MOVE TO CARTHAGE

Thus, in 1959, the county holdings were moved to a newly rented facility in downtown Carthage and the tie to Southern Pines was severed. It seems that the move was something everyone – Southern Pines, Carthage, and the county – wanted to do as soon as they could. The 8,000 volumes that the county owned were moved during the evening of 12 January 1959 when 27 members of the Carthage Jaycees used their personal vehicles to move the books to Carthage. The new facility in Carthage had been renovated, but it did not have bookshelves at the start, so the books were simply stacked on the floor. Miss Haney said that even in the absence of shelves, the county library “will do the best we can to serve the public” from Carthage. The shelves finally arrived ten months after the move.⁷³

During the early 1960s, Miss Haney continued to work with state and county officials, trying to improve the county library situation. Her position as the joint head of the libraries in both Moore and Richmond counties made her a natural to take over the position as the first director when the new Sandhill Regional Library System was established in 1962.⁷⁴ Working with the state, she identified the possibility of obtaining federal construction funds to help build a new county library facility and identified space in Carthage where it could be built, right next to the county courthouse and county offices. County officials were supportive, but in the end,

could not come up with enough county money to qualify for a federal grant.⁷⁵ The disappointment of that situation was a factor in Miss Haney's decision to resign as director of the Sandhill Regional Library System and take an appointment as director of the Neuse Regional Library System in Kinston. She said she was sad to go, but "her reasons for leaving were because of the larger staff and financial support which the Neuse Regional system offers. She pointed out that the Kinston system has an unusually strong spirit of cooperation between city and county government which is basic to any good library system."⁷⁶ The newspaper article left unsaid whether or not Miss Haney felt that there was not enough spirit of cooperation between city and county in Carthage, but her remarks were pointed.

Mrs. Eugenia Babylon replaced Miss Haney as regional library director a few months later.⁷⁷ At her first meeting with the Moore County Commissioners, Mrs. Babylon pointed out that the Riddle Building was in dire need of replacement. However, the lead role in soliciting support for a new facility was taken on by a newly formed group, the Friends of the Moore County Library.⁷⁸

THE FRIENDS OF THE MOORE COUNTY LIBRARY

The Friends group was formed at a meeting in the Carthage Hotel on 13 November 1966. Composed of members from the northern parts of Moore County, as well as a few from Pinehurst and Southern Pines, the group did not include members from the two towns who had their own small town libraries, Aberdeen and Pinebluff. Undoubtedly aware from their friends and acquaintances that the librarian and the county Library Board had been unsuccessful in their efforts to persuade the County Commissioners to find the funding necessary for a new library, the Friends were clear in their objectives. "It will strive, not only to promote increased use of the library, but also to assist in Fund Raising for the purchase of books and better library

facilities.”⁷⁹ This socially and politically well-connected group began a steady series of efforts to publicize the need for a better county library through newspaper articles, speeches by local and invited dignitaries to community groups, and steady pressure on county officials.⁸⁰ By the end of their first year, the Friends group had succeeded in using their contacts with influential citizens and organizations to help convince the County Commissioners to provide the necessary funding so that federal funds could be added to the mix and a new library built. Construction began on the new facility in January 1968 and it opened one year later.⁸¹

Having succeeded in their immediate goal, the Friends of the Moore County Library gradually grew inactive, especially after their head, State Representative Clyde Auman of West End, resigned in 1972 due to competing pressures on his time. By 1977, the group had become so inactive that a newspaper article indicated that it had had to be revived. It seems as if the group grew quiescent when the library seemed to be well-funded, but was brought back to life each time there was a perceived need for more funding.⁸² In its post-1977 reincarnation, the group consisted of 47 members, with Southern Pines supplying the largest contingent from any single town. There were only three each from Carthage and Aberdeen and none from Robbins or Pinebluff.⁸³ However, they were not very active and the group fell into quiescence again.

Both Robbins and Pinebluff had their own libraries, although in Robbins the library was on the verge of closing. If people in Robbins wanted to reopen their library, they would have to become more active, and the Friends group had achieved success in the past. In 1983, the Friends group became active again, this time with energetic effort from Glory Garner, a Robbins resident and a contributing reporter for the local papers. Following in the same paths that the group had trod in the late 1960s, the new members sought to energize locally well-

connected individuals and organizations into renewed support for the county library, and in Robbins' case, for support for a county library branch in their town.⁸⁴

The Friends group continued to be supported primarily by members who came from Southern Pines or the northern end of the county, thus their interests tended to focus on those areas. The interests of the town libraries in both Aberdeen and Pinebluff did not get attention among the Friends. Both Aberdeen and Pinebluff were to join the county system in the 1980s as a result of the initiative of the county librarian, Helen Causey, not of the Friends group. Robbins, however, was to benefit from the interest. Although the effort to create the Robbins library was primarily a local effort, it did not hurt them that many members of their Robbins library group were also well connected to the Friends group.

THE MOORE COUNTY LIBRARY TODAY

In 2005, the county library seems to regard itself as a self-contained entity. The outreach it began with in 1944 continues to this day with its extensive bookmobile effort. The changes in bookmobile service reflect the changes in the times. In the early years, the bookmobile was focused on bringing books to isolated rural homesteads and communities. In the late 1940s through the 1950s, it continued that effort, but also expanded to provide support to the small town libraries in Robbins, Aberdeen, and Pinebluff. It also provided books to isolated African-American communities who did not have a town library that they could use. In the 1990s and beyond, the bookmobile continues to provide book service to isolated communities. Although the residents of Seven Lakes could easily drive to Carthage or Robbins, the bookmobile brings books to them, with a special focus on meeting the reading desires of retirees who had grown accustomed to such service when they lived in other parts of the county. But the primary customers for bookmobile service today are the isolated retirement

communities and rest homes, whose residents do not have the mobility necessary to visit the town or county library.

Its relationships with its branch libraries are tenuous. The buildings in each of the town branches are owned by the towns and local library supporters tend to regard their local libraries as more belonging to their towns than belonging to a county system. Though everyone understands the contractual relationships between the libraries, the town libraries tend to act somewhat self-standing and the county library in Carthage tends to think of them in the same way too.

¹ David Stick, et al., *Report of the Legislative Commission to Study Library Support in the State of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: The Commission, 1968) Appendix A.

² Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Indivisible Community," *Libraries and the Life of the Mind in America*, (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 1977) 119-121.

³ Garceau xviii.

⁴ Garceau 16-23.

⁵ Garceau 32.

⁶ May V. Crenshaw, "Public Libraries in the South," *Library Journal* 42: 163-174, (1917) 163.

Ms. Crenshaw identified two facts of life in this short sentence – public libraries in the South were supported by a mix of private and public funds, but the "all" who could use them was usually limited to segment of the population identifiable by skin color.

⁷ Wilson and Wight 25.

⁸ Wilson and Wight 72.

⁹ George H. Esser, Jr. "Local Government and the Public Library," *Public Libraries in North Carolina; Proceedings of the First Trustee-Librarian Institute*, (Chapel Hill: Institute of Government, University of North Carolina, 1952) 11.

¹⁰ Liner 3-7.

¹¹ Liner xiv.

¹² Liner 37.

¹³ Garceau 40.

¹⁴ Simkins and Roland 316.

¹⁵ Esser 12.

¹⁶ William Stevens Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 467-468.

¹⁷ Liner 60.

¹⁸ Kenneth R. Johnson, "The Early Library Movement in Alabama," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy, & Comparative Librarianship* VI (1971): 120.

¹⁹ North Carolina Library Commission, *Sixteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 9.

²⁰ North Carolina Library Commission, *Eighteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1942-June 30, 1944* [pamphlet] (1944): 11-12.

²¹ Fletcher 29.

²² Jessica Harland-Jacobs, *The History of Public Library Service in Durham, North Carolina 1897 to 1997*. 23 July 2001. 16 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.durhamcountylibrary.org/ncc/dclhist/01intro.htm>>.

²³ Mitchell 10-11, 56.

²⁴ North Carolina Library Commission, *First Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission 1909-1912*; Wendell W. Smiley, *Library Development in North Carolina before 1930* (Greenville, NC: East Carolina University Library, 1971) 80-81.

²⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *First Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission 1909-1912* 10.

²⁶ Anders 187; Hughey 14; Esser 12; Wilson, "A Program for North Carolina Libraries" 72.

²⁷ Harriet Catherine Long, *County Library Service* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1925) 7.

²⁸ Linda Rose Hansen, *Public Library Service in Selected States: An Analysis of Some Patterns in System Formation* (Chicago: Illinois Regional Library Council, 1978) 2.

²⁹ Wilson and Wight v.

³⁰ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission* 8-10.

³¹ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission* 8.

³² Barker 33-34.

³³ North Carolina Library Commission, *Eleventh Report of the Library Commission of North Carolina* 6-7.

³⁴ Wilson and Wight 23.

³⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *North Carolina Library Commission Twelfth Report* 3.

³⁶ North Carolina Library Commission, *Fourteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission for the Biennium July 1, 1934-June 30, 1936*, Ts. (1936).

³⁷ North Carolina Library Commission, *First Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission 1909-1912* 11.

³⁸ North Carolina Library Commission, *Fifteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 4.

³⁹ Wilson and Wight 181-183.

⁴⁰ Hansen 4.

⁴¹ North Carolina Library Commission, *Eleventh Report of the Library Commission of North Carolina* 6.

⁴² North Carolina Library Commission, *Fifteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 4.

⁴³ North Carolina Library Commission, *Seventeenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1940-June 30, 1942* 5-7.

⁴⁴ North Carolina Library Commission, *Eighteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 5-6.

⁴⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *Eighteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 5.

⁴⁶ Garceau 201.

⁴⁷ North Carolina Library Commission, *Sixth Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 9.

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- ⁴⁸ Louis R. Wilson et al., "Libraries and Federal Aid, Report of the American Library Association Committee on Federal Aid," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30 (1936): 428-429.
- ⁴⁹ Elaine von Oesen, "Public Library Extension in North Carolina and the WPA," *North Carolina Historical Review* XXIX, (1952): 383-385.
- ⁵⁰ von Oesen 393-4.
- ⁵¹ Valentine, "Steel, Cotton, and Tobacco: Philanthropy and Public Libraries in North Carolina, 1900-1940" 278.
- ⁵² Louis R. Wilson and Marion A. Milczewski, eds., *Libraries of the Southeast, a report of the Southeastern States Cooperative Library Survey, 1946-1947*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Southeastern Library Association by the University of North Carolina Press, 1949) 41.
- ⁵³ Wilson and Milczewski 53.
- ⁵⁴ Richard H. Leach, *The Federal Government and Libraries*, (N.p.: n.p., [1968]) 3.
- ⁵⁵ Leach 49-59.
- ⁵⁶ R. Kathleen Molz, "Libraries and the Development and Future of Tax Support," *Libraries and the Life of the Mind in America*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977) 50-51.
- ⁵⁷ R. Kathleen Molz, *Library Planning and Policy Making: The Legacy of the Public and Private Sectors*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990) 41.
- ⁵⁸ Garceau 111.
- ⁵⁹ "Itinerary for WPA Bookmobile Given," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 30 Mar. 1939: 9.
- ⁶⁰ "Wonderful Chance To Read Some Good Books," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 13 Apr. 1939: 1.
- ⁶¹ "WPA Bookmobile Returning Here For Longer Stay," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Jan. 1941: 1.
- ⁶² Julius Amis, letter about plans for Moore County Library, North Carolina Library Commission: Raleigh, NC, 26 May 1944.
- ⁶³ "Library Board Holds Meeting; Great Response Reported after First Year's Operation Here," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 8 Nov. 1945: 7.
- ⁶⁴ Dorothy H. Avery, "Lending Books Delightful Job; Though It's Hard Work, The County Librarian Enjoys Making Routes," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 16 Apr. 1946: 3.
- ⁶⁵ "WPA Bookmobile Returning Here For Longer Stay," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Jan. 1941: 1; Dorothy H. Avery, "Moore County To Have Bookmobile," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 20 Jun. 1946: sec. 2, 2; Dorothy H. Avery, "Bookmobile May Soon Be Reality; Library Still Going Strong With 3000 Books Loaned Out In County," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 7 Nov. 1946: 8; "Moore County Secures Bookmobile," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 29 Apr. 1948: 3.
- ⁶⁶ "Bookmobile Travels in Roseland Area," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 1 Jul. 1948: 4.
- ⁶⁷ "Library Board In Annual Meeting," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 27 May 1948: sec. 2, 6.
- ⁶⁸ "Library Board In Annual Meeting," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 3 Feb. 1949: 7.
- ⁶⁹ "Moore Folks Do Heavy Reading."
- ⁷⁰ "Dorothy Avery Resigns as Moore County Librarian," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 22 Mar. 1956: 1; Miss Alma Edwards, "New County Librarian Is A Real Asset," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 14 Nov. 1957: 4.

⁷¹ Haney.

⁷² "County Library to Move into Riddle Building," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 4 Dec. 1958: 1.

⁷³ "Co. Library Is Moved To Carthage; Located in Riddle Bldg.," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 15 Jan. 1959: 1; "Bookshelves for Library Arrive," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 15 Oct. 1959: 4.

⁷⁴ "Moore To Be In Regional Library Body," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Aug. 1962: 1; "Hollis Haney Gives Report on New Regional Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 6 Sep. 1962: 1.

⁷⁵ "Commissioners Turn Down Medical Aid, Study Library Building Plan," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 9 Jul. 1964: 9; "Seek New Site For Moore County Library," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Jul. 1964: 9; "Moore May Get New Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 10 Jun. 1965: 2; "Hope for Library Building in Moore Fades," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 8 Jul. 1965: 9.

⁷⁶ "Miss Hollis Haney Resigns as Regional Library Director," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Sep. 1965: 2.

⁷⁷ "New Area Librarian Appointed," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 30 Dec. 1965: 1.

⁷⁸ "Mrs. Babylon Discusses Library Needs with County Commissioners," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 29 Jan. 1966: 6.

⁷⁹ "Friends of Library Form County Group," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 17 Nov. 1966: 1.

⁸⁰ "Library Board: Wants Local Funds To Match Federal Money," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 1 Jan. 1967: 1; "Reasons Cited: Support Given Move to Build County Library," *Pilot* [Southern Pines, NC] 1 Feb. 1967: n.pag.; "Asks Green Light For New Library," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Feb. 1967: 1; "Blount Stresses Importance of Public Libraries," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 23 Feb. 1968: 8; "Friends of Library Meeting in Carthage Friday Evening," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 3 Mar. 1967: 9.

⁸¹ "Commissioners Allocate \$50,000 for Library Bldg.," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 9 Mar. 1967: sec. B, 1; "Federal Funds For Library Get Approval," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 17 Aug. 1967: 1; "Moore Library Building Assured," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 7 Sep. 1967: 1; "Commissioners Approve \$116,509 Library Building," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 7 Dec. 1967: 1; "County Commissioners: Underwrite \$20,000 For County Library," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 21 Dec. 1967: 1; "Ground Breaking Held Friday For New Library," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 25 Jan. 1968: 1; "Friends of Library Will Launch Campaign for Funds," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 2 May 1968: 2; "Commissioners Budget \$20,224 for Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 20 Jun. 1968: 1; "Friends Of Library An Active Group," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 25 Jul. 1968: 3; "Friends Give Library \$1,000 for Equipment," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 19 Sep. 1968: 8; "Rotarians In Tour Of New Library Here," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 21 Nov. 1968: 10; "Moore Library in Carthage Open to Serve Entire County," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 12 Dec. 1968: 2; "Dedication and Open House Held at Moore County Library Sunday," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 23 Jan. 1969: 1.

⁸² "John McPhaul Heads Friends of Moore County Library," *Robbins Record* [Robbins, NC] 27 Jan. 1972: 4; "Dr. Seige Named President Moore Friends of Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 2 Mar. 1977: 12; Edith Falls, "Friends of Library Reactivates," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 2 Mar. 1977: 13.

⁸³ Xerox copy of handwritten list titled "1978-79 Friends of Library," (Moore County Friends of the Library Folder: Moore County Library, Carthage, NC)

⁸⁴ "Library Friends Active Again," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 21 May 1983: 5A; "Friends of Library Active Again," *Moore County News* [Aberdeen, NC] 25 May 1983: 2b; Kevin Lewis, "Library For All Reasons," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 7 Jan. 1984: 3A; "Friends of Moore Library Elect Officers," *Robbins Record* [Robbins, NC] 4 Apr. 1984: 6; Kevin Lewis, "Friends of N.C. Libraries Met At Weymouth," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 18 Apr. 1984: 7a; Kevin Lewis, "Glory Garner Believes Libraries Need Friends To Survive," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 23 Apr. 1984: 6A.

The creation of the Moore County Library in 1944 was the result of more than a new funding model. When the Moore County Library's third director, Hollis Haney, became simultaneously the director of both the County Library and the Sandhills Regional Library System in 1962, a parallel effort at developing a new library organizational model became reality.

To create a funding model that would provide state grants to counties that could not or would not support a countywide library system on its own, library supporters, led by the North Carolina Library Commission had to navigate legal and political structures in Raleigh. The effort to conform to or to modify laws in order to create new public libraries was an effort done in large part by community boosters and library professionals together. During the same time that this effort was taking place, however, library professionals were evolving new understandings of the role and value of the small public library.

Reading the professional literature from the early 1920s on, one notes that library professionals despaired of securing adequate funding for adequate libraries. One way to achieve a professionally agreed level of funding support was to consider efficiency of both processes and funding through advocacy of larger units of service. Looking at the evolving professional context, one may begin to understand why this direction was pursued and how the library profession began to view things through a different lens than did some of the small town library supporters. To understand this growing divergence, it is useful to trace its path in a

chronological look at how professional attitudes towards small public libraries evolved over time.

BROADER CONTEXT – THE PROFESSIONAL DRIVE FOR SIZE

GETTING STARTED IN A SMALL WAY

As the idea of spreading public libraries to the un- and underserved parts of the state began to take hold in the early part of the twentieth century, library professionals concentrated on just getting libraries established. Since the public library concept began in the village and community tradition of New England, those who would see it expanded to other sections of the country tended to see the New England model as one to emulate. Reminiscences about the evolution of early public libraries highlighted the small perspective and the role of philanthropy. “Memorial libraries are therefore very abundant, and as the expense often has not been spared in the erection of such memorials, many of our towns, even the smaller ones, are ornamented by library buildings which are gems of architecture”.¹ Philanthropists, for whatever their underlying reason, donated public library facilities to communities and, in the process, also donated an opportunity for the community to take ownership of the institution.

But the fact remains, with all its significance, that about the public library cluster naturally the affections and the interest of the community ... Seldom has such a proposition been rejected by an intelligent community. The library has already quietly won its way to the hearts of the people, more especially of the common people, who will be found ready to undertake its support on condition of its becoming public property.²

William Fletcher, when he made the above statement, was thinking primarily about the situation in New England. The same, however, was true in the South. Annie Wallace, the librarian for the Atlanta Carnegie Library, noted in a talk to a conference in 1907 that “(the) free public library as a municipal property in the South dates from the acceptance of Mr. Carnegie’s first gift to the South in 1899”.³ While she was perhaps not quite accurate in asserting that Atlanta’s Carnegie was the first municipal public library in the South, she was accurate in describing the spirit of the idea that philanthropy often prompted public awareness of their

ownership of the public library. As noted in a previous section, the Durham Public Library was authorized by the General Assembly in 1897 after local citizens had donated the facilities for use two years prior. Raleigh's Olivia Raney Library followed the same pattern – donation in 1899 by a local philanthropist followed two years later by General Assembly authorization of a public library. Asheville followed the Durham and Raleigh model, while Charlotte and Greensboro established public libraries after donation of Carnegie buildings.

Library supporters and professionals encouraged the state in 1909 to establish the North Carolina Library Commission to guide library extension throughout the state. The commission immediately sought to engage local community associations in the process. In one of its first acts, the commission chairman attended the annual meeting of the Federated Women's Clubs in Raleigh in May 1909 to ask for their cooperation in building community libraries. The prevailing attitude was summed up in a short comment in the Commission's first annual report in 1910: "... local library associations serve as the best means of creating library sentiment in a community and of making a library beginning".⁴

This effort bore fruit. By the time of the Commission's seventh biennial report in 1922, local organizations were having significant success in opening libraries in small municipalities. "The nineteen months ending June 30, 1922, was a period of unprecedented interest in the establishment and reorganization of public libraries." Nineteen new municipal libraries had been opened in that period.⁵ In Moore County, to cite one example, a fifth public library had been opened during the period (though all five were more accurately subscription or association libraries, they were "public" in the sense that they were intended to serve the white citizenry of their respective communities) and the local women's groups had established 13 traveling library stations in small community locations throughout the county.⁶

While the North Carolina Library Commission concentrated on just getting public libraries established in all the communities in the state, others gave some thought to what such libraries might do for their communities. “William S. Learned, a senior staff director at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and a supporter of progressive educational reform in his own right” wrote an internal memo to help the Carnegie Foundation focus its ideas on its goals.⁷ The President of the Foundation thought the memo deserved a wider audience and had it published in book form in 1924. In his consideration of the complementary nature of discovery and diffusion, Learned opined that while schools did a good job of diffusing knowledge to children to aid in their own efforts of discovery, little was done for adults. He suggested that the newly established public libraries might serve as a “Community Intelligence Service,” a center patronized as much as the Post Office where adults can get useful information as well as “polite” literature. He noted the differences between what smaller and larger town libraries could afford to do and suggested linking small towns to larger ones so that technical collections may be shared. He went on to advocate a role for “community intelligence personnel” who actively seek ways to discover what is needed and to find ways to make it available. Such personnel, and such an agency, need to be “actively aggressive” in outreach and guidance, for all kinds of different community groups and needs. While the book collection would be the basis of such a “Community Intelligence Service,” it would only be part of the effort.⁸ In Learned’s vision, such a service would become so valuable to the community that it would find itself freed from the constant need to justify its existence to the taxpayers;

... it is in the nature of the situation that the wiser and more far-sighted library service becomes, the more generously and permanently it is recognized and supported. ... However disagreeable the conclusion may be, libraries that lack support may as well confront the fact that they are not furnishing the kind of service required by the individuals whom they ought to reach.⁹

Learned may have been the first (and possibly the only) individual to suggest that the role of the public library be one of personal service, to provide diffusion of useful information to the citizenry, rather than to be one focused on the collection, as a repository of knowledge.¹⁰ His view that the library be a “community intelligence service” in which both small and large libraries could share information for the mutual benefit of their combined clienteles was innovative, but not persuasive enough to be taken up by those in the profession who were seeking to create public libraries in the classical mode.

THE COUNTY MODEL

In North Carolina, the leader of the effort was Louis Round Wilson. He had been there from the start and would continue to be a voice of leadership for decades to come. In 1924, however, his focus was on different things than Learned’s ideas. By the mid-1920’s, there were between 70-100 “public” libraries in existence in North Carolina; some tax-supported, some association or subscription libraries. Women’s Clubs were doing a good job of creating small libraries and energizing municipal authorities to take over their operation. However, the rural areas of the state were still not well served by library facilities and library professionals began to push for counties to become the provider of library services for small communities and for the citizenry who did not live in incorporated towns. In an address to a Winston-Salem meeting of the North Carolina Library Association in 1923, Wilson laid out the tasks for North Carolina libraries for the upcoming decade. Since North Carolina was at that time primarily an agricultural state with few large cities, it seemed logical that the county was the appropriate political entity to provide book distribution. Although four counties (Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, and New Hanover) had entered into arrangements whereby the county paid municipal libraries to provide service throughout the respective counties, Wilson felt it was time to engage

the counties directly. He cited the establishment of county library systems in California as a model that North Carolina would be well advised to follow.¹¹

In California, county libraries had been authorized since 1909 when the legislature followed the lead of the head of the state library association and passed a law authorizing counties to either establish their own systems or to contract with municipalities for county-wide service. What must have impressed Wilson, however, was the part of the law that *compelled* counties to establish libraries if a majority of the voters requested one and *forbade them* to close a system unless two-thirds of voters voted for closure in a special election for that purpose. “The California county libraries were created to ensure public library service for all, rural residents as well as city dwellers. The ideal of complete geographical coverage was not achieved, but ... (emphasizing) small collections in numerous and widely dispersed stations, it brought books close to people wherever they lived”.¹²

Wilson was probably realistic enough to realize that the North Carolina legislature was unlikely to approve similar laws, but he reflected the profession’s prevailing attitude that the county should be the source of book service outside of large cities. The argument for county systems, however, began to diverge from the idea of small libraries in many places to the idea of larger library systems in fewer locales. The new goal was to provide more efficient service. In the 1923 meeting of the American Library Association, the group went on record in support of county systems. “That the American Library Association has viewed with interest the growth of the county library system, and wishes to express its belief that the county is the logical unit of library service for most parts of the United States, and that the county library system is the solution of the library problem for country districts.” It went on to say that “Opportunities for the country resident must be more nearly equalized with those of the city dweller, if we are to

preserve our national farm life”.¹³ Three years later, the ALA published a how-to-get and how-to-run a county system manual, with specific guidance on administrative techniques and practices. The book highlighted a disconnect between the profession’s view of efficient system operations and the political realities of local ownership. The ALA said that local libraries may remain independent, but should join the county system “... for the local library has everything to gain and nothing to lose by this arrangement”.¹⁴ The passage included a discussion of how centralized processing could permit local librarians to do more community-based work. It seems obvious that a “local library has everything to gain” by having processing done centrally at the county level, but local politicians might disagree that they had “nothing to lose by this arrangement” when the inevitable question was asked about who was in charge of the local library.

The book also highlighted another disconnect, this time between the profession’s concept of efficiency and the community’s concept of ownership.

To many people, the word library implies a beautiful building with little thought of the books therein or their usefulness. This idea must be dispelled. A county library is primarily a system of book service, which places books in all parts of the county, where they invite use, and is most emphatically not a collection of books centrally housed, and used only by those who chance to come and get them.¹⁵

The divergence had begun and the profession was seeing libraries in a different light from what some of the small town users were using. Communities sometimes valued the library building as much as or more than they valued the books it held. As time went on, such an attitude might have made local communities resistant to efficient ideas about book service if they seem to run counter to the communities feeling about “its” library facility.

In 1926, the ALA published a companion piece with recommendations about how to extend library services to more people. Asserting that library extension was a part of the political process (“Inequality of library opportunity between city and country is too undemocratic to continue”), the book laid out two approaches for library extension, approaches that had built-in contradictions.¹⁶

One approach was the local. “Local public library service for every one is needed ultimately, rather than state or provincial service, because the public library gives personal contact between reader and librarian, between reader and book collection, as state service can never do”.¹⁷ However, the ALA had already decided that the county was the “natural” basis for library service and had engaged the National Grange and the Federation of Women’s Clubs in the effort of giving the idea “widespread publicity and active support.” It seemed to want to steer control of new libraries away from the locals.¹⁸ In a chapter reflecting approvingly on the California experience and calling for state agencies to guide public library development, the ALA seemed to edge toward professional leadership. “Small libraries may spring up almost spontaneously and need guidance more than stimulus; county libraries usually come through active work on the part of the state agencies”.¹⁹

In the same publication, the ALA also began to offer ideas on how to measure adequate public library service. It thought that “\$1 per capita of the population of the community served is a reasonable minimum annual revenue for the library in a community desiring to maintain a good modern public library system with trained librarians”.²⁰ In a chapter on “People Without Library Service,” it adopted the 2500 population figure as the line between urban and rural and noted that the problem of library extension is “... primarily rural, for 93 per cent of the people without public library service live in the open country or in villages of less

than 2,500 population”.²¹ However, citing a 1925 study of Wisconsin villages that concluded that a minimum of \$4,000 a year was necessary for good public library service, the ALA suggested that if a town had less than 4,000 people, it would need to join with an adjoining town or county to obtain adequate public library service while keeping the tax burden below \$1 per capita.²²

The idea that the county was the “natural” unit for library service and the \$1 per capita figure became the professional mantra. A 1927 pamphlet designed to provide guidance and advice to library advocates in rural areas noted that “Like the consolidated school, the county library is able to give a high quality service to scattered country people, as well as to the villages”.²³ It also cited the Wisconsin assessment of how the \$1 per capita recommendation was not being met by appropriations in many counties. “The county library plan should not be judged by partial service county libraries”.²⁴

North Carolina professionals echoed the ALA thoughts. In its *Ninth Biennial Report* in 1926, the North Carolina Library Commission urged those who would create new small libraries to join into a county unit. “While there has been no aggressive county library campaign, the Commission has advised the new libraries which have been organized, as well as organized libraries, in a position to do so to adopt the county unit”.²⁵

Two years later in its *Tenth Report*, the Commission became a bit more direct and a bit more critical of small libraries. In its terminology, it seemed apparent that it was no longer satisfied with just having an institution called a “public library” open in a community. “North Carolina has 72 libraries serving the public. More than half of these are inadequately supported and so poorly administered that they give the wrong impression of the function of a public

library”.²⁶ More explicitly, it stated that it wanted to work against local initiative unless such initiative led toward the recommended organizational schema. “It is obvious that a library unit which will give service to the rural residents is what is needed in the State. To meet this need the county unit has been adopted, and the establishment of small town libraries has been discouraged except where it is evident these libraries would serve as nuclei for county libraries later”.²⁷

The report also highlighted the profession’s standard of what constituted adequate public funding for public libraries. The Commission ranked North Carolina with other states in terms of how much per capita was spent on public libraries and found it wanting.²⁸

State	Per Capita Funding
California	\$1.08
Indiana	\$0.50
Massachusetts	\$0.85
New Jersey	\$0.39
Tennessee	\$0.10
Virginia	\$0.07
North Carolina	\$0.04

One year later, the onset of the Depression meant that the goal of \$1 per capita support (which had never been achieved in North Carolina at that time) for public libraries became more remote than ever and that it looked unlikely that most North Carolina counties would ever achieve the standard. The profession began to consider other alternatives. In a 1934 article describing the effect of the Depression on public libraries, Julia Wright Merrill pondered how adequate public library funding could be obtained. In a section entitled “What of the

Future,” she asked “Will the future bring regional units of several counties for effective and economical library administration, with plenty of extension agencies making books and library service easily available? Will state and federal grants supplement local appropriations?” She articulated the professional goal of more efficiency as a way to achieve adequate levels of appropriations.²⁹

The Depression also highlighted another professional thought about libraries, similar to the one expressed in the 1926 North Carolina Library Commission report – a bad library may be worse than no library at all. In Knoxville, Tennessee, the librarian (Miss Mary U. Rothrock) felt “that we could rather not open at all than not give the fundamental services. We didn’t want to lower our standards or do anything that we couldn’t do well” and thus closed down all but one branch library on 10 March 1933.³⁰

So by the early 1930s, the professional attitude toward small public libraries was that they had to be able to provide at least what the profession considered adequate service, and adequate service could not really be provided unless at least \$1 per capita was provided for such service, and not only small towns, but also poor counties probably could not provide adequate levels of funding for adequate service. The profession’s answer was larger service units.

THE MULTICOUNTY REGIONAL MODEL

By 1935, the challenges of providing adequate service from the county level had come to the fore in North Carolina. The Rosenwald Fund had offered matching funds to eleven counties in seven Southern states if the counties would establish public libraries organized by county and offered to all citizens of the counties, whether urban or rural, white or black.

<i>States and Counties Accepting Rosenwald Fund Monies</i>	
State	County
Alabama	Walker
Louisiana	Webster
Mississippi	Coahoma
North Carolina	Davidson
	Mecklenburg
South Carolina	Charleston
	Richland
Tennessee	Hamilton
	Knox
	Shelby
Texas	Jefferson

However, the results of the demonstration effort were disappointing, in part because many of the counties could not meet the requirement for matching funds and had to withdraw from the effort. Louis Wilson and Edward Wight were commissioned to do a study of the project and their assessment was that counties were probably not the answer to adequate library service, at least in the Southeast. In particular, they observed that the data leads “to the conclusion that in the seven demonstration states from one-half to two-thirds of the counties cannot provide, out of purely local income, sufficient support for adequate library service, and to that extent must be

considered ineffective units for library development”.³¹ Citing Chapter Xi of Carleton Joeckel’s 1935 *The Government of the American Public Library*, Wilson and Wight concluded that

The situation seems to call for action along three lines: first, consolidation of areas small in size and in population to form larger units for service; second, joint financial support by the local unit, by the state, and possibly by the federal government; and third, general co-operation among libraries of every sort within a state.³²

For Wilson and Wight, a “region” generally meant an area with an administrative head, a trained professional staff, and a centralized collection. They felt a library region could be most accurately defined in terms of function, not in terms of geographic units. One function that needed to be considered seriously, though, was the ability of the supported region to provide financial support.³³ They looked at the problem as one of efficiency and funding and found a solution that seemed to meet those two criteria.

The regional idea became the new mantra. The North Carolina Library Association offered a new plan for library development in 1935 that looked at the \$1 per capita standard as a goal that now not only small towns, but also poor counties could not meet.

Forty counties have no public libraries within their borders. Forty-four counties which have libraries are failing to even partially support them for their income is less than twenty cents per capita (ALA standards called for \$1.00 per capita). ... The solution, for the small inadequately supported library and for the section with no library, may be contract service of two or more counties to form a regional library.³⁴

ⁱ “The Regional Problem: Suggestions for Its Solution”

This attitude was expanded to include the entire South. Tommie Barker's 1936 report to the ALA on the condition of Southern libraries stated

As much as people may desire library service, librarians are facing the fact frankly that in most areas the local resources are not there to support it, and are thinking and talking more and more in terms of state aid and a state system of library service. Along with the move towards state aid goes the recognition of the further fact that the average county in the southern states is not a desirable unit for public library service as it is small in area and population and wealth.³⁵

It was interesting that Barker contrasted "people (who) desire library service" with "librarians ... (who recognize) that the average county in the southern states is not a desirable unit for public library service." It would seem that the profession was thinking more in terms of its own professional judgment about what constitutes "service" and less in terms of what the (taxpaying) users might think that they "desire." Using much of the same sentence construction as had been used in Wilson's and Wight's book, and again citing Joeckel's work, she recommended that small libraries be consolidated "into larger units of service".³⁶ She also anticipated (and perhaps was suggesting) regional demonstrations funded by the Federal government, perhaps by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

The larger unit drumbeat became part of the continuing professional discourse. The 1936 report of the North Carolina Library Commission discussed the efficiencies envisioned in larger regional units. "Regional libraries composing several counties which agree to service from a system including a central library, book trucks, library branches and stations, would provide more adequate and more economical service." It noted that the Citizens' Library Movement was on record as approving a plan for regional libraries.³⁷ In its next report in 1938, the Commission highlighted multi-county cooperation in Louisiana as a possible model for North Carolina,

lyrically describing how “On a regional basis, or contract service for several counties, books and library service would radiate from a headquarters library to every corner of the region”.³⁸

The big news the Commission had to report in 1938 was the establishment of an initial regional effort. The effort, however, had not been inspired by the taxpayers, the local officials, or the small library users, but rather by a Federal agency that was providing funds specifically for the purpose. “The TVA has contracted with the Murphy Public Library for library service in the region of Hiawassee Dam, Cherokee County. ... The service area may include, besides North Carolina counties, counties in Georgia and Tennessee”.³⁹ As it turned out, the service area of each of the TVA regional library efforts remained linked to prevailing local political structures in the states involved and in North Carolina that meant the region was a multi-county structure.

In 1941, after successful lobbying had convinced the North Carolina legislature to provide state funds for support of public libraries, the unit of service continued to be the county. All the money allocated by the state was to be used by county agencies in their effort to create or extend library services. A second regional library had been organized between Beaufort, Hyde, and Martin counties in the eastern part of the state, but this effort too was a response to Federal funds having been allocated only upon the agreement of small libraries to cooperate.⁴⁰

Julia Wright Merrill in 1942 again stated the professional judgment that localities and counties were no longer the chosen agencies to operate public libraries. In her *Regional and District Libraries*, published by the ALA, she asked the policy question about what was needed to create adequate public libraries. Her answer was that “joint action of several independent governmental units is needed to set up library districts or regions according to regional library

laws. Local jealousies may make such joint action difficult unless there is state aid to act as a lever. On the other hand, a *progressive* section of a state may act in advance of state-wide sentiment” (italics in the original).⁴¹ She stated the ALA’s position on appropriate size and organization by quoting a 1934 assessment that the new minimum population for a public library service area should be in the range of 40,000-50,000.⁴² The profession, if it were able to achieve such economies of scale, did not show much interest in losing them. In her consideration of regional libraries, Merrill noted “withdrawal must be made possible ... it should probably not be made too easy”.⁴³

THE EFFORT TO REGIONALIZE NORTH CAROLINA’S COUNTY LIBRARIES

With World War II behind them, library professionals took the lessons of national planning used during the Depression and the War and sought to apply them to public library issues. In its 1948 report, the North Carolina Library Commission recommended that those interested in public libraries acquaint themselves with national level planning for larger service units.

The book, A NATIONAL PLAN FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE [caps in the original], published in 1948 by the American Library Association, points the way for larger units of library service and for complete library coverage for the United States. It is recommended for reading and study to North Carolinians who are concerned with improved library service in their State.

It also chided local people for going their own way, not listening to the counsel of the profession. “Several small, poor counties are attempting to operate individual county libraries when more efficient and more economical service could be rendered by the regional library plan of two or more counties working (together).”⁴⁴

Marjorie Beal in 1948 completed a study of the North Carolina library scene that had been funded by the TVA and published by the North Carolina Library Commission. In it, she again reiterated the now-standard refrain that too many public libraries in the state were too small to be considered useful.

Many North Carolina counties are too small and too sparsely settled to finance even minimum library service; so plans have been recommended for two or more counties to combine and form regional libraries. ... To improve the quality of library service through enlarged book collections, more large units of service, and by the employment of additional qualified librarians, is one of the major goals at present of the Commission.⁴⁵

She also invoked ALA standards to justify larger units by stating that “2 books per capita” was the minimum standard for public library service. Thus, a “collection of 25,000 volumes is the minimum number which will provide the variety of subject matter needed by a normal community”.⁴⁶ Since math would indicate that a “normal” community that adhered to the standard would thus have 12,500 people, it is unclear how Beal’s “normal” community meshed with Merrill’s guidelines that a useful library system needed a population at least four to five times larger. It may well have been that Merrill was considering efficiency at a national level, while Beal was considering efficiency at the lower population density of North Carolina.

At about the same time, Louis Wilson again brought forth a volume on the topic. The Southeastern Library Association feared that the TVA might weaken in its support for cooperative public library efforts because it had been unable to obtain adequate information about libraries in the area. In an effort to support the TVA and to keep it engaged, the Southeastern Library Association contracted with the TVA to survey the area and collect the needed information. Marion A. Milczewski was appointed in 1947 as the original director of the effort, but when he resigned at the end of 1948 to move to California, Louis Wilson was asked

to complete the project. Published in 1949, the survey sought to address public libraries in the Southeast as a regional, not a state or local issue, because their goal was to “look at all public libraries in relation to what is necessary for effective service to the region”.⁴⁷ The authors used the term “region” to refer to the entire Southeastern United States instead of to multi-county organizations. In this, it seems clear that they were very influenced by the “regional” focus on sociological issues that had been championed by Howard Odum at the University of North Carolina during the preceding decade. In Wilson’s view, in the Southeastern Region of the United States the role of the public library was perhaps more important than it was in other parts of the country and the authors focused on the inability of the governments in the region to provide adequate funding for them. “Its public libraries – the principal and almost only source of supply for books and information for the general public – exist precariously without the income to perform their educational function”.⁴⁸ Citing 1943 and 1948 ALA studies which had concluded that public libraries needed at least \$1.50 per capita for minimum levels of service, \$2.00 per capita for good service, and \$3.00 per capita for superior service, the authors decried the woeful inadequacies of funding in the region. The following is the result of merging the data contained in tables showing Public Library Per Capita Expenditures for the years 1946-7.⁴⁹

State	Municipal	County	Regional
Florida	\$0.53		
North Carolina	\$0.46	\$0.26	\$0.26
Georgia	\$0.58	\$0.16	\$0.34
Virginia	\$0.41	\$0.27	\$0.30
Tennessee	\$0.42	\$0.06	\$0.09
Kentucky	\$0.21		
South Carolina	\$0.40	\$0.19	\$0.10
Alabama	\$0.21	\$0.20	\$0.18
Mississippi	\$0.20	\$0.08	

Wilson seemed to have moved away from the concept that those who fund public libraries should see the efficiencies involved in larger service units and accepted that their budgetary concerns would outweigh the library profession's focus on efficiency. Instead, Wilson offered a social viewpoint.ⁱⁱ When one considered how public libraries were to be funded, Wilson felt it was necessary that

two premises are accepted as a foundation from which to start. The first of these is that the library is entitled to support from public funds, as a socially useful, non-profit institution which shares some of the educational functions of schools and colleges, and which at the same time has extensive additional responsibility for community education and information. Second, this justification for support from public funds should be expressed in law in such a manner as to provide a dependable basis for the library's annual income.⁵⁰

It is highly unlikely that anyone in the library profession disagreed with this viewpoint, but for the future, spokespersons for the profession returned time and again to the efficiency

ⁱⁱ "Wilson" is cited as the author. Although he is listed as one of the editors, there is no indication as to who wrote what part of the book and the writing style seems so consistent as to suggest that Wilson probably was the final drafter and most important contributor.

argument, if only because those in the North Carolina political profession showed no inclination to accept “that the library is *entitled to support* from public funds.”

A faculty member at the then School of Library Science at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 1952, Elaine von Oesen again expressed support of the North Carolina Library Association’s 1935 belief in regional libraries, stating that “an area served by a library unit should include sufficient population and wealth to support adequate service” and that “small emaciated libraries” should be discouraged.⁵¹ In her view, the importance of good public libraries outweighed other considerations.

Among the barriers to setting up inter-county library service have been local pride, fear of loss of control, and the long-established county political unit ... The greatest opposition to regional contracts has come from counties with established library systems and those which have been unwilling to take in poorer neighbors”.⁵²

Such expressions were no doubt well received by professional audiences, but were probably not impressive to local commissions and boards.

In an address to library trustees in the same year, she cited the Public Library Inquiry, and especially Leigh’s book, as supportive. “The findings of the social scientists who conducted the Public Library Inquiry have supported the opinion of many North Carolina librarians who see, as our major objectives, larger units of library service and more adequate financial support”.⁵³ But she noted that those who had adequate financial support were satisfied with their situations and those who were not satisfied were also the ones who did not have enough money to change things. “Only the counties which were unable to set up any library service alone have been willing to cooperate with other counties, and even co-operatively they have had too little income.” Her solution was the same one that had now been articulated for almost 20

years – “We are going to have to work out larger units of library service to improve that service without curtailing its extent”.⁵⁴ The audience probably understood who von Oesen meant when she said “we,” but the audience did not include those who actually wrote the checks.

The ALA weighed in again in 1954 with the publication of Gretchen Schenk’s *County and Regional Library Development*. Her work was heavily influenced by the ALA’s 1948 *National Plan for Public Library Service* by Joeckel, Winslow, and Martin and by her reading of Robert Leigh’s part of the Public Library Inquiry, the 1950 *Public Library in the United States*. Schenk said that each recommended establishment of library systems covering larger areas, serving more readers, and supported by larger budgets. “In every case particular stress was laid on centralizing technical processing routine administration and decentralizing and strengthening a greater variety of real services to a greater number of people in a larger geographic area.” She felt that “the major task of future library development lies in the establishment of larger units,” but that such larger units did not necessarily mean any particular political base – “such repeated references to county government and county library organization should not, however, be mistaken for an endorsement of county libraries per se. The term county library is generic and means an adequately staffed, well-financed and expertly administered large library unit”.⁵⁵ In fact, later in the book, Schenk asserted that, in addition to being too varied in their financial strength, counties were too disparate across the nation to be a good basis for library support.⁵⁶

Thus the earlier efforts to work within the prevailing political structure of the South, the counties, were put aside in favor of the “adequately staffed, well-financed and expertly administered large library unit.” Again, this was an approach that library professionals could agree with, but it was an approach that might find less sanguine reception in North Carolina’s county seats.

In his 1983 history of North Carolina public library growth, Thornton Mitchell identified 1956 as a watershed year. “It probably was coincidental that the merger of the State Library and the Library Commission, the publication of the ALA standards for public library service, and the enactment of federal aid for libraries all occurred in 1956”.⁵⁷ The 1956 standards did indeed articulate a consolidating concept. Asserting that decent libraries could not be expected to occur spontaneously, the standards said

Libraries working together, sharing their services and materials, can meet the full needs of their users. This cooperative approach on the part of libraries is the most important single recommendation of this document. Without joint action, most American libraries probably will never be able to come up to the standard necessary to meet the needs of their constituencies. ... Libraries are therefore urged to band together formally or informally, in groups called “systems”.⁵⁸

Repeating what Harriet Long had said back in 1925, the 1956 standards tried to state that small libraries should welcome “systems.” “The development of systems of libraries does not weaken or eliminate the small community library. On the contrary, it offers that library and its users greatly expanded resources and services”.⁵⁹ This was reiterated in their list of standards for library systems. Standard 52 stated that the public library should be an integral part of general local government and “should be controlled by a public body or official, elected or appointed, and responsible to local government” while subsequent standards emphasized close integration of the library with the community it serves.⁶⁰

While there was nothing wrong, in principle, with such standards, the profession continued to act as if everyone involved in public library operation should recognize the essential value of the position and act accordingly. Looking at the prospects for library growth in the expanding population centers of Southern California, John Henderson in 1962 predicted “astronomical increases in population, in which drastic governmental changes will take place”

and that library services “should properly function on as broad a basis as water supply, air pollution control, public transportation, and other area-wide public utilities and facilities that overlap jurisdictional boundaries and call for coordinated master planning”.⁶¹ Seemingly without considering that political governing bodies tend to want to keep what they have, Henderson suggested that the need for libraries would lead the way to political evolution. “Implied in any comprehensive plan for regional library service and the establishment of library systems is a new philosophy of local government. Political wisdom will be needed to develop a plan that will combine local autonomy and diversity with the features of region-wide coordination”.⁶²

Those closer to the situation in North Carolina were a little more restrained. In 1963, the North Carolina Library Association published new standards for public libraries in the state. Frankly acknowledging that theirs was an outgrowth of the 1956 ALA standards, they established a new baseline population number to use when evaluating the ability of a library to serve its patrons. The Association “recognize(d) the fact that good library service is economically impractical for library systems serving fewer than 50,000 people. Public library systems in North Carolina serving fewer than 50,000 should seek new affiliations or be prepared to pay more for service”.⁶³ In their listing of standards, number 4 urged investigation of possibilities (“Public libraries should investigate possibilities of improving service through cooperation or affiliation with other libraries in a system. This system should combine existing and potential library resources in a pattern appropriate to the area”) and number 45 encouraged innovation (“The State Library should encourage experimental programs and demonstrations leading to the development of large library systems”).⁶⁴

Distance from the actual situation seemed to be a consistent variable in how spokespersons for the profession addressed the political realities of small town and county

governing boards. Phillip Monypenny's 1966 survey for the ALA of how libraries operated in the various states said, in effect, that local governments are inadequate. The entire survey seemed based on what librarians thought needed to be done, less on what users (or the bill payers) said they wanted and/or needed.⁶⁵

The North Carolina State Library Board (the successor to the North Carolina Library Commission) attempted to get a sense of what was needed for the state in 1968 by hiring an outside consultant to research and create a plan to promote improved library service. It was obvious that the consultant listened quite closely to what the Board said because on page 1 of the report it states "Our assignment involved analyzing the present situation, *determining the feasibility of larger units of service*, and suggesting the role that should be assumed by the State Library in the development plan [italics added]." To develop the plan, the consultant interviewed librarians and trustees from 10 locations, none that could be said to be truly small or rural, but did not interview any local government officials. Having understood that larger units of service were the desired answer, it was unsurprising that the consultant concluded that "Even at a much higher support level, libraries can realize their potential for improved service only if they work closely together in larger units." The report did, in contrast to Henderson and Monypenny, acknowledge North Carolina political realities. "... county government is a strong unit in the state and any plan produced must be such that it can be 'sold' to the county commissioners. A regional plan will likely be approved if already existing district or regional lines are used".⁶⁶

It was obvious that the profession was still divided from the governing agencies upon which they depended for support. When describing the varying levels of service available in different parts of the state, the report noted "these inequities are perhaps symptomatic of a

broader issue: that of autonomy for the individual community. Many librarians regard the local autonomy issue as one of the greatest stumbling blocks to increased cooperation among libraries”.⁶⁷ They offered the State Library Board two plans that the Board might use to tempt communities to accept central guidance toward larger units of service. The preferred plan essentially had the State Library running regional library systems while the alternative suggested cooperation between existing libraries instead of a new system organization. The consultant offered the alternative plan because their research indicated that lots of people would resist loss of local autonomy. The consultant preferred the first plan, feeling that the alternative catered too much to fears of resistance to loss of local autonomy. It felt confident enough to recommend the centralizing plan because “...it is our strong belief that worries about local autonomy are not sufficiently based on reality to justify these risks”.⁶⁸ The fact that neither plan seems ever to have been attempted may indicate that the consultant’s “strong belief” was itself “not sufficiently based on reality.”

Hope springs eternal, however, in the profession. Four years later, facing an unexpected reduction in Federal funding imposed by the Nixon administration, the librarian at the University of North Carolina at Asheville suggested a cooperative approach to serve the westernmost 11 counties in the state. His concept was based on an old idea of efficiency (centralized cataloging and book management) and a newer thought about cross-organizational-lines cooperation. The proposal called for a “a quasi-public institution” made up of six college, six public, and two regional systems, plus five technical institutes and ten special libraries, with a state-supported academic library (the author’s own) selected as the headquarters. The weakness in the concept was evident when his new organization required new personnel authorizations at

UNC-Asheville and offered the public libraries in the region little more than consultancy services.⁶⁹ The State Library did not seem interested in the idea.

COOPERATION INSTEAD OF CONSOLIDATION

The State Library may have had similar ideas in mind, but had a different idea about how to execute them. The push for larger units of service seemed to have stalled out since the last regional library system in the state had come into existence in 1964 and no one seemed interested in joining together to create new ones after that date. In 1981, the State Library engaged another consultant to create a plan for library cooperation, if not for library consolidation. In the first of what was planned to be a series of documents addressing cooperation and networking between libraries of different types, the consultant acknowledged that

While North Carolina public libraries are overall the weakest per capita in terms of budgets, materials, and staff, these statistics for units of service indicate that they are the closest to the people of the state and are therefore the logical primary nodes of a statewide library network, which would upgrade their ability to meet requests at the local level.⁷⁰

There is no indication that the series continued beyond this first report.

Citing Wisconsin as a model to emulate, the report indicated that the desire to convince or coerce small libraries to surrender some autonomy in return for more resources seemed to have disappeared and the new idea was how to link them all together.

The idea of cooperation seemed to spark more interest in smaller libraries than the consolidation idea had done. Representatives from small communities and poor counties found ways to work together to maximize their own assets without minimizing the sense of autonomy that the town or the county felt. Rural library representatives indicated that they had concerns

with time and distance that their urban counterparts did not have. Rural libraries served less than half the state's population in an area that covered three-fourths of the state's land mass and thus had to be creative to provide needed services over longer distances. Such distances required new ways of thinking and the old approach of insisting on centralization and larger service units had proved untenable.⁷¹

The profession still seems to be intellectually isolated from the realities of life in small North Carolina library systems. The 2000 version of the *Directory of North Carolina Public Libraries* published by the State Library lists fifteen regional library systems, fifty-one county library systems, and ten municipal library systems in the state. The listing gives the very clear impression that these are all the public libraries in the state. It did not, however, list the CMC Library Consortium, a cooperative grouping of seven libraries in Rutherford County.ⁱⁱⁱ Three libraries from the Rutherford County system are joined with three independent municipal libraries from three different Rutherford County towns and with the local Community College library in a shared endeavor. At least one group of libraries in the state is finding a new way to work together, even if they seem to have been overlooked by the agency responsible for them.

RATIONALITY VS. INCREMENTALISM

Kathleen Molz captured the essence of the divide between how library professionals perceive public library service and how residents of the served locality perceive the public library itself. As she noted in 1977, "... the issue of tax support for libraries in this country has been from the beginning fraught with contradictions and ambivalences both from those who sought it and those who made provision for it".⁷² But perhaps her 1990 consideration of the same topic more clearly addressed the contradictions and ambivalences when she contrasted the

ⁱⁱⁱ By 2006, the CMC Library Consortium had expanded to ten libraries, by incorporating additional libraries in Polk County.

profession's rational approach to the problem with the community's incremental approach.

Although in her 1990 *Library Planning and Policy Making*, Molz was contrasting public with private planning, the analogy works for the profession-locality mindset as well. She notes that rational planning has served as the dominant paradigm for librarians, and their half-century insistence on asserting that efficiency in service should be the measure for public libraries seems to bear her out. On the other hand, the organizational process paradigm deals with fractionated power and parochial interests and acknowledges that policy effectiveness might be a lot messier than the crisp assurances offered by the rational approach to efficiency. As she notes, "in the first model, decision making is viewed as the choice of a unitary decision maker; in the second ... action is discerned as the output of a number of organizations that have been partially coordinated by those in command".⁷³ She went on to say that the "incrementalist, politicized aspects of planning within an institutional or organizational framework have perhaps been too much overlooked".⁷⁴

This review of how the profession viewed the small public library seems to bear her out. In the earliest days, it was enough to accept the messiness of local citizens creating their own libraries. However, as the profession became A PROFESSION in the early to middle twentieth century, rational efficiency became the paradigm, perhaps in part because administration and control were the heart of many professional education efforts, in the model pioneered by Dewey and those who followed his path. Control and efficiency in the library facility became the model for control and efficiency in the library system. However, as Garceau pointed out during the Public Library Inquiry, city hall was profoundly ignorant of the business inside the library, but allowed librarians to be autonomous within the walls of the building because librarians were not important enough to be an issue most of the time.⁷⁵ However, when

the library professionals sought to extend that control and autonomy they enjoyed within the walls of their library into the arena that city hall felt it owned, passive political support for the local public library easily turned into passive political resistance to any organizational changes. It seems to have taken the profession a long time to recognize this.

However, the rational paradigm does not seem to have entirely disappeared so much as it seems to have retreated; back from the idea of consolidation into larger, efficient units of public library service, back into the arena ceded to it by the political side of the equation – small, non-threatening efficiencies.

CREATING A NEW SMALL-TOWN LIBRARY WITHIN A LARGER SYSTEM

In this different environment, in which library professionals who actually have to deal with political reality have worked to find ways to be more quietly efficient, those who might wish to create their own libraries have seen the professional staffs as allies instead of opponents. We can see this if we take a close look at the evolution of a new public library in the small community.

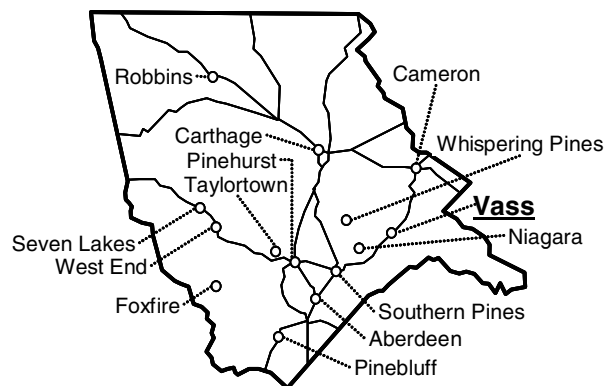
John Colson had pointed out in 1983 that most people feel the idea of a public library is important, but not THAT IMPORTANT to them personally. The Public Library Inquiry in the late 1940s had revealed the same thing – most people don't actually use the library, though most feel some sort of contentment that it exists should they need it. If Jesse Shera had stated in 1949 that "the objectives of the public library are directly dependent upon the objectives of society itself," and Colson had stated that "a library is a function of a community," what is that "society?" What is that "community?" If most adults don't use it, is the society, is the

community, only those who create the public library, or is it those who unconsciously “feel” a need for the public library, if only an inchoate feeling?⁷⁶

Once community groups decide that their town would benefit from having a library, they have to address the dormant inchoate feeling of the rest of the community who have not thought much about it. They have to convince citizens and governmental officials to support the idea and, in the process, they may well encounter the professional library staff who have some ideas about how the desire for a hometown library might be melded into the desire for efficient library service. Just such a situation developed in Vass, North Carolina in the last half-decade of the twentieth century. A small group of potential library users navigated their way from dream to reality by working with, but not for, library professionals who would have preferred centralization, size, and efficiency, but were willing to help decentralized, but cooperative, library efforts.

LOCAL CONTEXT – BUILDING VASS’ SMALL LIBRARY WITHIN THE LARGER STRUCTURE

The Town of Vass lies on U.S. Highway 1 in eastern Moore County, southwest of Cameron and northeast of Southern Pines. Incorporated as a municipality in 1907, Vass was a minor Moore County business center in the early part of the twentieth century. As with other Moore County towns, Vass was bisected by the railway and was involved with the railway as a vehicle to take away the forest and agricultural products produced in the Vass area. The relative importance of Vass as a business center may be inferred



from the fact that two of the important county newspapers, *The Sandhills Citizen* and *The Pilot*, both were founded in Vass, though both later moved to Southern Pines, the eventual business center of the county.⁷⁷ Articles in *The Pilot* during the 1920s seemed focused on business issues, with their largest concern being to articulate a need for new roads for the Vass-Cameron area. Both *The Pilot* and *The Sandhills Citizen* seemed during the 1930s to concentrate on issues relating to the Vass-Cameron area and showed little awareness of Robbins-Carthage, Aberdeen-Pinebluff, or Southern Pines, either as other locales in the county, or as other business competitors. At least until 1964, when the hometown Vass-Lakeview School lost its high school classes to the newly created consolidated county high school at Union Pines (close to Carthage), Vass was a self-contained small Moore County town. What it did not have was a library, though it did not seem to feel a need for one.

A library of sorts was apparently established in Vass in 1934, however. On 7 January 1934, an article in *The Captain*, another Vass newspaper, noted “The local library of which Miss Mary Frank McMillian is librarian has just received the following books from the Library Commission of North Carolina. These books are loaned until May 1st”.⁷⁸ That summer, *The Captain* consolidated with *The Sandhill Citizen* and reported on page one in its edition of Wednesday, the 1st of August, that “The Vass Public Library will be open each Saturday afternoon from 3:30 to 4:30 o’clock during the remainder of the summer months. All who wish to get books may do so at this time.”⁷⁹ The item was bylined by “Mary Frank McMillian, Librarian”. In October of the same year, Ms. McMillian had another item in the paper noting that “The public library will be open from 3:00 to 4:00 every Saturday afternoon. A new shipment of books from the state library has been received.”⁸⁰ These were the only historical

references to any Vass library in the twentieth century and no evidence of its existence is to be found in Vass or in the county library's local history records.^{iv}

This 1934 reference pre-dated the arrival of the WPA library efforts in this area and also predated the subsequent bookmobile service the WPA provided to Moore County, but it was during the period that the State Library was willing to loan books to communities trying to establish local libraries. The North Carolina Library Commission's annual report in 1932 noted that the Commission tried to provide books, free except for transportation charges, "either thru [*sic*] traveling libraries to schools and communities or loans of books to individuals."⁸¹ The Commission was still attempting to persevere with this service as the Depression grew deeper and funds were exceedingly scarce.⁸² Ms. McMillian's Vass Public Library effort in 1934 must have been an instance of individual initiative in which she contacted the Library Commission and, for a while, was able to obtain a small supply of books. Her efforts apparently did not have any lasting impact, either because the Library Commission could not continue the service or because there were no funds available in Vass to purchase materials for local use. There was no mention of a library in Vass after October 1934.

That was to be the situation for at least the subsequent 64 years.

In 1998, John Wallace was appointed to the Vass Planning Board.⁸³ Wallace, a retired Army Colonel, had recently moved to Vass from Whispering Pines and was interested in being helpful to his new hometown.⁸⁴ At one of the first Board meetings he attended, Jean Kebler, another member of the Board, wondered out loud why she had to pay to use the library in Southern Pines in order to get books for her children. "And she said 'as a Planning Board, we're

^{iv} The three items in *The Captain* about the library mentioned Mary Frank McMillian the first two times and Myrtle McMillian the third. It is unclear if these were two different women or the same woman with two different first names.

always thinking of doing something for the town of Vass ... why don't we look into idea of establishing a library here, a public library. Where you don't have to pay to be a member.' ” The idea struck Wallace as a good one: “as a planning board, we thought that was a great idea. It would add something to the town of Vass.”

The members of the Planning Board seemed ready to entertain the idea of a library, both for the benefit of town residents and for a larger reason. An undated brochure put out by the Vass library association noted that an article in *The Pilot* had stated that twenty-five percent of Moore County residents operated at the lowest literacy levels. “This shocking revelation encouraged the Vass Planning Board to proceed with plans to fund a library for the town.”⁸⁵

GETTING STARTED: FINDING OUT HOW TO DO IT

Ms. Kebler prepared the ground well for the concept by finding a local family who owned a property that might serve as a library building. Patsy and Phil Keith had apparently been thinking about the idea of a veteran's memorial for the Vass area, but Ms. Kebler seemed to have gotten them to add the idea of a library to the memorial. Accordingly, on 22 May 1998, the Keiths offered to donate their property to become a library/veterans' memorial. Their official offer might well have been drafted by Ms. Kebler:

In the past there has been no library in the Vass area. Our local citizens have had to travel to Southern Pines or Carthage when they need access to the library. We feel there is a strong need for a library located in Vass ... If you will establish a non-profit library association, we will donate our property at 128 Seaboard Street in honor of and as a memorial to all area veterans past and present for use as a library.⁸⁶

Even before the Keiths put the offer in print, they had made a verbal commitment to Ms. Kebler.

To figure out how to turn the offer into an actual library, Ms. Kebler sought out advice. While it might seem that the Moore County Library would have been very interested in Vass' desire for a library, the staff at Carthage seemed to have redirected the question to the regional director. According to John Wallace's recollections, Jean had gone to Carthage for advice and they told her to contact Carol Walters, the director of the Sandhill Regional Library System of which Moore County was a member. So, at the start of their efforts to create a library, the group at Vass was guided and inspired more by the Regional Library than by the County Library.

At the request of the Planning Board, Ms. Walters met with them on 20 July 1998 to discuss the mechanics of creating a public library in Vass. Using the experience that the town of Robbins had had in starting their library, Ms. Walters estimated that it would cost Vass about \$125,000 to open a library, assuming that they were to start with an existing building that could be modified to that purpose. She made the point at that first meeting that "One decision that must be made early on is whether to become part of the Regional Library System or to be an independent library." Although her written comments did not indicate a preference for one or the other decision, she clearly thought Vass would benefit from association with the Sandhill Regional Library System.

She thus left the Vass Planning Board with copies of the planning process that Robbins had followed, including a discussion of the benefits of being a member of the region. The Robbins paperwork (from 1991) emphasized that while the town would provide the building,

A book collection will be gathered from existing volumes already owned by the town ... , duplicate copies from within the library system, the rotation of large numbers of books from the Main Library collection, and the purchase of a 'core collection' of reference books, best sellers, and children's books.

RESULT

In addition, the LIBRARY would receive access to reference service, adult programming, children's programming, loan of equipment and other non-book items, periodical subscriptions, and the advice and services of the Regional Professional Staff including Children's Librarians, a Cataloger, and Public Service Librarians.

The TOWN would receive from the proposal a modern, busy, professionally run library for its citizens. The Moore County Library/Sandhill REGION would get an outlet to reach thousands of Moore County taxpayers who are many miles from the free library service to which they are entitled.⁸⁷

Ms. Walters also provided them with documentation about how the Robbins group had raised money and solicited political and popular support for the effort to create a local library. Her presentation and the paperwork she left with them clearly showed that association with the regional system would allow Vass to derive some financial benefit while not necessarily losing any sense of local control. Although the proponents of the Vass library were not to finally decide until their 19 April 2000 board meeting to seek membership in the regional library system, the idea that a library would more likely succeed by being part of the larger system was planted and took root.⁸⁸

Since the Planning Board was a non-executive group appointed by the Town Board, John Wallace suggested that Ms. Walters come back and give a similar presentation to the Town

Board, to gauge their interest and level of support. She did that and, as Wallace remembered, “she made a talk before the Town Board, and the Town Board was very non-committal. They just sat and listened ... I got the impression that they didn’t take it very serious. They seemed non-committal.”

So, if it were to happen, “basically, it was the Planning Board that was heading it up ... the Planning Board practically did it all.”

Luckily, the Planning Board had some members both who were readers and who had some experience in managing projects. Two members were involved in real estate, one was a building contractor, and Wallace had been a senior level military manager. For Wallace, the idea of having a local library where he could check out books appealed to him.

Those four, including myself ... were very committed to doing this. And the reason I wanted to do it so bad was ... I read a lot, and I buy quite a few books ... I say “this is great. We’ll have a library next door and all I’ll have to do is check out a book when I want one.” Save me a lot of money. I made a nice contribution to it because I said “In the long run, if I live several years, it’ll more than pay for itself.”

SETTING UP AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

By February of the following year, the Vass Planning Board had committed to building a library and was following the general guidelines and advice given them the previous summer by Carol Walters. In a letter to the Vass Town Board, Milt Matich, the Planning Board Chairman, they reported that they had “approved, by unanimous vote, the development plan for a library in the old theater building next to Keith Hardware.” By that time they had raised \$8,500 in cash donations and calculated that they needed to raise at least another \$145,000 for remodeling of the old theater building. The letter did not ask the town for any money, but did ask the town board to “approve establishment of a foundation for the purpose of raising

donations for a library ... (which would) work under the direction and control of the planning board.” The new organization was an amalgam of the library that Jean Kebler wanted and the memorial that the Keiths wanted – the Friends of the Vass Library Foundation, a Veteran’s Memorial.⁸⁹

If the Town Board was not actively interested in the project, they at least were not actively hostile. The Friends organization was accordingly incorporated and the original members set about recruiting additional members. They started with five members on the Planning Board and, since the Town Board did not appear to be interested, sought members from the Vass business community and elsewhere. The group had a sophisticated understanding of who were the kinds of people needed to make the project a success. They recruited local leaders, such as two local Vass bank managers who were familiar with money management and a local veterinarian’s wife who was known to be a person who made things happen. Since Vass was a small town, they saw the library as a location for readers from all over the northeastern Moore County area and thus recruited membership from Cameron, a few miles to the north, and from Woodlake, a golf and residential community just outside of Vass. Wallace again:

... we tried to get local leaders in the community, and we tried to be as diversified as we could and just have just as many women as men, and all of them had a sincere dedication to “hey, we’re making this thing happen.” And, that’s how it all got started ... we mentioned lots of names, so to speak, but we approached certain ones and they were willing to join. And be a member of the Friends of the Vass Library board.

RAISING FUNDS

The members then set out to raise funds, a process that would tell them how much local support they might find for a library. Ms. Walters asked them to present their ideas to the Moore County Library Board of Trustees in July 1999, to solicit ideas about the process from

them and to begin the process of enlisting Moore County government into the creation of a library in Vass.⁹⁰ During that summer, the Friends group also began to organize their first fund raising events in Vass. Wallace's handwritten minutes of the 30 August 1999 meeting indicated that all members of the group had been given contribution cards and were expected to deliver their contributions to the treasurer. The first event was a reception scheduled for 8 September at the theater that had been donated by the Keiths. This event, to be catered by a local barbeque restaurant, was intended to introduce the library idea and the library building to the community, and invitations were to be sent to "all town employees, all candidates running for office, County Commissioners, Church leaders, etc."

But the big event was to be the first full fledged fund raiser, a barbeque and baked chicken dinner scheduled to be held at the local elementary school on the 25th of September. The goal was to sell 1500 tickets for the event. Signs were to be posted at the Vass Rescue Squad and a local flea market, a notice was to be run in the local county newspaper, friends and families were solicited for workers, local churches were asked to provide desserts, and a local restaurant was contracted to cook the food on site.⁹¹ Wallace contracted with the school for the use of the cafeteria and paid the \$100 fee.⁹²

The Friends were not able to sell their hoped-for 1500 tickets, but the event did attract over 600 people from the areas they had thought might support the concept – from Vass, Woodlake, Lakeview, Whispering Pines, and Cameron.⁹³ Wallace felt this event was an eye-opener. "(We) had our first big fund-raiser, which was a supper, or I should say a barbeque supper, where we had it at the local elementary school, we raised, on that first thing, about \$4,000. And, it came so easy." It had come so easy because "we took in more in contributions than they paid for their dinners. So we realized then that there was a lot of interest."

The Friends then started to raise money in earnest. They had the building, they had individually pledged contributions, and they had the sense that people were supportive of their goal. Now they needed real money. By the end of September 1999, they had raised over \$30,000 from individuals, from businesses, and from county government, and from their sole fund-raiser.⁹⁴ During the subsequent month, the Keiths deeded the theater property to them and continual fund raising had increased their cash on hand to over \$50,000.⁹⁵ But their expectations were high and, in November, the Chairman of the group sent a memo to all members noting that they were already \$35,000 behind where they had wanted to be. He urged them to not only contribute themselves, but also to reach out to the business and governmental communities for support.⁹⁶ As part of the outreach effort, the organization published a three page information sheet outlining their goals and the costs of the endeavor, which included the promise that “most of the solicitation will be on a personal contact and word of mouth basis”, using only volunteers, and that “the goal of the fund raising committee is to get as much neighborhood participation as possible.”⁹⁷ Neighborhood participation also meant using neighborhood contacts. David Cummings, a member of the Moore County Board of Commissioners, lived near Vass and was approached for help. Wanting to see the library built in Vass, Cummings became, in Wallace’s words “our representative, per se, on the Board of Commissioners.” He convinced the county board to support the effort and to commit funds to help the Friends group raise enough to start renovating the building. By December 1999, they had raised enough money to begin the renovation of the theater building, the first step in making it into a library.

Vass itself is a fairly small town and not all that wealthy. The Friends group therefore also reached out beyond the immediate Vass area, looking for potential benefactors who liked to

support worthy causes. They had a fair success in this effort and received a number of significant contributions from persons who would probably never actually use a library in Vass. By the end of their first fifteen months of fund raising, 223 separate individuals or groups had contributed to the effort. Subtracting the value of the donated building and the cash contribution from the county, the Friends group had raised \$97,000.⁹⁸ However, as Wallace recalled, the majority of the overall contributions were small in scale.

(three) made some rather large contributions, they didn't even want their name used ... and I'm talking about 10, fifteen thousand dollar contributions. But, I would say that ... most of the funds was raised from these \$15-20 people giving money, so to speak, and you're looking at the Town of Vass, with a population of 750, and then you're looking at Woodlake ... which I don't know the population ... and Whispering Pines, lot of people make contributions out there, and Cameron. These are people who just walked into the supper and laid money out – and still do! ... But most of the funds were raised ... from local people that gave 5, 10, 15, 20 dollars and did it on several occasions. And then when you start multiplying that ... well, it was tremendous.

For the following year and a half, the Friends held monthly meetings, at first at the Vass Rescue Squad but after early 2000 often at the renovated theater building, keeping close tabs on the steadily evolving renovations and on the state of their financial resources. They also continually sought out new members to add to the group, kept working on raising funds through contributions of cash as well as labor and/or materials for the renovation, and tried to keep the project in the public eye through public relations efforts and contacts with the local newspapers. Members of the group learned more about fund-raising through attendance at a Non-Profit Fund Raising Seminar at Sandhills Community College, solicited funds and support through direct mailings of information to 4800 addresses in the eastern Moore County area, wrote grant requests to the Golden Leaf Foundation and to Carolina Power & Light, and held book sales on the sidewalk in front of the theater building as it underwent renovation.⁹⁹

An example of the efforts, small in terms of actual funds raised, but large in terms of building a sense of community support for the library, occurred in the fall of 2000. One of the members of the Friends group was Pete Madsen, who had retired from his post as director of a statewide education program in New York state and who lived in the golf-oriented community of Woodlake, just east of Vass. He seemed to have spread the gospel of a town library through his social network in Woodlake. In October 2000, the Woodlake Garden Club and Craft Group announced that they were having meetings each Wednesday to make “seasonal decorations and projects to be sold to benefit the Vass Library Fund.” Evidence of the mood behind the effort was displayed in an announcement of the crafts sale that was published in a flyer distributed throughout Woodlake. “ALL of Woodlake can be involved in this most worthy of causes. A library is a must for an educated community.” [capitalization in the original]¹⁰⁰

DIFFERENCES OF FOCUS BETWEEN THE FRIENDS AND THE COUNTY LIBRARY

The members of the Friends of the Vass Area Library were successful business people in their own rights and were individuals who had a collective sense of being in charge of their own affairs. They had sought advice from the director of the Sandhill Regional Library Systems when they started their project, but they were people who would determine their own way. The idea had been brought to the attention of the Vass Planning Board, at that time headed by Milt Matich. Matich had taken to the idea and was the early leader of the effort. It was Matich who had introduced the idea of a new library in Vass to the Moore County Library Trustees in the summer of 1999. In the fall, the new director of Moore County Libraries, Mark McGrath, began a correspondence with the Friends as he sought to understand how and if the Vass library was to become part of the Moore County System. On 5 October, McGrath sent a letter to Milt Matich, asking for answers to a few questions so that he could “make a fully informed recommendation concerning the future of any additional branch operation of the Moore County Library System.”

He seemed particularly focused on issues of control, asking “Does the foundation recognize that the legal authority for the operation of any branch of the Moore County Library stands with the Moore County Board of Trustees, which is appointed by the County Commissioners?” He made his point explicit when he asked

Does the foundation recognize the advisory capacity that it would hold as regard to the administration and operation of the facility? Does the Executive Board understand that any actions anticipated through their deliberations would necessarily be presented to the County Director of Libraries for further action or consideration? This would include the finalization of any current plans for alteration to the donated facility and all future action or dispositions.¹⁰¹

McGrath was new in his job at that time and may not have been finely attuned to local sensitivities and political pull. One can imagine that the tone of the letter did not sit well with a group who had just begun their project and felt that since they were doing all the work, they might well want to make the key decisions themselves.

Apparently the Vass group did not deign McGrath’s letter worthy of comment, but they did invite him over to Vass to see what they were doing. In December, he again wrote to them, enclosing a copy of his previous letter and asking that the questions he had asked in October be answered. However, his visit to the site of the new library had excited his imagination and he was clearly more supportive in December than he had been a few months earlier.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit with a small group from your board. They had arranged for me to have my first glimpse inside the former theatre [*sic*] ... after my visit, I realize the tremendous potential that is also hiding under that big roof! ... You folks have taken on a big project – in size and in potential impact to the community. I hope that we will be able to help.

The potential he saw in the old movie house energized him to become more involved with the Vass project. He still wanted the legalisms sorted out, but that seemed to take a back seat to wanting to get the library built.

I returned from my visit inside the Vass “library” with a fresh approach of optimism. And, to tell the absolute truth, much more than just optimism! I think the Board members who saw my excitement level raise, as I shot my video of the building, would tell you my eyes got wide and my mind began to race with each step. I would like to get some of the ground rules finalized, as might be appropriate, so that I can jump in to help with your project ...¹⁰²

But the closer he got to the project, the more problems he saw. He apparently had overcome his initial insistence of being seen as in charge of all library issues and was instead willing to work with the Vass group to first get the library built, and only secondly to decide on its organizational relationships. However, he could not just agree with everything the Vass group wanted to do. In McGrath’s view, the Chairman of the Vass Friends had a different conception of what a public library might be from what the library profession might want. He saw their focus as being too restrictive and felt they needed to understand that a good library needed to address more than one community need. McGrath apparently had made some suggestions about how to design the new facility, but they had not been well received. In February 2000, he again wrote to the group, expressing his concerns.

Mr. Matich has always held computers and their involvement with the school system as his priority — in planning, design and operation of the library. The library’s priority continues to be service to library patrons with an emphasis on eye-to-eye interaction as we satisfy their resource needs [underlining in the original]... I continue to see tremendous potential for YOUR building and hope that we might continue to be involved partners in the ultimate success of this wonderful community resource ... I continue to feel that presenting the open facility to more people, by whatever format possible, will magnify your fund raising efforts, resulting in increased flexibility for YOUR budgetary demands and dreams. A well conceived working plan just might attract more dollars than a “spruced up as best you can” finished project. I continue to respect the energy and commitment of which YOUR project is

such glowing evidence.¹⁰³

The conflict between the Chairman, Mr. Matich, and the Library Director finally reached a breaking point after their next joint meeting. Professional disagreement had apparently become personal animosity. A 20 March 2000 letter addressed to “My new friends with interest in the Vass Library” laid out the situation.^v McGrath and Matich had two different visions on how the library might evolve, and McGrath felt he could not support Matich’s. He expressed himself in stark terms, subtly implying that he might withdraw his support from the project unless something changed.

Reaction to the facility is filtering down to us from visitors. The reactions fall into two categories. The “potential” reaction for the project is all good - or even better than good! The reaction to Mr. Matich is not. I am working on the plan that I committed to provide to you and which I will have finalized next week. I will present the plan to the Vice-Chairmen for their action. I am through volunteering myself for frustration at the hands of Mr. Matich ... More important to me are some of the feelings I am gathering along other lines. In the meeting, Mr. Matich inferred strongly that the space upstairs might be utilized for income producing purposes and that the whole building might be used in that way if the library violated it’s [sic] lease. The inference that we might violate a lease is insulting to me and is not conducive to strengthening a relationship that needs solidifying ... Let’s face it, I’m ready for a divorce (from him) and we haven’t even had a warm handshake yet. What animosity living together could create is something I don’t care to imagine.¹⁰⁴

The minutes of the following two Vass Library Board meetings give no indication that the level of ill-feeling between McGrath and Matich had become public knowledge. While most of the minutes are taken up with concerns about renovation design items, the most significant decision was taken in the April meeting when the Board decided finally to seek to become part of the Sandhill Regional Library System and thus, by default, part of the Moore County Library as well. That decision indicated that McGrath would be in a stronger position to advise on how

^v The envelope that the letter was mailed in was not found in the records available for review. Judged by the content and emotions expressed, it is likely that this letter was sent to selected members of the Vass group, but not to the chairman.

to renovate the theater so that it could become a library. John Wallace, who had during the previous year been elected to the Vass Town Board, took the lead on researching the legal requirements and on securing the necessary contracts between Board, town, county, and regional library system.¹⁰⁵

The Vass group, however, had not been led into this decision without having examined the alternatives. Although it seemed fairly clear from the start that association with the regional system had some technical and administrative benefits, and the relationship could enable Vass to benefit as well from state funding that would come via the Region, they seem to have explored other alternatives. At a board meeting in September 2000, they invited a guest who had knowledge of the Given Memorial Library in Pinehurst and he spoke with them about the reasons why Given had chosen to remain a private association and not be a part of any larger system. The different circumstances of Vass and Pinehurst, and the differing goals of the two respective libraries, seem to have assured the Vass group that their decision to go with the Regional association was the best choice for them.¹⁰⁶

The final act in the evolution of the Vass library from good idea to actualization as a part of the Moore County system took place in June 2000 when Milt Matich was replaced as chairman of the Friends of the Vass Library Foundation. In what could have in other circumstances been called a *coup*, Matich was replaced at a special meeting on 26 June, a meeting that he did not attend. When he was informed on 3 July that he had been replaced, he responded with a letter pointing out that the action was outside the bounds of the articles of incorporation of the group. However, as he could see that his position had become untenable, he indicated that he was ready to go. "If the board wishes to replace me as chairman it must be done by the by laws."¹⁰⁷

With the way cleared, the board (minus Mr. Matich) met again on 12 July and, after discussion of his letter, rescinded their actions of 26 June. A formal motion to replace him was passed with nine yeas and three abstentions and John Wallace was elected unanimously as the replacement. The record showed that the Board had made this decision “due to Milton’s health and the fact that his job may cause him to leave the area.”¹⁰⁸ Apparently the concern with Matich’s health was not just a fig leaf to cover the discomfort of his removal. At the August board meeting, “John Wallace gave a report on Milton’s health. He is still in the hospital and has a long recovery ahead of him.”¹⁰⁹

INVOLVING THE VASS TOWN BOARD

As noted earlier, John Wallace indicated that when the Planning Board had approached the Vass Town Board with the idea of a library, the Town Board had been non-committal. They did not actively oppose the idea, but did not seem interested in actively promoting it either. Since the Planning Board was only an advisory board and the Town Board was the executive board, Wallace ran for and was elected to the Town Board in 1999. In this new role, he could ensure that as the library idea evolved, the Friends group would have a voice in town decisions about the library. In February 2000, he brought up the progress of the library to the Town Board, telling the other board members that he could assure them “that the vast majority of the town citizens and citizens from the surrounding community supports these efforts.” He invited his fellow Town Board members to attend a library board meeting. “As elected officials we should be involved with anything that would enhance the quality of life in Vass and the majority of its citizens.”¹¹⁰

By fall of 2000, the goal line was in sight and the Friends group could envision the grand opening of the new library. The decision to seek membership in the Moore

County/Sandhill Regional Library System had been made and had been well received by both county and regional officials. However, for it to become a reality, the town had to enter into a contractual relationship with the county and this had not yet occurred. Wallace told the library board in October 2000 that he would attempt to set up a joint meeting of the library and town boards to discuss the project.¹¹¹ His attempt did not seem to be successful as the minutes of library board meetings never mention attendance by any town board member other than Wallace. Nonetheless, the discussions with the county continued. On 19 October, Theron Bell, in her role as chair of the Moore County Library Board of Trustees, sent a letter to the Vass Town Board.

The Library Board of Trustees of the Libraries of Moore County enthusiastically endorses the efforts of the Vass Library Foundation Board and the citizens of the Vass community in establishing a public library. We know that the Commissioners must be proud of this effort to enhance the Vass community. Their hard work and persistence are evident through the progress that has become so visible in recent months.

When we received our latest up-date of the progress to the former theatre building at our Board meeting on 18 October, we decided to make this formal declaration of support.¹¹²

In her letter, she enclosed copies of two contracts, tentatively dated 13 November 2000. One was between John Wallace acting for the Friends of Vass Library Foundation and Harry Callahan, Mayor of the Town of Vass, agreeing to maintain the library for the town, if the town would make a contract for support from the county. The other was between the Town of Vass and the Moore County Library in which Vass would fund the library facility and the county would operate it.

On 12 October and again on 1 November, Wallace told the library board that a joint meeting would be held with the Town Board on 13 November to ask for formal affiliation of

library board with town, and with the county library system. He asked them all to attend to show support.¹¹³

The meeting had the desired effect as the Mayor signed the contract.

The effort to get the Vass Town Board to agree to the relationship with the county was not easy. The minutes of an early 2001 Town Board meeting indicated that although the Board had agreed to pay its share to the county, it was not in agreement about how much that share should be.

Commissioner Wallace explained that the library will have to pay an annual fee of \$4,500 to be included in the Moore County Library System and asked if the Town would budget funds in the next budget year to cover this item. He said that the Friends of Vass Library Committee may be able to raise the whole amount, but it would be nice if the town would show support for the library by budget [sic] the amount should they not be able to raise the whole sum. Commissioner Lassiter suggested the town split the administrative fee 50/50 with the Friends of Vass library and therefore budget \$2,250 in the next budget. That amount would be brought up again during the budget process.¹¹⁴

The Friend of the Vass Library had to agree to pay half of the town's amount if the agreement was to go into effect.^{vi}

On 7 May 2001, the Moore County Commissioners concurred as well. Mark McGrath appeared before the Board of Commissioners and told them "I think I've got a good deal for you this time." The Board agreed and voted unanimously to approve the affiliation agreement, which had been signed on 13 November 2000 by the Vass Town Board and the Vass Library Board. The Vass Area Library had become part of the county and regional library system through the efforts of the library board and one member of the town board.¹¹⁵

^{vi} Nothing had changed by 2005. In an interview, John Wallace noted "they've only committed to half of what we have to send the county every year, they still haven't changed that. "

OPENING THE NEW LIBRARY

By December 2000, renovation work had progressed to the point where the Library Board was ready to hold an open house to introduce the new facility to the public. By the time of their 7 February 2001 meeting, they had decided on 11 March as the date and appointed individuals to organize the event. The event was set up as a cultural gala, with background music provided by the Union Pines High School string ensemble. After pondering who to invite, the Board mailed out 535 invitations. One of the things they were most keen on displaying at the event was the record of contributions and how they had spent the donated money for the library. Their treasurer, Ron Engles, was a retired CPA and had kept very thorough and detailed records, so they were able to create an effective display, in part to entice new visitors to want to join the effort.¹¹⁶

They handed out a brochure at the Open House that told of the history of the Ideal Theater building and the evolution of the idea of a public library in Vass. Having talked about the past, the brochure ended with a hope for the future of the Vass Library.

As members of the Moore County Library System and the Sandhills Regional Library System we will be able to fulfill the literature and reference needs of students and citizens of Vass • Cameron • Lakeview • Lobelia • Mt. Pleasant Whispering Pines • Woodlake • Moore County. The facility will also encourage meetings at the library for cultural, civic and social purposes. Having kept the stage we may also be able to present small theatrical or musical productions.

“Knowledge can bring the world to you.”¹¹⁷

In his remarks to the crowd, John Wallace made a special point of highlighting Jean Kebler, who had been the one who initially brought up the idea of a library. Pete Madsen then passed out Certificates of Appreciation to a number of volunteers. Four days later, at a meeting

of the Vass Lions' Club, Wallace made many of the same points in an effort to solicit interest in and support for the new library.¹¹⁸

As the opening date approached, the group continued to seek support and publicity wherever they could find it. The countywide newspaper, *The Pilot*, had several articles on the renovation of the theater. The *Sanford Herald*, the newspaper in neighboring Lee County, also carried a long article on the new facility, probably because many of the residents of Cameron in the far northeastern part of Moore County, some of whom might have gravitated to nearby Sanford for library service, now had a facility to call their own. The reporter was taken with the spirit and enthusiasm of the volunteers who had made the library happen.

Old-fashioned community spirit is alive and well in the Town of Vass and surrounding hamlets. In true grassroots style, the citizenry has come together, worked diligently for the past three years and turned a dream into reality — the opening of the Vass Area Library on Friday ...

(quoting Portia Cummings) “We’re really passionate about the library, and this isn’t the final phase.”¹¹⁹

The Vass Area Library opened to the public on 15 June 2001 and celebrated its Grand Opening on 9 September. There were many attendees at the Grand Opening, to include a U.S. Congressman, two North Carolina State Senators, several members of the Moore County Board of Commissioners, and the Mayor of Vass. One visitor was not listed among the prominent names. However, at the event, John Wallace called up Jean Kebler, who had come back from West Virginia for the ceremony, for special recognition. The idea she had broached in 1998 had become a reality.¹²⁰

THE VASS LIBRARY TODAY

With the formal opening of the Vass Area Library and the hiring by the county of Alice Thomas as the librarian, the facility became a real library. The Friends of the Vass Library, however, continued their efforts. Not all the renovations had been completed, not all the desired books were yet in place, not all the shelves had been erected. But the Friends continued their monthly meetings, continued their monthly review of their financial statement, continued to solicit support and contributions, and continued to build the library. Ms. Thomas thought about the library's needs and gave her wish-lists to the Friends and they tried to help. And she opened the doors to the public: the library was open 40 hours a week.

Four years later, the Vass Library seems to be the heart of the Town of Vass, but only for those who are curious enough to wonder where that heart is. One finds one's way to it by following the green public library signs along U.S. Highway 1. The library's location on Seaboard Street would not be noticeable to anyone just passing through Vass, nor to anyone not familiar with the town. Aligned parallel to and only a few yards away from the north-south rail lines (originally laid by the Seaboard Airline Railway), Seaboard Street looks like the old main street of the town, with angle parking on both sides of the street, flat-front brick buildings flush on sidewalks covered in part by overhanging awnings from the stores, and business of the kind not often seen along heavily traveled roads. Facing the library, one notes the Post Office in a free-standing building to the right. The library sits in a row of flat-fronted buildings. It shares its right wall with a series of small offices and businesses, its left wall with a sometimes-open electrical appliance store. Just to the left of that is a very-different-from-a-big-box department store, with two hardware stores next in the same row of buildings. Both hardware stores are similar, in that they are full of small items that are particular to the needs of their clientele. In particular, both stores sell lots of specialized farming implements and one store has a box full of

live crickets for fishermen who come in to buy them for bait. All of the stores are old in appearance, with wooden plank floors, high ceilings, large windows, and stuff piled in boxes everywhere. In this block of Seaboard Street, the library is the only building that looks like something from the latter twentieth century.

And the people in Vass like it that way. Or at least the people who worked to make the library a reality like it that way. Those for whom Vass is a place to sleep at the end of their commutes to jobs in Southern Pines or Raleigh probably never notice Seaboard Street. Or those for whom Vass is the place near the road to real shopping areas probably never notice Seaboard Street. The librarian notes that she sees many of the same people in the library all the time.

That's like one thing I really like. Just getting to know, you know, people, individually, and what they like to read. You know, you can hold books for them you think they might like and that kind of thing. I like that ... you saw the lady who came in here earlier with her granddaughter. I think she goes to the Post Office, just about every day, and they then stop by here, two or three times a week. And sometimes they check things out and sometimes they don't.¹²¹

The librarian is the only employee at the Vass Area Library and thus has to do everything. But the level of usage at the library is not intense and thus she is able to interact with the patrons and provide a level of personal service not available at larger libraries.

I have a couple of people who come in because they think they're more apt to find a best-seller here, or they'd rather be on my list for it, than on Carthage's list or Southern Pines' list, 'cause it's a shorter list. And, there's a couple of ladies from, like, Aberdeen who come about well, every other week ... I mean, that's kind of a long haul, to come from Aberdeen all the way up here, but I think, they check out about, like two huge bags of books ... I don't know, I guess they ... they usually have like certain ones they are looking for.

An outside observer looking at the flow of patrons into the Vass Library notes that there are regulars who come in every morning to use the computers, mostly for email, but also

for job searching. Several young mothers are regulars. As the mothers use the computers, the children either sit and read in the children's section or use the children's computers wearing earphones as they play educational games. There are other regulars who come in routinely just to sit down to read the newspapers or to browse through the paperback exchange books. The librarian classifies the patrons as being members of two groups: "... the people who are in Woodlake who are generally older ... retired people, who come in for books, or books on tape. And then there are people who are local, to Vass. They're usually bringing their children in ... mostly ... or using the computer."

And then there are other regulars who come with a different focus.

One older female patron who comes in to read the newspapers also asks the librarian if there is anything she needs. The librarian mentions new bookshelves, and the patron takes a note and indicates that she will look into it. John Wallace stops by almost every day, mostly to check the new books and to say hello to the librarian. Pete Madsen shows up periodically to check with the librarian. He also seems to have a self-appointed task of cleaning the place, first by emptying the trashcans, then by cleaning the rest rooms. It is clear that he is also an ambassador for the library. Several patrons came into the library to meet him. He had told them about the Vass Library and urged them to visit and to get library cards. One patron mentioned to Madsen and the librarian that she had had a card for Given Memorial Library in Pinehurst, but had no idea there was a library in Vass, nor that there were other county library branches.

The facility itself is surprising. From the street, it looks like an uninteresting nearly windowless brick façade with a glass fronted first floor. Upon entry through the front door, one

notes the display cabinets on both sides of the foyer, filled with books, photos, magazine articles, and artifacts about military service. 'This is the Vass Veterans' Memorial that the Keiths had stipulated when they agreed to donate the building in 1998. Passing beyond the foyer to the main part of the room, one notes on the left shelves with books for a paperback exchange preceding a series of computer stations, and on the right the librarian's desk preceding a reading area with chairs and tables.

At the next instance, one realizes that this building was not always a library because the low ceiling that was above the foyer and the initial areas has suddenly disappeared and one's eyes are drawn way up to the three story tall room that is the library itself. The room has bookshelves along the sides, arranged in oblique rows near the edges of the room. In the center of the back wall is a raised floor that is now the children's reading area. The space is filled with small furniture and some toys, in addition to books. Orienting oneself to the room, one realizes that this had been an old theater and the children's reading area had been the old stage. It is not now as high as a theater stage because the old sloping floor where the theater patrons had sat has been replaced with a new level floor that is about a foot lower than the level of the former stage.

At nearly 6500 square feet, the room is vast and the lighting is pleasant. The entire area has a soothing quality about it. Standing near the old stage and turning back to look towards the entry doorway, one sees that the old balcony is still there, but it is in the process of transformation from a deep balcony to a smaller meeting area and gallery, with several meeting rooms behind it. According to John Wallace

we will start working on the upstairs, and finish that. And that will be used for meetings, like for Boy Scouts, Woman's Club, various things like that ... When I think of a library, and what it can do for a community, I think it would be nice if we could establish some cultural events and that type of thing. But, based on the uses of the library, and the number of meetings that are held in there by various organizations, I think this will continue to grow. And, I think when we get the upstairs built, and get a big round table; I think that library will be used five to six days ... or five or six nights a week, for sure. That's my opinion ... a meeting place where additional people can meet and relax, and maybe establish some types of cultural events, put on by the library.

So Wallace, Madsen, and the other Friends continue to work to improve the library they created during the period from 1998 to 2001. The librarian feels that their efforts have stimulated a stronger sense of community pride in Vass. " ... they're really proud of it ... you know, when it originated, that was kind of the work of a few, you know, really pushed, and worked really hard. So, if they hadn't done that, I don't know that it would be here. But now that it's here, I mean, I feel like it's got a base of support. It's pretty strong." And Wallace, when asked if the new U.S. Highway 1, which bypasses Vass and allows people to drive non-stop from Sanford to Southern Pines, would have a negative impact on the library's future, thought otherwise. He felt the bypass would speed the commute time to Raleigh and thus make Vass more attractive as a residential community for people working in the Triangle. And the library will be something they will want. "It's going to improve the library. I think you'll have more members because ... they can get to Raleigh faster from here than they could twenty miles out, by living in Zebulon or someplace like that, because of the traffic ... so I think the bypass is going to help the library overall. I really do."

The Vass library is a refreshing place. One hopes Wallace's optimism is correct. One also hopes that the librarian's sense that community support for it has grown is also correct, so that it will continue on even after the current generation of Friends departs the scene.

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² Fletcher 19, 28-29.

³ Wallace 64.

⁴ North Carolina Library Commission, *First Biennial Report of the North Carolina Library Commission 1909-1912* 10.

⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *Seventh Report of the North Carolina Library Commission December 1, 1920-June 30, 1922* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1922) 10.

⁶ North Carolina Library Commission, *Seventh Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 13.

⁷ Description from John W. Boyer, *Continuity & Change: The College as an Advocate of Curricular Innovation and Debate; The New Plan and Its Initial Success*. 1997. 16 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.uchicago.edu/docs/education/continuity-change/view2a.html>>.

⁸ William S. Learned, *The American Public Library and the Diffusion of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, 1924) 3-26.

⁹ Learned 26-27.

¹⁰ According to Kenneth E. Carpenter, *Libraries: The Real Carpenter Report*. 9 Nov. 2000. 16 Nov. 2005 <<http://hul.harvard.edu/assembly/carpenter.html>>.

¹¹ Wilson, "A Program for North Carolina Libraries" 72.

¹² Ray E. Held, *The Rise of the Public Library in California*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973) 130-147.

¹³ Harriet Catherine Long, *County Library Service* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1925) 7.

¹⁴ Long 76-79.

¹⁵ Long 53.

¹⁶ American Library Association, *Library Extension: A Study of Public Library Conditions and Needs by the Committee on Library Extension* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1926) 11.

¹⁷ ALA, *Library Extension* 14.

¹⁸ ALA, *Library Extension* 42-47.

¹⁹ ALA, *Library Extension* 54.

²⁰ ALA, *Library Extension* 24.

²¹ ALA, *Library Extension* 31-32.

²² ALA, *Library Extension* 39.

²³ League of Library Commissions, *Rural Public Library Service: A Handbook for Rural Leaders* (League of Library Commissions, 1927) 7.

²⁴ League of Library Commissions 9.

²⁵ North Carolina Library Commission, *Ninth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1924-June 30, 1926* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1926) 8.

²⁶ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission* 8.

²⁷ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission* 10.

²⁸ North Carolina Library Commission, *Tenth Report of the Library Commission* 8.

²⁹ Julia Wright Merrill, "What the Depression Has Done to Public Libraries," *Public Management* XVI (1934): 139.

³⁰ Robert L. Duffus, *Our Starving Libraries: Studies in Ten American Communities during the Depression Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933) 71.

³¹ Wilson and Wight 182-183.

³² Wilson and Wight 184.

³³ Wilson and Wight 185.

³⁴ North Carolina Library Association, *A Plan for Library Development in North Carolina* (Greensboro, NC: North Carolina Library Association, 1935) 8.

³⁵ Barker 37.

³⁶ Barker 98-99.

³⁷ North Carolina Library Commission, *Fourteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 10.

³⁸ North Carolina Library Commission, *Fifteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 6.

³⁹ North Carolina Library Commission, *Fifteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 6-7.

⁴⁰ North Carolina Library Commission, *Seventeenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1940-June 30, 1942* 6; von Oesen 393-394.

⁴¹ Julia Wright Merrill, *Regional and District Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, Library Extension Board, 1942) 17.

⁴² *ALA Bulletin*, 26:608, Sep. 34

⁴³ Merrill, *Regional and District Libraries* 18-21.

⁴⁴ North Carolina Library Commission, *Twentieth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 5-6.

⁴⁵ Helen Marjorie Beal, Ed., *Libraries in North Carolina: A Survey, 1946-1947* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Library Commission, 1948) 4.

⁴⁶ Beal 13.

⁴⁷ Wilson and Milczewski 19.

⁴⁸ Wilson and Milczewski 4.

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- ⁴⁹ Wilson and Milczewski only coincidentally on pages 46-7.
- ⁵⁰ Wilson and Milczewski 44-48.
- ⁵¹ von Oesen 381.
- ⁵² von Oesen 393.
- ⁵³ Institute of Government, *Public Libraries in North Carolina: Proceedings of the First Trustee-Librarian Institute*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Government, University of North Carolina, 1952) 4.
- ⁵⁴ Institute of Government 5.
- ⁵⁵ Gretchen Knief Schenk, *County and Regional Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1954) iii-iv.
- ⁵⁶ Schenk 10-28.
- ⁵⁷ Mitchell 76.
- ⁵⁸ American Library Association, *Public Library Service: A Guide to Evaluation, with Minimum Standards* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1956) 16-17.
- ⁵⁹ American Library Association, *Public Library Service: A Guide to Evaluation, with Minimum Standards* 17.
- ⁶⁰ American Library Association, *Public Library Service: A Guide to Evaluation, with Minimum Standards* 30-35.
- ⁶¹ John D. Henderson, "County and Regional Libraries," *Future of Library Service: Demographic Aspects and Implications*, Ed. Frank L. Schick, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library Science, 1962) 116.
- ⁶² Henderson 111-112.
- ⁶³ North Carolina Library Association, Public Libraries Section, Development Committee, *Standards for North Carolina Public Libraries* (Raleigh: North Carolina State Library, 1963) 3.
- ⁶⁴ North Carolina Library Association, *Standards* 4, 16.
- ⁶⁵ Monypenny 3.
- ⁶⁶ Arthur D Little, Inc. *A Public Library Program for the State of North Carolina: Report to the North Carolina State Library Board* (n.p.: Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1968) 5.
- ⁶⁷ Little 10.
- ⁶⁸ Little 23.
- ⁶⁹ Ainsley A. Whitman, *Proposal for a Library Network System to Serve the Far Western Area of North Carolina*, (Asheville, NC: University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1972) 8-9, 29.
- ⁷⁰ Alberta Smith, *Access to Information for North Carolinians*, (Raleigh: N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources, Division of State Library, 1981) 5-6.
- ⁷¹ Virginia Orvedahl and William Wartman, "Common Ground: The Rural Perspective," *North Carolina Libraries* 51 (1993): 126-128.
- ⁷² Molz, *Library Planning and Policy Making: The Legacy of the Public and Private Sectors* 41.

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- ⁷³ Molz, *Library Planning and Policy Making: The Legacy of the Public and Private Sectors* 69.
- ⁷⁴ Molz, *Library Planning and Policy Making: The Legacy of the Public and Private Sectors* 73.
- ⁷⁵ Garceau 88.
- ⁷⁶ Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library* 248; Colson 112-113.
- ⁷⁷ Moore County Chamber of Commerce. *Vass / Lakeview*. 14 Sep. 2005 <<http://www.sandhillschamber.com/vass.cfm>>.
- ⁷⁸ "New Books for Local Library; Must be returned to Library Commission by May 1st," *Captain*, [Vass NC] 7 Feb. 1934: 1.
- ⁷⁹ "Library Notes," *Captain/Sandhills Citizen*, [Vass, NC] 1 Aug. 1934: 1.
- ⁸⁰ [no headline], in *Captain/Sandhills Citizen*, [Vass, NC] 1 Oct. 1934: 1.
- ⁸¹ North Carolina Library Commission, *North Carolina Library Commission Twelfth Report* 3.
- ⁸² North Carolina Library Commission, *Fourteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission* 6-8.
- ⁸³ Margaret Cirone, letter appointing John Wallace to Vass Planning Board, Town of Vass, NC, 10 Mar. 1998.
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- ⁸⁷ Sandhill Regional Library System, "Sample Figures: Proposed Vass/Cameron/Lobelia Library," 20 Jul. 1998)
- ⁸⁸ Bebe Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Minutes, Apr. 19, 2000," 19 Apr. 2000.
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- ⁹⁰ Carol G. Walters, letter about idea of starting library, Sandhill Regional Library System, Rockingham, NC, 10 May 1999.
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- ⁹⁴ Ronald J. Engles, "Friends of The Vass Library Foundation, a Veterans' Memorial Income Statement, from May 1, 1999 to September 30, 1999," 12 Oct. 1999).
- ⁹⁵ North Carolina General Warranty Deed of Gift [from Phil & Patsy Keith to the Friends of the Vass Library Foundation, A Veterans' Memorial], 27 Oct. 1999; Ronald J. Engles, "Friends of The Vass Library Foundation, a Veterans' Memorial Income Statement], from May 1, 1999 to October 31, 1999," 7 Nov. 1999.
- ⁹⁶ Match, "Report to Foundation Board Members," memo, 11 Nov. 1999.
- ⁹⁷ Friends of Vass Library Foundation, "Fact Sheet Vass Library Project," 1999.
- ⁹⁸ Friends of the Vass Area Library, "Cumulative Contributions Thru 12/31/00," 3 Jan. 2001.

⁹⁹ Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Meeting, November 1, 2000," 1 Nov. 2000; Portia Cummings, "Friends of Vass Library Board Meeting, December 6, 2000," 6 Dec. 2000.

¹⁰⁰ "Vass Library Benefit Craft Sale," *Woodlake Reflections*, [Vass, NC] 22 Sep. 2000: 7.

¹⁰¹ Mark McGrath, letter to Mr. Milt Matich, Vass Library Foundation Board, Carthage, NC, 5 Oct. 1999).

¹⁰² McGrath, letter to Board Members of the Vass Library Foundation, Carthage, NC, 17 Dec. 1999.

¹⁰³ McGrath, letter to Vass Foundation Board members, Carthage, NC, 24 Feb. 2000.

¹⁰⁴ McGrath, "My new friends with interest in the Vass Library," letter, Carthage, NC, 20 Mar. 2000.

¹⁰⁵ Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Minutes, Apr. 19, 2000," 19 Apr. 2000; Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Minutes, May 3, 2000," 3 May 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Cummings, "Friends of Vass Library Board Meeting, October 4, 2000," 4 Oct. 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Matich, "General Board, Friends of Vass Library Foundation," memo, 10 Jul. 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Minutes, July 12, 2000," 12 Jul. 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Minutes, August 9, 2000," 9 Aug. 2000.

¹¹⁰ Wallace, handwritten note to Town and Library Board members, 29 Feb. 2000.

¹¹¹ Cummings, "Friends of Vass Library Board Meeting, October 4, 2000," 4 Oct. 2000.

¹¹² Theron Bell, letter from Moore County Library Board of Trustees to Vass Town Commissioners, Carthage, NC, 19 Oct. 2000.

¹¹³ Wallace, "Friends of Vass Library Board, Special Call Meeting, October 12, 2000," 12 Oct. 2000; Briggs, "Friends of Vass Library Board Meeting, November 1, 2000," 1 Nov. 2000.

¹¹⁴ "Minimal Financial Contribution for Vass Area Library," [part of minutes of Vass Town Board Meeting] N.p.: n.p., n.d.: n.pag.

¹¹⁵ Florence Gilkeson, "New Vass Library Joins County System," *Pilot*, [Southern Pines, NC] 9 May 2001: A1; Carol T. Thomas, letter accompanying Agreement for the Affiliation of the Vass Library with the Moore County Library System, 9 May 2001.

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¹¹⁸ Wallace, "Speech, 3/11/01, at the Open House," handwritten notes, 11 Mar. 2001; Wallace, "Lions' Club Meeting, 3/15/01," handwritten notes, 15 Mar. 2001.

¹¹⁹ Susan Farrington, "After three years of hard work, Vass library ready to open," *Sanford Herald*, [Sanford, NC] 10 Jun. 2001: 1A.

¹²⁰ Wallace, "Speech, Sept. 9, 2001 – Grand Opening for Library," handwritten notes, 8 Sep. 2001.

¹²¹ This and subsequent unattributed quotes from the librarian are from an interview with Alice Thomas in the Vass Area Library on 17 May 2005.

The public libraries in Moore County all seem to have followed a more or less singular path to the place they now occupy. The Southern Pines library was a women's group effort that eventually became a town library. But the larger town of Southern Pines and the groups that supported the Southern Pines library grew apart from the county and the other small libraries, choosing to hold themselves apart and independent. Thus its story is interesting only for the way it began. Southern Pines is larger in population and wealthier than the other smaller towns in Moore County and its library has lived a separate existence. The other smaller libraries in the county have more in common with one another than with the Southern Pines library.

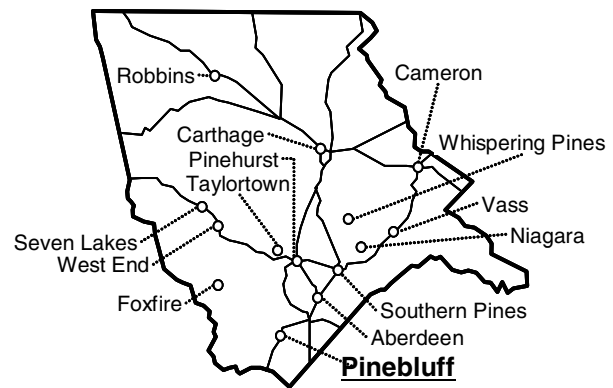
Aberdeen's Page Memorial Library was a philanthropic gift that eventually became a branch of the county library, almost because it could no longer continue without that relationship. It never grew much beyond being the effort of a small group of people. The town enjoyed it, but never really supported it, either in a sense of community support, and certainly never in the sense of political support. If it had not been adopted by the county system, it might well have just faded away.

The library in Carthage grew out of a women's club milieu, but ran out of steam early. The clubwomen who created it were never able to pass off the library to the community and eventually gave up the effort. It was saved for a while only because it served as the de facto county library. However, when the county built its own library building, the Carthage town library ceased to be. It just faded away.

In Robbins, the same thing happened. Small libraries built and operated by women's clubs finally ran out of support and funds and closed down. The story of the development of the current Robbins library is, in many ways, a modern version of Aberdeen's. In Aberdeen, one woman donated the land and the library building, and only after decades did she finally deed the property over to the town. In Robbins, one woman donated the land for the library and led a group effort to raise the necessary funds to build a new library facility on that land. She worked within the then-prevailing library structures to secure support from both county and regional library supporters.

Vass followed a similar path to completion as had Robbins, but it started out more as a small group effort. Try as they have, the Friends of the Vass Area Library have not yet been able to engage the political side of the town to support the idea and had to win support and financial help from the county and regional library systems.

One library in Moore County, however, went through all the various small town library contexts. It began as an idea of a women's club, and evolved into a community organization supported by donations. But unlike all the other libraries in the county, it



was the only library that engaged the political structures of its host town and won municipal tax support at the ballot box. It not only sought and won an election for a library tax (something no other Moore County town ever tried), but it also sought and won an election for a library bond issue (again, something no other Moore County town ever tried). Unlike Aberdeen which petered out until saved by the county, unlike Carthage which just faded away, unlike Robbins

and Vass which began their current lives as part of the county system, this one library met the county system as an equal and joined on its own terms. The story of the public library in the town of Pinebluff goes through all of the contexts so far described. However, like all of the other libraries so far encountered, it is, in large part, the story of a single strong individual who willed the library's continued existence during periods when its light was flickering.

EARLY YEARS – CLUB AND ASSOCIATION

The Pine Bluff Library Association was organized November 18th, 1908 by Mrs. Fanny Magoon Grant, wife of Dr. William Grant of Concord, N.H., and sister of Gov. Magon [*sic*] of Panama. Mrs. Grant was a woman of liberal education, and deeply interested in the development of library work in America. Associated with her, and forming the original board of directors, were Mrs. Lydia Sanders of Boston, Mrs. Ida Wheeler of New York, Mrs. Mary E. Aikins of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Mrs. Marian Packard of Pine Bluff. Mr. G.O. Sanders of Boston gave the organization a small building, quite elaborate in construction, intended for use as a Band stand near the corner of Philadelphia avenue and Pecan street. It was moved to some adjacent lots purchased by the association and rebuilt to adopt it to library use, and in that odd little place, "the size of a postage stamp" as one witty patron called it, the library led a prosperous existence, until the small quarters were outgrown and the present building was purchased, which is more centrally located and is available for various public uses, town meetings and so forth.¹

The Pinebluff Library Association, certified by the North Carolina Secretary of State on 3 December 1908 as a private corporation, is the oldest library association in Moore County. Although Page Memorial Library in Aberdeen had been built the year prior and the Page Memorial Library Association had held their initial organizing meeting in December 1906, the Aberdeen association was not chartered by the state. The Pinebluff group takes pride both in being the first to attain that status and in their nearly one hundred years of continuing and unbroken support of their town library.

The original Pinebluff Library Association was an exclusively women's organization, with membership limited in its incorporation documents to female residents of the Town of

Pinebluff.¹ As noted in the quotation above, the original members were all either wealthy Northerners, winter residents of Pinebluff, or immigrants from the North who had chosen to remain in Pinebluff year around. They had been instrumental in the establishment of the first proto-library in Pinebluff somewhere near the end of the nineteenth century, but by 1908, they wanted to formalize the effort, possibly as a local pride initiative in response to what they could see happening just a few miles up the road in Aberdeen.

This group of women who donated the money for the establishment of the library obviously had the financial resources for their effort, but they were also a well-read and well-traveled group, living in a town of well-read and well-traveled fellow citizens. Their interests and contacts extended far beyond the confines of Pinebluff and Moore County. Dr. John Achorn, one of the leaders of Pinebluff's Village Improvement Society (incorporated 1912) and an early supporter of the idea of a public library in Pinebluff, had done graduate medical studies in Berlin, Germany and had worked as a doctor in Berlin, New York City, California, and Boston prior to coming to Pinebluff.² Achorn's wife, the former Harriet Priscilla Sawyer, composed music to accompany poems by Heinrich Heine.³ The Achorns and many of their friends and neighbors subscribed to newspapers from not only in the North from where they had moved, but also from other world capitals. An example of continuing town pride in those early women and their wide-ranging interests and contacts is a small item in the caption of a photograph in a book of local history. Under a picture of the original Pinebluff Library, the caption reads, in part "Legend has it that it was the world's smallest public library at that time."⁴

¹ The town librarian, Tony Parker, in an April 2005 interview quoted the original charter: "... that's the wording of the charter, the 'Pinebluff ladies and their daughters' that incorporated in 1908."

One of the original members of the Pinebluff Library Association, Mrs. Mabel Sanders, had given the Association space on her property at the corner of Pecan Street and Philadelphia Avenue for a building. However, that first “library” was hardly one at all. The Sanders had a bandstand on their lot that was used by Pinebluff’s musical clubs as a place to rehearse and put on small concerts. It must have been adapted as an outdoor reading area with the books probably being kept inside the Sanders’ house. Nonetheless, the group was proud of that bandstand. In the early 1920s, Marian Packard, another one of the original members, was apparently a reader of a British magazine named “The Wide World” and sent a photograph of the bandstand library to a contest about “any Extra-ordinary facts in the English speaking world, offering a prize for articles of superior interest.” She accompanied the photograph with a claim that it was “the smallest library in the world.” The magazine responded with “(a) prize of a small sum of British coin, commensurate with the size of the library,” a sum that was used as the starting point for a later attempt to raise money for the library.⁵

By 1910, Mabel Sanders had donated a real building to serve as the library on the lot across the street from her house, but it was small and apparently the growing library soon outgrew it. According to David Packard’s recollections, in May 1911, John Patrick gave the Library Association a new building on a lot on Cherry Street between New England and Philadelphia Avenues, some two blocks to the east of the building donated by Mabel Sanders. This became the home of the Pinebluff Library for the following forty-five years.⁶ Both of the first two library buildings had been donated, but both of them were, from the start, the Library Association’s. Philanthropy in Pinebluff did not carry with it the same strings of control as had been the case in Aberdeen. The Library Association used it to operate the town’s library, using their own funds for that purpose.

Although a Pinebluff resident would remember that building from the days of his youth in the early 1950s as a “dark, dark, little place,” it held a fairly robust stock of books in its early years and was well patronized.⁷ The Library Association still owned the previous building and the minutes of the 4 January 1913 meeting of the Pinebluff Village Improvement Society mention that the two groups were working together to use the first library building for other civic purposes.

Reporting for the Committee appointed to look into the matter of renting the Library Club House to be used for a public recreation room, Mrs. Akins said she believed the Library Association would put the Club House in good order, furnishing it with tables, etc., and putting up curtains, the Library Association and the Improvement Society to share the proceeds equally.⁸

The first library building had been located on the space currently occupied by the Pinebluff Fire station. The actual structure was apparently moved at some time and, according to Packard, eventually incorporated into the building that was the house of Hugh Keith. Thus did Pinebluff’s first library building evolve into another use, much as had been the case with Aberdeen’s proto-library.

FROM WEALTHY LITTLE TOWN TO STRUGGLING LITTLE TOWN

The relative wealth of the people who created and used the Pinebluff Library continued to be evident through the years of the First World War and into the 1920s. In the social columns of the local *Sandhills Citizen*, references to Pinebluff nearly equal those to Southern Pines and exceed those to Aberdeen and Pinehurst. The town’s population apparently dwindled down to only a few during the summer months, but then boomed during the late fall and winter, before tapering back off again in May-June of succeeding years. Winter residents, usually from the Northeast, arrived by train to re-open their “cottages” that had been kept in condition over the summer by hired help. The winter social life centered around musical Sunday

afternoons hosted by Mrs. Achorn in her home, private dances and parties in homes, tennis and card tournaments at the resort hotels, and public dances and seasonal get-togethers at the Village Improvement Society's Assembly Hall. The unbylined authors of the Pinebluff society columns seemed to be part-time residents themselves, as the columns tended to drop off in the summer and fall, but resume in the early winter and continue through to the spring. Almost all references to the library are to be found in these social columns, interspersed with items about the comings and goings of the numerous part-time residents.

References to the library pop up from time to time as the columnist either wished to inform people about new books or to announce a library fund-raiser. The mentions reveal no small amount of community pride, both in the library and in the literary pretensions of the residents. An item from 1922 is typical.

... It is a surprise to some visitors that so many people patronize our library. As a matter of fact there are scores of reference books and classics, and a few thousand volumes of fiction, and this being a community quite above the average in intelligence it is not remarkable that when the library is open there are a great many exchanges made. As you look into the homes here about well-filled bookshelves may universally be seen.⁹

The Association saw its mission as being more than literary diversion for its members; it also saw itself as an adjunct to the schools. Pinebluff had, at that time, a one-room elementary school located about two blocks away from the library. A column reporting on the results of the annual Library Association meeting noted that "Plans were made for renewing the activities of the library and purchasing the books required in (the) literature course in the school for the coming year." But funding was needed for that purpose and the tone of this and other columns suggest that the Association was starting to need help. Civic pride needed civic funding if a library was to thrive. The original founders of the Library Association were growing older and,

while new members continued to be recruited, it seemed as if the costs of maintaining the kind of library they wanted were beginning to become a financial burden. The Pinebluff Library had been founded in 1908 as an Association and, despite the growth of municipally funded libraries in other towns in the state, there seemed to be no consideration of any other funding model for the Pinebluff Library Association.

By 1927, the members of the Association must have found that their efforts needed enhancement. At the annual meeting,

It was urgently requested that membership dues should be paid early in the season to meet the requirements of maintenance. The very low price of fifty cents yearly puts this really valuable library in the hands of every interested citizen, an appointment for instruction and amusement which no one should miss.¹⁰

They tried to engage more interest in the library and to expand its membership. For some time starting in the mid-1920s, the library had been the scene of periodic bake sales sponsored by the women of the local Methodist church (which was on the same block as the library) to raise funds for their activities. The Library Association must have seen this as a model to use to raise additional funds. However, they did not seem to want to compete with the church group's fund-raising method and thus sought other ways to expand their membership and raise money. One that continued for years afterward was the Bridge, Ping-Pong, and Billiards tournaments held at the resort hotels in town. Those wishing to enter the tournaments paid an entry fee that also gave them annual membership in the library.

The library has no support income in addition to the very small sum derived from rental of the building, except the membership fee of fifty cents per year; and the present benefit tea is the inaugural of an effort to secure funds to purchase new books, to add to the already well chosen collection, now on its shelves. The library is surely one of the most important, most useful, and most entertaining institutions of our town, and every citizen should be and will be after this opportunity offers [*sic*] a contributing and supporting member.¹¹

These were evidently high social occasions.

The principal subject of social anticipation here this week is the Bridge Tea for the benefit of the Pine Bluff Library, which will be given in the Sun Parlors of the Pine Bluff Inn on Saturday afternoon ... The very low price of fifty cents for each player has been fixed in order that all may have a share in this benefit to our Library.¹²

Since Pinebluff during these years was a winter resort, the Library Association sought to offer the library services to visitors as well as residents. A 1927 column reported, as a follow-on to a report about the improvements to the tennis courts, that

The directors of the Pine Bluff Library Association have issued cards of invitation to all visitors and citizens to avail themselves of the use of the library, for the nominal sum of fifty cents, annual dues, to cover expense of maintenance. The library has a notable collection of valuable books, which has recently been enlarged by the addition of a number of scientific and historical works, the gift of Mrs. John Sedgwick of Utica, N.Y. Mrs. Dighton McGlachlin has presented several volumes of Cooper's novels, and some new Children's books will soon be catalogued.¹³

Money raised through dues was used not only for maintenance, but also to purchase new books. The Association paid attention to book reviews in major newspapers and also to the publications of local authors, especially those living in Southern Pines, and sought public input in the purchasing decisions. "The next purchases will include some biographies and a number of books for children. Any suggestions of titles of desirable volumes will be welcomed by the committee in charge of this department of the library work."¹⁴

By the 1930s, however, there are hints that things were not going well. Two short newspaper items indicate that the library, while it may have continued to operate on some small scale, had reached a crisis. In April 1930, a Miss Frieda Heller of the North Carolina State Library Commission visited Pinebluff and held a public meeting at the library. The announcement of her arrival indicated that someone had asked her to come in order to raise awareness of the situation. “(It) is expected there will be a large attendance and awakening of interest in our local Library, which is the nucleus of a really valuable collection.”¹⁵

The tenor of the discussion that Miss Heller held with the Association members and “a group of citizens who are interested in the problems of maintaining and conducting our library for the greatest good for our community” indicate that the Association was nearing the end of its ability to both fund and operate the library. “It has been operated on a subscription basis, with a consequent fluctuating prosperity.” The situation in 1930 must have reflected that not enough residents of the town felt they could afford the fifty cents annual dues required to obtain a library card and the citizens who attended the meeting wanted the library to be used by more than only those who could afford it. Miss Heller apparently suggested that the Association Library model might no longer suffice. The attendees seemed to agree that the subscription model needed to be discarded in order to make the library more available, especially to children.

A plan for making it a free public library is now under consideration by the board of directors and it is hoped the change may soon be effected, thus placing all the advantages of access to this valuable collection in the hands of our townsmen without charge. It is hoped that a natural history contest may be arranged for the children during the summer months. They will find every facility reference and study of subjects always interesting [*sic*], on the shelves of this well equipped library, which is really one of our greatest assets as a community.¹⁶

A visitor from New York mentioned it as a public library in a 1936 article in the *New York Times*.¹⁷ As far as can be told, the Pinebluff Library Association seemed to have changed its membership model from a subscription library in the early 1930s. In 1933, the North Carolina Library Commission's annual statistical report on libraries in the state changed its classification of Pinebluff's library from a subscription library to a public municipal library. All residents of Pinebluff may now have been able to use the library, not just members of the Association, but there was no indication that the Association considered changing its funding model from a dependency on private funding and contributions toward one that was supported by public funds. The library was public in that it was open to the public of the town, but private in its legal framework.ⁱⁱ Its move to a semi-public organizational structure apparently provided it some benefit. In 1932, the "state librarian arrived last Friday and has been assisting in rearranging books at the Pinebluff Library."¹⁸ During the following year, the North Carolina Library Commission, in an exchange of letters, told the Pinebluff Library Association what they needed to do in order to have their librarian certified as a public librarian.¹⁹

That 1936 article about Pinebluff that mentioned the public library was followed a few weeks later by a short mention about the arrival of winter residents. One arrival in particular was to be one of the main reasons why the Pinebluff Public Library was to continue on into the twenty-first century. "Mr. and Mrs. M. Parker and their daughter Charlene have returned to spend the winter months here."²⁰

ⁱⁱ In the 1930s, "open to the public" certainly did not mean open to all the public, a topic that will be returned to later in this paper.

CHARLENE PARKER AND HER LIBRARY

Born in 1916 in Houghton, a town just southeast of Buffalo in western New York state, Charlene Parker had a close relationship with the Pinebluff Library from an early age. Her son recalled that his grandmother, Charlene's mother, had something to do with the Pinebluff Library Association from the first days that the family wintered in the town, and that Charlene was also involved in the activities of the library from an early age. "I'm sure she was in there doing something from day one. 'Cause that's what the ladies were doing." The current Pinebluff librarian, Tony Parker (no relation), recalls that Charlene often talked about going to the library as a child and how much she enjoyed the place and the books.

After graduating from Pfeiffer College with an English degree in the late 1930s, she found jobs hard to come by. One job she did get, however, was as a librarian, though she probably was not paid for her work. In the summer of 1940, she took two summer classes at the School of Library Science at Chapel Hill, one of them on cataloging. In her application for admission, she indicated that she had been the librarian of the Pinebluff Public Library since December 1939 and, as her son recalled, took the courses to help her do her job better.ⁱⁱⁱ One of her instructors in that summer session noted that she was impressed with Miss Parker's ideas for improving her library. The job as librarian at Pinebluff may not have included a salary, but she had other reasons for remaining in her home town. One of them was Clay Parker, a young man who also worked in Pinebluff and who, though not related, already also carried the Parker name.

In 1941, both young Parkers left Pinebluff. Clay was drafted and went off to the Army. Charlene went off to Raleigh where she had found a job working for the North Carolina

ⁱⁱⁱ The annual North Carolina Library Commission statistical reports for 1939 and 1940, however, list Mrs. Charles L. Warner as the librarian. Miss Parker might have been her assistant.

Library Commission. She may have become aware of the opportunity in Raleigh from the fact that the Library Commission had been loaning books to the Pinebluff Library. A November 1940 column in the newspaper had announced that the library was to be open three hours per day in the afternoons of Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday and also from seven to nine in the evening on Saturday. “On our library shelves you will find several new ‘best sellers’ and those with the loan from the State Library provides [sic] us with recent popular books of fiction and nonfiction for children as well as adults.” The column was bylined with the name of the regular social news correspondent, but the final paragraph might well have been a press release written by the librarian, Charlene Parker, illustrating how she felt about the institution. “Libraries are the institutions in American life which give us a knowledge of the wealth and richness of the culture which more than a century of democratic life has produced.”²¹

In May 1942, she took leave of her job in Raleigh and came home so that in June, she and Corporal Parker, on leave from the Army, could marry at the Pinebluff Methodist Church.²² Her son remembered “they got married, had a three-day honeymoon in Myrtle Beach ... [laughs] ... then they got on the train and went in opposite directions.”

Her Library Commission job had only a few more months to go. Later that year, Corporal Parker was assigned to the Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Then he got stationed at Fort Knox, found a closet to live in, and said “come on out.” So Mom did. And got a job ... Mom was running a technical library that went with the Armored School. Cataloged in the “Leavenworth System.” ... that was evidently a fairly busy operation ‘cause she had a staff of four or five or six people with her there ... ²³

When her husband was shipped to Europe in late 1944, Charlene returned to Pinebluff. In 1946, the war over and his service commitment fulfilled, Clay returned home and

was discharged. While in Raleigh where Clay was to enroll under the GI Bill at a business college on Fayetteville Street, Charlene stopped in to visit the Library Commission to see if she could get her old job back. She apparently had been a valued employee those several years earlier. The June 1946 edition of the Library Commission's *News Notes* reported on page 1 that "Mrs. Charlene Parker returned to the North Carolina Library Commission on April 1, 1946. Mrs. Parker was librarian at the Armored School at Fort Knox, Kentucky."²⁴

The following year, Clay finished his studies and the family returned to Pinebluff to begin a new life and a family. With Charlene off to Fort Knox and the war on, the Pinebluff Library apparently remained open, but perhaps just barely. At their annual meeting in January 1943, all members were urged to be present. Indicating that the Association continued to operate under the 1908 charter that limited membership to women and that there seemed to be a problem with keeping it going, an item in the newspaper read "Ladies interested in the continuance of library activities are cordially invited to attend this meeting."²⁵ By the late 1940s, the library was open only four hours a week, from three to five in the afternoons on two varying days of the week and the Association was continuing in its routine patterns of raising money through bridge parties.²⁶ Nothing much had changed since 1908.

However, in 1949, an incident happened that changed the landscape.

POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE PINEBLUFF PUBLIC LIBRARY

Levi Packard, who had come to Pinebluff as a boy in 1888 and who had served continuously as a city officer since 1903, resigned in September 1949. Packard had, at one time or another, been town clerk, mayor, commissioner, tax collector, auditor, and treasurer. All during the years the Pinebluff Library Association had operated the town library, he had been

watching over the public purse. There had been no indication that anyone had ever considered making the “public” library a publicly funded or operated utility. There were probably good reasons for that. A biography of Packard published in both *The Sandhill Citizen* and in the *Moore County News* tells the story, and, in the process, seems to give a hint of an underlying tension in the town. In 1903, Packard

became a key figure in one of the earliest and hottest of the many community fights that have distinguished Pinebluff’s truculent history. The original plans to make Pinebluff a leading Southern resort haven had shown evidence of failure, and a group of resort-conscious residents felt that only considerable advertising and promotion would see this dream come true. They proposed that a fund be raised to pay for such a program – and that the fund be created by a special tax levy.

Of the 150 individuals in Pinebluff, twenty-four were registered voters and twenty-three of them voted in the election, where the tax proposal won twelve to eleven. Packard and those opposed, however, did not accept the result and took it to court, claiming that a majority of registered voters, not just those who voted, were required to approve a tax increase. In this interpretation, the result of the election was a tie, since only twelve of the twenty-four registered voters had voted for the levy. The court agreed and the tax levy was set aside.²⁷ The proponents of the tax turned away from promoting Pinebluff and turned away from public funding for civic improvements. Many of the proponents were part-time residents, but Packard was a permanent resident, a town official, and permanently on guard against those who might seek to use public funds for things he did not support.

In 1949, he finally retired and other full time residents became active in local politics. One of the new residents was the author Manly Wade Wellman, who had recently moved to Pinebluff and who succeeded Packard as the new town clerk. The artist Glen Rounds also had made Pinebluff his home and his wife Margaret was an officer of the Pinebluff Library

Association; during the same period she had opened a small bookstore in her house in town.

Charlene Parker had also returned to active public life after the birth of her son, Lanny, and was both president of the Friendship Class of the Methodist Church as well as a director of the Pinebluff Library Association. At a meeting in early 1950, she was named vice-president of the Association.

The Pinebluff Library must have been doing fairly well at providing reading materials to the public as their annual reports indicated that the five hundred or so residents were checking out over ten books apiece annually, with children accounting for half the circulation.²⁸ But money continued to be a problem. In 1952, the Library Association decided to find a new funding model and the political situation favored their chances.

In 1949, the same year that Levi Packard had resigned, Eutice Mills had been elected mayor. Mills, who was to serve continuously as mayor for seventeen years, was a local and a self-made individual. As a young man, he had started as a gas station attendant in Aberdeen, but had wisely invested his small paycheck by buying up inexpensive lots of land all around Pinebluff. By the late 1940s, he owned much of the property in the southern corner of Moore County. His wife, Virginia, was from Pinebluff and had gone to primary school in Pinebluff's one-room schoolhouse with, among others, Charlene Parker. That school building, originally constructed in 1902, had served as a school until the 1930s when the school board consolidated it with a primary school in Aberdeen. With the school closed, the building was then used as Town Hall. In 1948, Eutice Mills had been the spokesman for Pinebluff as the town sought to regain a local school, so that Pinebluff students could walk to a neighborhood school. Quoting Mills, "Pinebluff, in the Aberdeen school district, finds itself in the rather self-conscious condition of being one of the few incorporated municipalities in the state that has no school to

send its children to.”²⁹ The town’s efforts were rebuffed. Their request ran counter to the then-fashionable attempt to consolidate smaller schools into larger units, and the response from the State and County was blunt. “Not only does it appear that the establishment of a small elementary school at Pinebluff would be unsound educationally, it would also be unsound economically.” Perhaps just to be sure the message got through, the entire text of the State’s response to the Moore County School Board was printed twice in the local newspaper.³⁰

Eutice Mills was proud of Pinebluff and, no doubt, also proud of the town’s library. Virginia Mills was elected a director of the Pinebluff Library Association in 1954 and was a member for many years, right up until her death in her 80th year in 1998.³¹ Mr. Mills was also the brother of Doris Mills Stewart, who was to be the director of the Moore County Library from 1962-1978.³² The Library Association was likewise proud of itself and its town. In 1949, they had celebrated their fortieth anniversary and had congratulated themselves in a front page article in the Aberdeen newspaper for having had the first set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in any library in Moore County.³³ But they must have been experiencing problems. The Moore County Library was dropping by routinely to loan them books and had, in 1949, referred to Robbins, Carthage, and Pinebluff (but not Aberdeen) as “branch libraries” during their annual report.³⁴ But though the county library saw the Pinebluff library as a subordinate organization, the Pinebluff Library Association was not receiving any of the state funding that the county received. If the library was to be able to continue as an independent organization, the Association needed to find a way beyond periodic bridge parties and book donations to support themselves. If the Library Association was beginning to run dry on money to sustain Pinebluff’s public library, Eutice Mills was probably not inclined just to watch it fade away.

Voters will go to the polls August 30 to decide whether or not the town will give financial support to the Pinebluff library ... If approved by the voters, the proposal will permit the town commissioners to use up to 10 cents per \$100 property valuation of tax money for support of the library ... The library has hitherto depended for its support – with increasing difficulty – on private donations through “Library Association” memberships and through annual card parties and other benefit events ... Library officials estimate that \$350 annually is the minimum necessary for proper maintenance of the institution and say that an additional amount is needed for a building fund looking toward expansion of the small original library building which has served the community for many years.³⁵

Thus did a front page article in the Aberdeen newspaper characterize the situation. A group of citizens had collected the necessary signatures of thirty individuals who had voted in the 1948 gubernatorial election on a petition and presented it to the Board of Commissioners, asking for the election. The Board had to establish a special registration procedure for the election which was duly held on 30 August 1952. The exact words on the ballot were “Should a special tax be levied for the establishment, maintenance and support of a public library?”³⁶

The result of the vote was forty-six in favor, fourteen opposed. The vote meant that the Board of Commissioners had the authority to levy the tax, but they could instead simply pay the equivalent out of general tax funds to operate the library. It appears they took the second option.^{iv} Now that the Commissioners had the authority to fund the library, they also considered whether or not they should also operate it. In the end, after discussion with the Pinebluff Library Association, the Commissioners decided that since the Library Association was willing to maintain and operate the library, the town would contract with them to do it. A contract was duly drawn up and signed, to run in perpetuity with either party able to terminate it

^{iv} The North Carolina Library Commission was thrilled by the vote, though they did not quite understand exactly what had occurred. In their 24th Annual Report, they noted “Pine Bluff also passed a library tax vote of 10¢ on the \$100. This is the first library in the State to vote the maximum tax.” See North Carolina Library Commission, *Twenty-Fourth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1954-June 30, 1956* ([Raleigh], 1956).

at the end of any fiscal year. Eutice Mills signed for the town. The Pinebluff Library Association Board of Directors (who included Margaret Rounds and Charlene Parker) signed for the Association. The Pinebluff Public Library was a (partially) publicly funded library and an agency of town government.

The small library building on Cherry Street had long been too small for the perceived needs of the Pinebluff Library. For young Lanny Parker, it was a sort of foreboding place. “I remember going down there and, for some reason or other, it always seems like to me as if it was winter and Mom had to fire up the kerosene stove to get the place warmed up ahead of time ... But, dark, dark, little place.” Having had success in transforming the library to a town agency, the Association decided to try it again. In 1956, they suggested an idea to the Commissioners.

1956 – PINEBLUFF VOTES FOR A LIBRARY BOND

Eutice Mills in February 1956 wrote a letter to a New York City bank, explaining the proposal. He apparently felt quite comfortable doing so.

...with regards to the proposed Library Building, this is the story. The town now maintains a library from a special tax which was voted by the people several years ago. We propose to build a new addition on to our present Town Hall as the old Library Building is obsolete and in another location. By adding this addition on to our Town Hall we will be able to efficiently operate the Library and give the people better access to its use. The Special Taxes which have been voted on by the people will be used to maintain the new library as they have been used to maintain the (old) one in the past. We propose to pay the bonds by a tax levy other than the special (assessment). In answer to (your) other question about the Library, The Town operates its own Library independent of any other Governmental agency and it regularly appoints a Library Board which administers the operation of the Library.³⁷

It is clear that Mills was still happy about the fact that Pinebluff had its own independent library and he wanted to see it get better.

On 8 May 1956, the voters of the Town of Pinebluff were presented with three bond propositions to vote on. Proposition 1 was for a bond to borrow money to enlarge and extend water system. Proposition Three was for a bond to construct and maintain streets. Proposition Two asked:

Shall the qualified voters of the Town of Pinebluff approve the bond ordinance which was adopted by the Board of Commissioners of said Town on March 8, 1956, and which (1) authorizes bond of said Town in the maximum aggregate amount of \$3,000 to finance the erection of an addition to the building now used as a Town Hall in order to provide space for the Town Library, and (2) authorizes the levy and collection of an annual tax sufficient to pay the principal in interest on said bond; and also approve the indebtedness to be incurred by the issuance of said bonds.

The town published the results in a Public Notice in the 24 May 1956 issue of *The Sandhills Citizen*. The water bond had passed eighty-five to thirty-seven, the street bond had passed eighty-five to thirty-six, and the library bond had passed ninety-three to twenty-nine.

Ten months later, the new library opened. A captioned photograph in *The Sandhill Citizen* showed the new front entrance, flanked by the librarian and the Pinebluff Library Association past presidents. The individual to the right in the photo was the then-current president, Charlene Parker. The caption noted “The building of a new library is a proud achievement in the history of Pinebluff ... Its completion is a high mark in the 50 year history of one of the finest small-town libraries in the state.”³⁸

Its completion was also a high mark in any Moore County library’s relationship with its town. Pinebluff was the first town in Moore County to tax itself to support a public library and was the first to approve a bond to finance library construction. Charlene Parker had been deeply involved in this transition from private association to public agency, but now began to back away from a leading role.

Lanny Parker remembered that about 1957, “when the second kid came along, Mom decided she had more than she needed to do to keep up with the library.” But she continued to work for the library. At the annual Library Association meeting in 1959, she was appointed to the book committee for the second consecutive year.³⁹ Her son described the book committee as not just a book selection committee.

... I remember Mom doing a whole lot of work on getting books for the ... new library ... remember riding around with her to ... you know, people would have estate (sales), and there were books there. “Oh, come take them if you want them.” ... I rode up to Southern Pines with her and off ... I forget all the places we went around there. And then she’d go down and wade through all those boxes to try to find something that was worth keeping, out of that.

Through the 1960s, Mrs. Parker raised her children, worked in the church, and continued to be a member of the Pinebluff Library Association. The old library building on Cherry Street was converted into the Boy Scout hut. The library continued on in its new home, an 840 square foot wing off the 730 square foot Town Hall. It continued to add new books to its shelves and continued to request additional loans of books from the county library.⁴⁰

If the opening of the library in 1957 had been the high mark, the low point was to arrive on 12 June 1970.

STARTING ANEW

Fire has been a constant in Pinebluff’s history. The town is named for the long leaf pines that cover the area, and the houses and buildings in the town are tucked in among thousands of pine trees. Over the years, the town has had many hotels and resort facilities and all of them eventually succumbed to fire.⁴¹ In 1970, fire took another victim. A front page article in the *Pilot* told the news.

Fire destroyed the Pinebluff Town Hall and Library early Friday and burned a priceless collection of rare books that had been given to the town ... The fire started at the east window of the brick library wing of the building ... Town records were saved, being locked in a fireproof vault.

But the building was a charred, sloppy mess.

And the town is sad about losing its fine library.

Mrs. Clay Parker, librarian, estimated the collection to have contained some 5,500 volumes, including many fine memorial volumes, irreplaceable gifts and bequests received from Pinebluff residents through the years, and a number of books signed by their authors.⁴²

Town government and the Pinebluff Library Association decided on the spot that the library would be rebuilt. It would not be an easy task because as the mayor, Don Cunningham, learned to his dismay, the fire insurance did not cover the books and only covered a part of the cost of the building. Funds would have to be raised through donations.⁴³ Former residents like Manly Wade Wellman contributed money and books, the Cub Scouts raised money to buy children's books, old associations with New England were tapped as Boston-based foundations were solicited for support, the community college gave some books from its shelves, and local citizens gave books and cash. ⁴⁴

One of the biggest contributors was Eutice Mills. According to his son, John, he wanted to see the library rebuilt *exactly* as it had been. To that end, he went directly to saw mills, selected the exact grade of wood for the book shelves, watched over as they were milled to his exact specifications, and instructed the carpenter in the reinstallation according to the original plans, which he either had or had found in the remains of the Town Hall. According to anyone who remembered the library before the fire, Mills' efforts resulted in a new library building that was virtually identical to the one that had burned.

With the building restored, and donated books arriving from all over the state, someone had to rebuild the library operations and that someone was Charlene Parker. No doubt using the skill she had learned in the summer cataloging course she had taken at Chapel Hill in 1940, she recorded, catalogued, labeled, and shelved all the donated and purchased books.⁴⁵ The book task took longer than the reconstruction task, but both were accomplished. The library reopened for book check-out just over a year after the fire, on 25 June 1971. The furnishings were not all in place and the books were not all on the shelves, but patrons were able to pick up books.⁴⁶ After getting the library back in operation, Charlene Parker seems to have settled back again, letting others run it.

MERGER WITH THE COUNTY

But letting others run it and having it run smoothly were two different things. In 1980, the mayor of Pinebluff sent a letter to the Pinebluff Library Association pointing out that

According to the library records the Pinebluff Library Association has not met since November 6, 1976. Unless there is a meeting of the Association within the month of April 1980 ... the town will declare the contract between the Town and the Pinebluff Library Association as being null and void and of no further force and effect in accordance with Paragraph 7 of the contract entered into on September 24, 1952, under terms of which the Library Association gets its funds to operate.⁴⁷

One of the addressees on the letter was Mrs. Charlene Parker. It is doubtful that Mayor Carpenter really wanted to revoke the contract with the Library Association. The library was being operated satisfactorily, but the governing group was not as active as it had been. Although Lanny Parker had graduated from Aberdeen High School in 1965 and was by 1980 working for the Wake County Library System, he was in enough touch with his mother to realize what was happening.

my sense of the thing was that the Library Association would go along for years, and if they met once a year, that was about as much as they got together ... formally, I mean. They all saw each other at church or ... some other social function around town. It's a tiny place; you could hardly not see each other. But it was ... for a long time, it was a really very small group. I had the sense it wasn't more than ten or a dozen of the ladies in the community. And, I think Mom was president forever, but it wasn't really a terribly active group.

The members of this not terribly active group had been members now for thirty to fifty years and had been the backbone of the library. If the library was to continue, the group would have to grow or something would have to change.

Helen Causey, at that time the Moore County Library Director, had saved Aberdeen's Page Memorial Library from fading away in 1984. Having discovered Aberdeen's library and incorporated it into the county system, she looked a bit farther to the south at Pinebluff and must have thought that the Aberdeen model would be good for Pinebluff as well. The Pinebluff Public Library had much stronger political and community support than had the Aberdeen library, but the drive that had created, expanded, restored, and sustained it over the preceding three-quarters of a century was about to flicker out. Looking at the history of the Pinebluff library and at Pinebluff's "truculent" history, Ms. Causey must have detected that if there was a way to bring the town and county together, she would have to prepare the ground. Again, Lanny Parker:

... I'm recalling that the ... county librarian at the time ... made some overtures ... to Mom, at least. And ... and as I remember it, Mom was like "yeah, you know, like this is something we really need to do, 'cause it will give us access to the books. And it will just generally improve things. But I've got to get that bunch to go along with it. They're pretty tough to move sometimes."

So, I think it started with, really, with kind of an invitation from the county library. But I had the sense that Mom, and maybe one or two of her buddies, had kind of picked up on that (and) called a meeting of the Library Association to discuss that, and approve that, and I don't remember whether it, whether it had to go before the Town Council, or whether they took it before the Town Council or not.

In fact, they did take it to the Board of Commissioners. On 3 April 1985, Ms. Causey and Mrs. Parker took the idea to the Board. Much of the conversation concerned financial matters, and Charlene Parker possessed the institutional knowledge.

Commissioner E.E. Brafford asked Mrs. Parker about the current town expenditures on the library. Parker replied that the town levies a 3 1/2-cent tax on residents and generates some \$4,000 a year for the library.

Parker said the library is only open six hours a week at the present and many working people have complained that, they can't use it since the library is only open between 3 and 5 p.m.

Parker said the major advantage for Pinebluff would be the library being staffed by personnel from the library system and would be able to remain open 20 hours a week. A proposed schedule had the library open on regular hours Tuesday through Friday and on Saturday mornings.

Under the new system, Pinebluff expenses would be for books and processing, periodicals, rent of equipment, supplies, and building maintenance.

A substantial increase for the town expenditures would be heating costs during the winter if the library was kept open more hours. ⁴⁸

The Board unanimously agreed with the proposal. On 8 July 1985, Mayor Don Cunningham representing the town and Charlene Parker representing the Pinebluff Library Association signed the contract with the county. After seventy-seven years of independent operation, the Pinebluff Public Library officially became a branch library of the Moore County Library System, as well as a branch library of the five-county Sandhill Regional Library System. Charlene Parker who, with others, had kept the library alive for forty-five of those seventy-seven

years, had shepherded its evolution into a new structure, one that gave hope that it would keep the Pinebluff Public Library open indefinitely.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TOWN

Its official status may be that of a branch library, but to the residents of Pinebluff, the Pinebluff Public Library is still the **PINEBLUFF PUBLIC LIBRARY**. Their library has always inspired them to describe it in superlatives. At one time or another, locals have called it “the smallest public library in the world,” “one of the finest small-town libraries in the state,” “one of the best.” Mayor Cunningham continued that tradition, referring to it in 1987 as a library “as good or better than any town its size.”⁴⁹ Those opinions may not be objectively correct, but they are a true expression of the attitude of Pinebluff residents. More than a few of them must have wondered if the decision to ask the county to operate the library would work. When the county took over the operation of the library in 1985, the first out-of-town librarian was hired. However, she too took to the library and, upon her retirement five years later, it was obvious that she had taken to the town as well.

Margaret McLeod presides over a cozy den of a library that suits the character of this quiet but well-read Moore County town.

“I think it has been the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done,” said Miss McLeod, who has been tending to the reading tastes of town residents since 1985. “Everybody is just so nice down here in this little town, and they’re all avid readers - the young and the old. And, they appreciate your service so much.”⁵⁰

Ms. McLeod’s good experiences with the town and theirs with her must have reassured the Pinebluff Library Association that they had made a good decision to go with the county. In fact, she turned out to be a factor in the growth of new membership in the library association. Pam Wase in 2005 remembered Ms. McLeod as the draw for her.

Well, my kids are what got me into this library, because they were ... old enough to walk around the block and see that there was a library and come in and check out the little kids' books. And, at that time, Margaret McLeod was the librarian here, and she (had) just a wonderful rapport with kids and she would always have a plate of cookies on the table. And the kids were allowed to take a cookie, but not until they checked out the books. They had to go and check out a book and, you know, agree with Mom about that was what they were going to get and take it home and then, they could go get a cookie. And my kids would just beg me to go to the library to see Miss Margaret, you know. And they wanted the cookie, but they got to where they just loved her, and they'd go first to see her and then they'd say "well, where are the cookies?" And she'd say "The books first." And, to this day, she still asks about them, and they ask about her. That was just a magnet for us, when we first moved to this town.⁵¹

Ms. Wase's introduction to Ms. McLeod and to the library led her to want to be more a part of the life of the institution. She sought to join the Pinebluff Library Association, at this time more a "Friends of the Library" organization than a Board of Directors.

The Pinebluff Library's luck with librarians continued when Ms. McLeod retired and the county assigned Tony Parker to be the Pinebluff librarian. Tony, a former hardware store owner, former County Commissioner, and well-known local historian, had long been associated with Moore County libraries, either as a reader, a supporter, a politician, and, most recently, as an employee. In 1992, Helen Causey assigned Tony to work half time as the local history specialist at the county library in Carthage and half as the librarian in Pinebluff. It turned out to be an inspired decision for both the Pinebluff library and the Pinebluff Library Association.

At the time of his arrival, the Association was going through one of its down times. Parker remembered that "(At that time,) the Pinebluff Library Association was not really active ... They supported the library, wholeheartedly, but they didn't meet the way the charter said to meet." But the town was about to construct a new town hall on the lot next door to the library and not much thought had been given to what would be done with the old town hall, the 1901

schoolhouse with the wing that had been added in 1956 for the library. When Tony asked what might be done with the old town hall, “they said, well, we might give it to the library.” He mentioned it to Helen Causey, but she said the county could do nothing with it as they had no money to spare. He looked to the Friends of the Moore County Library (with whom he had worked during his terms as County Commissioner) and found little interest. So he turned to Charlene Parker and the Pinebluff Library Association.

With six or so members of the Association in attendance, Helen Causey told them that if they wanted to try to raise the money to expand the library into the old town hall spaces, she would allow Tony to spend all day at Pinebluff working on the project. But all the money and labor would have to come from Pinebluff. Handwritten Library Association minutes from 18 July 1994 include the comment: “Strike while the iron is hot!” Strike they did. Tony Parker recalled that they set a high goal for themselves - \$50,000.

We raised over half of that through contributions and we did the entire renovation, after the town gave us the building ... And most of it was through small donations, but those that gave \$100 or more, their names are on the wall. And, we sold a lot of quilt raffle tickets and raised money that way ... And yard sales, we had some good sales because people knew we were trying to raise money ... But we did the renovation without ever closing the library, one single hour ... we did it in twelve weeks, almost to the day, and did it without closing the library, even went through a summer reading program without closing the library ... it was done by that group of ladies.

“That group” was led by Charlene Parker and included Virginia Mills, Octavia Morse, Gladys Hearn, Betty Foushee, Nancy Little, Mary Caton, and Pam Wase. Mmes. Caton and Wase were relative newcomers. The others had been members of the Library Association for as much as a half a century. Virginia Mills was the wife of Eutice Mills; the husbands of Mmes. Parker, Hearn, and Foushee had, at one time or another, been on the town Board of Commissioners; Mrs. Little had been married in Pinebluff in 1949 and had been the Town Clerk

in the 1980s; and the park at the town lake was named for Mrs. Morse's father, who had given swimming lessons for children at the lake for years. They had been children there, had raised their own children there, and were still working for the town, and especially for its library. Like generations of residents before them, they liked to read and the library was the place to find reading material. It was for them almost an extension of their homes and they were willing to work to make their "home" better.

As Tony Parker recalled it, the group did what it had to do to convert the town hall into a larger library facility, mostly by raising money, recruiting volunteer workers (like Mary Caton's husband and son, the electricians who installed new wiring for free), and providing money for equipment. Tony himself constructed the librarian's desk and went to state office surplus stores in Raleigh to find tables, chairs, and bookcases to use in the new part of the library. As had been the case with Eutice Mills rebuilding the burned library back in 1970-71, Tony worked to create a librarian's desk that looked like it belonged to the building, like it had always been there. According to a letter to the Sandhill Regional Library System written by Charlene Parker, the unchanged look of the library was important. "The new section is perfectly in keeping with the style of the old and *this was a major consideration for the townspeople*" [italics added].⁵²

The job completed, the Pinebluff Library Association then fell back into their previous pattern of using their monthly meetings as little more than social occasions. However, when an issue arose that they could get into, they got into it.

In the early 1990s, the Sandhill Regional Library System was transitioning from card catalogs to online catalogs. The Moore County librarian had bar codes prepared for all the

books in the Pinebluff library, but was unable to fund a computer system for the library. And, even if money could be found for a computer, the book had to be prepared first. The librarian had to affix bar codes to all the books in the library, while also operating the one-man facility. He approached the Pinebluff Library Association. They asked about the issue.

“When can we go on computer?”

“Well, you’ve got a lot of work to do.”

“What work do we have to do?”

“Well, you’ve got to put barcodes on all these books down there.”

Well, Mrs. Morse volunteered. And she helped me barcode all the books in the library. Not only that, I had a hard time with paperback books. If somebody asked me if we had it, I couldn’t find them. She actually helped me put spine labels on every paperback that we had at that time ... so that we could put them on the shelf in alphabetical order like hardbacks, so I could find a paperback if somebody asked for it.

Anyone visiting the Pinebluff Library in 1995-1996 would have noticed Mrs. Morse there every day, sitting in the stacks, carefully affixing bar code labels to every book.

The books were prepared, but neither the region nor the county had the money for a computer. The town was also a bit short on funds, so Tony broached the issue to the Pinebluff Library Association.

This group right here wrote a check for a \$300 deposit and gave it to Helen Causey to order our computer. The county didn’t pay for it, the region didn’t pay for it, these ladies paid for it. When the computer got there, we wrote a check for \$2700 and some-odd cents to finish paying for it. We paid for our own computer, ourselves, with money that we raised. And we were the first to go online with the computer. We got our work done.

But the computer for the catalog was only part of the work that needed doing. The advent of the Internet had caused patrons to ask if the library might someday go online.

Neither the region nor the county had connectivity, nor did they have a plan at the time. But when a patron offered to donate a computer to the library for that purpose, the Town Clerk reprogrammed some money to pay for a new phone line and for the cost of a dial-up internet service for the library. Town Hall did not have internet connectivity at the time, but Town Government felt the library needed it and went ahead and funded it. Minutes of monthly meetings of the Pinebluff Library Association indicate that in May 1997, the “Town of Pinebluff has budgeted for computers and internet.” In June 1997, the “Town has offered to pay monthly fee [sic] to have Internet ... Association voted to go ahead with Internet installation.” The eagerness of town government to get *their library* connected to the Internet finally caused their contracted partners to become involved. A handwritten post-it note attached to the June 1997 minutes states “Internet – Should have been discussed with [unintelligible, but seems to be a name] & SRLS Prior to involvement.” It *was* discussed after involvement and things were worked out. But the Town of Pinebluff and the Pinebluff Library Association had decided what *their* library needed and just did it. “We got our work done.”

Charlene Parker died in 1999. The next year, the Pinebluff Library Association, in conjunction with the county library and the Town of Pinebluff, remembered her work for the library. On Sunday, 11 June 2000, they held a ceremony during which they installed a plaque over the entryway to the Pinebluff Public Library, dedicating it to the memory of Charlene Parker.

PINEBLUFF PUBLIC LIBRARY TODAY

Pinebluff is the southernmost town in Moore County, on U.S. Highway 1 about five miles south of Aberdeen. The highway bisects the town into an eastern and a western half. The east-west avenues are all named for places the town founders had hoped to find new investors –

Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New England, and Boston. The north-south streets are all named for trees, with the streets on the east side named for fruits, those on the west side named for nuts.^v The fire station and the town water tower are on the west side; the lake, the Methodist and the Baptist Churches, the Town Hall, and the Pinebluff Public Library are on the east side. Anyone looking for Town Hall will come across the library because the two buildings sit side by side on East Baltimore Avenue.

The entrance to the library is the original entrance to the one-room Pinebluff Primary School that the building was built to house in 1901, and over the door one sees the dedication to Charlene Parker, who had attended school in this very building in the 1920s. Stepping up the two concrete steps, opening the heavy wooden screen door and the even heavier solid wood main door, and entering the library, one is immediately struck with the woodiness of the place. Upon reflection, one might not be surprised, since the town of Pinebluff looks like an urban forest, with long-leafed pines everywhere and pine straw on all the flat surfaces. But the library itself is all wood. Pine plank floors, pine plank paneled walls. Heavy wooden book cases with reference works, new arrivals, and children's books line both sides of the room; heavy wooden tables and chairs flank the passage to the librarian's desk, which itself is a heavy, solid, pine counter. Behind the librarian's desk, one notes to the right a walk-in safe door. A safe is an unusual library component, but when one recalls that this is the former Town Hall, it begins to make more sense. In fact, the safe still holds town records and the Town Clerk comes over periodically to manage those records.

^v Charlene Parker was fond of telling new arrivals that the people on the west side of town "may be nuts, but you all on the east side are fruits."

Behind the desk, one notes on the wall a large oil painting of a man in what appears to be some sort of uniform. The painting has a heavy, carved wooden frame with acorns as decoration and the words “AB 1879”, “MD 1887”, and “1880-1884”. The librarian will later tell you, should you ask, that it is a painting of Dr. John Achorn, one of the early residents of the town. It had been given to the town and had hung in the Town Hall, but when town government had moved to the new building next door, they left the painting here for the library.

Sitting at one of the tables in the reference section doing some work, the visitor can see the flow of patrons coming into the library. The library is only open twenty hours per week, from two to six in the weekday afternoons. When the door is opened at two, early patrons are often individuals who want to use the computers for web surfing or email. They usually come in, do what they need to do to use the computers, then proceed to work silently at their tasks. About mid-afternoon, school children start to show up, some to use the computers, some to do their homework, some to read magazines, some to look for their friends. Sometimes a parent is with them, and, if the children are young, both children and parents gravitate to the children’s section near by the computer stations.

But many of the patrons who come in are older and come to drop off or pick up books. It is clear to the observer that for most of them, the interchange and conversation with the librarian is as important to them as the books are. More than a few patrons are regulars, coming in weekly, if not daily, to exchange books and exchange conversation with the librarian. The slow pace of visitors to the library provides both of them the time to stand and talk, to reminisce, to discuss books, reading, and the state of the world. More than a few patrons come in to pick up the books that the librarian has set aside for them. They have called earlier and asked for some books to be held for them. All of them, the regulars and those who have come

in to pick up reserved books, tend to talk with the librarian, look closely at the new book arrivals, then slowly browse around the shelves, not usually finding anything, but looking nonetheless, and then departing.

Other patrons come from other locations to Pinebluff, not to check out books, but to ask the librarian for local history information. Tony Parker, the librarian, spends his mornings in Carthage concentrating on his job as the local history librarian. In the afternoons, when he is at Pinebluff, patrons seeking help are sent his direction and show up in Pinebluff, often pleasantly surprised at the library in which they have found Tony. A glance around the building tells the reason.

Standing at the librarian's desk and looking to the left, one can see where a wall had been removed in the mid-1990s to open up the space between the old town hall and the old library. The library wing, which had been added on to the Town Hall in 1956 and rebuilt after the 1970 fire, now holds the bulk of the library's collection. Again, the pine floors, the pine paneled walls. Just beyond the two round tables with public access computers on them are heavy wooden bookcases along the walls and shorter, but still heavy, wooden bookcases standing in three parallel rows in the middle of the room. But what stands out immediately is at the end of the room.

There is a fireplace, with an old panoramic painting of Pinebluff, circa 1900, above the mantle. The fireplace is flanked by several wing chairs with side tables and lamps, and a globe. It looks like a place to sit down to read. And, if it were cold outside, the fire looks like it would be doubly inviting.

The Pinebluff Public Library doesn't look or feel like the other libraries one has seen in Moore County. Patrons who encounter the Pinebluff Public Library for the first time feel its different mood; residents of Pinebluff know that mood and that's just how they want it. When asked about their immediate impressions about the library, members of the library association responded with consistent comments.

"It's homey."

"It's very comfortable."

"There's lots of books."

"Very pleasant to come and read here."

Sharon Fox, a newer member of the Pinebluff Library Association (and an elected member of the town Board of Commissioners) saw it as an extension of the home.

It's like a hidden jewel, you know. Pinebluff is such a wonderful small town and then to walk into a library that is so well stocked is such a shock. Because from the outside, it looks like a very small building, it does not look like it could contain as many books as it does. And it's, it feels like home, you walk in here and it's like the library that you were at as a youth. You know, it's a very comfortable library.

The hominess, and the smallness, of the place seems to attract more than just residents of Pinebluff. The librarian noted that many of the users come from outside of town.

(Everybody) that comes in here, for the first time, talks about the warm atmosphere. They like it because it's kind of homey, and it's not like a commercial building. It has a lot of character to it. And we have people that drive here from Southern Pines and even Aberdeen and Pinehurst because they can normally get the book they want while they're here, without having to request it and come back at a later date ... And a lot of people like that.

But the essence of the place seemed to have been captured by one member of the Library Association when she thought back to why she had joined the Library Association in the first place. The Pinebluff Library made her think about her youth.

You know, I grew up in the Southern Pines Library – and, of course, this was the old one, beside of the Post Office – and they had a fireplace and they had two loveseats on either side and Mrs. Boyd had donated a table with a Lazy Susan in the middle and this was their magazine table. And, of course, you could twirl it around. We were never told, you know, “don’t come in here.” We were always, as children, made to feel welcome. If we wanted to go over and curl up in one of the loveseats and read for a while, it was perfectly all right. As a child, you know, it was the most wonderful part of my life.

The Pinebluff Public Library doesn’t feel so much like a library, rather it feels more like how you remember home to have been, or maybe more likely how you imagine grandmother’s home might have been. A 1988 profile of the town in a local newspaper included the headline “Pinebluff could have been bigger, but its residents like it as is.”⁵³ That’s probably a good description of the library as well. It could be more, but the town, the Association, and the users like it as is.

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- ¹ “Pinebluff Items,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 7 Jan. 1927: [9].
- ² “Noted Man Passes Away,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 20 Aug. 1926: [3].
- ³ See, for example, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=7786.
- ⁴ Pinebluff Historical Committee, *Pine Bluff, North Carolina: 1884-1976*, (Pinebluff, NC, 1976) 53.
- ⁵ “Pinebluff Items,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 7 Jan. 1927: [9]. Additional information about “The Wide World” can be found at <http://www.collectingbooksandmagazines.com/wide.html>.
- ⁶ Packard, *A Collection of Facts and Data about Pinebluff* 20.
- ⁷ The quote is from Lanny Parker, Charlene Parker’s son, given during an interview held on 6 June 2005 in Raleigh. Any unattributed quotes in the Pinebluff Library story come from Mr. Parker’s interview.
- ⁸ Village Improvement Society, “Minutes,” typewritten and mimeographed, Pinebluff, NC, 4 Jan. 1913.
- ⁹ “Pine Bluff,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 2 Feb. 1922: [8].
- ¹⁰ “Pine Bluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 2 Dec. 1927: [6].
- ¹¹ “Pinebluff Items,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 14 Jan. 1927: [5].
- ¹² “Pinebluff Library Benefit Bridge Tea,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 7 Jan. 1927: [1].
- ¹³ “Pine Bluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 9 Dec. 1927: [3].
- ¹⁴ “Pinebluff Items,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 11 Feb. 1927: [10] and 25 Mar. 1927: [7].
- ¹⁵ “Pine Bluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 28 Mar. 1930: 7.
- ¹⁶ “Pine Bluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 13 Apr. 1930: 8.
- ¹⁷ “Winter Resident of Pinebluff Gives Sandhills High Praise,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen & Vass, NC] 27 Aug. 1936: 2.
- ¹⁸ “Pinebluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 11 Nov. 1932: 3.
- ¹⁹ North Carolina Library Commission, letter to Pinebluff Library Association, 5 Aug. 1933.
- ²⁰ “Pinebluff Items,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 11 Sep. 1936: 3.
- ²¹ Mrs. W.K. Carpenter, “Pinebluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 7 Nov. 1940: 4.
- ²² Mrs. E.F. Pickler, “The Week in Pinebluff,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 21 May 1942: 5; “Parker – Parker,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 28 May 1942: 5; and Mrs. E. F. Pickler, “The Week in Pinebluff: Miss Charlene Parker weds C.C. Parker Sunday,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Jun. 1942: 5.
- ²³ Her departure for Fort Knox was also mentioned in Mrs. E.F. Pickler, “The Week in Pinebluff,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 26 Nov. 1942: 5.

²⁴ North Carolina Library Commission, *News Notes*, Ts. (Raleigh, NC, Jun. 1945) 1.

²⁵ "Pinebluff News," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 7 Jan. 1943: 4.

²⁶ "\$91.00 Raised to Benefit Pinebluff Public Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 1 May 1947: 1; Mrs. W. R. Griffin, "Pinebluff News: Library Hours," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Aug. 1947: 9; Mrs. W.R. Griffin, "Pinebluff News: Library Hours," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 30 Oct. 1947: 3; and Mrs. W.R. Griffin, "Pinebluff News: New Books at Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 11 Dec. 1947: 9.

²⁷ "Levi Packard, Pinebluff Landmark, Resigns as Town Clerk," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 29 Sep. 1949:12. The same article was also printed as "Packard Quits as Town Clerk," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 13 Oct. 1949: 6.

²⁸ Mrs. Ehrman Pickler, "Pinebluff News: Presents Book," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 27 Oct. 1949: 2; Pickler, "Pinebluff News: Library Benefit Party," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 10 Nov. 1949: 4; ; Pickler, "Pinebluff News: New Books," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 8 Dec. 1949: 7; Pickler, "Pinebluff News: New Library Books," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 5 Jan. 1950: 4; Pickler, "Pinebluff News: Library Meeting," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Feb. 1950: 5; "6,109 Books Are Circulated From Pinebluff Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Feb. 1950: sec. 2, p. 4; Pickler, "Pinebluff: Library Meeting," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 22 Feb. 1951: 2; and Pickler, "Pinebluff News: Library Meeting," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 17 Jan. 1952: 3.

²⁹ "Pinebluff Seeking School Of Its Own," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 27 May 1948: 3.

³⁰ "Comptroller of Board of Education in Opposition to Pinebluff School," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 19 Aug. 1948: 4; and "State Board of Education Head in Opposition to Pinebluff School," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 19 Aug. 1948: 8.

³¹ Mrs. E.F. Pickler, "Pinebluff News: Library Meeting," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 29 Jul. 1954: 3.

³² Mary Warren-Harris, "Turning Pages Into Adventure," *Pilot*, [Southern Pines, NC] 2 Feb. 1987) 4A.

³³ "Pinebluff Library Has 40th Birthday," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 24 Feb. 1949: 1.

³⁴ "Work of Library Board Reviewed," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 8 Dec. 1949: sec. 2, 3.

³⁵ "Special Election on Library Aid Set in Pinebluff: Vote Set Aug. 30 After Petition Is Presented to Board," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 26 Jun. 1952: 1.

³⁶ Unattributed mentions of ballots, ballot results, and contracts in the following paragraphs are references to the original documents that were discovered in file drawers within the walk-in safe in the Pinebluff Public Library. The author was allowed to look at the documents and take notes on their contents during a visit on 19 November 2003.

³⁷ Eutice H. Mills, letter to New York City bank lawyers acknowledging their agreement to handle the Pinebluff town bond, 15 Feb. 1956.

³⁸ "New Pinebluff Library Opens Sunday," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 21 Mar. 1957: 4.

³⁹ Mrs. E.F. Pickler, "Pinebluff News," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 26 Feb. 1959: 2.

⁴⁰ See, for example, "Moore Library Circulation, Services Show Healthy Gain," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 8 Jun. 1961) 1; as well as Mrs. E.F. Pickler, "Pinebluff News: New Library Books," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 20 Jul. 1961) 3; "New Books Added," *Sandhills Citizen*, (Aberdeen, NC. 4 Jun. 1964: 9; "Pinebluff Library Recent Additions," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 16 Jul. 1964: 3; "New Books At Library," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 20 Aug. 1964: 4; and "Pinebluff News; New Books Added to Pinebluff Library July, September, and October," *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 29 Oct. 1964: B8.

⁴¹ Pinebluff Historical Committee 16.

⁴² "Town Hall Guttled in Blaze; Pinebluff Library Destroyed," *Pilot* [Southern Pines, NC] 17 Jun. 1970: 1.

⁴³ “Pinebluff is Seeking Library Funds, Books,” *Pilot* [Southern Pines, NC] 22 Jul. 1970: 3A; “Say: ‘We’ll Build It Back’ Pinebluff Library Friends,” *Robbins Record*, [Robbins, NC] 23 Jul. 1970: 1.

⁴⁴ “Appeal for Funds Made for Pinebluff Library,” *Pilot*, [Southern Pines, NC] 5 Aug. 1970: 1; “Pinebluff Donates 206 Books to Local Library,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 15 Jul. 1971: B1. The last headline was an error. Pinebluff’s Cub Scout Pack 206 had collected returnable soft drink bottles and sold them for \$35.10 with which they bought a Hardy Boys series for the library.

⁴⁵ “Pinebluff Library Holding Dedication Ceremony,” *Pilot*, [Southern Pines, NC] 7 Jun. 2000: D3.

⁴⁶ Mrs. Grace Green, “Pinebluff News,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 24 Jun. 1971: 3.

⁴⁷ Town of Pinebluff, letter (unsigned copy) to Mrs. Julia Mangum, President, Pinebluff Library Association, 24 Mar. 1980. Mrs. Mangum had been president or officer of the library association for over 30 years at this time and had retired as the Pinebluff Postmaster in 1973. See “Mrs. Mangum Retires; Mrs. Styers Named Pinebluff Postmaster,” *Sandhills Citizen* [Aberdeen, NC] 5 Jul. 1973: 1.

⁴⁸ Jeff Schulze, “Pinebluff library merger with regional proposed,” *Sandhills Citizen and News Outlook* [Aberdeen, NC] 6 & 7 Apr. 1985: 3a.

⁴⁹ “Pinebluff ‘quiet town’,” *Citizen-News Record* [Aberdeen, NC] 22 Apr. 1987: n.pag.

⁵⁰ Mark Stinneford, “Librarian Honored For Service To A Quiet Town of Readers,” *Fayetteville Observer-Times* [Fayetteville, NC] 7 Jan. 1991: 1.

⁵¹ This quotation and future unreferenced quotations from the Tony Parker and from members of the Pinebluff Library Association come from an interview with members held in the Pinebluff Public Library on 20 Apr. 2005.

⁵² Pinebluff Library Association, “Nomination for Outstanding New/Improved Library Facility Award,” memo accompanying nomination package, 2 May 1995.

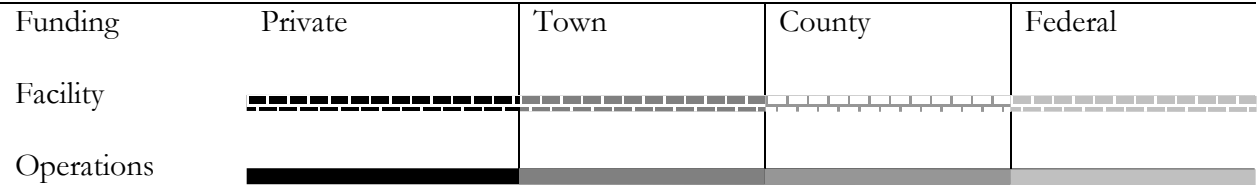
⁵³ Spivey.

10

SIMILAR, BUT VARIED, PATHS TO A SIMILAR PLACE

To look at how these Moore County libraries evolved over the course of their twentieth century histories, one might look at a series of timelines tracking their evolution. Starting at 1900, each town and each library shared a few things in common, but each also had to traverse a local environment that affected their development. The following figures depict that evolution. The timelines are marked to reflect the funding source by shading and library function by fill (bricks for facility costs and solid for operations cost).

Figure 1: Timeline Coding



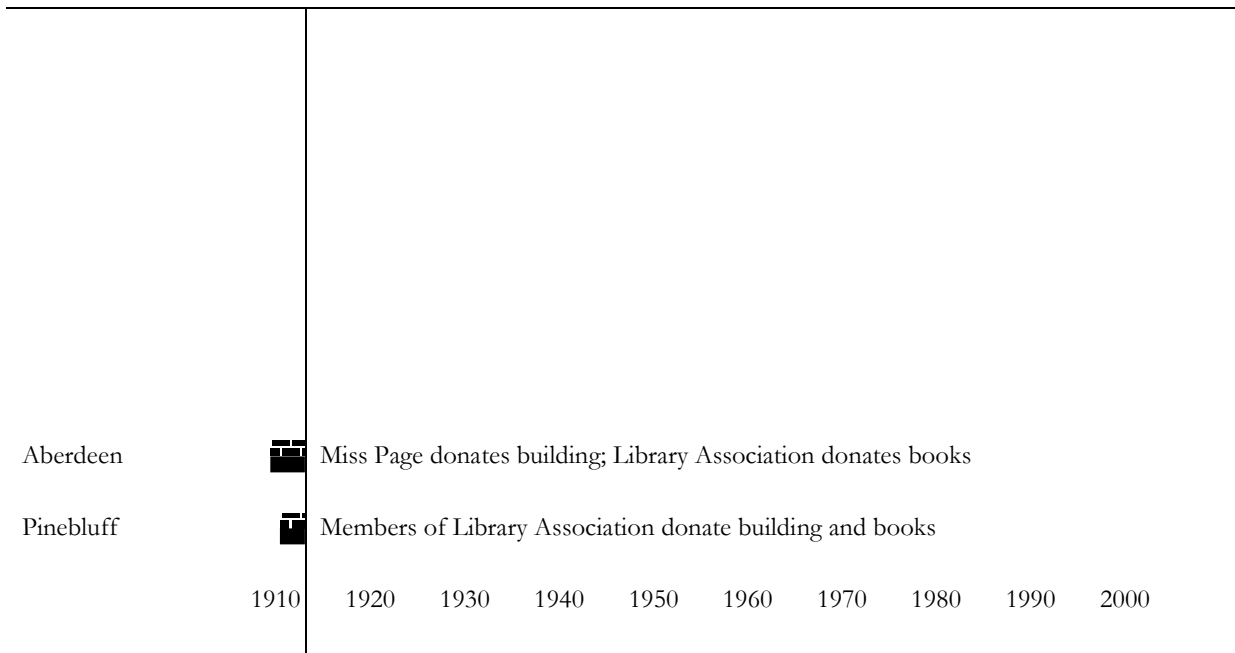
At the start of the twentieth century, four towns had proto-libraries. Three of them were originally Seaboard Air Line Railroad traveling libraries, Pinebluff's was home grown.

Figure 2: Proto-Libraries in 1900

Carthage	Seaboard Air Line Railroad Traveling Library
Southern Pines	Seaboard Air Line Railroad Traveling Library
Aberdeen	Seaboard Air Line Railroad Traveling Library
Pinebluff	300 books donated to town by Pine Bluff Village Improvement Association
	1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000

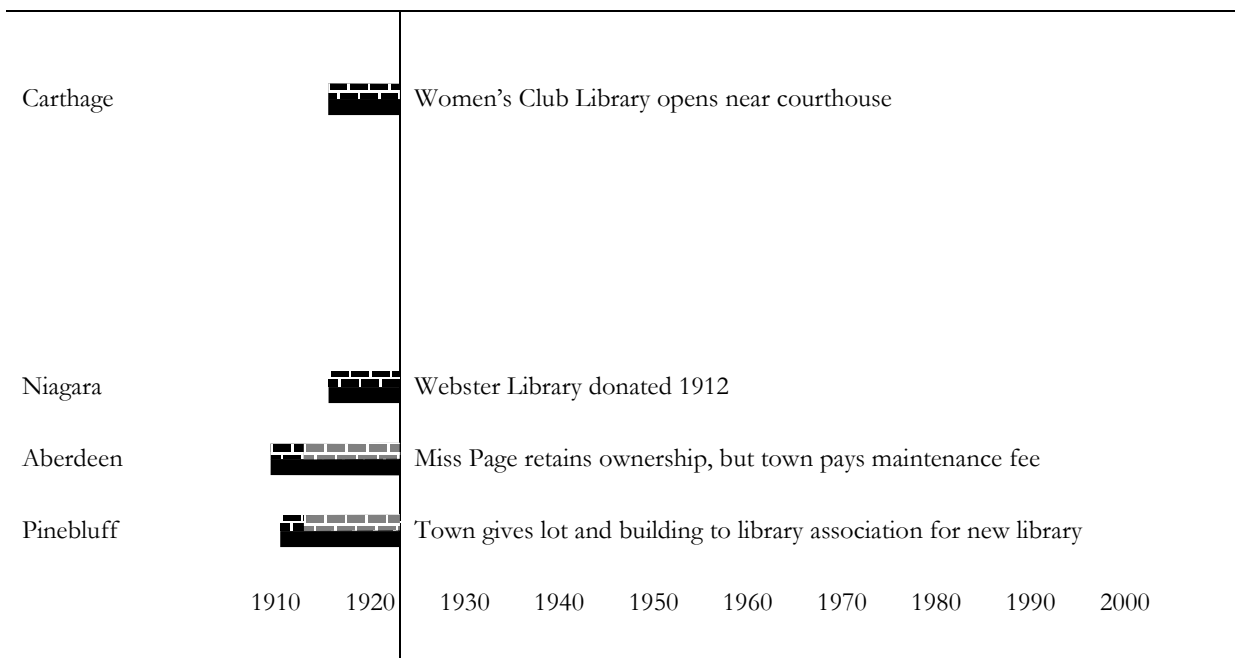
By 1910, both Aberdeen and Pinebluff had their first town libraries. Aberdeen's building had been donated by Miss Mary Page. Its first books were a mix of donations by members of the Page Memorial Library Association and others, along with some purchases made from Library Association dues. Pinebluff's building and books had been donated by the members of the Pinebluff Library Association.

Figure 3: Two Libraries by 1910



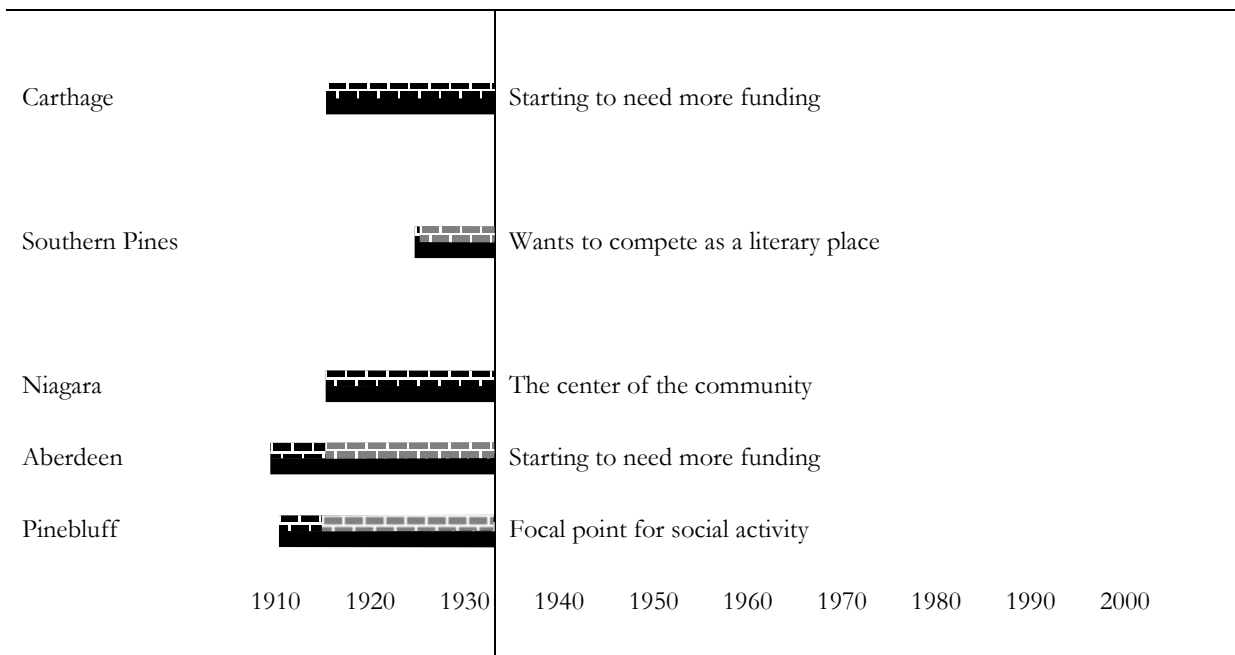
By the beginning of the 1920s, libraries had been begun in both Carthage and Niagara. The Carthage library was a club effort that existed in loaned spaces. The Webster Library in Niagara, on the other hand, was a philanthropic donation by a single person. The town received a building and books as a community library. In Aberdeen and Pinebluff, the town started to pay for some of the maintenance of the library facility. In Aberdeen, the library association retained ownership of the facility, but received an annual stipend from the town; in Pinebluff, the town gave the library a lot and a new building, but the library association paid for its maintenance.

Figure 4: Four Libraries by 1920



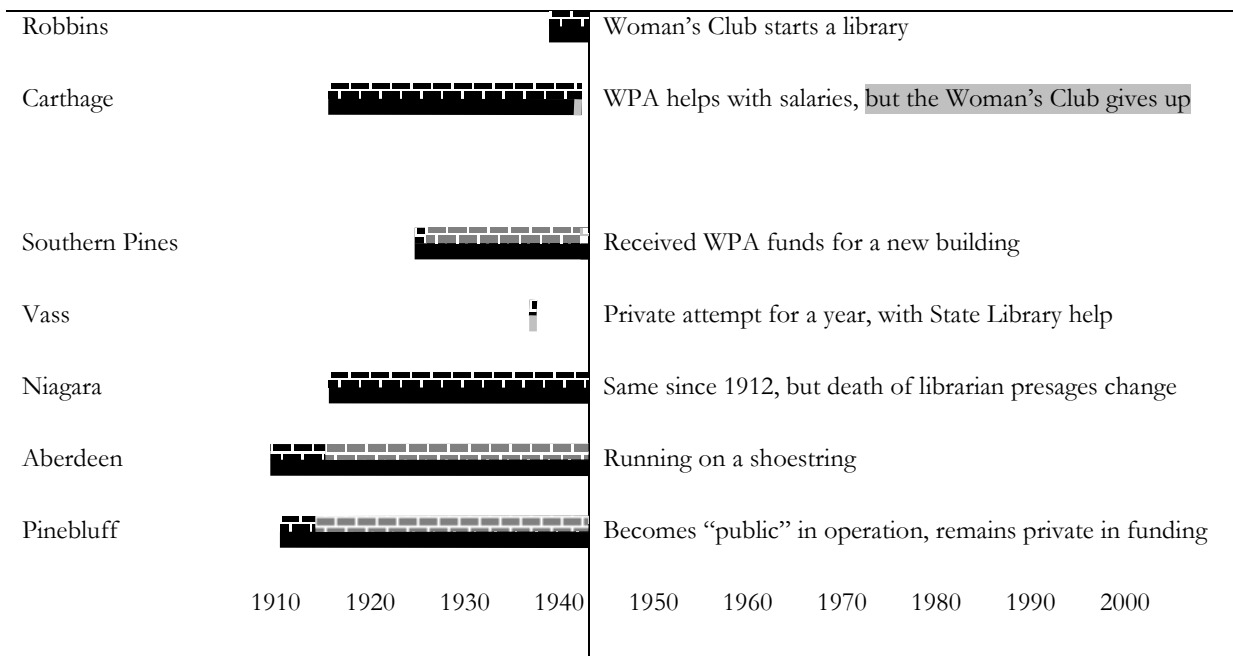
Southern Pines, not wanting to fall behind the other towns, opened its own library in 1922. Though it was operated privately, the town provided space for it shortly after its establishment. Niagara and Pinebluff both continued on as centers of community focus: in Pinebluff, it was a social focus; in Niagara, it was a social and locational focus. The town libraries in both Carthage and Aberdeen were beginning to run into cash flow problems, but at least Aberdeen's library owned its own facility.

Figure 5: Southern Pines becomes the fifth by 1930



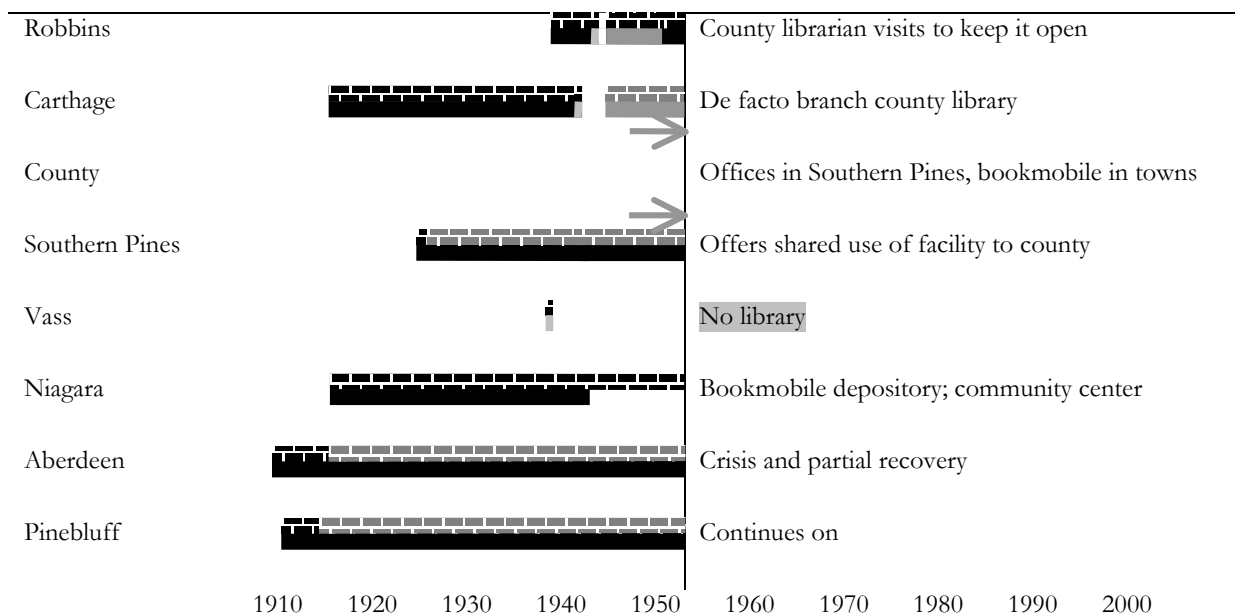
During the 1930s, money woes began to really affect these libraries. Carthage moved to the basement of the courthouse, but needed WPA salary help to keep the place open. When the county needed the space again and the books burned in storage, the Woman's Club could not continue. Money was tight in all the other towns as the individuals and clubs operating their libraries looked for ways to raise small amounts of money to keep going. One individual in Vass tried to start a library, but the effort lasted less than a year. On the other hand, Southern Pines was able to build a new library building with WPA funds.

Figure 6: Attempts in Robbins and Vass; WPA tries to help by 1940



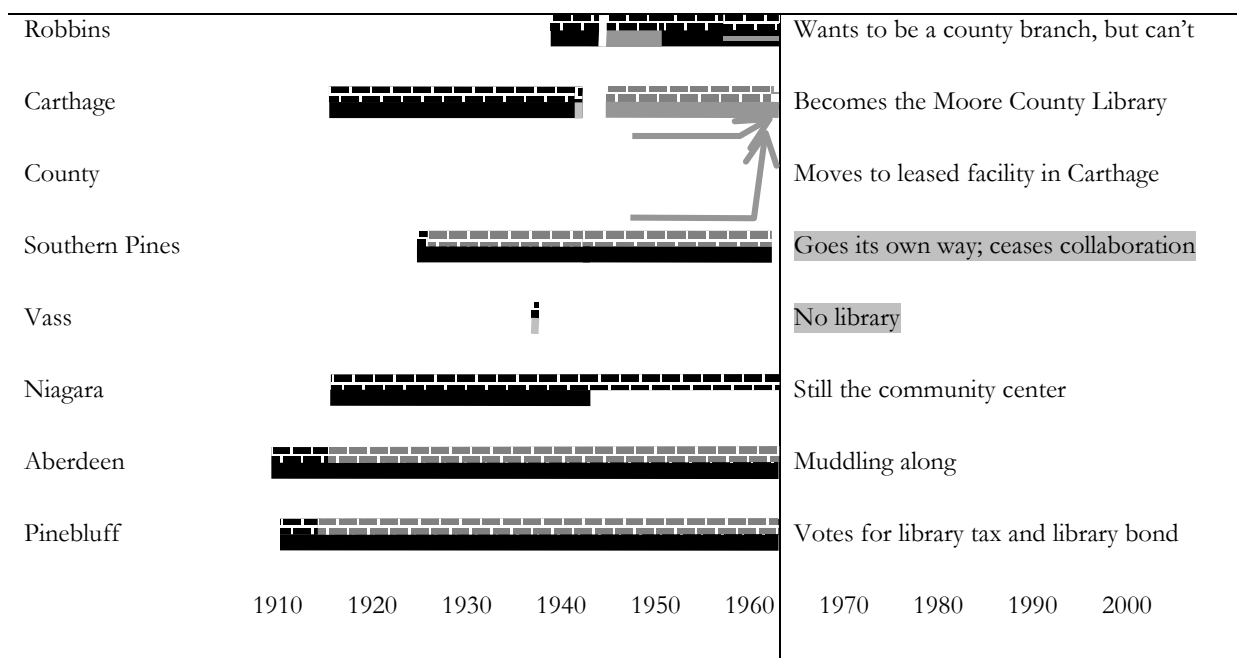
Robbins also couldn't keep up a library, even with WPA funds and closed. Both Robbins and Carthage had no library until the county applied for state aid and established a county library in 1944. Southern Pines offered space for offices and book storage, but the Carthage library (in the WPA-built Community House) acted as the de facto county library. The county librarian kept Robbins open by visiting on a weekly basis to open the doors. Niagara quit checking out books while Aberdeen and Pinebluff continues on with their private/public operation.

Figure 7: With State Aid, the county establishes a library in the 1940s, sharing facilities



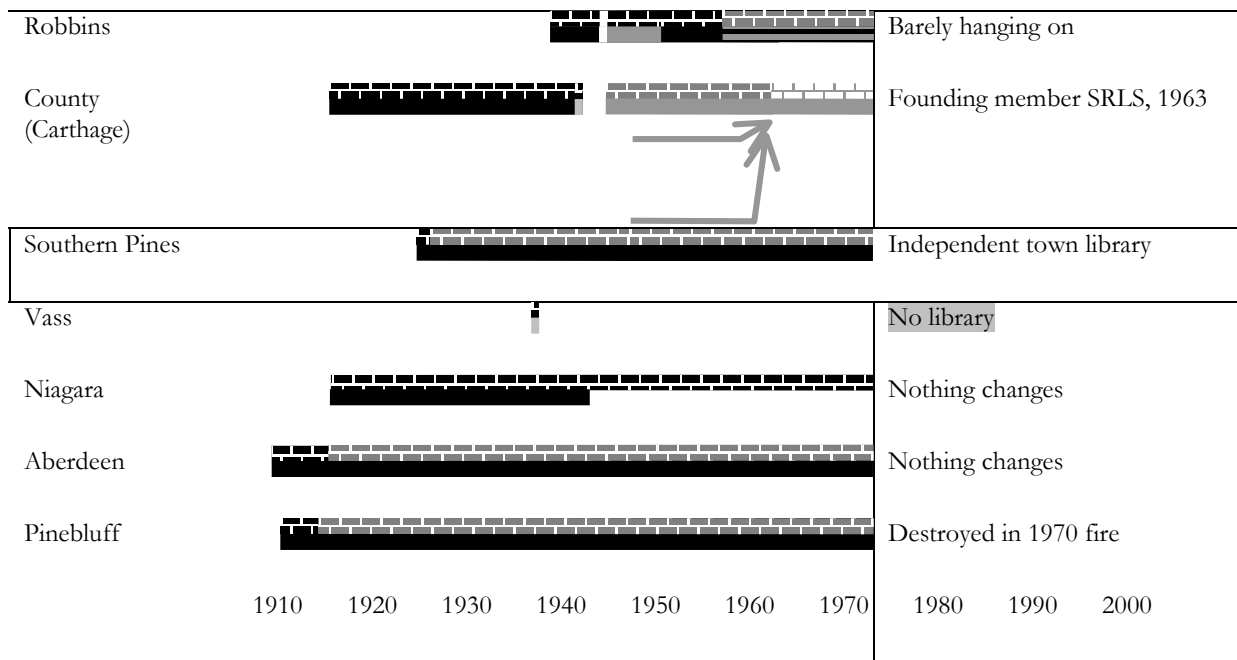
The big event of the 1950s was the move of the county's book stocks from Southern Pines to a leased facility in Carthage in 1959. From that date, the Carthage library ceased to be a town library and the Southern Pines library ceased to be a part of the county effort. Robbins struggled on, staying open only with the help of the county librarian. Robbins wanted to become a county branch library, but could not meet the requirements to become one. Pinebluff became the first and only town to put the question of funding the library with taxes to the voters. Pinebluff voters approved the use of town funds for library maintenance in 1952 and approved a bond for a library building to be built onto the Town Hall in 1956. Aberdeen and Niagara continued on, Aberdeen needing funds and Niagara using the building for community activities, but not for book lending.

Figure 8: County library moves to Carthage in 1959; Southern Pines goes its own way



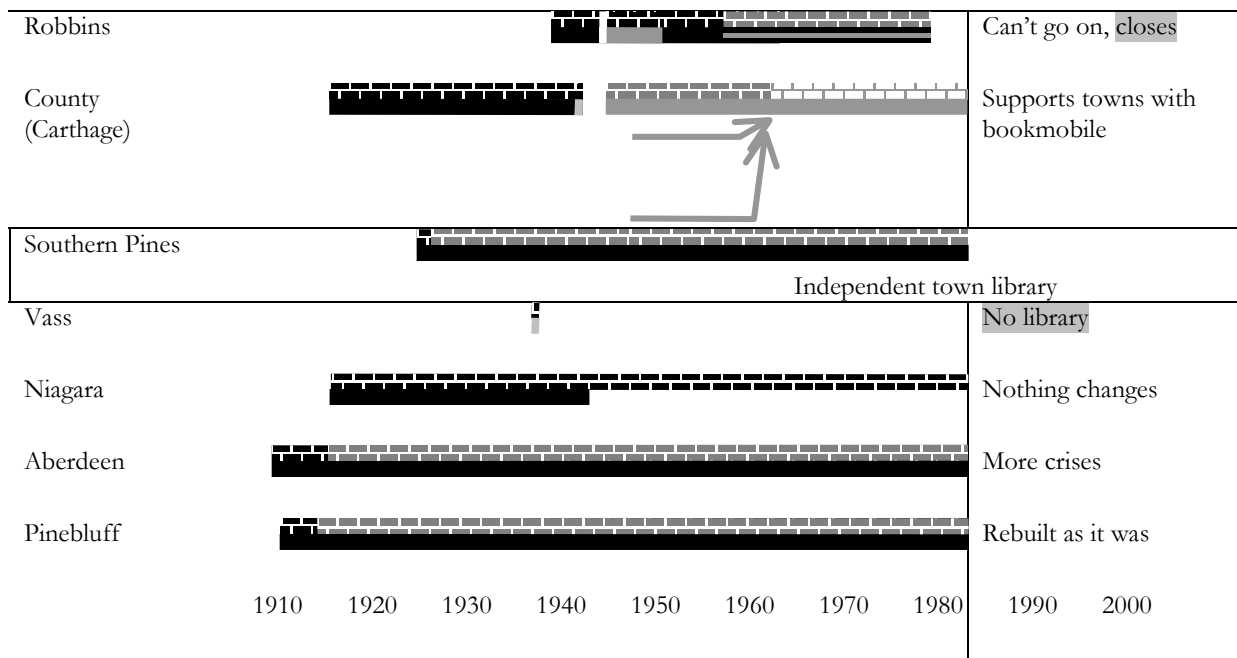
With the county library moved to Carthage, the Carthage Town Library ceased to exist in 1959. From that date, the town provided no more direct support to the library and the link between town and library seemed to fade. It became a county-level effort and started to look beyond Carthage. In 1963, it was one of the founding members of the Sandhill Regional Library System and, when a new county facility was constructed in Carthage in 1969, became the headquarters of the Regional Library. All the other town libraries continued on in their normal endeavors: struggling in Robbins and Aberdeen; going on alone, separate from the other county libraries in Southern Pines; and recovering from a disastrous fire in Pinebluff.

Figure 9: County library becomes part of Sandhill Regional Library System



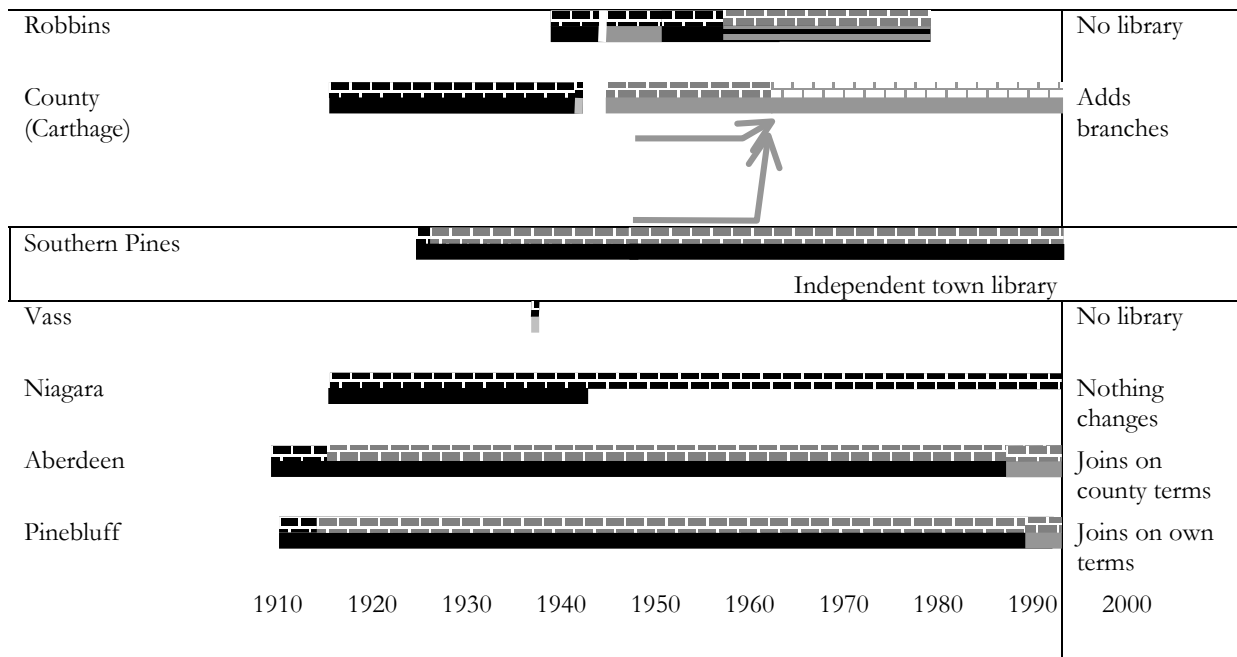
Pinebluff rebuilt its library from scratch and re-opened a year after the fire, looking almost exactly as it had before the fire. Aberdeen continued to suffer from chronic underinvestment in its facility and local clubs tried, but could not sustain the effort to keep it in good shape. In Robbins, the lack of funding finally forced the small library to close, although the books were put into storage in hopes of a new library reopening. The county library tried to help the small towns by having its bookmobile supplement the small book holdings. Southern Pines and Niagara continued to go their own ways, independent of other efforts.

Figure 10: Rebuilding and loss in the 1970s



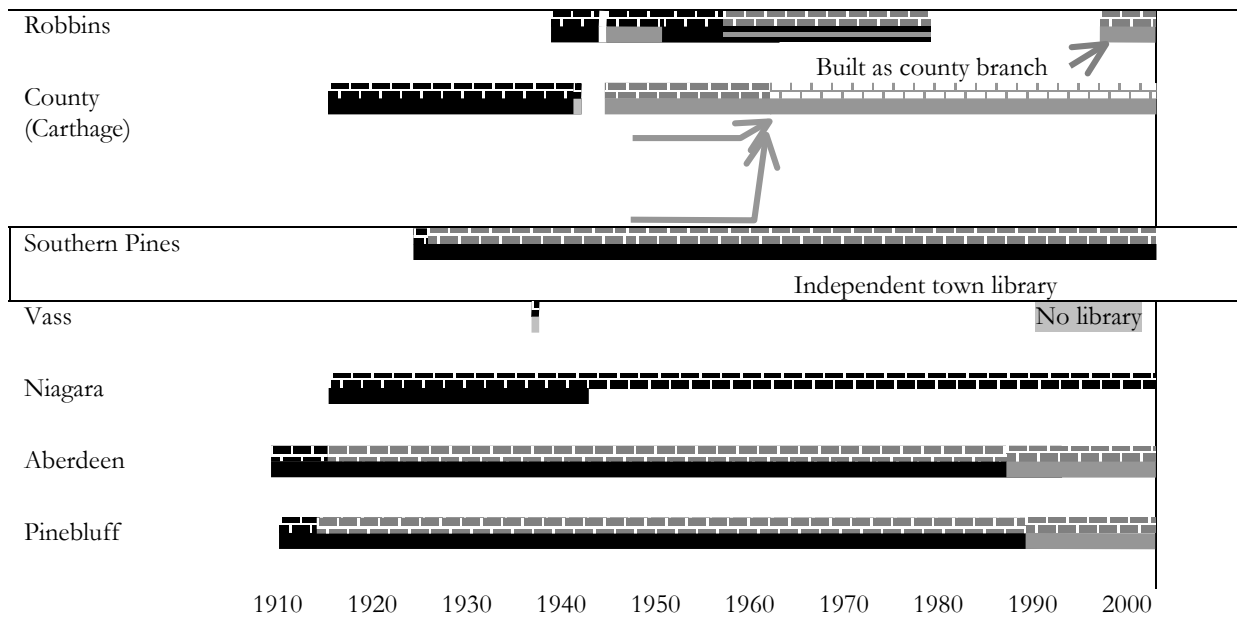
The 1980s were a period of outreach for the county system. The county saved Aberdeen's Page Memorial library from decay by taking on its operations. That example inspired Charlene Parker in Pinebluff to suggest that the Pinebluff Public Library might be operated more hours a week were it to join with the county as well. Attempts to re-establish a library in Robbins continued, while Niagara and Southern Pines continued on in their own fashion.

Figure 11: County outreach to towns in the 1980s



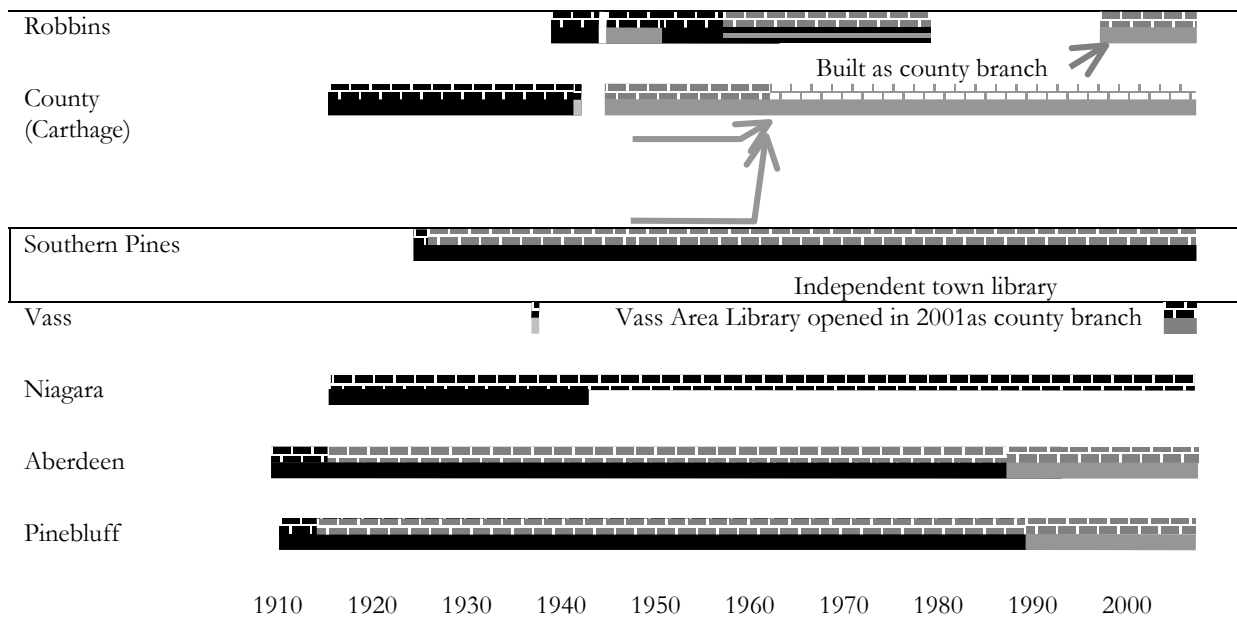
Theron Bell's initiative resulted in the 1994 opening of a new library in Robbins. Working with both county and regional library leaders, Robbins obtained matching grants which enabled it to build a branch library and put it on a sounder financial footing than had previously been the case for Robbins libraries. Pinebluff built a new town hall and turned over the old town hall building to the library, which expanded into the new spaces after a fund-raising effort. A new effort to create a library in Vass started in 1998.

Figure 12: Robbins returns in the 1990s



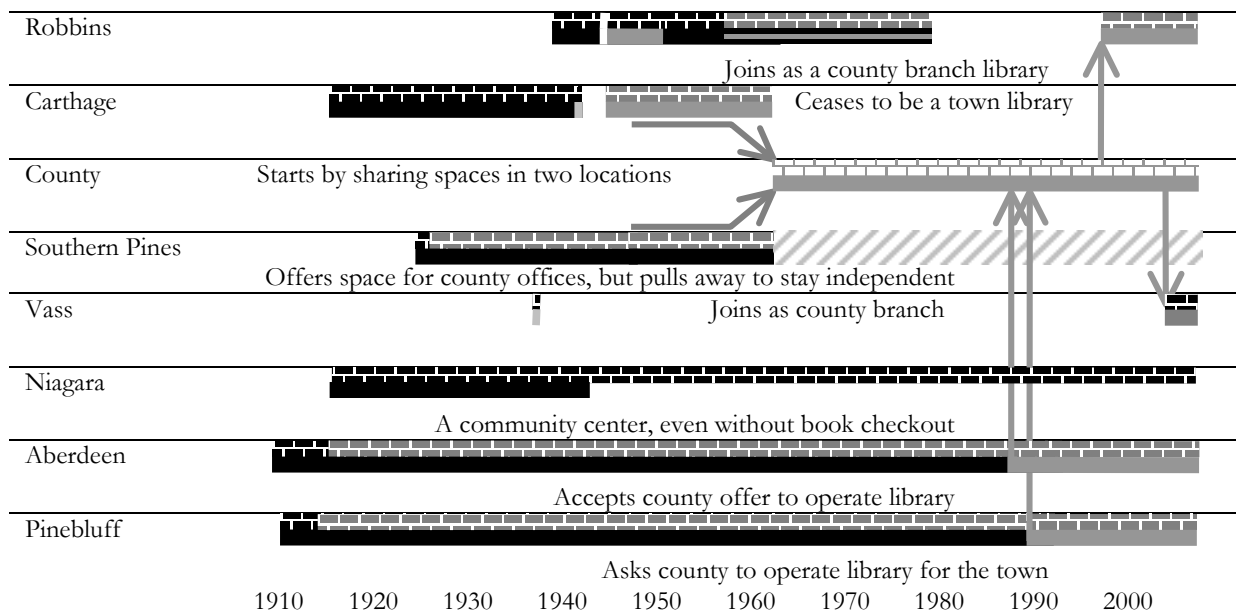
By 2005, the county library system funded the operation of libraries in Robbins, Vass, Aberdeen, and Pinebluff. In each of these towns, town government provided funds to maintain the facility (although in Vass, the town only committed fifty percent of the needed funds and the Friends group made up the slack). Southern Pines, with its wealthier tax base, remained an independent municipal library, not connected to the smaller libraries in the other towns of the county. Carthage hosted the county library, but did not contribute to it. Niagara's Webster Library remained in place, with its original book stock, but was not active as a library.

Figure 13: Vass joins the county and regional systems in 2001



So, over the course of a century, seven Moore County towns established libraries. In 2005, there were still seven libraries in the county, though the Webster Library in Niagara did not operate as a typical library. Southern Pines and its library has gone its own way since 1959 and is not closely connected any more to the other smaller Moore County towns. The town libraries in Robbins, Carthage, and Vass all started, stumbled and fell, and were restored as county branches. In Carthage's case, the county took full responsibility for the library and the town seems to have lost its sense of having a local library, even though the county library is indeed in the center of Carthage. In both Robbins and Vass, when local initiative built new library facilities, they came into existence as county branches. In Aberdeen and Pinebluff, however, the long history of local library ownership and existence has enabled both towns to retain libraries with local feel. In Aberdeen, that feel is exemplified by the original building. In Pinebluff, it is exemplified by the building and by the close personal relationship that many of the leading residents have with "their" library.

Figure 14: Independent and collaborative lives of Moore County town libraries



11

**IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO SUPPORT THE LIBRARY,
BUT NOT EVERYONE IS A VILLAGER**

An observer attempting to understand the local public library in these North Carolina communities eventually comes to conclude that these libraries exist because active individuals willed them into existence. They were not created as the embodiment of large principle, they were not created by outside forces or money; they were created from within, for reasons that came from within. In a very real sense, they exist because they meet the needs of those who willed them to exist. In the early twentieth century, the needs were those of smallish, self-selected groups of citizens. In the latter twentieth century, the needs are still those of smallish, self-selected citizens. The libraries exist because they meet the needs of those who want them, they meet the needs of “the served.”

But are “the served” the only members of the community who might benefit from the library? And if the library were to reach out to “the unserved,” might it not attract more support and thus more resources?

There is another aspect lurking in the shadows, an aspect that has affected the effort to spread the perceived benefits of public library service to all groups within the citizenry. As Louis Swanson pointed out in 1988, an “unsavory dimension of the rural South in crisis is the persistence of overt and subtle racism. Of course, racism has always been a part of the rural South’s social fabric.”¹

The situation of the served and the unserved in the libraries and towns under study here is affected by the history of this region. Moore County is in the South. And, despite how much one might wish it otherwise, the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and civil rights struggles still affect life in Moore County communities.

Many observers have seen public libraries as being more advanced in urban areas, where the groups that dominate the public library scene are a bit more diverse. In the rural areas of the South, things are different and the communities under study here are fairly typical of that differentness. The history of public libraries in these small North Carolina communities has been dominated by groups that originally established and operated them – a mix of small philanthropists, activist individuals, and pillars of the community.

Although he did not use the terms “served” and “unserved,” Kenneth Wilkinson, in *The Rural South in Crisis*, felt that the divide between in- and out-groups in the rural South represented a threat to the very life of the people who live there. For him, a key

dimension of the community crisis in the rural South is fragmentation or isolation of local groupings from one another ... Physical isolation tends to mean social isolation today. Moreover, the rural South has the added problems of extreme concentrations of poverty, severe deficits in services and persisting inequality. Consequently, isolation – physical and social – is a pervasive threat to community well-being in the South.²

One might well see the introduction of Internet computers in small-town libraries as a way to bridge that isolation, but Wilkinson was not sanguine. “As elite groupings gain first access to the new technologies, the result is likely to be further separation among neighbors. In remote settlements of the region where virtually all families are in or near poverty, widespread illiteracy limits the probability that the complex new technologies will be adopted quickly.”³

Wilkinson saw the situation in the rural South as a continuation of a historical fact – the political and social powers-that-be are satisfied with their situation and not inclined to seek changes. He did not focus on the groups that support and patronize the public libraries, but his observation seems to include them. “As in the other regions of the country, the South has two major forms of inequality, one based on economic differences and the other on ascribed characteristics such as race, age, and gender. In the rural South these two forms of inequality converge with staggering results.”⁴

THE MOST UNSERVED

The groups who built and “own” public libraries in the South always acknowledged that the “public” served by these libraries was not composed of all of the population. Stephen Cresswell, in his article on libraries in the Jim Crow era, noted that this was not an issue of segregated facilities in the early days of the public library in the South. The early public libraries didn’t segregate. They excluded African-Americans entirely.⁵

The situation was stated quite plainly around the time of the opening of Page Memorial Library in Aberdeen. In her article in the *North Carolina Library Bulletin*, the first librarian waxed on about how Page Memorial “aims to reach all ages and classes of people in the town” and “there is hardly a family in town without one or more reader’s cards.”⁶ But the founding document for the Page Memorial Library Association had limited membership in the Association, and thus the ability to obtain a reader’s card, to “any white person not less than fourteen years of age, who is willing to pay the annual membership fee of one dollar”⁷. The North Carolina Library Commission’s editorial commentary about the opening of new town libraries was very complimentary about Aberdeen and held it up as a model for other small

towns, acknowledging the realities of 1913 North Carolina. “The library is free to all white residents of Aberdeen”.⁸

The situation was not unique to Aberdeen, to Moore County, to North Carolina, or to the South. And responses to the situation were also not unique to the South. There were some voices in the South attempting to address the situation, though those voices were not in the communities that were supporting their town libraries.

Louis Round Wilson was insistent in acknowledging in his writings that African-Americans were not afforded access to public libraries.⁹ His interest in the issue was undoubtedly part of the reason why the North Carolina Library Commission consistently visited the issue. By 1948, he pointed out clearly that it was time to stop considering the African-American community as a special “problem” and that the issue of separate facilities was a social, and not a legal, impediment. In his survey of Southeastern libraries he stated that the work

... has considered public libraries for the whole population, including Negroes, upon the basic principle that adequate free public library service should be universally available ... it should be noted here that the legal compulsions on which dual public school systems rest do not seem to apply to public libraries. This leaves a considerable degree of flexibility for libraries to work out effective ways of attaining dynamic and universal free public library service ... The general pattern in the Southeast however is the maintenance of separate branches, located in centers of Negro population.¹⁰

The American Library Association was not so bold. For most of the Jim Crow era the ALA saw service to African-American populations as “a special problem in Southern states.”¹¹ Their consideration of library extension in the 1920s even included a chapter on “Library Service to Negroes.” However, nowhere in this book, nor in other ALA publications from the first half of the twentieth century can one detect a willingness to challenge the social status quo.

Unintentionally anticipating Louis E. Swanson's 1988 consideration of poverty of spirit in rural areas, the ALA in the early twentieth century seemed to see African-Americans as somehow not really American. Discussing the spread of public library service to rural areas, the ALA felt rural populations were deserving of good library service because "these rural folk are largely of native American stock (aside from the large Negro element in the South), of the same blood which has built up and freshened the cities."¹² One supposes the author of this passage was blithely unaware that African-Americans with several hundred years of ancestors born in the South might consider themselves to be somehow "native American stock," people "of the same blood" who had played a role in the development of cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, and Richmond.

The ALA did not ignore the topic, but its members did reflect the attitudes of their time and their social groups. It is perhaps unfair to continually quote an almost 80-year-old document, but the paternalism that comes through in the text is emblematic of the Association's attitude to unserved communities.

Library service to most special groups is an aspect of intensive rather than extensive extension, and is outside the scope of this study. The Southern Negro, however, forms so large a part of the population, and the problems, financial and otherwise, of the additional library facilities *needed to care for him* [italics added] are so great, that the subject warrants separate consideration.

Their acceptance of the status quo was clearly illustrated when they quoted Mary Rothrock of Tennessee as advocating public library service for African-Americans when she said "For the South, *separate service to Negroes under white leadership* [italics added] will come as surely as library service for the white race, and in proportion to the demand, as rapidly as for whites."¹³

Rosemary DuMont's 1986 article about "Race in American Librarianship" looked at the historical position of the library profession on the question of integration of southern public library facilities, with a particular look at what the ALA did. Her assessment was that the profession was not really willing to directly address the topic for the most part. The sense of benign neglect is reminiscent of the absence of commentary on civil rights issues in the North Carolina State Library Commission minutes during the height of the Civil Rights Era. Stephen Cresswell ten years later echoed DuMont's observations. The ALA in general supported civil rights for African-Americans, but chose not to be very open or confrontational about the topic.¹⁴

The North Carolina Library Commission was sensitive to the issue from its earliest days, but its members were citizens in the Jim Crow South and they worked within its strictures. In 1940, for example, the Commission noted that "In Hertford County the negroes raised a thousand dollars to purchase their own bookmobile, the first in the South to be owned and operated for the exclusive use of the colored people."¹⁵ It seemed as if the Commission did not acknowledge that African-Americans in Hertford County might feel they had a claim to public funds being expended for county library service, especially when the WPA was paying all or part of the salary for librarians at public libraries in Winton and Ahoskie, the two major towns in Hertford County.

By 1941, state aid was coming to the counties and the Commission thought it right that some of it should go to service for the African-American community.

The Negroes have shared in the State Aid fund. In Durham County the Stanford L. Warren Library purchased a bookmobile to serve the Negroes of all the city of Durham and Durham County. In Wake County the bookmobile was purchased for the use of both whites and Negroes and serves the Negroes eight days each month. In the counties of Hertford, Durham and Wake, one-third of the State Aid fund has been allocated to

Negro library service. In several of the counties a portion of the State Aid fund has been expended for books for the Negro library. An increase in county-wide library service for the Negroes should be developed.¹⁶

“Service for the Negroes should be developed,” but “should be developed” did not mean using the same facilities. The Commission, knowing how hard it had been to get support for public libraries at all, seemed not to want to push the issue and instead continued to support separate library service for the races. By the end of World War II, the Commission felt pretty good about how this part of the population was being served. In its *20th Report*, the Commission noted “Negro public library service has advanced greatly – though only one-half of the Negroes have access to public libraries.”¹⁷ Two years later, they felt even better.

An outstanding development in the public library field in North Carolina during the past two years has been the extension of service to Negroes with 15 additional counties. This increases the Negro population with service from 50% to 70%. ... Three patterns of service have been followed: namely, a branch of the county or regional library; an independent unit with separate budget; and service shared with the existing library by use of bookmobiles and deposit stations.¹⁸

In Moore County, the bookmobile was the vehicle that spread library service to black communities. The doors were not yet open at the Carthage Library, which was acting as the county library, and were not open at any of the town libraries.

It took until 1960 before the state Library Association acknowledged that the public library would serve all residents, and service should not be denied because of “religious, racial, social, economic, or political status.”¹⁹

THE MOST UNSERVED IN MOORE COUNTY

In Moore County, it was (and is) a fact that there existed (and continue to exist) a sizable underclass of African-Americans in or near the edges of towns. Although a similar story

could be told about every town with a library in Moore County, the story of Pinebluff and Addor tells the story for them all.

A brochure from about 1900, used to lure investors to Pinebluff, highlighted that “colored labor is readily obtainable.” Another brochure seemed to try to assure Northern investors that the situation in Pinebluff was manageable. In a 1903 brochure, the inside cover has a photo of a black family in a two wheeled cart being pulled by a bullock, entitled “The Race Problem.” The look of poverty and passivity in the photograph must have been intended to comfort the Northerners who might want to build in Pinebluff.

Much of the readily obtainable labor probably came from the community of Addor which is located adjacent to Pinebluff, an easy one mile drive or walk south on the same street that runs by the Pinebluff Public Library. Originally settled by Belgian immigrants, Addor rapidly evolved into a predominantly black community. David Packard’s handwritten reminiscences indicate he was very aware of the local population demographics. “1887 the white pop was exceeded by blacks. Many blacks brought in for the turpentine stills ... most whites left there by 1900 & old had left by 1920.” Addor, like other African-American communities in Moore County, lay just outside the incorporated limits of the town of Pinebluff and thus was not a matter of concern for town residents. If Addor came up in the newspapers, it was usually only because of some small tragedy or some small item of curiosity. For example, a front page item in the 12 March 1936 edition of the *Moore County News* mentioned Addor, noting that “With only a cave in the ground for a home, a Negro family of four members has successfully weathered the coldest winter Moore county has experienced in years.” There was no follow up, no commentary, no interest in the human situation. The only time Addor or Addor’s interests ever became important to Pinebluff was in the early 1990s when Addor, which had been an

incorporated municipality from 1884 to 1971, attempted to re-incorporate itself. According to an article in the *Pilot*, “The North Carolina General Assembly could not enact the necessary special legislation because of opposition of the Pinebluff Board of Commissioners. Pinebluff borders Addor and the Town Board’s permission is necessary because much of Addor lies within Pinebluff’s extraterritorial zoning jurisdiction.”²⁰

The residents of Addor were not residents of Pinebluff and therefore were not eligible to use the Pinebluff Public Library for all of its existence up until 1986 when it joined the Moore County Library System. The residents of Addor were not part of the village.

JOINING TOGETHER TO CREATE SOMETHING

When Wilson in 1948, and Swanson forty years after him, worried that the inattention paid to disadvantaged citizens in rural areas would result in a general brake on progress for the society at large, they were early describers of what has recently become a discussion on social capital.

Robert Putnam popularized the social capital concept and sees it as an analogy to physical and/or human capital – a thing that enhances individual productivity. He dates the concept back at least to 1916 when a Progressive Era school supervisor in West Virginia came up with the idea to explain why a social unit seemed stronger than a collection of individuals. For Putnam, social capital “calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.” This network of reciprocal social relations is generalized rather than specific; you expect that someone will eventually do something for you when you do something for someone. Putnam sees social capital imbedded in a community structure. Social capital is not just the output of contacts between individuals;

rather it is the output of “networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity.”²¹

Francis Fukuyama in his 1999 *Social Capital and Civil Society* carried the idea in the same direction, asserting that social capital is an “informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism.” But for the norm to exist, there must be an actual human relationship, an actual, recognizable and recognized, relationship between people that leads to cooperation between groups. For Fukuyama, they are “therefore are related to traditional virtues like honesty, the keeping of commitments, reliable performance of duties, reciprocity, and the like.”

One can look at the groups who founded the small town public libraries in Moore County and detect social capital at play.

Such cooperativeness is based on a sense of shared values and that sense of sharedness possesses both positive and negative components. On the positive side, Fukuyama describes the concept as a “radius of trust.” People who share understood values have a certain circle of people among whom cooperative norms are operative. If a group's social capital produces positive and outer directed behaviors and activities, the radius of trust can be larger than the group itself.

On the other hand, if a group's social capital produces negative or inner directed behaviors and activities, the radius of trust can be small indeed. Putnam characterized social capital as having both potentialities. Bridging social movements are outward looking and

encompass people from diverse groups, while bonding social movements are inward looking and reinforce exclusive and homogeneous identities. Bonding can work to help groups out of the mire, but bridging is necessary to reach out to get more help/advice. Bonding gets by, bridging gets ahead. Bonding creates strong in-group loyalty, but can create strong out-group antagonisms. Putnam says bridging and bonding social capital are not interchangeable.²²

The libraries in Moore County towns are the result of such bonding activities.

THESE LIBRARIES BOND MORE THAN THEY BRIDGE

Fukuyama looked back to Alexis de Tocqueville to describe bridging activities as the art of civil association, an act that de Tocqueville saw as an American attempt to offset the effects of democracy. In de Tocqueville's view "a modern democracy tends to wipe away most forms of social class or inherited status that bind people together in aristocratic societies. Men are left equally free, but weak in their equality since they are born with no conventional attachments." Of course, he made these observations during the early nineteenth century and was looking primarily at white Americans. One can easily expect that those born with darker skin coloring would sense that they were born with certain "conventional attachments" if only because the majority skin color group would reinforce their sense of belonging to the minority. But we digress, because Fukuyama felt that de Tocqueville was on the mark with his observation that

the vice of modern democracy is to promote excessive individualism; that is, a preoccupation with one's private life and family, and an unwillingness to engage in public affairs. Americans combated this tendency towards excessive individualism by their propensity for voluntary association, which led them to form groups both trivial and important for all aspects of their lives.

That sense of voluntary association certainly found itself in groups that founded Moore County's small town public libraries. It is as true in 1998 for the Friends of the Vass Library as it was in 1908 for the Pinebluff Library Association. All the groups who built and sustained these small libraries knew each other well, understood each other's feelings, and felt closer to each other as a result of their shared enterprise.

On the other hand, Putnam's bonding social capital was not necessarily as positive all the time. Even as he looked back to the Progressive Era as a golden time of associational cooperation, Putnam acknowledged that such bonding and bridging may well have been more about social control leading to social reform to avoid social revolution.²³ Fukuyama felt that social capital tends toward the bonding side and "perhaps the reason that social capital seems less obviously a social good than physical or human capital is because it tends to produce more in the way of negative externalities than either of the other two forms ... group solidarity in human communities is often purchased at the price of hostility towards out-group members."

In the case of the Moore County town libraries, the solidarity that the founding and supporting groups feel does not seem to be "purchased at the price of hostility towards out-group members." The emotional resources they need to spend just to maintain their in-group solidarity pretty much exhausts their time and attention capital. They are not so much hostile to out-group members as unaware of them. For example, when asked how they recruit new members for the Pinebluff Library Association, the group all said it was done one-on-one, by word of mouth. The same was true in Vass; new members of the Friends of the Vass Library were recruited one-on-one, by word of mouth. It is fairly clear that such a recruiting style will tend to be restricted to their circle of bonded local acquaintances and does not have time for bridging out to people they do not yet know. If someone from outside their circle were to ask

to be a member, they would no doubt welcome them, but they have neither the time nor the inclination to look much outside their own social circles for new members.

In terms of groups that built and support Moore County's small town public libraries, one can see lots of the good old boy/girl network at work, but they are often narrow social networks, not necessarily inviting or cognizant of the marginalized groups. This leads to the larger problem of isolation that Wilkinson saw at the heart of the problems of the rural South. For Wilkinson, "... other dimensions of the crisis are cleavages in the structure of local social life. These include social inequality, which is perhaps the most wrenching problem of community in the rural South, and social fragmentation or isolation, which is the antithesis of community integration."²⁴ The groups that support Moore County's small town public libraries continue to reinforce their bonding needs, to the exclusion of the unseen and isolated out-groups. This may not contribute as much as it might to the development of positive social capital in their communities, but given their time and resources, it may be all that they can do.

¹ Louis E. Swanson, "The Human Dimension of the Rural South in Crisis," *Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future*, Ed., Lionel J. Beaulieu (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988) 96.

² Kenneth P. Wilkinson, "The Community Crisis in the Rural South," *Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future*, Ed. Lionel J. Beaulieu (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988) 80.

³ Wilkinson 83.

⁴ Wilkinson 78.

⁵ Stephen Cresswell, "The Last Days of Jim Crow in Southern Libraries," *Libraries and Culture* 31, nos. 3 & 4 (1996): 557.

⁶ Jones 26.

⁷ *Page Memorial Library Bulletin*.

⁸ North Carolina Library Commission, *North Carolina Library Bulletin, Volume Two 1912-1916*, Vol. 2, No. 3, June 1913 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1916) 18.

⁹ See, for example, his "A Program for North Carolina Libraries" 73.

¹⁰ Wilson and Milczewski 65-66..

¹¹ American Library Association. *Library Extension* 13.

¹² *Library Extension* 32.

¹³ *Library Extension* 73.

¹⁴ Creswell 565.

¹⁵ *Sixteenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1938-June 30, 1940* 14.

¹⁶ *Seventeenth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1940-June 30, 1942* 8.

¹⁷ *Twentieth Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1946-June 30, 1948* 6.

¹⁸ *Twenty-First Report of the North Carolina Library Commission July 1, 1948-June 30, 1950* 12.

¹⁹ North Carolina Library Association, Public Libraries Section, Development Committee, *Suggested Policies for Public Libraries*, (Raleigh: North Carolina State Library, 1960) 5.

²⁰ Clark Cox, "Once a Rowdy Lumber Town, Addor Takes on a New Character," *Pilot* [Southern Pines, NC] 2 Mar. 2001: A13.

²¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* 18-20.

²² Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* 22-24.

²³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* 399-400.

²⁴ Wilkinson 77.

WE LIKE OUR LIBRARIES AS THEY ARE

WE WANT A LIBRARY, BUT FOR OUR OWN REASONS

After having read the historical record of the lives of these Moore County small town libraries, after having visited and observed them all, after having talked to individuals who work in them, who patronize them, and who support them, one is impressed by how similar they all are at heart. They all spring from the same soil, the small towns and the communities in those towns, and they all seem to have been built on the same philosophical foundations.

Shera in 1952 identified the public library as having been founded for scholarly purposes.

The public library, as we know it today, came about through the effort of small and highly literate groups of professional men – scholars, lawyers, ministers, and educators – who sorely needed books for the performance of their daily tasks and who, through their efforts, convinced their respective communities of the social utility of supporting a public library. ¹

Much of the impetus for public libraries in general, and for these small town public libraries in particular, remains tied to scholarly, or educational, reasons. But in contrast to Shera's identification of "scholars" as those who needed research materials, it was children and their school needs that were the educational purpose for these libraries. In every case, the persons who built or supported these small libraries might have added general reference materials to their book stocks, but they concentrated on filling their shelves with materials that the children needed for school. In some cases, they placed reading materials that the schools had requested. In others, they placed reference tools tailored to the needs of children. In the

current day, they have installed educational software on the public access computers in the libraries.

When Carthage had its own library, many of the *Moore County News* articles that mentioned the library involved books for children, activities for children, and support for the schools. The same was true for the original Robbins libraries; the pictures and newspaper articles seemed most focused on the utility of the library for supporting school activities. In the current day, the librarian at Vass mentioned that she spent most of her time on children's activities. She wished she had more time for adult programs, but patron interests tended to nudge her towards creating children's programs instead of adult programs.

But education was, and is, not the only reason for the existence of these small town public libraries. Unlike Shera's "scholars", the adults in these towns see the library more a source of recreational reading than a source of reference material. When asked why they are members of the Pinebluff Library Association, most of the responses were tied to reading.

Do you all remember why you wanted to be members of the library association?

"Because I like to read."

"Interested in books."

"Just did."

... So, if they didn't have a computer here, it wouldn't matter?

"Not to me."

"I don't know computers anyway."

"Totally illiterate."

That last comment was probably not entirely true, but it did illustrate the fact that books and light reading were more important than reference materials to than individual.

Adult fiction constituted the majority of the book holdings in each of the libraries studied and biography was the largest non-fiction segment. Adult patrons are like John Wallace who said he read a lot and just wanted a place where he could go to look at new books that he might want to read. No one interviewed for this research and none of the individuals who discussed their library experiences during this process ever mentioned needing the library for non-fiction reading or for research purposes. In the historical record, one might find the occasional effort by a librarian to highlight the availability of reference materials at the local library, but the vast majority of interest shown by patrons and by the reading public was for pleasure reading, not for reference or for adult learning.

Unlike Shera or Ditzion, unlike Harris or Dain, the founders, supporters, and users of these small town libraries were uninterested in larger issues of social control or social betterment. They wanted a local library for their own pleasure and enjoyment. If some educational benefit was also to be derived, so much the better. But social benefit was not the primary goal; sociable enjoyment was. The reality of life in Moore County's small town libraries, both throughout the twentieth century and still today, is more akin to what the Public Library Inquiry researchers found in the late 1940s. They aren't that well-used and those who do use them are there mostly for personal enjoyment and recreation, not education.

They built, supported, and patronized their small town libraries because the libraries were an extension of their own homes into their communities. Lanny Parker's description of his mother, Charlene, illustrates the focus. When asked if, since she had some library training and

had worked for the North Carolina Library Commission, she had ever considered working for the county library system, he replied that her focus was on her small town and nothing more. “She was perfectly content there in Pinebluff ... Mom was very much about home and family, and church and community, and I don’t think ... the idea of working for anything beyond the bounds of that ever crossed her mind.”

When asked how the library might better serve their towns, everyone contacted in this research effort held similar views. They mostly tended to see it as a place for finding something pleasurable to read, and thus were not particularly receptive to different ideas about the information value the library might provide. William Learned had suggested over 75 years ago that the local library had the potential to serve as a “Community Intelligence Service,” providing a central point for information exchange between government and the citizenry, and among the citizenry themselves. However, when asked what more the library might be able to do for their towns, the people most involved in the libraries all tended to think of the institution as some sort of nascent “cultural” center, not as an information center. A common response was that the library could branch out from providing reading materials and internet access to help “bring the arts into the community.” When asked to brainstorm some new ideas, the one most often mentioned was to use the library for art displays, most often by local artists. In fact, the Moore County Library provided this service quite often in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Vass library is following in the same tradition.

The same topic was mentioned informally to a number of members of various town governments, from town clerks to town commissioners to mayors: could your local library be of any benefit to local government if it widened its focus? Could it serve either as an information outlet to disseminate government information? Could it serve perhaps as an information

manager, to organize and maintain government records? Although most people indicated that the concept of the library as an information “kiosk” might be interesting, they saw no particular need for it and no need to pursue it. One town commissioner wanted to use the library as a location to hold copies of town ordinances, but mostly because he wanted to spare the town clerk from having to answer questions about them. In his town, if the citizens needed to hear something from town government, the bulletin board at the post office sufficed and the library was only an afterthought.

The idea that the local library might be merged more closely into town government, perhaps to allow a trained librarian to help manage town information as well as town library books stocks, was heard with politeness and then politely rejected. It was clear that most people thought of a librarian as a person who shelves books. The concept of librarianship as a profession was seen as quaint, and the thought that a librarian might actually be part of town officialdom was totally alien to them. The idea that the library could be more than it has been seems to be on the other side of a philosophical divide, a chasm that no one seems interested in crossing.

The small town local library is what it is,

and what it is

is what it was,

and that’s pretty much what it will remain.

Oh, it might add the Internet terminals, but the Internet has simply replaced the encyclopedia in the minds of most local observers. It really hasn't changed the concept of the library in their minds.

IT TAKES MONEY, BUT NOT JUST ANY MONEY

No one likes to pay taxes and that is particularly true for the residents of these small towns. With the sole exception of Pinebluff, no library supporters ever successfully approached town government for tax funds to support a local library, if the topic was even considered at all. If it hadn't been for the people who had some money and were willing to donate it, the small towns in this study would never have gotten their own libraries. At the advent of the twentieth century, the first library in Moore County, Page Memorial in Aberdeen, was donated by one woman and her family. Pinebluff's first library building was donated by one woman. At the close of the twentieth century, in Robbins, one woman gave enough in cash and property to get the process going. In Vass, the same thing occurred; without the Keith's donation of a building, the idea of a library for Vass would not have even been addressed. And without the skillful persuasiveness of the Friends of the Vass Library, a number of wealthy donors who had no involvement with Vass at all would not have given the large donations needed to secure matching funds from the county. In Robbins' case, the donations enabled the library supporters to secure federal funding; in Vass' case, the library supporters were uninterested in securing any funding from outside the county if it had any strings attached at all. Their libraries, like those in Aberdeen and Pinebluff, were to be locally provided and supported.

LOCAL FEELING, LOCAL CONTROL, LOCAL FOCUS

The South is a distinct place and has its distinct context. A number of observers have characterized it as a place where individuality and local control are more important than other

values. In a 1958 lecture, the sociologist Rupert Vance noted that the South is a place of “economic individualism in political action ... every farmer and shop keeper voicing the philosophy of little business ... The South had the mentality of small property and the farthest to the left it ever went was Populism – the radicalism of the right”.² Oliver Garceau’s 1949 review of the place of the public library in the political structure concluded that the South was rural, conservative, and uninquisitive, and that local politicians tended to follow the leadership of those whom they assumed were the local country gentlemen.³ He also noted that library boards tended to follow the same pattern when he commented that “the narrow social stratum that dominates library boards is noted with concern ... in the South”.⁴ Such a style was not predisposed to cooperate with other localities or to accept central direction over local institutions, even if they had decided to tax themselves to support such institutions. A 1968 consultant’s report to the North Carolina State Library identified the same issue with individuality. In a discussion of why communities would not choose to join a regional library system, the report noted that counties within a regional library area operate from different bases and may have more to lose than gain by joining a regional system. “However, these inequities are perhaps symptomatic of a broader issue: that of autonomy for the individual community. Many librarians regard the local autonomy issue as one of the greatest stumbling blocks to increased cooperation among libraries”.⁵ Librarians, as a professional class, may have regarded local autonomy as a stumbling block, but the local personalities who created, supported, and funded their public libraries seem to have had a different perspective.

Thus the context in which North Carolina’s public libraries operate is one characterized by strong local identification and strong local sense of ownership. As Garceau put it, “the local public library in America often remains a truly local institution”.⁶ And it has been

local people who have navigated their way through the local political context in order to create local public libraries. In the view of those who want to see more efficient public libraries, this localism is not necessarily a good thing. Another consultant to the State Library decried the variations in public library organization by noting in the first line of its report, “It is the finding of the Commission that, as the result of tradition rather than plan, the basic responsibility for financing our public library system is now being borne by local government” [underline in the original].⁷

Whether by tradition or by plan, statistics compiled by the State Library bear out the comment. As of 2000, according the State Library’s statistics, North Carolina public libraries are supported eighty percent by local funds, twelve percent by state funds, one percent by Federal funds, and seven percent by other funds (mostly donations). However, Garceau’s half-century old observation also still bears repeating. Public libraries in North Carolina are profoundly local and independent. But one of the prime reasons for the relative autonomy of local library boards and local librarians is profound ignorance of library business in city hall. Boards and librarians are pretty autonomous because they don’t require large amounts of funds when compared to education or public safety and therefore aren’t important enough to be an issue most of the time.⁸

Having gained a public library by finding a way through the social and political contexts of the local environment, maybe the local public library supporters have arrived at a low-level, reasonably unimportant status in the structure and that’s just how they want it to be.

CONSERVATISM AND ITS EFFECTS

The local feeling and local orientation evident in all the libraries here studied seems to be a reflection of a deep seated, in the bones conservatism among the people who created and who sustain their libraries. In this circumstance, conservatism is used in the sense of “the tendency to prefer an existing or traditional situation to change.” While those who wanted to create a library where none existed were certainly “changing” the situation in their communities, the change was not abrupt and was couched in terms that the community could accept. The library was an extension of the school, or an extension of the home reading room; it was not a new and different creature. The residents of the towns like their towns as they are and their libraries reflect that same sense. Thus, once a library was established, there was a reluctance to change anything about it, especially if the impetus for change came from outside.

The town of Pinebluff can provide an example of this conservatism in all of the towns and libraries in this study. A profile of the town in 1988 quoted one of the town commissioners as saying that she liked “the fact that Pinebluff is a quiet, conservative town.”⁹ Conservative it certainly is. The town exists as a sort of suburban forest with thousands of pine and broadleaf trees covering almost every lot in town. The town has no sidewalks, but along every street it does have parkways which are broad, pinestraw covered paths lined with rows of evenly spaced longleaf pines. The town also owns a wooded area on the southern border which surrounds its town lake and the location of several of its community water wells. The citizens, then and now, regard these woods and these trees as part of the town’s natural heritage and want to preserve them. However, when the mayor suggested a few years back that the town might want to work with a nature conservancy to place the town’s woods in a legally protected nature easement, she ran into resistance. Her idea was to use the easement to preserve the woods in their natural state

and thus to preserve a green buffer between the town and the ever-encroaching development that is occurring all around it in southern Moore County. Everyone who was asked if they wanted this preservation and protection was in favor of it. However, the resistance came when the idea of the easement was raised. Since the easement would have changed the conditions of ownership of the property (the town would forego ever using the property for anything other than wooded recreation areas), several influential residents raised objections. Their foremost objection was not to the idea of preservation of the woods, but rather was to the idea of giving up the possibility of deciding at a later date to do something else. No matter that neither the individual raising the issue, nor the mayor, nor anyone else at the town board meeting would ever want to see those woods as anything other than what they are, the idea that they might willingly give up the power to decide otherwise was too great for them to accept. In the end, they tended to prefer the existing or traditional situation to change. They tended to prefer to not protect their woods in perpetuity because that would require a change to how they protected their woods today.

Such is the situation in regard to how these small libraries began and evolved. Those who did the work to create them, to raise the funds, to operate them, to donate time and money, are typical of their peers. They do these things for their towns because they want their town to remain as they think it should be. They are true to their values of community, stability, and self-determination. Jared Diamond in his *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, a book exploring the factors behind societal collapse, discussed the role of values to a society. Looking in particular at the Norse experience in Greenland, he judged that in the end their adherence to their traditional values was a factor in their eventual collapse. Had the Norse not stuck so solidly to those values, they could never have lasted 400 years in their Greenland outpost. However,

the fact that they did was one of the main reasons why their society collapsed and died out after those 400 years. The Norse, like other societies in different places and times, had experienced change and found that it often brought about short-term negative consequences and, hence, preferred to stick with what they knew, even if it was not all that great, rather than to take a risk on change, which might or might not be for the better.

Considering Diamond's observations in terms of small town libraries, one can make a fair analogy. Had the people who created, maintained, and sustained the Pinebluff library, for example, not been so true to their values of local focus and local service, their library would not have survived. It might well have gone the way of Carthage's library and just disappeared. Or it might have gone the way of Aberdeen's, evolving into a county branch library only because the town did not want to suffer the embarrassment of having a building on the register of historic places be abandoned. But it did neither. It did evolve through three different modes of operation, but only because one woman worked within local society to grease the wheels of change.

The need for change is not only hard to accept, sometimes the need for change is hard to recognize. One can look at the evolution of the libraries in Carthage and Aberdeen and see that both ended up in places their founders might never have imagined. Diamond (and scholars who have studied other decision making situations) noted that some problems just are not perceived as problems even after they have manifested themselves. A slow trend of change can mask the large shift and leave actors thinking that this is only a small problem that if fixed will result in a return to the *status quo ante*. However, each small change added up over time eventually results in a very large change. This obviously happened in Carthage and Aberdeen as financial problems and the gradual dying off of the original founders and supporters resulted in

an organization that was finally and totally beyond financial saving. It might have happened in Pinebluff too. However, in Pinebluff, Charlene Parker worked with her peers and friends to change the environment, first by obtaining dedicated taxpayer support for the library, then by obtaining dedicated taxpayer support for a new library facility, and finally by obtaining town board political support for merging with the county library system. But none of this change occurred because someone from outside the tight little community saw the need and enlightened the Pinebluff library supporters. It happened because people inside the community saw the need and made the changes. They stuck close to their values even as they agreed to some changes.

It is difficult for people to change for, as Diamond notes, people stick “most stubbornly under inappropriate conditions (to) those values which were previously the source of their greatest triumphs over adversity.” The key, it appears, to successful change is to use those traditional values to address inappropriate conditions and to find acceptable venues of change that conform to those values.¹⁰

¹ Shera, “On the Value of Library History” 9.

² John Shelton Reed, and Daniel Joseph Singal, Eds., *Regionalism and the South: Selected Papers of Rupert Vance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) 199-200.

³ Garceau 36.

⁴ Garceau 68.

⁵ Arthur D. Little, Inc., *A Public Library Program for the State of North Carolina: Report to the North Carolina State Library Board* ([Cambridge, MA]: Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1968) 10.

⁶ Garceau 202.

⁷ Stick 1.

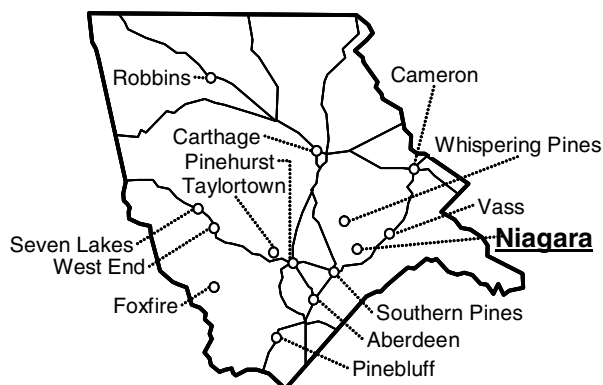
⁸ Garceau 88.

⁹ Chris Spivey, “Profile Edition, Wednesday, April 20, 1988,” *Citizen-News Record* [Aberdeen, NC] 20 Apr. 1988: n.pag.

¹⁰ See, for example, Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) 273-276 and 424-434.

NIAGARA – THE LIBRARY THAT EXISTS AS PLACE

In the preface to this dissertation, I mentioned hearing the Pinebluff librarian give directions to the Webster Library in Niagara. One day a few months after that conversation, I was leaving Carthage when I noticed that the road I was on was intersected by the



“Carthage-Niagara Road.” I decided to follow that road and see where it took me. After driving past several clusters of homes and the occasional small commercial building, I noticed a sign that said “Niagara.” The place, alongside the railroad track, looked pretty much like any other cluster of a few houses and what might have formerly been a small store. However, on a corner lot, across the road parallel to the railroad tracks, stood a small, well-kept, stone building with a sign over the front door saying “Webster Library, Niagara, North Carolina” and “Niagara Water Company, Inc.”

The very first volume published by the North Carolina Library Commission in 1913 had mentioned the establishment of this library.

The Webster Library of Niagara was dedicated January 12, 1912, with appropriate exercises. The building is the gift of Mr. J. C. Webster, a Hartford, Conn. man, who has spent a great deal of time in North Carolina. The library opened with about 1,000 volumes and the Rev. E. L. Sonders is the librarian.¹

Inside the building itself, there is a photograph on the wall of that occasion. A group of people are standing in their good clothes in front of the building on that dedication day. The tall man in the center of the photograph is Mr. Webster, the president of Aetna Life Insurance Company of Hartford.² The number of people in the photograph look to be at least three times as many people as live in the area of the library today.

One of the individuals who maintain the library building today is Leroy Snipes, a lifelong resident of Niagara. His father, J.V. Snipes was the local dairyman, local postmaster, local railroad stationmaster, local storekeeper, and local newspaper correspondent.³ J.V Snipes had moved to Niagara in 1906 and from as early as 1916 to the mid-1930s contributed periodical articles on doings in the town to local newspapers. The sense one gets from these articles is that the library was the social center of Niagara. Anything that required a meeting of any sort – a dance, a holiday party, a revival meeting, even a church service – occurred at the library. The librarian was similarly a focal point of interest for the residents. A 1920 mention captured the mood:

On Friday afternoon a very pleasant occasion took place at the Public Library. Mrs. J.M. Sargent the Librarian was responsible for a well carried out program consisting of recitations, reading, singing and last but not least refreshments were served and each one enjoyed the occasion to the fullest extent.⁴

From the time of its establishment in 1912, the Webster Library was the center of doings in Niagara. At the time of its establishment, it was one of the better stocked small libraries in the state. Through the early 1920s, the North Carolina Library Commission continued to mention it as an example of an exemplary small library. Things continued on in the same vein after both Mr. Webster and Mrs. Sargent passed away in 1921.⁵ The library continued

to be operated by the people of the town and they funded it with donations (often from seasonal visitors) and with box social fund-raisers held at the library.

Somewhere around 1940, the Webster Library ceased to function as a book loaning library, but it continued to function as a social center for the community, as a place for parties, for Boy Scout meetings, and as the offices of the Niagara Water Company. Books for Niagara were delivered first by the WPA bookmobile, then after 1944 by the Moore County bookmobile.⁶ The county bookmobile used the Webster Library as a book depository, storing books there for delivery to other more rural parts of the county.

The community of Niagara was beginning to fade away at that time. A visitor in 1982 noticed that there wasn't much there. "Only remnants of the transient, winter-only population, remain – several elaborate homes, an overgrown clearing where the train station once stood, a hotel, and a small community library." Mrs. Mary Snipes (J.V.'s wife) was to remember in 1982 that the tourist trade had dried up during the 1930s. People who had purchased homes and lots here during the earlier decades had walked away from them during the Depression. The abandoned houses were sold at auction and the hopes for a resort community died. But the library building remained.⁷

Twenty-three years later it still remains. An article written about Niagara in *The State* magazine in 1978 focused on the fact that the building was still there and the books were still there. The same remains true in 2005. Leroy Snipes and George Fortnum are both in their eighties and have lived in Niagara for almost all of their lives. For them, the library remains a sort-of living thing. During a visit to Niagara, they opened the building and happily showed it off. From the outside, it looks just like a smaller version of the Page Memorial Library in

Aberdeen. According to Mr. Snipes, it was built of the same material as was Page Memorial. The bricks look to be the same, the shape of the roof is the same, and the floor plan of the library is the same, with a small room at the back and a larger room in the front of the building. The inside of the building is all wood, just like the Pinebluff Library, with wood floors and pine paneled walls. The front room has a few tables in it and a few chairs. At one time, it had a small fireplace in it as well, but the fireplace was boarded over when central heat was added to the building. What one does not see in the front room are books. The books are all in the smaller room behind the wall that had held the fireplace.

In that back room, the shelves go right to the ceiling and they are all filled with books, most of which are the same ones that were on these shelves when the library was dedicated in 1912. A quick glance at the books reveals most of them had been published between 1870 and 1900. Most are novels, but there are a few reference and non-fiction books. The novels are mostly romances and moral treatises. One of the non-fiction books is a text and photo book documenting a bicycling trip through France in the late nineteenth century.

Both Mr. Snipes and Mr. Fortnum can remember back to when this building was open one day a week to check out books. But that is not what they remember most about it. When asked what they remembered about the library, the responses included comments such as:

“When I was growing up, we used to have parties here every Friday night for the children. Had a lot of fun out here. Didn’t have no money, no way to go anywhere, but you can get together.”

“We used to have a lot of fun out here ... Lot of fun.”

“We had Christmas parties, Halloween parties, out here.”

But when asked about reading or about the books in their library, the responses were surprising. When asked about how much they used the books in their library, they said:

“Not much, always had to work.”

“I never took time to read.”

“Most of us around had to work so much, didn’t have time to read books.”

For Mr. Snipes and Mr. Fortnum, this is a place of wonderful memory and they do not want to see the memories dim. Thus, they keep the place up as best they can, and replace the sign over the door every few years when it becomes weathered. It is important to them that the name “Webster Library” remains known. But for them, the library was not about the books, it was about the community.

But the Webster Library, and perhaps also the community of Niagara, may not have much longer to go. Both men are getting along in years and Mr. Fortnum is quite ill. They have been maintaining it all their lives, but do not have any idea what will happen to it after they are no longer on the job. No one else in town seems to care and no one else helps them in their efforts to keep the building and grounds up. More than a few suggestions have been proffered to them for how the library may be kept in being, most notably that it might be deeded over to the Moore County Historical Society to serve as a genealogy and local history center. But the two of them are not ready to make changes. This is their library, this is their town, and library and town will remain, as long as Leroy Snipes and George Fortnum remain. It is theirs, it is them.

¹ North Carolina Library Commission, *North Carolina Library Bulletin, Volume One 1909-1912*, Vol. 1, Number 10, March, 1912, (Raleigh, NC: Edwards & Broughton, 1913) 116.

² Patsy Tucker, "Niagara Never Quite Made It," *The State*, 1 Aug. 1978: 19.

³ Unattributed quotes in this section came from an interview with Leroy Snipes and George Fortner, held on 17 May 2005 in the Webster Library, Niagara, North Carolina.

⁴ [J.V. Snipes], "Niagara," *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 26 Mar. 1920: [6].

⁵ J.V. Snipes, "Niagara," *Sandhills Citizen*, [Southern Pines, NC] 7 Oct. 1921: [8]; and (16 Dec. 1921: [7].

⁶ "WPA Bookmobile Returning Here For Longer Stay," *Moore County News* [Carthage, NC] 9 Jan. 1941: 1.

⁷ Beth Myers, "Niagara Began As Resort," *Pilot*, [Southern Pines, NC] 29 Sep. 1982: 10B.

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WHY IT MEANS SOMETHING TO THEM

Over the course of the twentieth century, the paths of the small town library and that of the profession of librarianship have diverged. The profession rightly recognized early on that efficient library services could best be provided by larger, more robustly funded library systems, and accordingly began to press for them. As librarianship became more professionalized, the gap of mutual understanding between trained professionals and the well-meaning amateurs who had started the first small town libraries grew ever larger. When Vincent Anderson, the newly appointed Director of both the Sandhills Regional Library System and of the Moore County Library, looked out at small town libraries in 1969 and stated in an article in the *Moore County News* “before 1962, the four counties today served by the Sandhill Regional Library had a variety of independent county and town libraries. They might better be called reading centers since none had a certified professional librarian to direct them,” he was stating a fact, as he saw it. The small town libraries in Moore County did not have certified professional librarians “to direct them.” And they were perhaps better called “reading centers.” But to the people who had so selflessly sustained them all the years, Mr. Anderson’s professional judgment belittled their efforts and told them that their day had passed. But had it? In Pinebluff, for example, the well-meaning amateurs were less than a year away from having to rebuild their “reading center” after a calamitous fire. The record shows that they did not seem to think they needed a “certified professional librarian to direct them” in that effort. Perhaps their “reading center” was what the community wanted for a library, even if it might not be what a dispassionate observer might judge they needed for a library.

The gulf is there. The profession has professional aspirations and professional standards, but the small town has its own aspirations and holds itself to its own standard.

Pam Wase of the Pinebluff Library Association was describing the Pinebluff Public Library when she said the following, but she could have been speaking for people like her, in every town in Moore County that had a small library, in any day over the past 100 years.

I noticed the other day when I walked in here for something, the first thing that hit me when I walked in the door was the smell of the books, and it took me immediately back to, like being young and going to a library, whether it was school or, you know, in my town or whatever, I don't know. But it's like immediately, that sort of took me back and it was a comforting, you know, feeling.

And I think the thing that makes small town libraries continue to exist and be strong is just the very thing that, you know, they are small and they're comfortable and they feel like home. They feel like you're going back to Grandma's house where the shelves were loaded with books and it's just this warm feeling, you know, whether you ever take a book off that shelf or not, it's just a wonderful sense of feeling, you know, to be in that building.

"A wonderful sense of feeling." Maybe that's the best explanation why some individuals have worked so hard to create and sustain public libraries in their small towns.

Perhaps that's enough.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

1. Please state your name the first time you speak
2. How long have you been a member of the library association?
3. Why did you join?
4. How do you recruit new members?
5. Could you tell us about the work you have done in the library? For the library?
6. Can you tell us about your memories of the library when you were younger, perhaps when you were children?
7. Do you remember any stories about the library from your relatives or friends who have lived in your town for a long time?
8. What is your favorite thing about the public library? About your Hometown library?
9. What do you use the library for? Reading? Computer? Reference? Gathering place?
10. Is there anything you would like the library to do for you or for your community that it does not currently do?
11. Are there any services you would like to have your library perform?
12. What does the library mean to you? To your family? To your town?
13. Could you see your town without a library?
14. How would the lack of a library affect your town?
15. Would you use the Southern Pines Library if it were part of the county system?
16. Were there no local library, would you use another local library?

17. I heard someone say “if there were no library in Pinebluff, there would be no town here.” What do you think about that statement? Is the library important to your town?

QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARY STAFF

1. Please tell us how you became interested in working in the public library. In the *Aberdeen/Vass* libraries.
2. Could you tell us about the work you have done in the library? For the library?
3. What is your favorite thing about the public library? About the *Aberdeen/Vass* library?
4. What is your least favorite thing about the public library? About the *Aberdeen/Vass* library?
5. Is there anything you would like the library to do for your community that it does not currently do?
6. Are there any services you would like to have your library perform that it doesn't currently perform?
7. What does the library mean to you personally? To your family? To your town?
8. How involved in your library is the town government?
9. How much support do they give?
10. Do they ever request anything from you?
11. What does your community use the library for? Reading? Computer? Reference? Gathering place?
12. Tell us about your patrons. Do you have any long-term patrons?
13. Who comes in routinely and what do they do when they are here?
14. Could you see Aberdeen/Vass without a library?

15. How would the lack of a library affect Aberdeen/Vass?
16. Would your patrons use the Southern Pines Library if it were part of the county system? If no, why not?
17. Were there no local library, would your patrons use another local library? Or, would they just not use any library?

QUESTIONS FOR THE KEEPERS OF THE WEBSTER LIBRARY (NIAGARA, NC)

1. Please tell us about the Webster Library. What do you remember about it while growing up?
2. What did it mean to Niagara back when it was a working library?
3. Who used to run the library?
4. How did it work?
5. Could you tell us about the work you have done with the Webster Library?
6. Why has it been important to keep the “Webster Library” name on this building?
7. What is your favorite thing about the public library? About the *Webster* library?
8. What does the Webster Library mean to you personally? To your family? To your town?
9. What does your community use the library for? Reading? Computer? Reference? Gathering place?
10. Is there anything you would like the Moore County Library to do for your community that it does not currently do?
11. Is there anything you would like to have the Webster Library perform that it doesn’t currently perform?
12. Tell us about your books. Do you have a catalog?
13. Would you be interested in having someone catalog your holdings?

14. Could you see Niagara without a library?
15. How would the lack of a library affect Niagara?

QUESTIONS FOR LANNY PARKER (SON OF CHARLENE PARKER)

1. Why was your mother so interested in the Pinebluff Library?
2. What do you know of her youth in Pinebluff?
3. Was the local library important to her then?
4. Did she get a library degree from Pfeiffer College?
5. Why did you go into library work?
6. Tell us what you remember about the Pinebluff Library during your boyhood?
7. Can you remember where it was before it moved into the Town Hall in the 1950s?
8. What motivated your mother to work so long and hard for the Pinebluff Library?
9. Why did she do it for the *Pinebluff Library* and not for the county library?
10. Was she ever part of the friends of the Moore County Library?
11. What was the reason for the decision to join the county and regional system in 1986?
12. Who else was as involved in the library as your mother?
13. Is there anything we don't know about your mother and her library interest that we need to know?
14. What would you like this dissertation to say of her?

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