



LAYING A FOUNDATION

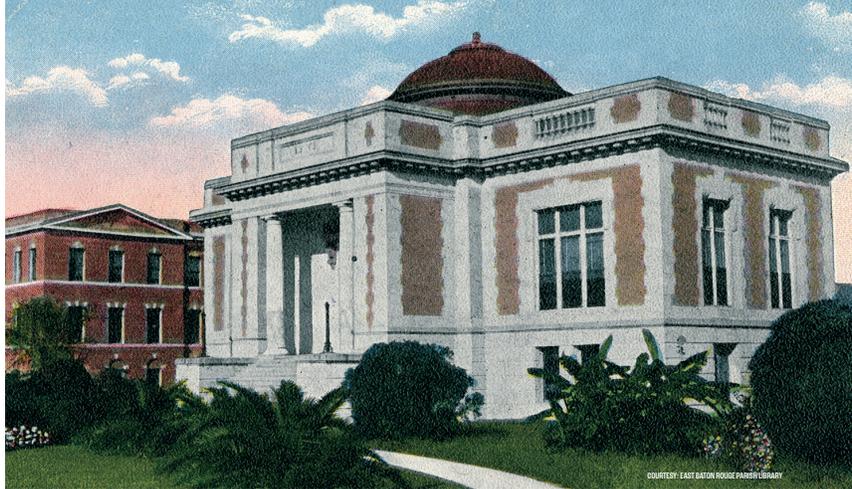
Although the Louisiana Library Commission officially opened its doors in 1925, the foundation of the State Library of Louisiana is built on the collaboration and commitment of even earlier supporters who aspired to empower their

communities through literacy.

We celebrate our 100th anniversary by honoring the pioneering library professionals who acted upon a bold vision of statewide service.

This is their story.

Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, La.



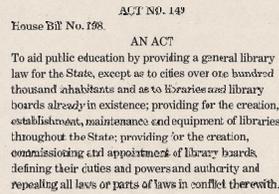
COURTESY: EAST BATON PARISH PARISH LIBRARY

THE LOUISIANA STATE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

The turn of the 20th century marked a pivotal time for librarians in Louisiana. In 1907, many of them gathered from various cities to create the state's first professional library association, the New Orleans Library Club. They began surveying existing academic and public libraries and, within two years, published the *Handbook of Louisiana Libraries*. The same year, the Secretary of the American Library Association urged the group to reorganize, forming the Louisiana State Library Association (LSLA).

Determined to draft a bill supporting the development of public libraries, the LSLA introduced groundbreaking legislation at the next legislative session. Passed on July 6, 1910, Act 149 provided for establishing and maintaining parish libraries and their boards – a partial victory since only \$1,000 was appropriated.

The LSLA's next priority was the creation of a state library commission. However, because the organization



disbanded during the first World War, the Louisiana Federation of Women's Clubs (LFWC) assumed its responsibilities.

Seeking a home for its traveling collections, "clubwomen" Katherine Hill and Margaret Reed secured a small space in the Old Hill Memorial Library on the downtown campus of Louisiana State University (LSU).

THE LOUISIANA LIBRARY COMMISSION

The LFWC's efforts paid off when Governor John M. Parker signed Act 225, creating the Louisiana Library Commission (LLC) on July 8, 1920.

At the recommendation of LFWC President Mrs. A. F. Storm, Parker appointed Rabbi David Fichman, R. W. Hayes of Tulane University and, most importantly, Katherine Hill, Margaret Reed, and fellow club member Harriett Daggett to the Commission.

Fichman, Hayes, and Daggett did not serve long, and in March 1925, Governor Henry Fuqua appointed replacements Garrett P. Wyckoff, Eleanor McMain, and Forrest K. White. Hill and Reed returned, though frustrated by depleted funds. Fortunately, a unique opportunity was unfolding that would reshape the future of Louisiana's libraries.



Essae M. Culver

THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION

On April 8, 1925, the League of Library Commissions president, Milton J. Ferguson, awarded the LLC a three-year, \$50,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Recommended by Wyckoff, Louisiana stood out from a list of 13 applicants because of its existing

library commission and the state's dire need for public libraries.

That year, Fuqua expanded the commission to include an executive secretary. Ferguson, also California's state librarian, recommended a university-trained librarian named Essae M. Culver, who had worked in rural Oregon and California. Culver accepted the daunting task and moved to Louisiana that July. Working in the LLC's borrowed quarters, she presented her recommendations, which included a state library located at the capital and "demonstration libraries" in each parish.

With support from the Commission members and the help of two assistants, Culver opened the Louisiana Library Commission in the Old State Capitol on November 1, 1925.



SHOWING HOW IT'S DONE

"The Parish Library is established by the Parish Police Jury, supported by the parish, and gives free library service to every man, woman and child living in the parish."

—Parish Library Handbook of Information, Louisiana Library Commission, 1929

PAVING THE WAY

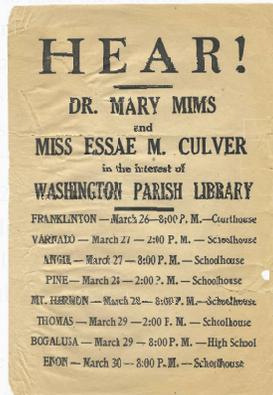
On June 26, 1926, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 36 to establish public libraries and their Boards of Control. Expertly crafted by attorney and soon-to-be Louisiana Library Commission (LLC) member J.O. Modisette, the law facilitated a demonstration library model that all parishes could potentially adopt.

The concept proposed that residents would welcome the opportunity to try out a local library. Once the trial was complete, citizens could support the library either through their Policy Jury or a dedicated tax. At the start of the demonstration, the LLC provided trained library staff and essential supplies.

The library also received a cataloged collection of 1,000 books and, when available, a bookmobile. The parish government provided the library facility, furniture, utilities, and maintenance.



JAMES O. MODISETTE



STATE LIBRARY OF LOUISIANA

A SAMPLE LIBRARY SERVICE

The first demonstration opened on December 12, 1926, in Richland Parish as an addition to Rayville's small but successful volunteer library. As only one of two establishments to stay open in the area during the Mississippi River Flood of 1927, the librarian circulated about 60 books a day to patrons who either waded in on foot or arrived by boat.

Three demonstrations followed: Jefferson Davis Parish (February 1927), Concordia Parish (October 1928), and Webster Parish (October 1929). Although the Jefferson Davis Parish demonstration library did not achieve completion status, the subsequent decade saw the opening of eight new libraries in North Louisiana, along with one in Orleans Parish. By 1948, 25 demonstrations had transitioned into permanent libraries, with a dozen parishes awaiting demonstration status.



Louisiana Library Commission bookmobiles crisscrossed the state from back roads to bayous, getting books into the hands of eager readers in rural areas.

FRONT DOOR LIBRARIES

A parish demonstration typically included more than one library location to reach its residents. In 1942, the Rapides Parish Library system comprised its central headquarters and eight branches. As the largest one-parish demonstration to date, it held multiple distribution centers in communal gathering places called deposit stations.

Because these locations were

generally inaccessible to people in rural areas, bookmobiles were introduced and gained instant popularity among the state's most remote residents.

Called "Le Bookmobeelle" by its French-speaking patrons, Vermillion Parish boasted 64 stops on its biweekly route in 1941. By 1955, 41 bookmobiles served 36 parishes and reached 80,000 readers.

The foundation of the bookmobile's success was

established years earlier when the Commission promoted it as an exhibit at one of the era's most popular attractions, the local fair.

On October 6, 1929, a 35-stop tour began at the Vernon Parish Fair and concluded at the State Fair in Shreveport. Visitors could step inside the repurposed delivery truck to enjoy books of every genre with titles tailored to readers of all ages living in rural communities.



A PLACE TO CALL HOME

“Louisiana’s State Library has one of the most challenging work environments of any state agency we’ve encountered.”

—Dr. Mary Mims, State Library Board member and Webster Parish native, 1954



From cramped space in the Old State Capitol, to luxurious quarters in the new Capitol, to the termite-infested building that previously housed LSU's library, the State Library had no set home for decades.

ON BORROWED TIME

In 1925, Essae Culver moved the first iteration of the State Library, the Louisiana Library Commission (LLC), from the mail and storage areas in Louisiana State University's (LSU) Hill Memorial Library to a room heated by a coal-fired furnace in the Old State Capitol.

When the New State Capitol was built in 1932, the Library Commission

relocated to its five-person staff to occupy the entire 18th Floor.

As tenants in Governor Huey P. Long's stone edifice, the Commission boasted a beautiful reading room, a private area for research and meetings, and a rare book room with a fireproof vault. Rumored to generate heavy traffic on the elevators, the Commission was forced to leave the new Capitol in 1940.

The offices stayed on Capitol grounds, but in the less desirable former Hill Memorial Library.

No longer owned by LSU, the deteriorating building came into the possession of the Louisiana Department of Highways. The structure, which was built in 1904, suffered from termite infestations and faulty electrical systems and offered little space to prepare demonstrations.



The Old Hill Memorial Library was torn down in 1956 to make way for a new State Library building.

CONTROVERSIAL CHOICES

After years of intensive lobbying by the Citizens Library Movement, the 1954 Legislature allocated \$2 million for a dedicated State Library building. In 1955, the State Building Authority made three attempts to find a suitable plot before the final location was decided. The first site, the East Lawn of the Capitol, was fiercely protested by hundreds of clubwomen and at least two legislators who believed the building would ruin the beauty of the rose gardens.

Two additional sites were proposed for development: the area just north of the Capitol Annex and Hill Memorial Library on Third Street. A state-owned residence occupied the first, and the Commission was headquartered in the other. After a vote of the Library Board, the area north of the annex was chosen, but just weeks later, the Old Hill Memorial Library site was selected instead. The original building was condemned upon inspection, and the State Library staff had to vacate with little notice. The aging structure was torn down on April 26, 1956.



LOUISIANA STATE LIBRARY BUILDING

A PERMANENT BUILDING

Architect John J. Desmond designed a 94,000-square-foot, five-story structure featuring a modern facade fabricated from white Vermont marble, Pittsburgh glass, and an exposed concrete frame.

On Sunday, November 9, 1958, Essae Culver welcomed the public to the new Louisiana State Library with a daylong open house. Staff members were strategically stationed throughout the building, and the wives of prominent state officials, including Mrs. Huey P. Long, Mrs. Lether Frazar, and Mrs. Wade O. Martin, served refreshments.



THE LIBRARY EXPANSION

In 1988, under the direction of the third State Librarian, Thomas "Tom" Jaques, lawmakers allocated \$8 million for major renovations. Construction began in December 1995. Work was done by March 1999, adding 50,000 square feet and a new entrance to reorient the building to North Fourth Street as part of a larger project to enhance the Capitol Park area.

During this time, the library underwent a third name change, transitioning from the Louisiana State Library to the State Library of Louisiana. Governor Buddy Roemer enacted this change into law in 1991, following years of confusion between the Louisiana State Library and Louisiana State University's library.



MID-CENTURY MODERNIZATION

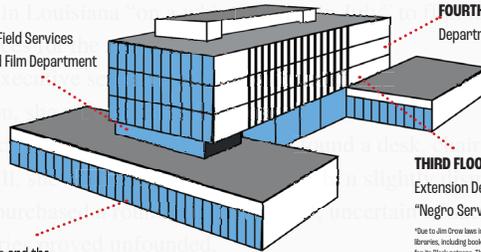
When the Louisiana State Library opened its permanent home in 1958, State Librarian Essae Culver oversaw eight departments. However, as the number of demonstration libraries increased, so did the staffing needs of

Louisiana's flagship library. Today, the State Library has nearly 50 dedicated professionals, a remarkable transformation from the early days of the Louisiana Library Commission, housed on the ground floor of the Old State Capitol.

1958 DEPARTMENTS AND LOCATIONS

SECOND FLOOR

Administration, Field Services Department, and Film Department



FOURTH FLOOR

Department for the Blind

THIRD FLOOR

Extension Department and "Negro Services" Department*

FIRST FLOOR

Readers Services and the Louisiana Department

*Due to Jim Crow laws in the South, Louisiana's public libraries, including bookmobiles, designated separate spaces for its Black patrons. The State Library's "Negro Services" department was absorbed by the Reference department in 1964 following the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

2025 DEPARTMENTS AND LOCATIONS

FIRST FLOOR

Access Services manages circulation and shipping functions and oversees the borrowing and lending of materials across the state and beyond through its resource sharing services.

Information Technology staff manages the State Library's technology and provides that same assistance to public libraries. Visitors to the State Library can access Wi-Fi and use one of our public computers.

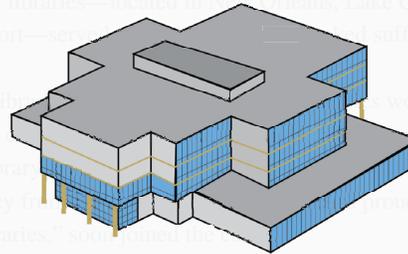
The Reference Department assists patrons by providing in-depth research assistance for state employees and officials, Louisiana public and institutional libraries, and Louisiana residents.

SECOND FLOOR

The Administration team, comprising the State Librarian, Deputy State Librarian, Business Manager, and Communications Director, oversees the library's operations and strategic direction.

The Center for the Book, the state affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book, hosts the Louisiana Book Festival. It presents Black History Month, Women's History Month, and National Poetry Month programs.

Library Development, overseen by the Associate State Librarian, supports public libraries by providing training and guidance to directors, staff, and trustees on policy, planning, and programs. Consultants



coordinate library services for the state's incarcerated population as well as youth service including annual Summer Reading Programs and the Louisiana Readers' Choice program.

Technical Services comprises two departments: **Cataloging & Acquisitions** adds items in various formats to the collection. Physical and digital items are made ready for patrons to borrow via purchasing, receiving, cataloging, and physical preparation or digital upload. **The Recorder of Documents** oversees the Louisiana Public Document Depository Program, through which government documents are made available to the public by distributing them to designated depository libraries and providing access through our online catalog.

FOURTH FLOOR

The Talking Books and Braille Library

(TBBL) specializes in serving Louisiana residents who are visually impaired, legally blind, have reading disabilities, or cannot handle print books. An affiliate of the Library of Congress's National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, TBBL provides access to more than 164,000 audio, large print, and Braille books and special playback machines. Reader advisors select materials for each patron.

FIFTH FLOOR

The Louisiana Collection features current information in government documents, law, and travel, as well as historical books, documents, maps, and city directories. The genealogy section holds rare books, microfilm, and online databases to assist researchers, and nearly 23,000 historic photographs and documents are available through a partnership with the Louisiana Digital Library.

LOUISIANA'S STATE LIBRARIANS



ESSAE CULVER
1925-1962



SALLIE FARRELL
1962-1975



TOM JAQUES
1975-2005



REBECCA HAMILTON
2005-2022



MEG PLACKE
2023-PRESENT



FLAGSHIP FESTIVAL

Since its debut in 2002, the Louisiana Book Festival has attracted thousands of authors, poets, panelists, chefs, musicians, and storytellers to what many consider the premier literary event in the state.

Over 200 authors and presenters, ranging from first-time authors to award-winning writers, interact with attendees during panel discussions and programs, followed by book signings.



CELEBRATING READERS, WRITERS & THEIR BOOKS

The festival, organized by the Louisiana Center for the Book, is held in the Capitol, State Library, Capitol Park Museum, and the surrounding Capitol Park.

It is free to the public run with the assistance of State Library staff and hundreds of volunteers.

A total of 2,147 authors, panelists, and moderators have participated since the festival's debut.

ONE BOOK, ONE FESTIVAL

A festival favorite is the One Book, One Festival discussion group. Since 2008, participants have read the same Louisiana-related book before meeting at the festival. Previous titles include Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Ernest Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men*, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The 2024 selection was Eudora Welty's *The Optimists' Daughter*.



Author Fatma Shaik leads a WordsShops writing workshop in 2023.

WORDSHOPS

Held at the State Library the day before the festival, WordsShops allow attendees to develop their writing skills one-on-one with renowned literary figures.

Participating authors have included those whose works have been made into Hollywood films and earned a Pulitzer Prize. Topics have included narrative non-fiction, flash fiction, long-form fiction, poetry, and book marketing.



FOCUS ON YOUTH

The festival features dozens of children and young adult authors. A Young Readers Pavilion and Teen HQ are also set up at the State Library for storytelling, presentations, and arts and crafts activities. The Louisiana Readers' Choice Awards ceremony honors the authors and their books voted on by students across the state.

LOUISIANA WRITER AWARD

Among the highlights of the Louisiana Book Festival is the annual presentation of the Louisiana Writer Award, which serves as the event's opening ceremony.

First awarded to Ernest J. Gaines in 2000 by the Louisiana Center for the Book, the honor recognizes extraordinary contributions to the state's literary heritage exemplified by the artist's body of work.

Poet and educator Julie Kane was selected as the Louisiana Writer Award recipient for 2025.



David Kirby receives the 2024 Louisiana Writer Award from State Librarian Meg Flecke.

SAVE THE DATE: The 2025 Louisiana Book Festival will be held Saturday, November 1