

*Louisiana*  
**STATE  
LIBRARY**



*25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

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## *The Cover . . .*

*The three homes of the Louisiana State Library are pictured on the cover in photographs by Ella Magee. From 1925 until 1932 Library headquarters were in the old capitol, in what was called the old adjutant general's office. With other government departments, the Library moved to the new capitol in 1932, to more spacious offices on the 18th floor. In 1940 Library quarters were removed from the capitol to the old Hill Memorial Library on the capitol grounds, where ever since inadequate space has hindered all phases of development.*





THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

*of the*

*Louisiana State Library*

1925 - 1950



*By*

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*and*

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Library use starts at an early age, for Louisiana parish libraries have books for every age and all interests. Here a pre-school youngster tiptoes for his picture book at the New Iberia branch of the Iberia Parish Library.

—Photo by Ella Magee.

## *Louisiana State Library*

Lovely Louisiana, famed in song and story, and the subject of more books than you can count on the fingers of your two hands, a mere 25 years ago was one of the most "bookless" of the 48 states.

Now with libraries in 31 of the 64 parishes bringing books through branch libraries and bookmobiles to the highways and byways, with bookstores doing a thriving business in

every metropolitan center, and with an ever-increasing demand for yet more libraries, Louisianians themselves are apt to forget that just 25 years ago they were practically without books, or easy access to the printed word.

But such was the case.

For it was exactly 25 years ago come July of this year that the Louisiana Library Com-

mission, forerunner of the present Louisiana State Library, set up shop—in borrowed quarters in the old state capitol.

And it was from this date forward that Louisiana's modern library development dates. During those 25 years, libraries have mushroomed over the state—and the demand for them has grown even more rapidly—a library school has been established at Louisiana State University, libraries have been set up in the schools and in one-time almost bookless Louisiana, the printed word has become increasingly easy to obtain.

Largely it all goes back to the Louisiana State Library. The history of library development is in effect the history of the state agency, which began operating a quarter of a century ago on funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation. Now its plan of library development is a model for not only other states but foreign countries as well. And the State's library has become an increasingly important unit of the state government.

Since that day back in July, 1925, Louisianians have borrowed a grand total of 9,000,000 books from the Library collection—and even that figure doesn't represent the true story because actually books are passed from hand to hand and from reader to reader without benefit of the library stamp.

The story is one in which literally thousands of Louisiana residents had a part. But because space here is limited, there will be no attempt to give credit where credit is due. Only those whose part in Louisiana's library development is so intertwined as to make it impossible to leave them out will be mentioned here.

Actually, the story of library development in Louisiana goes back beyond the 25 years that the Louisiana State Library has been in existence. As early as 1915 a group of clubwomen, headed by an energetic and library-minded group of officials, began sending out traveling libraries, forerunner of the present-day book service of the State Library. This same group aided by others pushed

through the legislature a bill creating the State Library Commission. So the stage was set when the League of Library Commissions, with \$50,000 provided by the Carnegie Corporation, began looking around for a strictly rural state in need of book service with a workable law providing for a state library extension agency—but no funds to put it into operation.

A representative of the League of Library Commissions visited Louisiana. He was impressed with the interest shown by the already existing Board of Library Commissioners of the relatively bookless state.

The upshot of the matter was that Louisiana was selected and the \$50,000 made available for a three-year demonstration. At first there was no state aid whatsoever, but after the very first year the state of Louisiana appropriated \$2500 per year for the work, a small beginning but a mighty one. Yearly appropriations by the legislature have mounted steadily since that time. And the library appropriation is one of the most popular to be considered every biennium by the legislators. A few years ago when a governor threatened to cut out the library appropriation, a perfect storm of protest from the high and low, from the cities and the rural areas, from the wealthy and the needy, broke over his defenseless head. The result was that the appropriation stayed. It has stayed ever since.

Largely, two persons figured in Louisiana's library development. They were in at the beginning and they labored long and hard to put the story of libraries across. In their efforts they had the help and advice of clubwomen, of legislators, of state officials and of just plain everyday citizens. Louisiana was hungry for books and she welcomed the chance to get them.

Miss Essae Martha Culver, a California librarian with excellent training and experience, was selected to conduct the Louisiana demonstration. Now after 25 years at her



Miss Essae Martha Culver, State Librarian, has directed Louisiana's statewide library program since its initial days in 1925. National recognition of the library progress here and of her inspired guidance came in 1940 when she was elected president of the American Library Association, first woman from a Southern library and one of the few librarians from the South to be chosen for that position.

job as head of the state's library development, she is somewhat amazed at her temerity in undertaking so mammoth a task.

At any rate, she did. On a hot July day, way back in 1925, she arrived in Baton Rouge to find not only a dearth of books but a lack of space for an office. Quarters were offered at Louisiana State University for the new addition to the official family; however, since the campus was four miles from the capitol and one of the objects was to serve the legislators, this offer was refused with regret. The president of LSU, impressed with this lusty new infant in Louisiana's educational set-up, appealed personally in the library's behalf to the governor of Louisiana. Space was found in the old capitol and the new venture was ensconced in what was called the old office of the adjutant general.

This only partly solved the problem. There was, of course, no library furniture, but Miss Culver refused to be daunted. She borrowed a desk, chair and a typewriter and set to work—although she confesses now that she was more than slightly dismayed at the prospect.

But even then she found a desire for books all over the State. Everywhere she went she was welcomed with open arms and everywhere men, women and children assured her that books were wanted.

It was no wonder.

At that time there were only five free public libraries set up under the law in the State. All had inadequate supplies of books to meet the needs of the 600,000 or so served by them.

First service inaugurated by the new state agency was book-lending by mail to individuals anywhere in the state. This informational service has continued throughout the 25 years and has been one of the primary activities of the Library. Individual requests for books and information have come from every one of the 64 parishes. On countless occasions there have been requests, too, for lists of books available on certain subjects,

and in response to these letters the Library has compiled bibliographies of available material for businessmen, educators, clubs and study groups. Then when the particular titles were asked for, they were mailed to the reader, whose only expense was for return postage on the books.

In its first year the Library answered 300 requests, an excellent record for the initial year's operation but one which is completely dwarfed by the present annual total of nearly 50,000. Nowadays, a great number of requests come from existing libraries, which are enabled to supplement their own collections with books from the state agency. But in the beginning, when no country people had access to libraries, this books-by-mail system was the only means most Louisianians had of getting books, and today, citizens of the 33 parishes still lacking parish-wide library service continue to read thousands of books every year from the State Library.

In 1925, at the first meeting of the brand new Library Commission—at least brand new insofar as actual functioning was concerned—with the new executive secretary, it was decided that one of the major efforts would be toward the establishment of parish libraries, that in the meantime informational service by mail would be provided for those who had no library service whatsoever and that among other projects, efforts be made to establish a library school, provide library service to legislators and that work be begun on a new and more adequate public library law.

All of this was a pretty large order since the executive secretary represented the entire staff of the new enterprise and since books were lacking. True, there were some 3000 books in storage, gifts and donations from clubs, but when these were sorted and cataloged, only some 2500 were usable. Seventy-eight were concerned with growing cotton in Egypt, hardly vital to Louisiana which had its own problem anent the growing of cotton.

Meanwhile, July had advanced into October and the library furniture, ordered months before, actually arrived, an event that was practically a millenium in the history of the Library. Finally the books were shelved and on a frosty November 1, 1925, the Library opened to the public.

Books to aid business were especially wanted and the Library settled down diligently to filling some of these hundreds of pressing demands for information. In short, business boomed.

In fact, it boomed almost too much. Some of the books which overflowed from the cramped office in the state capitol were stored on the old LSU campus. Sixteen Baton Rouge boys, who wanted reading material, broke into the store rooms and helped themselves to the books they found there.

In the meantime, a new figure had entered Louisiana's Library Story. This was J. O. Modisette, who served on the Commission until his death in 1942. A farm boy, who had known from experience what the lack of



In unpretentious quarters in the old state capitol, where the coal scuttle was a part of office equipment, the Louisiana Library Commission "opened shop" in 1925 to begin an ambitious program of taking books and library service to every far-flung corner of almost bookless Louisiana.



books meant, Mr. Modisette had by then become chairman of the Library Commission. He was assigned the task of disciplining the 16 youngsters who broke into the store room.

His reaction was typical.

"Those boys wanted books," he reasoned. "Perhaps we'd better give them something to read."

Mr. Modisette did. He "sentenced" the 16 to report weekly to the State Library for a period of months, to read selected books. The "sentence" apparently worked. Some of those same 16 are now among the Library's most valued "customers" and influential friends.

With Mr. Modisette now chairman of the Louisiana Library Commission and a tireless worker in the cause of books, the library business in Louisiana began to flourish. Mr. Modisette, who had a thriving law business of his own in Jennings, was asked to draw up a new public library law. He did, and in July, 1926, one year exactly from the time the State's library began to function, the measure he had drawn became law.

An important provision of the 1926 law was the creation of a State Board of Library Examiners whose function was to certify administrative librarians of public libraries. The first meeting of this group to examine applicants for certification was called in 1927, and the Board has been operating throughout subsequent years.

Miss Culver was more and more convinced that the answer to Louisiana's problem was the parish library. This appeared the only possible answer to get books into the rural area. The Commission members agreed. From this decision the Library has never wavered. Parish libraries still rank tops among the projects of the Library. Through this medium, books are being taken to the people of Louisiana.

The honor for establishing the very first parish library in Louisiana goes to Richland

parish, where a group of clubwomen already had a small library functioning. The Library Commission entered the picture in 1926 and offered to send 1000 books, along with considerable free advice and help. So the principle of state aid to parish libraries was established in Louisiana.

About this time, the Louisiana legislature was meeting at its regular biennial session. The Louisiana Library Commission had been in existence only seven months and many of the legislators had never heard of the agency. But the Commission, which had already practically moved mountains, refused to be discouraged. The agency asked for an appropriation. Somewhat to their own surprise they got it—to the tune of \$5000 for the biennium which represented the first state appropriation in Louisiana for library service, a milestone in the development of the work here.

With its headquarters established, its first parish library already in operation and with the public library law rewritten, the Library Commission looked for new worlds to conquer. The most pressing need, it was decided, was a demonstration to show the people of Louisiana just what library service meant to a community. Because at this point, Louisiana, or most of it, had little idea of the functioning of a library. To most, a library was associated with a college and the plain everyday citizen was apt to regard it as something with which he had no concern.

The Library Commission decided that it would conduct two such demonstrations, one in North and one in South Louisiana. Finally Richland, where parish library service was already being attempted, and Jefferson Davis were chosen. The decision to demonstrate parish library service was a momentous one in the history of the institution—but it's one about which there are to this day no regrets. For the library officials are convinced now as then that the best way to make people library-minded is to show them what a library can do for a community. It's a true and tried formula as far as Louisiana is concerned,



The late J. O. MODISETTE—Serving without compensation on the Library Commission Board for sixteen years, as chairman for fifteen years, "J. O." gained thousands of friends for the library cause by a simple statement in the corner of his legal business card—"Interested in Libraries". The phrase always led to a discussion of libraries with the countless leading professional and business men of his wide acquaintance.

The demonstration in Richland parish where the clubwomen's parish library was struggling along took the form of an additional large collection of books. Eighteen branch libraries were started and all was ready for the experiment.

And it was an experiment which was moving along in highly successful fashion when nature took a hand—with one of the greatest catastrophes in modern Louisiana history. The great flood in 1927 came along. The Mississippi river overran its banks. Levees broke almost daily and thousands of acres were inundated.

Richland parish was among those hardest hit. The area was almost completely under water. The librarian, who was over sixty years old, refused to be discouraged. Daily she donned boots and waded to the library housed in the school building. Negro refugees shared the quarters and the borrowers came in boats to get books. The story of Richland parish library in those trying days is an epic of determination and courage and the giving of service in the face of great obstacles.

The books were piled on chairs and tables as the flood waters crept into the streets of Rayville. Patrons came by boat just the same and finally the steps leading to the building were removed so boats could land more easily. Every boat left with its load of books and there are those Richland parish residents who to this day relate that without the library, they believe they would have been unable to ride out the superflood. As a matter of fact, circulation was kept at a level of some 60 volumes per day in the community of 1499 population. The circulation for the year reached the amazing total of 30,000 volumes.

At the end of the demonstration period, the residents of Richland were more than convinced. So incidentally were many of their neighbors. An appropriation was made by the police jury and the Richland library is going strong to this day.

The second demonstration opened as scheduled in Jefferson Davis, in the heart of Louisiana's rice belt. The people welcomed the library with open arms. Greatest users were children from French families and one youngster read 100 books. The stories told about that six-months trial period were remarkable, involving reading records that are outstanding. But the demonstration period ended as the flood and a depression struck and the price of rice dropped below cost of production. The people of Jefferson Davis just couldn't afford another tax. So they voted the proposed levy down and thus chalked up one of the few tax failures insofar as parish libraries are concerned.

Even so, the story the library was trying to tell was interesting more and more people. When the legislature convened that next year, the appropriation for the Library Commission was more than doubled—this in the face of one of the worst disasters in the State's history. Although the legislature was besieged with requests for funds for flood sufferers, the Library had made such an impression on the people of Louisiana that it was given a biennial appropriation of \$12,000—an increase of \$7,000.

As the State Library moved into its fourth year, there was an awakening of interest in the service. Up in the rich Delta country, Concordia parish was anxious to get a library. The police jury passed a resolution of establishment but no funds were available. Finally the jury was able to provide its share of expenses. The Library Commission agreed to provide books and a librarian and so Louisiana's third demonstration of parish library service came into being.

But the Mississippi began to kick up again. A tax election was called for June but by that time the fear of a flood had gripped the parish, a large portion of which was under water as the swollen river backed into bayous and creeks. The election was postponed.

Came July and it was decided to try again. The police jury, however, refused to call an

election on the grounds that the people of Concordia could not afford an additional tax at a time when crops were threatened with failure and backwater covered half the parish.

Aroused and determined, the people of Concordia circulated a petition for the tax election. And in no time at all, 25 per cent of the qualified voters had signed it. The police jury had no choice. They set the election for September 19. Once again Concordia rallied around. The first library tax in Louisiana was passed with a substantial majority of both voters and property valuation.

Meanwhile, back at State Library headquarters, the question of publicizing the service was the object of serious consideration. Finally it was decided to purchase a book-

mobile—a library on wheels—which would show the people of Louisiana just exactly how parish libraries proposed to bring books to isolated areas.

Bookmobiles are a common sight in Louisiana today. Twenty-six of the 31 parish libraries have them and an unofficial estimate indicates that they bring reading material to some 50,000 people. But back in 1929, bookmobiles were something that Louisiana had read about.

At any rate, a bookmobile was purchased. Shelves of books were painted on either side and a collection of some 500 volumes was placed on the shelves within. The bookmobile set off on a visit to Louisiana fairs and while no books were loaned from the collection, the library on wheels was an instant hit. Its mes-



To provide space for the Concordia parish library when it was opened as a Library Commission demonstration in 1928, the mayor of Ferriday moved out of his office in this brick building. Despite parish-wide losses from a Mississippi River flood the next spring Concordia citizens went right ahead to vote the first parish-wide library tax in Louisiana.

sage of romance, inspiration and service was welcomed by the people of Louisiana. It seized their imagination. Louisiana librarians still like to tell of the woman who looked over the bookmobile when it paused at a filling station. She told the librarian that she had no time for reading, adding that her husband read sometimes. She was offered a cookbook and her amazement was complete. The only books she had seen previously dealt with gasoline engines, she confided.

There were other stories of equal interest. For example, there was the child from the family where no one could read or write. The lad, who knew how to print, was interested in the bookmobile because he saw in the books it contained an opportunity for "book learning."

It was also in 1929 that Louisiana's fourth library demonstration was conducted. This

was in Webster parish and proved quite the most ambitious undertaking of the State Library to date. Webster had long been interested in a library. The Rosenwald Foundation was interested in financing a library project to serve both white and Negro readers. Through the Library Commission, funds for Webster were obtained and a parish library was set up. It was an instant and complete success. In the first eight months of the demonstration period, the circulation reached 88,778. Negroes as well as whites were enthusiastic. The Webster library has never faltered. It is still going strong.

One year later still another demonstration was begun. This was in the heart of Louisiana's Acadian country in Vermilion parish. The library actually opened early in 1931 with 4000 books from the Library Commission on hand. The Library likes to recall that



For demonstration libraries the State Library uses modern bookmobiles like the one above used in the Jefferson Parish demonstration. An estimated 50,000 Louisianians receive reading material from bookmobiles, which are used in 26 of the 31 parish libraries.



Vermilion parish residents welcomed their first library demonstration in 1931, but were unable to vote local support for it in a depression period with every bank in the parish closed. Waiting their turn for a second demonstration, they voted overwhelmingly for their library and just recently dedicated a magnificent parish headquarters building in Abbeville as a memorial to World War II veterans.

it was in Vermilion that a grandmother came from remote Pecan Island, traveling by boat and on foot, to attend the police jury meeting in Abbeville where the project was discussed. She added her voice to the demand for the library.

And here, too, the library proved an immediate success. However, the demonstration period ended in the midst of the depression when every bank in the parish had closed its doors. There was no money for local support but the demonstration left a "taste" for libraries in Vermilion parish. Nearly a dozen years later when the parish turn for a second demonstration rolled around, the citizens of

Vermilion voted overwhelmingly for a library tax that assured its continuation at the end of the demonstration period. And the branch at Pecan Island flourished with the rest. In fact, residents of the island only last year built a community center which houses their library and the health unit.

It was during 1930 that a long-needed library school was established at Louisiana State University, providing trained workers to administer public libraries as well as school and college libraries. Summer courses had been given for a number of years but the increased tempo of library development made an all-year-round course a vital necessity.

Another outstanding event at this time was of especial significance to the future of school and college libraries. Since its opening, the Library Commission, when called upon, had given expert advice and suggestions to school libraries and those of other educational institutions in the matter of selecting and purchasing books, cataloging, arranging, supervision and administration. In the fall of 1929, the Department of Education started a school library development program and added to the Department a State School Library Supervisor.

While neither the library school nor the newly directed attention to school libraries was a part of the Library Commission program, both plans had long been advocated by the Commission and their inauguration meant a greatly increased recognition of library values which had resulted from the state program.

In 1932, the state agency started a project of its own. It offered certificates to those who read a selected list of 12 books during the year. The response was immediate. Now, 18 years later and after no particular promotion other than yearly printing of the book list and newspaper announcements of their availability, the project remains one of the most popular ever begun by the Commission, and a grand total of 8,092 certificates have been awarded, representing 97,104 books read in this project alone.

Another parish library was added in 1933 when a demonstration was started in Sabine—a strictly rural parish and one badly wanting a library. Again the demonstration method proved its worth. The Sabine library is still thriving.

Meanwhile, Louisiana's state government had moved into the magnificent new capitol building, completed in 1932. So integral a part of the government had the Library become that when the other state departments moved the Library did, too—to the 18th floor of the new capitol building. A far cry from its small quarters in the old capitol, the new home provided additional space and considerably more readers along with the space.

Settled in new quarters, the Library Commission approached its 10th anniversary year with a feeling of a big job to be done. Requests to the Library for information had increased steadily. As a matter of fact, these showed a 500 per cent increase. Still, not nearly enough money was available. More and more parishes wanted demonstrations, yet without funds, the Library Commission could do nothing in this field.

Finally in 1937 the demand became so acute that the governor of Louisiana became interested in providing books to the rural areas particularly. His idea was to utilize the school libraries which had gained impetus under the direction of the State School Library Supervisor in the Department of Education.

But the Library Commission didn't believe that the school library was the answer. Nor were Louisiana educators sure.

To find the answer, a scheme was worked out.

The State Department of Education put books for adults into the libraries of 56 high schools in 10 parishes. The Library Commission put the \$10,000 provided by the Department of Education, plus additional funds, into a regional demonstration, utilizing three parishes with approximately one third the adult population of the 10 parishes. The parishes chosen were Winn, Grant and Jackson and the first library demonstration crossing parish lines in Louisiana got under way.

Results were conclusive. At the end of six months the 119,296 residents of the 10 parishes served by the 56 school libraries had borrowed only 14,355 books. The 31,610 residents of the three parishes served by the Tri-Parish Demonstration had borrowed 101,236 volumes.

The following year, the legislature added \$100,000 to the appropriation of the Library Commission with the understanding that the regional demonstration would be carried on until a tax election could be held to provide local maintenance.

Too much of a good thing has often proved a drawback, and when the three parishes voted in 1940 on local continuance of the library, only one, Winn, voted the two-mill maintenance tax. Although popular vote in the other two parishes was in favor of the library, the tax failed to pass—a deficiency due in main, it was felt, to a too-long continued state support. People there had gotten used to the idea of the State “giving” them a library and they believed certain rumors that even if the tax failed the library would remain.

Only two other parishes in the State have subsequently received one year library demonstrations without providing local maintenance when time came for withdrawal of state finances. These are Lincoln and Bienville, opened in 1939 and operated together. Unusual local conditions in both parishes contributed to insufficient financial support.

Passed in popular vote, the tax was nevertheless defeated in property vote in Lincoln. Bienville parish, by common consent, did not have a tax vote because the financial affairs of the parish were at that time disclosed to be in a most serious condition.

Failure to vote continuance of the Tri-Parish project as a whole was disappointing in the extreme but there was no time to waste on regrets because the fruitful results of those first pioneering days of Louisiana’s library development were by now abundantly evident.

In 1938 and ’39 seven thousand new members had joined the already 300,000-strong Citizens’ Library Movement which had been organized in 1936. Rapid strides were being made in building, strengthening and expanding libraries in colleges, universities and public schools—all as a result of increasing library consciousness.



“Meeting the bookmobile” to check out books was a gala event in 1938 in Winn parish when that library demonstration was in progress—and it still is, for Winn residents voted overwhelmingly to place their library on a local basis and still regard it as a great community asset.



Eleven parishes now had parish-wide library service and of those still lacking any kind of library, 45 had manifested interest in library establishment.

Demonstration library work was concentrated in 1938 in an enlarged Extension Department and has ever since been under the capable direction of Miss Mary W. Harris, another California librarian who had joined Miss Culver in the library pioneer days. Departmentalizing extension work was made possible because of the increased appropriation and because for the first time a qualified librarian was available to devote

full time to supervising demonstrations and giving advice to established libraries on questions of administration and service.

Before then, books for the demonstrations had been ordered, cataloged, assembled and processed through the Reference Department of the headquarters library.

Playing a helpful part in the program, the statewide Library Service Project of the Works Project Administration, sponsored by the Commission, began operations in 1939. Here again were tangible results of the Commission-advocated doctrines of good library service set up under trained personnel and



Preparing books for demonstrations was concentrated in an Extension Department of the Library in 1938. In basement offices of the capitol before being moved to the present State Library headquarters in Hill Memorial Library, the Extension Department orders, processes, assembles and catalogs all books for demonstrations, each collection being especially selected for the particular reading needs of each parish.

with co-ordinated plans interlocking it with the broad picture of development on a state-wide level: the WPA agreed in the future not to open a little library here, another there, and so on, stocked with any old kind of randomly-chosen books and staffed by untrained workers. Instead, the whole WPA Library Project would be in close conjunction with the Commission's program. Its head was a qualified, experienced librarian whose initial training was in the Louisiana program, and no WPA library projects were to be set up independently without Louisiana Library Commission approval.

This meant that the entire project was considered an adjunct to the Commission's Extension Department, both the WPA and the state agency pooling their resources to provide more and better Louisiana libraries. Without such cooperation the two agencies could well have found themselves working at direct odds with each other, with serious detriment to the long-range library plan.

WPA supervisors were trained librarians who directed the thousands of clerical workers, book repairers, bookmobile drivers and clerical assistants whose needed work, through WPA funds, was made available in parish and public libraries and in new demonstrations.

WPA money also bought thousands of books to strengthen and supplement the collections of existing libraries and the book stock sent from Commission headquarters for demonstrations. Another valuable contribution of this program was the Writers' Project. Under the sponsorship of the Commission and Louisiana State University the Louisiana Guide was prepared, and an illustrated book on Louisiana folklore was compiled. On the latter volume the State received royalties.

In operation until 1942, when the whole State WPA Project was discontinued, the Library Project had functioned as a part of the Commission's program; consequently, no libraries folded up as a result of WPA closing. True, in several cases budgets had to be

stretched to include the salaries of custodians formerly paid by WPA and some staffs were reduced, but the benefits from WPA funds were not lost as they would have been if the WPA Project had stood alone outside a permanent plan for library development.

Demonstrations were successfully concluded in Morehouse, Natchitoches and Terrebonne parishes. Concordia parish, which had been the first to vote a tax for library support, in 1940 became the first to pass a library tax unanimously, this time voting an increase from the original  $\frac{3}{4}$  mill to 1 mill. Two large city libraries had expanded their services for parish-wide use, in East Baton Rouge and Caddo.

Another triumph was the passage by the 1940 legislature of Louisiana's first state aid bill for existing libraries. Popular demand and voters' appeals from throughout the State resulted in the passage of the \$400,000 biennial appropriation, separate and apart from the Commission's own two-year appropriation of \$200,760. Only four votes in each house were registered against library state aid. The victory was a barren one, though, for the bill was vetoed by the governor because of insufficient funds.

Most outstanding evidence of the rank Louisiana's library program had attained was the election in 1940 of Miss Culver to the presidency of the American Library Association, composed of prominent librarians from all sections of this continent. Inside the State there was proof aplenty that the program was progressing by leaps and bounds, but selecting Louisiana's library leader to head the world's largest library organization was complimentary testimony of the professional attitude toward the truly amazing advance made under her far-sighted administration in an area which a mere fifteen years before had never known full library service.

It was the first time a woman from a Southern library had been elected to the presidency of the international library or-

ganization, and one of the few occasions when an ALA president had been chosen from a Southern state.

As American Library Association president, Miss Culver served on an advisory library committee to the U. S. Commissioner of Education and participated in numbers of library meetings in other states, where librarians engaged in programs similar to Louisiana's were eager to hear of the early obstacles overcome here.

Although the Commission offices were of necessity closed for five weeks late in 1940 while being moved from the capitol building

to the Old Hill Memorial Library on the capitol grounds, such temporary cessation of services had no effect on the total book circulation, for '40-'41 circulation figures of 1,384,204 books were a 37% increase over those of any previous two-year period.

Moving to the inadequate building in which it is still housed, has, however, been an impairment in every direction of the development program. Built nearly a half century ago for the then small Louisiana State University, the outmoded old structure offers totally insufficient room for all purposes. Preparation of books for demonstration libraries is seriously slowed because there is



Louisiana libraries have taken an active part in community planning for other civic improvements. At the East Baton Rouge Parish Library the city planning engineer and the parish clerk obtain information for over-all city plans and reports of other cities' accomplishments.

—Photo by Ella Magee.



Crowded conditions in the State Library's present headquarters on the capitol grounds have hindered expansion of all phases of the statewide program. One of the greatest present needs is for a functional library building to facilitate reference and legislative services and speed up preparation for parish library establishment.

—Photo by Ella Magee.

a woeful lack of shelf or floor space in the Extension Department where all demonstration books are processed. It is impossible to prepare books for more than one demonstration at a time, thus necessitating needless duplication of the same processes, and it is also impossible to take advantage of increased discounts which would be available if demonstration books could be bought in larger quantities for several demonstrations at once.

Loss to the permanent library has been disheartening, for several priceless collections which have been offered the Library, if adequate fireproof housing were provided, could not be accepted because there was no

place to put them. Several private libraries which have been accepted have never been used to full advantage for the same reason. Development of the film and record collections is also retarded for lack of adequate space. Further, the State Library is unable to administer the Federal program of books and records for the blind which is directed by the New Orleans Public Library until the state agency can administer it.

With the coming of World War II there was a national awakening to the need for more books and education facilities, which naturally turned people's minds to libraries—those available and those needed. Louisiana was no different from the rest of the

nation in this, and Commission activities were stepped up to meet the rising demands for books, books, and more books.

A more serious type of information was requested from all groups, for everywhere people wanted to read of the far-away places to which American soldiers were going, women as well as men were preparing themselves for war-time jobs, and everyone needed to inform himself on world affairs. Soldiers in Louisiana training camps wanted to study technical books for promotional examinations and to read of this land of Louisiana which was almost as strange to the Maine or Minnesota boy stationed here as the foreign countries to which he would later be sent.

Four more parish libraries had gone through the demonstration periods and had become locally supported—in Bossier, Vermilion (on its second attempt), Pointe Coupee and De Soto. All parish units near soldier encampments supplemented the camp libraries with needed books and in general cooperated in providing reading material for the thousands of boys stationed in the State.

In January, 1942, the Commission opened a library demonstration in Rapides parish, which with its huge military population, was the largest (90,000) served to that date by a demonstration library in Louisiana. It was successful throughout and became a local project at the end of the year.



During World War II all Louisiana libraries cooperated in making study and recreational material available for soldiers in Louisiana training camps. Above, soldiers on maneuvers near Natchitoches made extensive use of the Natchitoches Parish Library.

Overshadowing all acclaim and any temporary setback, however, was the irreparable loss to the library cause of J. O. Modisette, whose stalwart championship ended with his death on June 19, 1942. He had served continuously and without compensation on the Library Commission Board since his appointment in 1926, for fifteen of those sixteen years as board chairman. Since 1940, when the legislature in the general state government reorganization had placed the functions of the Library Commission under the Louisiana State University, he had served at the request of the governor as a one-man commission until the proposed transfer should be made. (Because the entire reorganization was later declared unconstitutional the Commission was never placed under University supervision.)

One month after the Library Commission offices opened in 1925 a letter came from Mr. Modisette on the legal stationery of his law firm, asking what he, as an interested citizen of Louisiana, could do to further library development. His generous offer was gratefully accepted and he was asked to draft a new public library law, the existing one being entirely inadequate. He drew up the law which became Act 36 of 1926, had it presented at the next legislative session and promoted it to almost unanimous passage in both houses.

At the first meeting of the Commission Board after his appointment as a member he presented nine practical suggestions to develop interest in and obtain support for libraries; at the next meeting his report of his activities included the fact that he had written 526 letters and had secured endorsements for the Library movement from leaders in business, state government, education and organizations throughout the State and from Louisiana's Congressional delegation.

His contribution was not in personal service alone, for he gave thousands of dollars in legal services to the State, preparing every library bill introduced in the legislature during the sixteen years he served on the

Commission and offering without charge his excellent legal advice on any problem which came up. Furthermore, every trip he made and every meeting he attended meant valuable time lost to his own highly successful law practice—and he went to hundreds of library board meetings, parish library openings, Citizens' Library Movement rallies, Library Association conventions, civic club and local government board meetings, always raising his voice in convincing argument for libraries.

Mr. Modisette's contribution to library advancement was outstanding in the nation, as shown in the citation of merit awarded to him posthumously on June 23, 1942, by the American Library Association's jury on citations. His selflessness for the cause of libraries was typified in the remark he made when informed, a short time before his death, of his selection for the merit award: "It should go to someone more worthy of it."

No new demonstrations were opened in the following year, but three more parishes applied to the Commission for demonstration libraries. A new extension service was inaugurated this year, though, for Negroes, with headquarters at Southern University at Scotlandville. It had long been felt that the leaders of the race, particularly, needed a good library from which to draw source material to offset the large amount of propaganda easily available. Functioning along the same lines as the reference and loan service at Commission headquarters, the Negro Service is primarily for adults, with no fiction or children's books being circulated. Excellent response and use has amply justified the opening of the service.

At this point a new era began. Over the years Louisianians had at last learned the meaning of good library service. The groundwork had been well laid, people had been informed on libraries by newspaper and magazine articles, talks by Commission staff members to countless clubs and organizations in every section of the State, word of



An extension service for Negroes was opened at Southern University, Scotlandville, in 1943 by the State Library. Operating on the same general lines as the reference and loan service at Library headquarters, the Negro Service is for adults, with no children's books or fiction being circulated.

mouth from satisfied library borrowers, and by observing the functions of libraries in neighboring parishes.

Now, parishes began applying for Commission-sponsored libraries more rapidly than it was possible to open the demonstrations. As soon as a police jury took the initial step of legally establishing a library by ordinance, the parish was placed on the Commission list to await its turn for a demonstration.

Some idea of the office work alone involved in putting on demonstrations is shown in the report of the Extension Director for the years '44 and '45, which stated that during the two year period 68,120 books were selected and made ready for library use, mainly in demonstration library projects.

By the end of 1947 ten parishes were on the waiting list, while three demonstrations were going on, in Lafourche, Iberia and Beauregard. Seven more parishes had successfully gone through the demonstration period and placed their libraries on a locally supported, permanent basis: Tangipahoa, Madison, Calcasieu, Acadia, Washington, Lafayette and Livingston (which voted the highest supporting tax, of three mills, voted up to then).

It had long been apparent that a change in the name of the State's library agency was most desirable. Functions of the Commission were actually those outlined for a State Library, which the Commission had always been. But the law library of the State, located in New Orleans, bore the name Louisiana



Bookmobiles extend library service to even the remotest country sections. Farmers in Iberia parish who are regular bookmobile patrons discuss the merits of a book of helpful down-to-earth farm information.

—Photo by Ella Magee.



State Library. As a consequence there was a continual mix-up in correspondence for the two libraries, always with the chance of losing valuable material for either agency.

With the agreement of the Attorney General, under whose direction the law library functioned, two bills were introduced in the 1946 legislature by the Commission to effect the name changes. The law library became the Law Library of Louisiana and the Library Commission became the Louisiana State Library.

With the new name came an expansion of services to include a legislative reference service, which operated officially for the first time at the 1948 session of the legislature, although many legislators had long used the Library's facilities.

A most significant project undertaken during 1947, different from any attempted before by the Library, was the demonstration conducted at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at the request of the Department of Institutions which at that time had jurisdiction over the penitentiary.

Operating on a system similar to that of a parish library, the penitentiary library was set up with a central headquarters unit and branch libraries in each of the inmate camps. Intensive use was made of the library, with inmates borrowing books on a wide variety of subjects, just as in parish libraries. Recreational books were of course in great demand, westerns, love stories and adventure novels being the most popular, for no detective or mystery books were included in the collection. But many, many prisoners read to improve themselves, studying trades they had previously followed or ones for future use, or reading for education on the higher levels of philosophy, science, history and literature.

As a part of the rehabilitation so essential in a modern penal program, the penitentiary library was decidedly a favorable influence and as one of the most unusual demonstrations ever conducted in the State's library program it was a success.

Unable to continue such a project indefinitely, the State Library hoped it would follow the same plan as that for parish libraries, and be supported at the close of the demonstration by the supervising Department of Institutions. This was not to be, however, for although penitentiary officials expressed regret over the closing of the service they said the penitentiary budget did not allow for hiring a trained librarian, and of course such a program would lose its efficacy unless closely supervised by an experienced person. So the State Library withdrew its books and the demonstration ended.

Another important event of this year was the enlargement of the Louisiana collection and naming it the Department of Louisiana Archives. The librarian placed in charge of answering all requests on Louisiana also directs the addition to the files of items about the State and about Louisiana figures, and maintains files of reports from state departments.

Louisiana's library saga has been marked with continuing progress along all lines in the past three years.

Fourteen parishes are now on the demonstration list, while 31—almost half of all the parishes—receive parish-wide service.

Planning for libraries has swept over the State. Tax renewals have been voted in those parishes whose original or second taxes have run out, many parishes have increased their library maintenance, bond issues and special taxes have been voted for building programs alone, and many new library buildings have already been dedicated.

Climaxing the yearly record of thousands of State Library books circulated in Louisiana is the grand total for 1949—1,064,539—an unprecedented twelve-month circulation and a most gratifying one in terms of the people whose lives have been broadened and brightened by benefit of the knowledge contained within the covers of those million and more books.

Satisfactory answers to an ever-changing variety of special information requests are

supplied through the Reference Department at State Library headquarters at the rate of nearly 50,000 a year. Requests for business information still head the list, as they did the first year the Library opened. Anyone wanting to start a new business or expand his present enterprise can get complete information on its background, operation and possibilities from Library material—and hundreds do, from the banker wanting to know about the new fertilizer business for

which he is asked to lend money, to the brick layer needing to learn how to lay marble floors and marble wall facings so that he can qualify for a profitable job calling for such technique.

Since 1930 the Reference Department has been under the proficient direction of Assistant State Librarian Debora R. Abramson.\*

Film service was inaugurated in 1949, and in the first six months the 37 films of the



One of the State Library's most popular services is the film service, inaugurated in 1949 and used extensively by clubs, civic groups and individuals. Here a film is being checked before being sent out on loan.

—Photo by Ella Magee.

collection were shown 626 times to a total of 19,890 people. Functioning in much the same manner as the book-lending service, the film service is available to individuals, clubs and groups upon request.

Increased out-of-state recognition indicates, too, the rank held by Louisiana's program among the top systems of the nation, side by side with systems which have been in operation years longer.

For instance, when foreign visitors come to America to study rural public libraries, they are almost invariably sent to Louisiana and to California, whose program is one hundred years old this year. From Canada, South America, South Africa, Australia,

England, France, Germany and Poland, visitors have arrived in recent years to observe Louisiana's system.

Such success is heartening to the librarians and many friends of libraries who have labored and striven in the heroic crusade. The hardest part is now over, for state-wide public awareness of libraries is at an all-time high.

Gone are the days when State Library representatives must convince people of the necessity or benefits of a library. What is needed now is a continued cooperation with librarians of established centers and a continued cooperation with individuals and groups who are still trying to get a library.



Juvenile delinquency problems are noticeably fewer when children have access to good books and magazines. Here, Livingston parish teen-agers make good use of the parish library's magazine collection.

—Photo by Ella Magee.

Almost everyone knows about libraries now. Those who have access to them have accepted them as an essential part of their daily lives and make good use of them. Those without them are either doing all they can to get a local library or are trying to find out just what steps to take.

Three primary problems impede even faster library development now. First is the cramped quarters of the State Library, second is an inadequate budget, third is a shortage of trained librarians. For the first, the answer is a modern, spacious building in keeping with the dignity and scope of one of the nation's outstanding cultural and educational programs. For the second, increased funds to carry on the accelerated program would materially hasten fulfillment of Louisianians' ever-growing demands for books and information. For the third, the solution is the entrance of new personnel into the opportunity-filled and inspiring field of library work.

In any case, twenty-five years of library development have brought to the fore a whole state population's eagerness for books—an eagerness so strong that all future obstacles will be overcome to satisfy it, as have all those in the past.

This then, in brief, is the story of the Louisiana State Library.

It is a story whose success has far exceeded the wildest and fondest dreams of that small band of pioneers who 25 years ago opened headquarters in a borrowed office with borrowed furniture—and with no books to speak of.

There is, of course, much to be done. But the State Library feels that if the next 25 years of its history approach in even a small measure the accomplishments of the last quarter century, library books will be an accepted service to every man, woman and child in Louisiana.



"If it's in print we will get it for you" is a State Library by-word. Material not included in parish library collections may be borrowed from the State Library, which in turn borrows rare material from other large libraries. This reader is studying photostatic copies of steel cargo ships obtained for him by the State Library from the John Crerar Library in Chicago.

—Photo by Ella Magee.