

1939.
NEW ZEALAND

COUNTRY LIBRARY SERVICE.

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNTRY LIBRARY SERVICE, FOR THE YEAR
ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1938.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

Wellington, 18th July, 1939.

SIR, —

The Country Library Service, formally inaugurated on 30th May, 1938, has provided a means whereby public libraries, groups of readers, and individuals in the country districts of New Zealand have been provided with regular loans of books from a central source. In addition, public libraries that have participated in the service have received practical help in library management.

METHOD AND TYPES OF SERVICE.

Instead of the direct allocation of money subsidies to libraries (the method of assistance in in operation until 1930), the purchase of books and other library material has been carried out by the Country Library Service with a staff of librarians who have also undertaken the task of arranging for the regular loan supply of these books to libraries. This has been done mainly by means of two specially designed book-vans, which carry and display over eleven hundred books each.

A book-van has visited each library participating in the Country Library Service at least once in every four months, when books left there previously have been exchanged for fresh ones from the van.

Postal and transport facilities have also been used as required for the service, which has aimed generally at placing books and library material where these are needed.

Service is not yet organized to its full capacity, but when this has been done it will be possible for each person living in a country district, however remote, to be as well served with library facilities as a city dweller.

It must be emphasized that the Country Library Service has not aimed to give a complete library service from a central source. For the successful working of the scheme a great deal has depended on the measure of interest that has been aroused and maintained in each community, since the provision of a necessary part of library service has been required from the community itself.

Service has been given, beginning in June, 1938, under the conditions specified in each case, to the following : —

(a) *Public Libraries* under the control of Borough Councils or Town Boards where the population of the borough or town district did not exceed two thousand five hundred at the date of the 1936 census, and which are situated not less than ten miles by the shortest route from the public library of any one of the four cities of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

To these libraries the Country Library Service has undertaken to supply a free loan stock of fifteen (15) books per hundred of the population of the borough or town district and to change this initial stock at least once every four months thereafter, provided that the Borough Council or Town Board in each case has agreed to do the following things :

- (i) To make the public library free to residents of the borough or town district. This has been understood to mean that each resident may borrow at least one free book for home reading, with a maximum issue of two free adult readers' tickets to each family.
- (ii) To maintain a reasonable standard of library service. It has been found that a local expenditure of 2s. 6d. per head of population per annum has allowed this to be done, always provided that help has been given by free loans of books from the Service.
- (iii) To establish and maintain a satisfactory free service for junior and intermediate borrowers, as opportunity permits, and in co-operation with the Country Library Service.

(b) *Public Libraries* situated outside a borough or a town district, and controlled by a properly constituted committee of subscribers, and situated not less than ten miles by the shortest route from any of the four metropolitan public libraries mentioned in (a) above.

Membership of these libraries has been required to be open to the whole of the community before they have been considered eligible for participation in the service.

An annual charge at the rate of £4 per fifty books supplied as initial loan stock has been made. This means that at least one hundred and fifty books have been placed on the shelves of each library for the payment of £4, since replacement of the whole of the initial loan stock has been made by the Service without further charge.

(c) *Groups of Readers* in isolated or remote parts of the country where no public library exists and where it is not practicable for one to be maintained.

The service has consisted of the supply on loan of an initial collection of fifty (50) books. At intervals of two months, one-half of the collection has been replaced by a supply of twenty-five (25) books, and the group has been required to forward at its own expense twenty-five (25) books so replaced to any other group or to the headquarters of the Country Library Service as requested by the Service.

(d) *Individuals* in any country district included in (a), (b), and (c) above who wish to obtain books or information on a particular subject or subjects.

The book or material reaches the borrower free, and he or she pays the return postage. Books for library exchange are posted at specially reduced rates.

Books or material have been supplied free on a variety of subjects. A few examples of subjects upon which material has been made available are—child study, economics, education, costume, physiology, hygiene, dietetics, public health, applied electricity, fruit culture, home economics, food, carpentry, cabinetmaking, plumbing, landscape and flower gardening, interior decoration, and photography. Certain types of books are not supplied under (d), such as fiction, certain types of current non-fiction, rare or expensive editions, or students' text-books.

PLAN FOR FIRST YEAR FULFILLED.

It is satisfactory to be able to state that the Country Library Service has fulfilled, and at some points exceeded, the plan laid down for the first year of its operation.

From the 1st December, 1937, to 30th May, 1938, time was taken up in preparation for the actual carrying-out of the service. Important things that had to be done were—

- (i) The appointment of staff, including the adapting of the personnel of the staff to a type of work not hitherto attempted on this scale in New Zealand.
- (ii) The ordering, accession, classification, cataloguing, and preparation of books for circulation.
- (iii) The planning and ordering of all equipment to be used in the service, including two book-vans.
- (iv) The preparation for work in the field itself, involving extensive correspondence with libraries and interested local bodies and groups.

The time available for preparation with a full staff was much less than six months. It is therefore a tribute to the enthusiasm and energy of the staff that the service was able to begin as soon as it did. By 31st December books had been distributed regularly in every province in New Zealand by means of the book-vans, by transport and rail services, and by post.

THE SMALL COUNTRY LIBRARY.

One of the problems that had to be faced at the outset was that of the small independent subscription library. Three hundred and fifty-nine libraries received money subsidies during 1929 or 1930 from the Education Department. Many libraries received no subsidies at all; and statistics compiled from all available sources show that over five hundred small country libraries have existed in this country, although some of them were not functioning in 1938.

Although the subsidy method was comparatively easy to administer, it left the libraries concerned very much to their own devices. In spite of letters that were sent by the Department from time to time requesting that a due proportion of "works of a serious nature" be purchased with the moneys granted, libraries tended to buy the more popular and cheaper types of fiction—gaining quantity rather than quality. When the grants were discontinued after 1930 the stocks that had been bought wore out very quickly, and by 1938 a number of the libraries had ceased to function altogether.

The first major task of the Country Library Service was therefore to help these smaller libraries, if possible. Certain difficulties had to be met. For example, should the existing subscription basis of these institutions be interfered with and the free issue of books made a condition of each library's participation in the service? Had this been done, many of the small libraries would have found it impossible to carry on—through lack of finance to pay their necessary expenses. Voluntary librarianship has not yet appealed widely to country people as a truly public service, but rather as a favour performed for one's neighbours or fellow-members of an institute or club.

To enable a beginning to be made with the problem it was therefore decided to make a small charge to each independent subscription library that had no means of establishing a publicly supported free service. The charge of £8 per annum for a hundred books, or £4 for fifty, changed three times during the year, was considered low enough to be attractive.

It was estimated that approximately 176 libraries would take advantage of this service during the first year of its operation. The estimate was based on a careful analysis of libraries in one part of New Zealand.

To 31st December, 1938, 179 libraries had applied for service, completed formalities, and received their stock of books. Many of the libraries—those that joined the scheme during the winter months—had been visited twice by the field librarians in charge of the book-vans.

Table showing Monthly Growth of Number of Small Libraries receiving Service.

Month.						Number of Libraries Added to Service.
June	..	..	..	..	..	62
July	..	..	..	..	..	37
August	..	..	..	..	..	17
September	..	..	..	..	..	29
October	..	..	..	..	..	19
November	..	..	..	..	..	9
December	..	..	..	..	..	6
Total, 31st December						179

In the period under review £497 was paid by these libraries for service to be given until 31st March, 1939.

NUMBER OF BOOKS ON ISSUE TO INDEPENDENT SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARIES.

The total number of books on issue to the smaller libraries at 31st December was 9,467. Most of the loans have been of fifty books, but there is an increasing tendency, which will be allowed for in planning future developments, for libraries to ask for loans of one hundred or more books at a time. It would be desirable to have the loans so increased, since a stock of fifty does not give borrowers a reasonable choice at all times.

ESTIMATE OF POPULATION SERVED THROUGH SMALL LIBRARIES.

It is estimated that a total rural population of 67,200 has been able to have access to the books of the Service by means of the small subscription libraries. It is difficult to state accurately the effective range of a small library, since modern transport has made travel easier and more speedy. Country people may visit regularly centres many miles from their homes. The estimate given is based on the population figures (1936 census) of the centres receiving service.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The following table shows the geographical distribution of the small libraries that have participated in the service :—

District.						
North Auckland	..	..	..	..	..	28
South Auckland and Waikato	..	..	..	..	..	24
Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, and Gisborne	..	..	..	..	..	9
Taranaki	..	..	..	..	..	5
Main Trunk and centre North Island	..	..	..	..	..	10
Wellington and Hawke's Bay	..	..	..	..	..	8
Total, North Island	..	..	..	..	..	84
Nelson and Marlborough	..	..	..	..	..	15
West Coast	..	..	..	..	..	11
Canterbury	..	..	..	..	..	41
Otago	..	..	..	..	..	12
Southland	..	..	..	..	..	16
Total, South Island	..	..	..	..	..	95
Grand total	..	..	..	..	..	179

FREE SERVICE TO FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

To 31st December, 1938, sixteen local authorities—eleven in the North Island, and five in the South—had decided to take the step in participating in the service. Substantial progress has also been made in other local areas towards the establishment of the free service during 1939. Many residents and local authorities are now realizing the weakness of the subscription method of financing public libraries, and are satisfied—

- (i) That there is a type of library which performs a service necessary to the advancement of a people.
- (ii) That it is right to spend public money on such a service.
- (iii) That the service should be made free to all residents of the district which provides the money.

As an institution, the free public library, when well supported by its local authority and supplied with a changing stream of books from a central source, is clearly one of the finest things that a country borough or town district can possess. The contrast between some of the best of the free

libraries and some of the most dingy and uninviting subscription libraries is most sharp. It is the difference between hope and despair, or day and night. In terms of the use being made of the free libraries, as against that made of the subscription ones, it is sufficient to state that the borrowers from the former have in one case reached the excellent total of nearly 50 per cent. of the population of the local area. Naturally, it can be expected that if the subscription barrier is removed more people will register and the number of borrowers will grow. But the free libraries have been able to issue more and better books to more people than have the subscription libraries, because the latter have rarely a democratic basis, but are associations of neighbours and acquaintances "supplying themselves with pleasant reading-matter, partly at the public's expense" (Munn-Barr Report on New Zealand Libraries, 1934).

Table showing Details of Free Public Libraries participating in the Service.

Controlling Authority.	Population of Local Area, 1936 Census.	Number of Books lent Free by the Country Library Service.
<i>North Island.</i>		
Bulls Town Board	527	100
Featherston Borough	1,050	158
Huntly Borough	1,942	289
Kaikohe Town Board	662	100
Kaponga Town Board	406	100
Morrinsville Borough	1,796	270
Otaki Borough	1,744	261
Pahiatua Borough	1,668	250
Taradale Town Board	1,206	180
Te Karaka Town Board	355	100
Woodville Borough Council	1,031	162
<i>South Island.</i>		
Alexandra Borough	871	130
Motueka Borough	2,169	320
Queenstown Borough	931	140
Rangiora Borough	2,239	336
Waimate Borough	2,315	346
Total	20,914	3,222

Assistance to the free libraries shown in the above table has been more than the mere delivery and periodical changing of the numbers of books shown.

In addition, help has been given to the libraries by the staff of the Service. The field librarians in charge of the book-vans have undertaken the bulk of this work, but other members of the staff of the Service have been sent to libraries as circumstances permitted and when the occasion warranted this step. It has generally been possible for each participating library to make a speedy change-over to the free service (which necessarily involves dealing with a larger number of borrowers) with the aid of the trained assistance that the Service has provided. Methods of recording issues, of classifying books, and of library administration have been to a great extent improved and standardized.

THREE PROBLEMS OF THE FREE COUNTRY LIBRARY.

(1) *Librarianship.*—Of the numerous problems and difficulties that have been met with in dealing with the free libraries participating in the service, three stand out as important. The problem of librarianship will remain unsolved until country librarians receive improved rates of pay and are better trained for their work. With the acknowledgment of the importance of the library in the community, there should come gradually a realization of the necessity of having an adequately paid and trained person in charge. The five-year programme of the New Zealand Library Association should do a great deal to help rural librarians to become properly fitted for their work.

(2) *Library Provision for Children.*—Few of the country boroughs can attempt even a moderate service for children. All of them wish to give the service, and would welcome the inclusion of a proportion of books for children in their loans of books. It is expected that provision will be made during 1939 for children's books to be available to libraries from the Service.

(3) *The County and Library Service.*—Inquiries have been made by several county authorities about the possibility of the areas under their control being included in the free service. Subscription libraries situated in county areas have been given a contract service, but the ultimate goal should be the abolition of the subscription method of financing these libraries and the achievement of free service to counties as well as rural boroughs. It is because boroughs and town districts have already taken responsibility for library service that it has been possible to co-operate with them at this stage. Also, county residents within range of borough and town-district libraries have had the advantage of a wider choice of books. It will be necessary to arrange for county authorities to contribute a fair share of the cost for free library service to their residents, the service to be given through the borough library where this exists, and in isolated parts of the county as well.

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH SERVICE HAS BEEN GIVEN.

Hamper Service. In places where no library exists and where it is not possible for one to be established, the service to groups by means of travelling hampers has been given. It has been found possible to give service by means of the book-vans to many places that have applied in the first instance for hampers of books.

Twenty-four groups, including two groups with twice the ordinary membership, have been formed, twelve in the North Island and twelve in the South. All groups that have been formed are more than 10 miles from any public library.

The service has operated smoothly, and the voluntary librarians have carried out their duties faithfully and have forwarded their collections of books at the times required of them.

In genuinely isolated districts this type of service is a great boon to those who wish to have books. The limited choice in each collection is partly made up for by the number of collections that reach a group each year. Also, those needing books on specific subjects may have them posted from headquarters.

Undoubtedly this type of service will grow steadily, but it is not expected to do so at a great rate. As books are made available more and more through the book-vans it will be possible to reach the bulk of the rural population through properly organized libraries containing reasonable quantities of books. The box or hamper type of service has always been regarded in countries abroad as merely a valuable forerunner to an improved and more direct type of service.

Postal or Reference Service.--This service has not been greatly advertised, because the staff of the Country Library Service has had to deal with more urgent problems in connection with the main lending service to libraries through the book-vans. Further, nearly all the books that have been acquired during the year have been needed for instant use in the libraries to which they have been delivered or sent.

Methods of dealing with individual borrowers by post have all been worked out, and the number of persons using the service is growing steadily. To the end of the year twenty-six persons had asked for and received books by post regularly free of charge.

It will be necessary, as soon as a sufficient stock of books has been acquired, for printed lists of books on various subjects to be made available to all libraries and groups participating in the service. When this has been done there will be an immediate and rapid growth of this highly important type of service.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SERVICE.

The main problem of the first year has been to ensure that sufficient books were obtained, made ready for circulation, and despatched either to the field librarians in charge of the book-vans or directly to the libraries or groups. Since the service was expanding rapidly during the middle part of the year and new ground was being covered all the time, the demand on available books was heavy, but at no time has it been necessary to refuse or postpone for any length of time a request for service. Two main considerations have weighed as highly important. These are (1) to ensure that the libraries, groups, and individuals participating or likely to participate in the service received all possible information about it; and (2) to ensure that books of all kinds in sufficient quantity were made available by the use of efficient technical library processes.

STAFF ACTIVITIES : DIVISION OF.

At the end of the year the number of persons engaged on the staff was ten. Their activities were divided as follows, two persons being engaged in each division :--

- (1) Organization and Administrative Division.
- (2) Field Division.
- (3) Cataloguing, Classification, Order, and Reference Division.
- (4) Receiving, Processing, and Forwarding Division.
- (5) Clerical and Typing Division.

BOOK STOCK.

Table showing Disposition of Book Stock, 31st December, 1938.

	Fiction.	Non-fiction.	Total.
On issue to libraries or in book-vans--			
North Island	3,726	3,297	7,023
South Island	4,135	3,348	7,483
In book hampers--			
North Island	390	260	650
South Island	360	240	600
In headquarters collection, Postal service ..	..	777	777
Total, all stock	8,611	7,922	16,533

It will be seen from the foregoing table that fiction represents slightly more than half, or 52 per cent., of the whole stock. Of the classified books, or non-fiction, the following were the percentages, expressed not in terms of the whole stock, but of non-fiction stock :—

Percentages of Various Classes of Non-fiction.						
General works	..	..	..	..	..	1·57
Philosophy and psychology	..	..	..	..	..	4·47
Religion	..	..	..	..	..	2·70
Social sciences	..	..	..	..	..	9·30
Philology and language	..	..	..	..	..	0·30
Natural or pure sciences	..	..	..	..	..	5·80
Applied science and useful arts	..	..	..	..	..	14·08
Fine arts and recreations	..	..	..	..	..	16·00
Literature (excluding fiction)	..	..	..	..	..	6·70
History, travel, and biography	..	..	..	..	..	38·80
						100·00

Comments on Book Stock.

It is still too early, seeing that the process of building up of stock is incomplete, for a critical analysis to be made of the percentage figures given above. In a year's time it should be possible to compare the strength of the holdings of the Service in various types of books with the issues of each type made to libraries.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING SELECTION OF BOOKS.

A determined effort has been made to get libraries interested in the many kinds of books to which they have not been accustomed—books on social questions, child study, health, diet and nutrition, games and outdoor sports, music, art, gardening, and many other topics. Nearly all the small libraries in this country rely on fiction for their main appeal to their borrowers. All libraries receiving loans of books from the Service have had 50 per cent. of fiction ; many of them have been allowed 60 per cent. To increase the proportion of fiction in the whole stock, and thus finally in the loans to libraries, would be easy, but fatal to the ultimate success of any programme for country-wide free library service, because local authorities and the people themselves would reject public financial support for what would amount to a free and perhaps harmless institution for recreation. It has not occurred to many intelligent people that libraries should be publicly supported, simply because of the types of books that are available from most libraries.

One extremely important aim of the Service must therefore be to help libraries to become useful and cultural as well as recreational institutions. The amount of fiction available need not be diminished if the proportion is not increased while that of general books is increased.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES : THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITIES ?

“ I have recently travelled throughout the country examining the educational work of the large libraries. As an educator I was profoundly impressed by the important work they could do if adequately supported. They are in a very real sense the ‘people’s universities.’ Every one agrees that education does not accomplish its end as it is limited to the work of the schools. In a democracy it is necessary that education should be carried forward into mature life primarily by reading. . . . I believe that the educational work performed by the library costs less in proportion to its value than any other part of our public system.” The quotation is from Dr. Alvin Johnson’s recent book “ The Public Library : A People’s University.”

It is clear that public libraries, properly administered and adequately supported financially, can do much towards education in New Zealand. The responsibility of local authorities, organized groups of interested citizens, and individuals in this matter cannot be overemphasized.

The establishment of good libraries is an elementary step in the process of giving significance to the high proportion of literacy in this country. Intelligent and useful citizens should develop with the aid of libraries, not in spite of the lack of them.

I have, &c.,
G. T. ALLEY, Officer in Charge.

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