
PUTTING THE COUNTY LIBRARY LAW THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE

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The three factors of poverty, ignorance, and race difference must be taken into consideration in any plan for southern rural library development. What can librarians do to hasten its progress?

In the first place we need demonstrations of successful county libraries in the South. We have excellent examples of county extension but these usually result from strong urban libraries. We must have more libraries in counties having no town of more than 5,000 people. Let us interest our southern philanthropists in county library demonstration.

And we need the aid and interest of men in public life. We have had governors and leaders devoted to the causes of public school, public health, and good roads. We need rural library governors who will think first of the booklessness of our farmers and their families.

If books are to be brought to the door of the average southern farmer, it must be done through state aid. Free rural schools were made possible by this means, and rural libraries can be financed in the same way. State aid could be based on the taxable property of a county, the state paying two-thirds of the salary of the librarian, the county paying the remainder, with a fixed amount for books and maintenance expenses. The county's share should be paid jointly by the county board of education and the county commissioners or governing board of the county. Arrangements should be made for the smaller counties to contract with their neighbors for library service. By this method, books may be made accessible to every man, woman and child in the South.

PUTTING THE COUNTY LIBRARY LAW THROUGH THE LEGISLATURE

By PURD B. WRIGHT, *Librarian, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library*

FIFTH GENERAL SESSION

From an experience of many years with several legislative bodies and sundry types of bills, I have not found any short or sure route to the governor's signature. Each effort develops new problems and different solutions.

The first effective county library law was put through by sheer pull and influence. Mr. Gillis, of California, was known to every person of political influence in his state as a determined fighter. He had an abounding faith in the merit of his bill. In this instance, this fighting faith was all that was needed. This is meant as a sincere tribute to James L. Gillis, to whom, more than any other man, we owe the county library as it operates today.

As a general rule, the handling of a library bill in a legislature should be governed largely by conditions. After all is said, it is mainly a question of salesmanship. Personally, I have always avoided partisan politics. But if I could secure needed library legislation in no other way, I would not hesitate to play the political game to the best of my ability. And if I did not know how, or was painted the wrong color, politically, then the efforts would be largely given to reaching the man or committee of the right color who could "put the

bill over." This is not always, seldom ever, an easy job—this interesting the other fellow.

It took four years to get the library commission bill through in Missouri. This had the support of all the educational associations, women's clubs, and like organizations. The first session, it got a hearing only. The second session, through the interest of an ex-school teacher who had no personal bills to push, it went through one branch. The third session it was pushed over. The final push was given by a man, now a prominent circuit judge in the state, who, born on a farm, had an ambition to become a lawyer. Without help, he worked his way through a country school, landed in St. Louis with nothing but his ambition, got a job pushing a loading truck in a wholesale grocery house in the day time, and went to law school at night. Later, he found himself a prosecuting attorney and still later a member of the legislature. He was a politician and wrapped up in the political game. Someone heard the story of his life, dramatized the work of the traveling library as a thing to help the ambitious boy. The bill went over on the last day of the session, in the omnibus. This was a case of winning on pure sentiment.

It took four sessions of the legislature (six years) to pass the present county library law. The first bill, submitted February 17, 1915, was a flyer, presented merely to get the attention of the state on the idea of a county library. It was nearly identical with the law of California and it created a sensation in library circles, because it seemingly sought to revolutionize library work in Missouri, practically doing away with the library commission. This drew the attention of the State Association, which appointed a committee to draft a proper bill.

In bill drawing, a wise legislator once suggested that some people were never happy unless they could make changes or amendments. Bearing this in mind, our bills have always worn horns—large enough to attract attention. The dehorning process seems to give trouble-makers a lot of pleasure and causes little real harm to the bill.

So, the second county bill bore horns, and some of them were knocked off, as a matter of course. But the educational process went on. So with the third. The fourth bill had still other horns, and it too would have been defeated but for a friend at court. The bill had been approved by the State Teachers' Association, the Federation of Women's Clubs, the farmer clubs, etc. All this counted for much, but all of it would have availed nothing but for the friend referred to, who was interested in a lot of good things for the people, but especially interested in library extension. And he stayed on the job. He, too, had been in the legislature, and on the circuit bench, and his wife was a member of the Library Commission. Articles in the country newspapers, letters from home folks in the small country towns and country people, all asking that the country be given the same rights in library matters that the cities long had had, all helped. There was thus an atmosphere favorable to the bill back of the man—the man who remained on the job. This bill went over in the open—it was not crowded in an omnibus.

One member of the legislature, commenting on the bill after it became a law, said he was not interested in the bill until he was reminded that he "had been voting for things for the town people for many years, but it had never entered his mind that, if these things—libraries

especially—were good for the town people, they should be good for the country people."

This argument had been used before a farmers' convention, and the delegates rose to it as a unit. Was this sentimental, too?

Sentiment has won more library fights that I have been interested in than any other one thing. But it takes work, a belief that the thing sought is worth while, and more work. But remember, a lot of people will fight for a sentiment when they will run from a principle.

The work should be organized, systematized, so that every effort will be directed at some specific point or objective.

Care should be given in the preparation of the bill. This presupposes a careful study of all available legislation and the results elsewhere. Local conditions, existing laws must be taken into consideration so that everything possible favorable to the end sought may be taken advantage of. Such a study may also disclose pitfalls which it would be well to avoid.

On the other hand, it may bring out the fact that it will be necessary to curtail some other state department or to trespass on grounds which some officer has long regarded as his private preserve. If these are really necessary, it is wise to know it and to prepare for that which is sure to come.

Being assured of the correctness of the bill and the righteousness of the cause, the plan of campaign should be developed and the work systematized. It is a library bill, of course, but that is no reason why this fact should be over-emphasized. Make it also the bill of the Teachers' Organizations, The Parents' and Teachers' Associations, The Farmers' Clubs (not forgetting the marketing section), the women's clubs, the historical societies, etc. Last but not least, get to Mother and Father with the educational thing that is the heart of the library movement—even with a faint suggestion of the idea that is ever in their minds and hearts: That it will give their children a better chance than the parents had, and urge a line or resolution to their member of the legislature. This is creating atmosphere—background. The Hon. gentleman in the Senate or House may say he pays no attention to petitions, and call it propaganda, and may even sneer in the open. But let me whisper to you that even in these "radiomatic"

days he keeps his ears close to the ground and hears faint whispers, if they are sufficiently insistent. Yes, he is always "tuned in" on any meter length, if there is real sincerity on the transmitter end of the line.

The rest of the work is up to the steering committee and the "man on the job." If there be a Library Commission, as with us, of course it is the first great aid. Its officers know more about the library needs of the state than anyone else, and they usually know the rules of the legislative game. But they can't do it all and should not be expected to. The steering committee keeps busy working the publicity stunts, and should be responsible for the strategy of the campaign—dramatizing

events or things that will count, watching for opportunities to advance the bill through its committee travels and place on the calendars. If the work has all been done as it should be, there is a deal of satisfaction when the final roll call shows a big majority voting "Aye."

If a snag is struck the first, second, or fifth trial, there is always the satisfaction in the thought that the sun will shine tomorrow or next week, and that there will be another session next year or the year after, and we'll be there—a little better informed, certainly with more knowledge of how the thing is done—and—yes—probably—with a better bill. And we'll put it through!—then or the next time.

HOW THE HARRIS COUNTY LIBRARY WAS STARTED

By JULIA IDESON, *Librarian, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas*

FIFTH GENERAL SESSION

In a county with one library which has been giving service for a number of years, I believe the question of getting the county library has usually proved to be a very simple one. Certainly in Houston it seemed a case of nothing more than "ask and it shall be given unto you."

The county law was passed first in 1917, but the form was not satisfactory, so that it was re-enacted in 1919. During that year it was my privilege to be overseas with the American Library Association, and when I got back I was very much occupied with the affairs of my own library. It was in the back of my head that we would have a county library some day but I hadn't really considered it seriously until one Saturday evening. It was a very busy evening and there was a long line of people to be waited on. A gentleman strolled up to the loan desk and stood there waiting. Finally he turned to me and said, "Miss Ideson, wasn't there a rural libraries law passed for Texas?" I said, "Yes, there was." He said, "Oughtn't we have a rural library in Harris County?" "We certainly should," I replied. He said, "I am a member of the Harris County Dairymen's Association and I think we can help you get it if you will get things started." I got a copy of the library law and suggested that he read it over.

Later the man came up and told me, "I see

that you have to have a petition of two-thirds of the majority of the voters of the county to start a county library, or the county commissioners can start it on their own initiative. I believe you can get a great many petitions circularized through the Dairymen's Association. Will you come to speak to the Dairymen's Association the next time they meet in Houston?" I said I would be very glad to.

In the meantime he prepared the petitions and about six weeks later I had a telephone call and went down to a meeting of the Association. There were about thirty of them there and I spoke to them as well as I could. A reporter made a beautiful talk on what books would mean to the dairymen's families and what books had meant to him. They passed a resolution and each took along some petitions.

Ever since the library started the trustees had allowed the residents of the county to come to the library and get books. We didn't undertake to mail them out but we did allow anyone of the county—we have a county population of forty or fifty thousand people—to come to the library to get books, and we had a list of about three hundred county borrowers. We circularized all of those with petitions. We sent the teachers copies of the acts and petitions and asked them to do all they could in their immediate districts.