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*History of the Missouri Library Association*

# **IMPROVING LIBRARY SERVICE IN MISSOURI**

**PRESENTED**

**BY**

**THE MISSOURI LIBRARIES PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**1953**

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**Miss Virginia Connell, Moberly Public Library, Moberly**  
**Willard K. Dennis, Southwest Regional Library, Bolivar**  
**Mrs. Otto Eisenstein, Warrenton**  
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**Ex Officio Member**  
**President, Missouri Library Association**

**Consultant to Committee: Lowell A. Martin, Columbia University**

The Missouri Libraries Planning Committee consists of thirty-seven civic and legislative friends of libraries, trustees of libraries, and professional librarians. Its chairman is a Kansas City lawyer and its vice-chairman a woman civic leader from Jefferson City. The group has district chairmen in five areas -- a library trustee from Lawson in Northwest Missouri, a retired judge from Hannibal in Northeast Missouri, the vice-chairman of the Committee in Central Missouri, a library trustee from Springfield in Southwest Missouri, and a member of the legislature from Piedmont in Southeast Missouri.

The Committee came together because library progress over the state has been slow, despite the excellent facilities in some of the more populous districts. It had access to statistics gathered by the Missouri Library Association and the Missouri State Library, and it had the service of an independent professional consultant. The group held a series of meetings beginning in October, 1952, in an effort to understand the library needs of the State.

Belief of the Committee: That free public libraries provide one of the most useful means for people of all ages to gain lifelong self-improvement and wholesome recreation -- and that such agencies are essential to enlightened citizenship in a democracy.

Purpose of the Committee: To recommend ways and means to bring adequate library facilities to all the people of Missouri.

Responsibility of the Committee: To propose a plan which will make maximum use of every tax dollar in the interest of economy of government services.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR LIBRARY PROGRESS IN MISSOURI

The Missouri Libraries Planning Committee early recognized that serious shortcomings exist in library service in the State. Before considering specific steps for improvement, the Committee adopted a set of guiding principles. These served to keep the plans and proposals of the group sound, practical, and balanced. They are not so much technical needs as seen by professional librarians as human needs and governmental realities as viewed from the standpoint of the resident of Missouri.

1. Every Missourian should have access to adequate library service somewhere within reasonable reach of his home, as part of his right as an individual and as a citizen. The children of today, in the cities and on the farms, should know and use the world of books as a means to develop into intelligent and responsible adults. Adults should have access to good free libraries, for continuing their education through life and for wholesome recreation through reading.
2. The right to minimum library service applies to all parts of the State. It is not a special privilege of people in the larger cities and in the most favored agricultural districts, but equally a right and a need of people in the hill country and in the areas of sparse population. We will not be giving full opportunity to our people until we have adequate library service throughout the State.
3. Adequate minimum library service includes (a) a plentiful supply of background and current books, pamphlets and magazines, pictures, films & records to cover the informational, educational and recreational needs of the people, (b) service by a competent professional and clerical staff, (c) housing of resources in suitable buildings near the people, and (d) bookmobiles to bring resources to people in the country. Every citizen and every child has a right to look about him and ask whether his local facilities come up to this minimum level.
4. Library service, to be effective and efficient, must be organized into administrative units large enough to provide the books and facilities which the people want and to operate at the lowest possible unit cost in order to use tax money as carefully as possible. Small, isolated library districts in every town and country cannot get full return from money spent. Future library facilities should be organized in adequate

administrative units able to provide the minimum essentials of service.

5. Similarly, libraries in Missouri, even those of adequate minimum size, must cooperate and coordinate their operations with each other, sharing resources and planning expenditures jointly, so that together they can give the people a range and quality of service that would not be possible alone. We must work toward a state-wide system of libraries.
6. The control of library service has been and should remain a local responsibility of subdivisions of the State. The reading of people can influence their beliefs and actions, and control of public sources of reading in a democracy must therefore be kept close to the people. Local policy groups of responsible and public-spirited citizens should guide the purposes of public libraries,
7. Library units should be directed by qualified administrative personnel, with authority to carry on operations and make decisions in specific cases within policies set in consultation with the citizen board.
8. Localities should make the initial effort to support library service. The community which benefits from the facilities should first make reasonable efforts to provide funds before State or Federal aid is made available.
9. The State government of Missouri has a definite financial responsibility to aid and supplement local efforts for library service. Libraries are part of the educational system of Missouri, and education is a legal responsibility of the State government. Moreover, the Constitution of Missouri declares that it is the policy of the State "...to promote the establishment and development of free public libraries and to accept the obligation of their support by the state and its subdivisions." It is clear from a study of constitutional and statutory provisions for library service in Missouri that free public libraries are a joint obligation of the State government and of the various localities, and a library plan for the future will need to define the respective roles of each.
10. A complete library system in Missouri must include an effective state library agency to supplement, advise and coordinate, but not to control, local library service. Such an agency, the nucleus of which exists in the present Missouri State Library, would stimulate local action under a state-wide plan, guide libraries in achieving more effective service, provide specialized resources and services not available locally, and distribute State money provided for the aid of local libraries.

## PRESENT LIBRARY SERVICE IN MISSOURI

The many reports and statistics which the Committee has studied add up to the following essential facts about library service in Missouri:

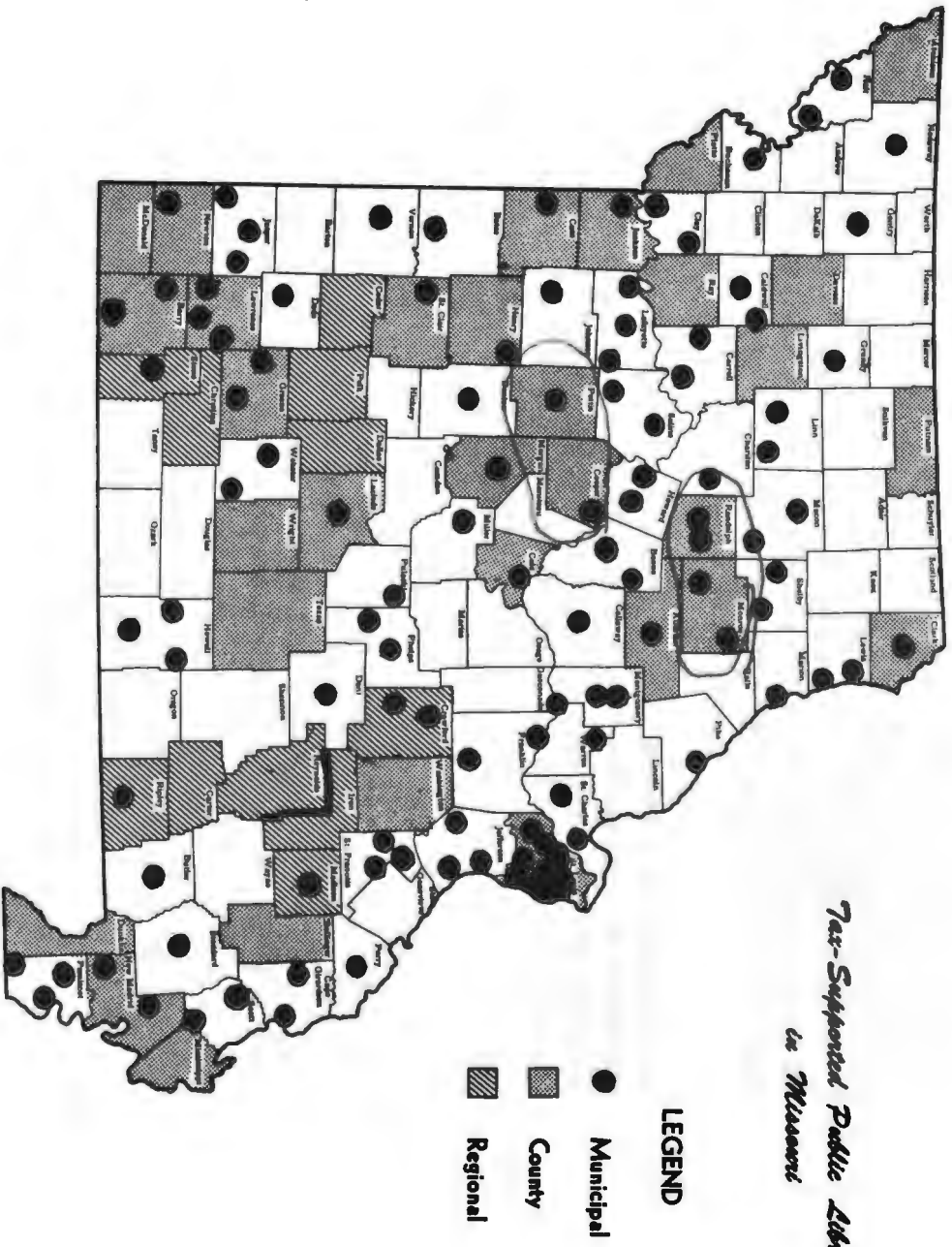
976,793 Missourians, approximately one-fourth of the total population, have no public library service within reach.

1,098,103 Missourians, another one-fourth of the population, receive library service limited in scope, amount and availability in city, county and regional libraries providing sub-standard service.

1,879,757 Missourians, one-half of the total population, receive library service of considerable variety, but limited in amount and availability, in the eight larger libraries serving primarily urban centers.

Closer examination of library service in the several parts of the State -- the unserved areas, the cities with library service, the counties with service, and the multi-county library units -- will reveal the progress made thus far and the problems that must be solved.

*Gas-Supported Public Libraries  
in Missouri*



## Areas Lacking Library Service

No local library service of any kind is available to almost one million people in Missouri, and approximately two-thirds of the land area of the State lacks this facility. Twenty-five counties, out of a total of 114, have no free tax-supported library of any kind within their boundaries. In 24 additional counties there is only one library serving a small city, while the rest of the county lacks facilities. Only 43 counties within Missouri have library service available over the whole area.

Most of the unserved districts are in rural areas and small towns. They are distributed over the State, some being in the sections with low assessed valuation and some in the highly productive farming districts; 13 of the counties entirely lacking library resources are north of the Missouri River, and 12 south of it. Since World War 11 most progress in establishing county-wide and regional library units has occurred in the hilly sections of the southern third of the State.

A central problem in improving library service in Missouri is therefore establishment of adequate facilities for one million people scattered over two-thirds of the land area -- people who have special need for books and similar resources because they do not have ready access to the educational and recreational facilities of the larger cities.

## City Libraries

One hundred fourteen of the 157 tax-supported public libraries in Missouri are organized as city libraries. The law permitting the establishment of city libraries preceded that for county units. In contrast with the county libraries, most of the city agencies were established prior to World War 11, and one-third of them before World War 1.

In the following tables, distribution by population served and by income is indicated for the city libraries for 1952-53.

### Population Served by City Libraries

| Population       | Number of Libraries |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Over 100,000     | 2                   |
| 25,001 - 100,000 | 5                   |
| 10,000 - 25,000  | 16                  |
| Under 10,000     | <u>91</u>           |
| TOTAL            | 114                 |

Income of City Libraries, 1951-52

| Income             | Number of Libraries |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Over \$100,000     | 2                   |
| \$40,001 - 100,000 | 2                   |
| \$10,000 - 40,000  | 19                  |
| Under \$10,000     | <u>91</u>           |
| TOTAL              | 114                 |

NOTE: City libraries contracting with a county for completely unified service are counted as part of the county library.

Two large city libraries have comprehensive programs and can take their places among metropolitan libraries in the county. Both St. Louis and Kansas City have gained local support and are currently building up their resources, although both face serious building problems. They possess strong and specialized collections which already have made a contribution to state-wide resources, and which might be utilized even more for supplementing limited collections in various parts of the State. They have a contribution to make, and should participate in state-wide funds for library service.



# OPPORTUNITY

# HANDICAP



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The six city libraries serving 25,000 - 100,000 population -- in Columbia, Jefferson City, Joplin, St. Joseph, Springfield, and University City -- are well established. They have upward of five full-time staff members and can provide some specialized service. However, it must be noted that not one of these libraries has an income which approaches \$1.50 per capita, the now out-dated minimum standard adopted by the American Library Association in 1948. Close examination would undoubtedly show many opportunities for improvement in these libraries. They serve a quarter million people located in the trading and cultural centers of Missouri and should not be neglected in any plan for developing state-wide service.

The agencies in the medium-sized cities having 10,000 to 25,000 people necessarily present a mixed picture. A few have achieved substantial library service by making special financial efforts. Many have dedicated and experienced librarians who give the best possible service with their limited resources. But most lack the means to provide even minimum materials and personnel, and present the same problems as the group of smallest libraries.

Three-fourths of the city libraries in Missouri serve less than 10,000 people and have incomes under \$10,000 per year. Actually over one-half of the city libraries have less than \$5,000 per year. They usually have one part-time untrained staff member and money enough to buy only a small part of the books actively needed in their communities. By no means can they be called modern, effective public libraries. A library plan for Missouri must provide for improvement of the majority of city libraries, which are small and weak.

The many city libraries are located for the most part in the midst of rural areas that lack service. Policy has differed in opening this city facility to the country people, the most common practice being a non-resident fee for use by out-of-city readers. City libraries have done little to provide materials of interest to the country people, and library service has not been brought to country centers or in other ways made convenient for out-of-towners by the city agencies. When county libraries have been established around the city agencies, the two adjacent units have often remained separate, so that the limited financial resources within the county have had to support two or more government facilities supplying book services. The smaller city libraries have naturally concentrated their attention upon their own residents, and--with some notable exceptions--they have not been a factor in extending library service over the State.

There probably is no value in size as such, whether in libraries or any other activity. Indeed, in planning library service care must be taken against fostering super-libraries too far removed, both physically and psychologically, from the people who use them and who should control them. But observation of very small libraries shows that they cannot provide the many kinds of materials needed for modern living, they cannot organize what they have for most effective use, and they cannot provide staff members able to help children,

parents, citizens, businessmen, farmers and others in getting maximum benefits from the resources.

Any library plan for Missouri must provide for joint action among smaller communities, and for larger units of library service, so that localities can do together what they cannot do alone. This applies in particular to the many small city libraries in the State.

From the brief survey of city libraries in Missouri, the following points emerge for future planning:

- a) the few largest municipal libraries have a unique resource both in materials and personnel, and should be drawn even further into state-wide service plans;
- b) most of the existing city libraries are small and weak, and means should be found to bring them into cooperative, larger units of service, so that their resources would have full use and their service to local readers improved without necessarily raising local library taxes.
- c) in view of the limitations of many existing municipal libraries and their failure, once established, to develop into larger units for both country and town people, additional city libraries should not be depended upon in the future development of library service in Missouri.

### County Libraries

The greatest recent growth and vitality in the Missouri Library movement has been in county libraries. It has been a brief growth, stimulated in good part by the State Library in the years immediately after World War 11.

The basic county library law in Missouri was adopted in 1921. Only one county library was in existence as a result of this law at the end of World War 11. Since then forty-two additional counties have voted for county-wide library service, thirty-one being south of the Missouri River. Twenty-two counties have voted against county library districts and forty-nine counties have taken no action on the question.

Growth of County Libraries in Missouri

| Year of Establishment | Number of Libraries |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1942                  | 1                   |
| 1945                  | 2                   |
| 1946                  | 9                   |
| 1947                  | 17                  |
| 1948                  | 6                   |
| 1949                  | 3                   |
| 1950                  | 0                   |
| 1951                  | 0                   |
| 1952                  | 0                   |
| 1953                  | 5                   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>43</b>           |

The forty-three counties are organized for library service into thirty-six units, at present, thirty-two covering one county each, and four regional units serving two or more counties. Five counties which recently voted for library service are in process of organization, and may take the form of two regional units. The county units are distributed by size and income as shown below:

Population Served by County and Regional Libraries

| Population       | Number of Libraries |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Over 100,000     | 1                   |
| 25,001 - 100,000 | 6                   |
| 15,000 - 25,000  | 13                  |
| 5,000 - 15,000   | 16                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>36</b>           |

County and Regional Libraries by Income 1951-52

| Income             | Number of Libraries |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Over \$100,000     | 2                   |
| \$35,001 - 100,000 | 3                   |
| \$20,001 - 35,000  | 14                  |
| Under \$20,000     | 17                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       | <b>36</b>           |

Most of the county libraries are small. The majority serve less than 25,000 people and have less than \$35,000 annually with which to give service. Only six of the thirty-two county units achieve a 25,000 population mark, and only four the level of \$35,000 per year.

Some favorable and some doubtful characteristics of Missouri county libraries can be reported after study of a sample group in the field. A few large units provide a variety and quality of service comparable to that in good city libraries and in addition get the service out to people in smaller communities by means of small branches, bookmobiles, and even cases of books in local stores and other centers. All the county libraries use bookmobiles, which bring reading materials out to people who have had only limited access to them. An intangible but important quality in county service in Missouri is the spirit and enthusiasm found in the librarians directing this work.



On closer study, however, one must raise questions about the smaller county units (which, it will be remembered, are in the majority). The first condition noted is that the budget in most cases can provide for only one experienced and trained librarian, which means that the specialized staff characteristic of the modern library (as of the modern school and the modern hospital) is not available. Further, this one professionally qualified staff member usually gives most of his or her time to administration, selection and ordering books, organizing the collection, and financial and maintenance matters, so that even he does not have much chance to help readers in using the resources. The parts of the book collection having to do with reference and non-fiction materials for adults are often a disappointment. Factual resources for business, technical materials for agriculture, current events commentary for citizens--these are often as limited as in small sub-standard city libraries. Analysis of bookmobile schedules usually reveals a preponderance of school stops, and a breakdown of circulation figures shows use primarily by children. Opening up the world of books to children is a notable accomplishment, but it is not the whole range of library service.

The Committee has the impression that library extension in Missouri in past years has depended too much on the separate county unit. Field work was directed at this level, the law stresses this form, and state aid favors it. Yet many of Missouri's library problems today can be traced to the existing county units.

Shortcomings in present county libraries provide a warning against depending exclusively upon this unit of government for future growth. Missouri is divided into 114 counties, each relatively small. Among the 71 counties now lacking area-wide service, 62 have less than 20,000 population, and 46 have individual assessed valuations under \$20,000,000 which means that a library tax of ten cents on the hundred dollars assessed valuation would produce less than \$20,000 from local sources. In other activities Missouri has developed inter-county programs, and this also is necessary for library service.

"County library" as used here may mean a single library unit serving all people in a county, or it may mean a unit that serves people living outside of cities which already have separate libraries. Eighteen of the thirty-six county and regional libraries serve all persons within their boundaries; this may be done by means of a single legal library agency serving both city and rural areas, or by separate legal library units in the county and in a city within the county, with a contractual agreement coordinating the two into a single service agency. In the remaining eighteen counties, where separate city and county units exist with separate staffs, physical plants, and book stocks, the full measure of joint action under the county library idea is not achieved. From visits in several such situations it can be reported that some measure of cooperation is developing between the adjacent library agencies within counties.

The county libraries in Missouri are quite young and are still in the stage of organization. They have accomplished much in a brief time and will accomplish more. At the same time, they leave much to be desired in both diversity and depth of library service, and they raise the following points in planning future growth:

- a) attention must be given to means for improving the majority of existing county libraries, particularly by working with nearby counties;
- b) encouragement should be given to both existing and future county libraries which serve the whole of their counties and not just the areas outside the cities which already have municipal libraries;
- c) the county as a unit for future growth of library service has serious limitations in Missouri, and should not be utilized unless some practical plan for integrating county units into larger and more adequate library systems can be developed.

### Regional Library Units

Four multi-county or regional libraries have been established in Missouri. They rest legally upon the county library law rather than upon any authorization for regional libraries as such, and are held together by contractual agreements. They are combinations of less populous counties, which as service units thereby attain more adequate size and financial resources. They eliminate one or more chief administrators, combine book resources, maintain one cataloging and processing department, and in other ways make the money at their disposal go further. Moreover, they are in a position to hire staff members more highly qualified, which is likely to show in parts of the library activity as different as the efficiency of business records and the quality of educational and reading programs. The four existing agencies are all in the less populous, hilly sections of the southern part of the State.

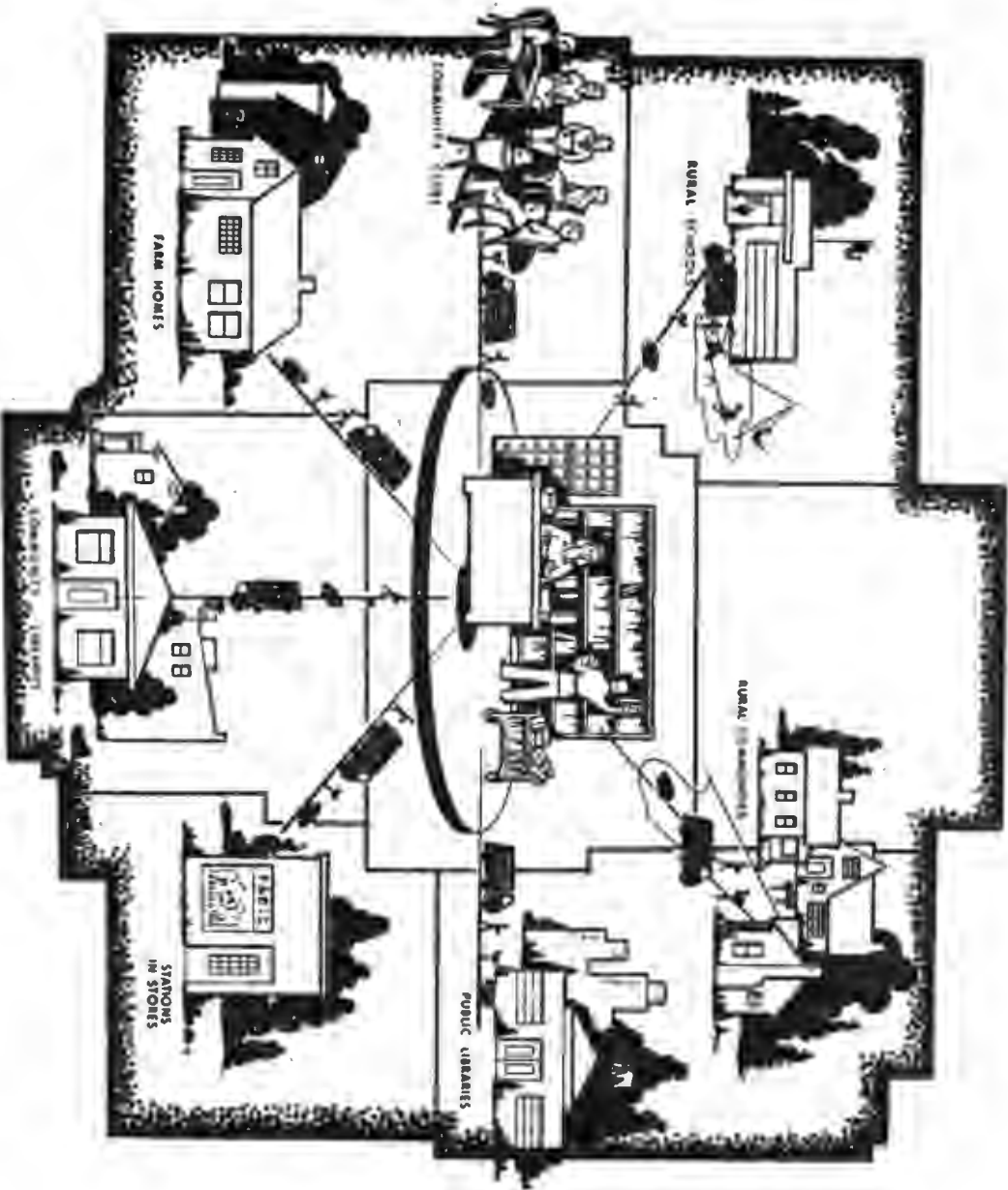
Field visits to regional libraries substantiate the theoretical advantages of the larger unit. While they fall short of ideal service, it is hard to suggest an alternative plan that would bring better facilities to these very difficult areas. With increased state support, which seems justified where local people make a considerable effort to maintain their own educational agency and adopt the most economical form of organization, they would be able to achieve minimum standards.

This development offers possibilities, but should be studied carefully before placing all hopes for the future upon it. The existing regional units

in Missouri do not exceed 40,000 in population even with combinations of three counties, and they therefore face the problems of medium-sized county libraries. Among the counties now without district-wide library service in Missouri are thirty-one with populations under 10,000, which would require joint action by several to approach a minimum adequate library unit. It is not easy to get counties to work together on a joint service, nor is it easy to hold them together once they enter a contract. The regional library unit made up of several counties has not been found to be stable from the governmental standpoint over the country, and three of Missouri's multi-county districts have encountered difficulty on this score.

The experiences to date with regional libraries in Missouri leads to these conclusions for future plans:

- a) the regional library unit holds definite promise for sparsely settled areas in Missouri
- b) legal provisions for this type of unit should be re-examined to free them, if possible, from the county as necessary sub-units;
- c) regional libraries are still an experiment in Missouri and in the rest of the country: they will need careful guidance from a central agency to get started, they will encounter some indifference and opposition, and they may not prove stable from the governmental standpoint.
- d) because regional library units usually serve sparsely settled districts, they will need special outside financial aid if they are to provide service up to modern standards.



## Missouri State Library

The State Library of Missouri is essentially a public library extension agency, both in law and in practice. It does not serve as an historical library, a law library, or a legislative reference center, which activities are performed by other agencies. It serves only to a limited extent as a source of materials and information for officers of the State government, and it does not maintain the documents and archives of governmental activity. It provides book service to school libraries, but by policy this function is being curtailed somewhat, and its former specialized staff guidance and advisory service to school libraries has lapsed for want of interest from school authorities and lack of notable success.

This report examines only the extension functions of the Missouri State Library, its responsibilities and opportunities for improving general library service for all the people of the State. The report makes no evaluation or recommendations concerning present or possible services of the State Library to the various government offices in Jefferson City.

As the public library extension agency for Missouri, the State Library currently functions as a supplementary and guidance service. Specifically it performs the following main activities:

1. assembling of information about libraries in the State,
2. advising existing libraries on internal policy and management,
3. furnishing of reference service and loaning of special materials to existing libraries,
4. furnishing of reference service and loaning of special materials directly to almost one million people and many groups outside of local library districts,
5. encouraging new and adequate library units in parts of the State now lacking local service,
6. encouraging small libraries to reorganize into larger units so they can provide improved service,
7. administering direct bookmobile service to selected districts in the state,
8. distributing state money provided for the aid of local libraries.

While giving some attention to each of these responsibilities, the State Library during the past few years has emphasized streamlining of its own internal operations, building up of its reservoir collection at the capital, and distributing throughout the State of its resources by means of inter-library and direct loans. In 1951-52 the State Library circulated 120,111 items (12,395 to libraries, 19,099 to individuals and 1,695 to communities and clubs in unserved areas, 82,528 to schools, and 4,394 to officials in the capital). The circulation figure was only 60,911 in 1949-50. Many of these issues were preceded by reference and research activity on the part of the State Library staff. Annually about 1,200 of the items distributed must first be obtained by the State Library from sources other than its own collection, often from libraries outside the State. Demand for these services can be expected to increase as library progress continues and readers over the State make increasing use of books and special resources.

The advisory and promotional activities of the State Library, although of high caliber, have been limited in the past few years, because of lack of sufficient personnel and because future directions of growth were being studied. This contrasts with the years immediately after the War when this activity was stressed and when the main growth of county libraries occurred.

Current promotional activity is aimed primarily at consolidation of existing libraries--the joining of city and county units, and of county units with each other. The bookmobile program administered by the State Library is also directed toward larger units, with state-supported bookmobile service recently being given in two locations, each involving three counties. Two regional libraries are currently being formed in these areas, and some of the city units are affiliating themselves with the regional units. This success points the way for the future promotional activities by the State Library.

The Missouri State Library has unquestionably made an important contribution to library development in the State. Interest in the people of the State has been uppermost, despite changes in its activities. What is lacking is a balanced, long-range program, coordinated with state-wide effort at the local level, and designed not only to hold the present system together, but also to build toward the greater library service which Missouri should have.

**SERVICE**

23

**TO ALL CITIZENS FROM THE**

# *Missouri State Library*



**MISSOURI STATE LIBRARY SERVES**

**DIRECTLY : 881,625 PEOPLE**

**INDIRECTLY : 3,073,028**

## A STATE-WIDE SYSTEM OF LIBRARIES FOR MISSOURI

Free public libraries in Missouri, as elsewhere, started originally in separate municipalities. More recently they have been established in single separate counties.

While these developments have brought some kind of service to three-fourths of the people of Missouri, they also account for the major library problems now before the State. Between the municipal and county units are substantial gaps without facilities, in which one-fourth of the people live. A majority of the existing libraries, county as well as city, are too small to provide the service the people want, like schools too small to provide modern education for children or hospitals too small to provide modern medical treatment for the sick.

The answer is not simply to create new libraries to fill in the gaps. The unserved areas are districts of sparse population, some of them very limited in natural resources and wealth; each taxpayer would have to make an unreasonable effort to pay for library facilities, and even then his needs would not be met.

Nor is the answer to pour more tax money into the small, separate library units. The people in a small town and in a relatively small county have almost as many reading interests as people in a populous district: there are the same children growing up and needing the world of books, the same young people trying to learn about vocations, the same parents seeking to understand the many problems of a home and family, the same citizens with a responsibility to vote sensibly, the same farmers and businessmen needing facts and ideas. While it does not cost as much to provide adequate library service in Ste. Genevieve County with its 11,000 people as it does in the city of St. Louis with 1,000,000, the financial effort needed per taxpayer in Ste. Genevieve County is many times as great if he seeks to maintain his library alone.

Currently several additional conditions make it necessary to develop joint programs among libraries. Costs in this field, as in others, are mounting. While assessed valuations have kept pace with rising costs in some sections of Missouri, in others both population and wealth are on the decline. At the same time that costs are going up, demands from the people increase for library materials and services as they try to meet more and more complex economic, civic and personal problems.

On the other hand, the answer to library progress in Missouri is not to take authority for library service away from localities and to create

huge libraries administered by the State. The administration of educational facilities in Missouri has been a local function. The people themselves should determine as directly as possible their need for books and similar materials, particularly when these materials contain ideas which influence their beliefs and actions. Furthermore, library service must be brought close to the individual, and is not of greatest value if available only at a distant point.

Finally, a library plan for Missouri cannot be imported ready-made from the outside. It must fit the conditions in the State that most directly influence the structure of library service. Some of these can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The existence of many small libraries, with strong local affiliations.
2. The promising experience with several multi-county, regional libraries.
3. The sparse nature of the population outside of the two metropolitan centers.
4. The sectional interests of large divisions of the State, such as the southwest hill country, the southeast lowlands, the northwest farm country.
5. The state tradition of supporting and guiding educational service, but not of administering such service directly.

The key to library progress in Missouri is in joint action which harnesses the many forces supporting library service, in a plan that takes account of the special conditions of the State. The most promising means for improving library service in Missouri is through (1) cooperative, coordinated administration (2) of libraries of adequate size (3) in a state-wide system. Such system, built on joint effort, would provide the best library service possible with the money that can be made available. It would bring the full library strength of the State to every individual through planned development and exchange of resources among libraries of all sizes.

An integrated, state-wide system of library services has several levels:

1. The local outlet serving people in the smaller cities and the country-side, which is part of -
2. A larger library unit service a district of some size and meeting minimum requirements for adequate service, and which participates in -
3. Informal cooperative plans for special library service over large sections of the State, which in turn is back up by -
4. A state agency with a reservoir collection, special staff, and contacts inside and outside the State.

### The local outlet

Ideally every Missourian should have a complete library within a few miles of his home. Practically he will never have such facilities, partly because they would cost too much, and partly because they would not be fully used.

However, every Missourian should be able to reach conveniently an outlet that can meet his most insistent needs and that can provide him with a variety of reading material over a period of time. In the smaller localities, this might take the form of an installation in a rented store or other convenient location, open part-time and during those hours when people can most easily get to it, and in charge of a responsible and service-minded local person. Or it might take the form of regular stops by a mobile unit sent out from a central headquarters.

The main consideration is that such local outlets must be integral parts of a larger, adequate library units. Standing alone, the library in a town of a few thousand people, or even in a city of 5,000 people or more, (there are 127 independent tax-supported and subscription libraries in Missouri serving less than 6,000 people) can meet only a small fraction of the demands made upon it and is soon exhausted by regular readers. As parts of larger library units, such local outlets would be constantly refreshed with new books and materials from headquarters and special requests and inquiries could be quickly referred to the central agency.

Similarly, whole counties of 10,000 or 12,000 population which stand alone in providing library service will get only a semblance of modern service, and should be parts of larger units. There are 18 counties in Missouri with less than 12,000 people outside of municipalities which already have service, 13 of these trying to provide separate facilities with this limited number.

Certain standards should prevail for the local outlets which are part of larger units. No person should have to travel more than 15 minutes to get to such an outlet if it is a stationary branch open a few hours each day, and no more than 10 minutes if it is a bookmobile available for only a few hours at intervals. Bookmobile stops should be at intervals of no more than two weeks, and stops should take account of the convenience of adults as well as of children. Local outlets should have a minimum of 3,000-4,000 books in good condition and of current interest, of which close to 2,000 should be available to readers at any one time. This stock should be changed and renewed at frequent intervals. The staff of stationary outlets should be under periodic guidance and supervision of professional personnel from headquarters, and each bookmobile should be staffed in the field by a qualified librarian.

State Library providing  
specialized service to  
smaller units, and  
guidance and coordination  
for the state-wide system



Coordinated service  
group working  
cooperatively in a  
large section of  
the State



THE BASIC ADMINISTRATIVE  
UNIT OR SYSTEM OF  
LIBRARIES PROVIDING  
SERVICE IN LARGE CITIES,  
LARGE COUNTIES, AND  
MULTI-COUNTY REGIONS



Local outlets -  
for city neigh-  
borhoods, towns  
and country-side -  
reaching every  
resident in  
Missouri



PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STATIONS  
IN STORES

PROPOSED STATE-WIDE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE  
IN MISSOURI, DESIGNED TO BRING MODERN SERVICE  
TO EVERY MISSOURIAN AT MINIMUM COST

- - - - Voluntary, informal association  
\_\_\_\_\_ Direct lines of authority

### Minimum library units

The basic unit of library organization over the state should be large enough to provide essential requirements of modern library service, which can be listed briefly as follows:

#### **A. Organized Resources**

1. A basic collection of several hundred information tools, kept up-to-date with additions and revisions.
2. A collection of books to meet the regular demands of readers, renewed with the addition of at least 2,000 new titles annually.
3. Copies of the more important periodicals not usually taken by home subscription, and bound files of those magazines that have information of continuing value.
4. Bulletins, pamphlets and similar non-book publications covering practical and current material of local interest.
5. A selected collection of educational films, records, music, and art reproductions of use to local organizations, business groups, students, etc.

#### **B. Staff**

1. An administering librarian, qualified professionally and personally to organize and direct efficient and effective service and to make the library of maximum benefit to the people served.
2. At least four professional librarians to (a) guide the reading of children, (b) furnish information and materials to individual adults and to groups and organizations, (c) organize and catalog the collection for easy use, and (d) provide expert assistance on the bookmobile and supervision of the attendants in local outlets.
3. Clerical staff to perform the routine and record-keeping activities, usually numbering as many or more than the professional staff.

### C. Housing and Maintenance

1. Central headquarters, including inviting and efficient quarters for readers.
2. One or more bookmobiles.
3. Small branch outlets as needed.

While the cost of such minimum provisions will differ depending on circumstances, and particularly upon whether the unit can develop useful cooperation with other similar units, the minimum cost for such facilities at the present time could not be less than \$45,000 to \$50,000 per year.\* On the other hand, it should be understood that this is not the cost for service in a small city nor even in a small county, but for a minimum library unit including both city and country districts and sometimes taking in two or more counties, and usually having at least 25,000 people in the district. On the other hand, this is a bare minimum for adequate service, and units should be substantially larger wherever practicable.

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\*This figure will vary as the value of the dollar changes. It should be adjusted regularly up or down, using some such simple index as the average cost of books purchased (about \$2.50 at present) and the beginning salary necessary to get professional personnel (about \$3600 at present), thus tying the minimum to the essential items of book costs and salaries.

#### Sample Breakdown of Annual Costs for Minimum Library Unit Serving Four Counties

|                  |                                            |                 |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Resources</b> | - 2000 new books at \$2.50                 | \$ 5,000        |
|                  | - duplicate copies of new books            | 2,500           |
|                  | - magazines, replacements and new editions | 1,500           |
|                  | - films, records, etc.                     | 1,000           |
|                  | - binding of older books still useful      | 1,000           |
|                  |                                            | <u>\$11,000</u> |
| <b>Staff</b>     | - Chief librarian                          | 5,200           |
|                  | - 4 professionals at \$3,800               | 15,200          |
|                  | - bookmobile driver                        | 2,600           |
|                  | - 3 clerks                                 | 5,800           |
|                  | - 2 branch attendants                      | 4,000           |
|                  |                                            | <u>\$32,800</u> |

|                   |                                            |                 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Equipment</b>  | - Central building (rental or maintenance) | \$ 1,200        |
|                   | - branches (rental)                        | 1,000           |
|                   | - bookmobile operation                     | 1,200           |
|                   | - bookmobile depreciation                  | 1,200           |
|                   | - supplies, etc.                           | 600             |
|                   |                                            | <u>\$5,200</u>  |
| <b>Contingent</b> | -                                          | 500             |
|                   |                                            | <hr/>           |
|                   | <b>TOTAL</b>                               | <b>\$49,500</b> |

How will minimum adequate units of this kind be achieved? Certainly not by the promotion of additional city libraries, nor even by the promotion of county units unless most of them are prepared to join in larger districts.

There is no one means to move toward adequate organization of library service in Missouri, but several possibilities, to be used on local conditions and affiliations prescribe:

1. Consolidation of two or more existing library districts, particularly the joining of a municipal library with a county unit.
2. Contractual relations between two or more separate districts to have one provide area-wide service in a unified program, as when a newly authorized county library contracts with an existing city agency for service.
3. Contractual agreements between two or more county districts to form a regional library.
4. Cooperative programs between two or more independent libraries to provide coordinated service in an informal library "system".

These several alternatives are authorized under present law. All except the last have been used in Missouri. Because the untried plan of informal library systems could serve as a transition to adequate library units in some parts of Missouri, it is described briefly here.

A cooperative system among several libraries is designed to improve service by joint action without altering the governmental structure of agencies. To achieve any substantial measure of improvement, the libraries in a cooperative system must maintain the following joint activities: (a) cooperative selection of material, (b) joint purchasing of books, (c) joint processing and cataloging of materials, and (d) free use of the facilities of each library by any resident of the total district served. This alternative should be looked upon as a step toward fully integrated units, and financial aid for library "systems" should be for a stated period after which one of the other alternatives should be adopted in order to get the fullest possible return from public money.

Anyone acquainted with the various interests which attach to localities and to local institutions recognizes that changes in the governmental affiliations of service agencies do not come easily. Where they have occurred in Missouri libraries, they can usually be traced to a relatively few leaders, in the ranks of both librarians and lay persons, who worked tirelessly for an ideal, and who found in time that most people are prepared to support a change if it gives them better service at no greater cost. Because of the various difficulties, state funds for promoting library service should be used in part to give special aid to those districts which adopt the more effective forms of organization.

Although they will take different forms depending on circumstances, minimum library units as here outlined must form the foundation for improved library service in Missouri.

### Informal Cooperation in Large Regions

Minimum units by definition give minimum service. But Missouri wants better than minimum service if this can reasonably be achieved. It has facilities of high level in the largest cities and a few counties. How can service be improved beyond the minimum in the less populous districts of the state, assuming they first take steps to lay the foundation of adequate units?

Considerable return can be expected from definite plans for cooperation between several library districts in a large region. Separate districts, even districts made up of more than one county, can draw upon each other's resources through inter-library loan. As a next step they can plan together to have one concentrate on a subject of special local interest, thus freeing another district from this subject so that it can concentrate on a second topic of special interest to its readers. Together the libraries of a large region can conserve the historical records of that section, or build up the expensive film materials that they need. They can jointly bring in special personnel to start special educational projects or to evaluate their holdings in designated fields. Together they can put on a

public relations campaign to show the value of libraries to all the people.

One possible function of an informal organization of libraries in a section of the state is centralized ordering and cataloging of books for member libraries. Ordering and cataloging consume a substantial part of the librarian's time in a library, thus limiting his opportunity to work directly with the people in his community. Much the same work is duplicated from library to library, in keeping order records, placing orders and getting as much discount as possible, cataloging the same titles or sending away for printed catalog cards, etc. A central office, possibly attached to one of the larger libraries in the section, would eliminate effort duplicated many times, could introduce labor-saving devices because of its larger volume of operations, and would get greater discounts because of its larger volume of purchasing. It would be similar to the central processing done for branches by the main unit in a large metropolitan library system - or like cooperative purchasing among a group of independent grocery stores. In any such plan selection of books and decisions on what is going into the local library would remain in the hands of local authorities. Membership would be voluntary, with any library free to meet the extra cost of doing its own processing. This prospect has been outlined briefly in order to illustrate the possibilities in cooperation at this level.

The size and structure of sectional cooperating districts need not be uniform over the State. Usually at least 100,000 people would be served by the combined units in a section, and one larger library would often serve as a nucleus for the group. Conceivably some parts of Missouri could not or would not create large districts for cooperation, because of lack of common interest or of a natural nucleus for the district, but all would stand to gain from such action.

The essential element in the state-wide library program here proposed is self-help through efficient organization and joint effort. This is not a matter of individual libraries and communities taking a magnanimous attitude and doing favors for less fortunate sections; it is a matter of enlightened self-interest, the responsibility each has to improve library service for its own people even if this requires definite adjustments. Money will be needed to forge this state-wide system, but some progress can be made with the funds at hand, and additional funds which become available should be used to build up this state-wide system for all the people of Missouri. In this direction lies the best hope of both library progress and library economy.

## The Financing of Missouri Libraries

To maintain a library system that provides at least minimum adequate service for all Missourians, both the localities and the state government must allocate additional funds. The state-wide cooperative system previously described will insure full return from every tax dollar spent.

The key to the necessary financing of Missouri libraries is joint responsibility by the various subdivisions and the State. The localities must pay a prominent share of library costs because local people benefit from the service. The State must also pay its part in library costs, because the libraries are part of the state educational system and because the Constitution of Missouri explicitly states that it is the policy of the State Government "... to promote the establishment and development of free public libraries and to accept the obligation of their support by the state and its subdivisions." Neither level of government can carry the burden of adequate library service alone; both must do their share.

### Local Funds for Library Service

At present the municipalities and counties provide 94.5 percent of the tax money going into Missouri public libraries. Of 146 units supported from taxes, 92 are supported by a tax rate of ten cents on the hundred dollar assessed valuation, 34 by a higher rate, and 20 by a lower rate. As a first step, the localities which do not achieve this rate (sometimes termed the one-mill rate) should immediately come up to this level, and should not benefit from supplementary state funds until they do. On the other side, the considerable number of localities that have come up to the maximum legal rate of two mills demonstrate that this degree of effort is within reach of many Missouri communities. The Missouri State Library and the Missouri Library Association, along with the local library boards, should carry on a continuous and coordinated campaign to demonstrate the cultural and educational benefits to the people in supporting a tax rate greater than ten cents on the hundred dollars of evaluation for their local library.

### State Funds for Library Service

The State of Missouri currently provides \$200,000 annually to supplement local library funds, thus furnishing 5.5 percent of library expenditures. The future of book and educational service for all the people of Missouri depends upon the state government meeting a greater share of its obligation for libraries. While no one can prescribe the exact portion of total library costs that the state should carry, certainly

a minimum of one-quarter of the total -- several times the present amount -- should be furnished by the central unit. In time decisions made for state support of local schools should also apply to local libraries, the educational facility used by adults as well as children, resulting possibly in the state providing one-half of the money needed for this service to its people.

State funds for local library service are now distributed by law under a formula designed to give some aid to all libraries and additional aid for equalization purposes to selected libraries; one half goes on a per capita basis to all library districts which maintain at least a one-mill local tax or funds amounting to at least one dollar per capita, and the remainder on an equalization basis to county and regional libraries with local incomes of less than \$1.00 per capita.

In general this basis of distribution is suited to the present stage of library development in Missouri. In part it helps all libraries that make a reasonable local effort, and in part it gives special help to larger units serving more scattered populations over county and multi-county areas.

Several shortcomings can be pointed out in the present state aid provisions. County libraries are given special help even though many fall below minimum standards or population and income; this serves to perpetuate questionable library units, and does not result in full return from state money. The regional units do not receive sufficient special help to accelerate the growth of this needed type of organization. Further, the equalization provisions are tied to a rate of \$1.00 per capita, when at present dollar values a floor of at least \$1.50 per capita is needed.

With these considerations in mind, it is proposed that the present state-aid plan be modified in the following four respects:

- (1) Equalization should be based on a minimum rate of \$1.50 per capita for library service.

At present one-half of the supplementary funds appropriated by the state legislature are used to bring libraries up toward the minimum rate of \$1.00 per capita. This is not a realistic figure, because \$1.00 per capita will no longer support modern library service. The \$1.00 figure, adopted twenty years ago by the American Library Association as a rough measure of library costs, was raised to \$1.50 in 1948, and is once again out-of-date. This latter figure will serve as a practical working measure for equalization at the present time, but it should be designated in the regulations of the State Library Advisory Board rather than in legislation so that it can be adjusted up or down as the value of money changes.

**(2) Equalization funds should go only to libraries which have adequate size to provide minimum service and to use funds efficiently.**

At present, money for equalization goes to all county libraries which levy a one-mill tax (i.e., ten cents on each hundred dollars assessed valuation) but do not come up to the per capita standard. This means that the many limited county libraries, which we have seen are unable to provide minimum service and which have large unit costs because of their small-scale operations, receive special help and have very little incentive to reorganize into adequate units; these same present provisions will also encourage new small county libraries in the future to go their way alone, thus complicating rather than helping the library problem in Missouri. It is therefore proposed that equalization funds go only to libraries which serve a county or multi-county area and which have an annual income from taxes (state and local) of at least \$20,000 which is close to one-half the sum necessary for an absolute minimum of adequate service. By this means state equalization funds would be used not for larger units of any kind, but for larger units able to come within reasonable reach of adequate service.

As a device to encourage the evolution of adequate larger units over a period of time, it is proposed that equalization funds also be made available to "systems" of libraries for a limited period. A system of libraries means two or more legally independent units, usually a county agency and one or more municipal agencies, which together provide coordinated service over a county area. The conditions necessary for effective coordination were previously described.

To receive equalization grants, such systems should have at least \$20,000 from tax funds. The systems should participate in equalization grants only for a period of five years, after which consolidation to form a single unit to get full benefit from larger-unit operation would be necessary to continue sharing in these grants. Equalization grants under this plan would be divided among the libraries in a system according to the population within the district of each. The Missouri State Library, as the administering agency for state funds for local libraries, would have to inspect library "systems" annually to be sure they achieve the several conditions of coordinated service.

**(3) Special supplementary funds, over and above per capita and equalization grants, should be made available to county units which are integral parts of multi-county libraries.**

The multi-county or regional library, as we have seen, is one of the promising means for improving library service in Missouri. The problem

that such a unit faces is that it must serve a wide geographical area. Special financial help should therefore be given to such units by the State. It is recommended that \$5,000 annually be made available to each county in a multi-county library unit, over and above other state grants. This special help would go only to regional units which maintain at least a one-mill tax (i. e. , ten cents on each hundred dollars assessed valuation) for libraries in the several districts, which will receive in income from taxes a total of at least \$30,000 per year with these special grants, and which show proof that the separate counties work together as a single unit for library purposes. At the present time, ten counties qualify for the special supplementary funds; total state money to help local libraries should be adjusted biennially to meet changes in the number of qualifying counties.

- (4) Establishment grants of \$5,000 per year should be made available for the first two years to new libraries which qualify as minimum adequate units.

If the new and adequate units necessary in improving Missouri library service are to get underway, they must be given special help at the outset. Libraries voted by the citizens in spring elections do not begin to get funds until the autumn. More serious, new units face heavy initial costs -- for a basic book collection, for a bookmobile, for suitable quarters. These establishment grants of \$5,000 would go only to libraries which meet full minimum standards (and not to informal local "systems" of existing libraries), and therefore would apply to only a few units each year. They are over and above other financial support and the grants would be made only in the two initial years of the agency.

The several changes here recommended, while keeping the intent of the present state-aid plan for libraries, would increase the effect of state money upon library progress in Missouri. An example will serve to illustrate the distribution of state funds, assuming the legislature decides initially to appropriate money to support only one-tenth of the state-wide program, or \$400,000 per year: \$50,000 - \$70,000 would go for special aid to multi-county libraries and for establishment grants. \$165,000 - \$175,000 would be distributed on a per capita basis to all libraries making minimum local financial effort, and \$165,000 - \$175,000 to larger adequate units which do not have incomes of \$1.50 per capita because of limited local assessed valuations.\*

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\* Attention should be given to equitable assessment practices over the state. If this is not achieved, a more suitable basis for estimating local wealth must be developed for the various services aided by the state on an equalization basis.

When the state aid law for libraries is revised, it should designate only the general provisions of the fund, and should leave the details of regulations to the administering agency, the Missouri State Library. Thus, the law might designate general purposes (state-wide library help, equalization, and special help to multi-county libraries) and general proportions to be devoted to each purpose. The State Library and State Library Advisory Board, working closely with the library officials of the State, would then establish and maintain regulations, adjusting them to meet altered conditions as library progress occurs.

### Federal Funds for Library Service.

The United States Congress has been considering a bill which would bring a small supplementary fund from the national government into those states which are actively extending and improving library service. The federal grant would be to the State, and would be spent according to plans prepared by the State; the Missouri State Library is already authorized by law to receive grants from the United States government.

Federal money, if received, should be used in Missouri to speed up the development program for libraries envisioned in the present report. Specific use will depend upon the stage of progress when the federal money becomes available. At present two main uses are in order:

1. To promote joint programs between city and county libraries
2. To promote regional units made up of two or more counties

At a later stage the special funds might be used, for example, to experiment with centralized processing and cataloging of books, as recommended elsewhere in this report. The additional federal funds would simply be fitted into a well-established program of library development in Missouri.

## PROGRAM OF THE MISSOURI STATE LIBRARY

The Missouri State Library must be prepared to play a key role in a state-wide system of adequate library service. Again and again, in the present report, the need is clear for an agency that will get the contemplated program started, keep it going, and supplement local efforts as necessary. The present services of the State Library are discussed in an earlier section of this report.

Leadership by the State Library does not mean control of local action, or interference, or independent plans that do not have wide support. But it does mean guidance and coordination, for the essence of library progress in Missouri must be joint effort at all levels, so that a state that does not rank at the top in wealth and resources, but which by hard work and careful planning seeks to live a good life with the resources it has, can marshall its full state-wide strength in providing vital educational service through libraries.

A brief look at some of the tasks confronting the State Library will demonstrate the scope and importance of its responsibilities.

1. The Missouri State Library must stimulate and aid the 71 counties which now lack county-wide library service.
2. The State Library must work with over 100 existing public libraries which do not come up to minimum standards, helping them to improve their service and efficiency.
3. The State Library must advise with the 15 or 20 libraries which now definitely come up to standards of size and support, and with the increasing number of units that will achieve these standards as the program moves forward, helping them to develop modern educational methods and to get full return from their essential strength.
4. The State Library must stand behind all library units, supplying them with the specialized books and materials and the specialized professional skill which they do not have locally.
5. The State Library must interpret the laws and regulations relative to state aid so that the greatest possible return is received from public money.

### State-wide Interlibrary Loan Service

A library system for Missouri should provide for interchange of resources to aid any potential reader. Organization for this purpose should be maintained at two levels -- the libraries within a large section of the state, and the Missouri State Library for the whole State.

Libraries within one section in Missouri can help each other by sharing their book resources. This can take several forms: Loaning a single title needed in another community for brief period when such titles are not currently in use in the agency which owns them, purchasing together groups of books of interest to several communities and then rotating parts of the groups for periods of several months among the participating libraries, even the inter-agency honoring of a reader's card among a group of libraries to give the more industrious readers access to fresh collections on a reciprocal basis. Inevitably the larger libraries within a region would be called upon for many loans and these libraries should therefore share in financial aid from the state, even though the needs of the smaller libraries may be more pressing. The libraries of the teacher's colleges, which have a responsibility for educational progress in their districts, may well have a part to play in regional mobilization of book resources.

At a level above the large sections, the Missouri State Library should develop and clarify its inter-library loan service. Missouri properly conceives of its State Library as standing behind local resources with a collection of books that can be called upon by the localities. However, so long as Missouri has many small libraries, each operating separately from the others, the State Library must buy books of all types and levels. The State Library now tries to provide material over the whole range of reading, and cannot do an effective job because of budget limitations. If some such regional cooperative plan as suggested above is worked out, the State Library would need to fill only those requests that cannot be handled within a section of the state. In practice this would mean that the smallest libraries in a district would help each other, the medium-sized libraries would stand behind the small units, and the State Library in turn would stand behind the medium-sized units. Thus the State Library could concentrate its purchases, do a better job of backing up book service of the state, and could contemplate the purchase of such expensive materials as film for use over the State.

The book reservoir function of the State Library can be further narrowed and clarified -- and thus made more effective within budget limitations by dependence upon the half-dozen largest libraries in the State for highly specialized materials and service. In part such a

plan already exists, with the two large city libraries (St. Louis and Kansas City) providing several hundred books each year which the State Library does not have in its own collection. This relationship can be extended in several ways: by agreement as to types of material (special art books, for example) which the State Library would not try to stock because they are already in the cities, by using the special subject reference services of the big city libraries as a backstop for reference questions not readily handled at the State Library, and by faster communication from Jefferson City to St. Louis and Kansas City by means of direct teletype. The college, university and special libraries (such as Linda Hall) should also be used if feasible in a scheme to concentrate and improve the State Library's reservoir function. Particular attention should be given to fitting the St. Louis Public Library and the Kansas City Public Library into a system of book resources, because they will participate in state financial aid and have a direct stake in state-wide library service.

This is a proposal for integrating library resources in Missouri at several levels, in order to bring every book in the state within call of every reader, and in order to make the tax dollar go further.

### Cost of State Library Service

The various responsibilities of the Missouri State Library call for leadership, judgment, understanding of governmental relations, and high professional competence - not just from the central library agency in Jefferson City, but out in the field as well. They call for a reservoir collection of books and other educational materials and for library specialists prepared to back up a far-flung library system. They also call for resources to demonstrate or push service at the strategic moment when effective state-local action can be achieved.

The Missouri State Library at present (1952-53) has a total annual income of \$145,000. Half of this is appropriated for bookmobile service out in the state. The remainder is spent about equally for central services in Jefferson City and for extension activity in the field.

The resources of the State Library show shortcomings at various points. The reservoir collection, while expanding, still lacks the range of books and journals needed to meet special demands, and the collection lacks the film materials needed to develop the use of this potent form of communication in libraries that are not part of the film cooperative. The number of professional staff members handling specialized information and bibliographical requests from the field is not equal to the present and potential demand. The extension staff for

working with officials and librarians over the state is woefully small. And, across the board, salaries of professional staff members are low.

The annual budget of the Missouri State Library should be raised from \$145,000 to at least \$200,000 if it is to play its necessary role in improving library service in Missouri. An increase of \$25,000 is needed to support an extension staff adequate in size and ability, \$10,000 additional is needed for new positions in the central unit, \$10,000 additional for books and other resources, and \$10,000 to raise the salary scale for professional staff members so that qualified personnel for existing and necessary positions can be obtained and held.

### Relations with Local Libraries

The Missouri State Library should give special attention to close consultation and working relationships with local libraries over the State as the library program develops. The state agency must take on added responsibilities if the whole program is to go forward. Discussions in the field sometimes revealed lack of understanding of the aims and problems of the state agency, and this condition could increase as the library program is accelerated. This question calls not only for a steady flow of information out from the state level, but also for active participation by local librarians and trustees in devising plans with the State Library. The need for close working relationships applies at all levels of the state library organization -- the State Library Advisory Board, the administration in Jefferson City and the state workers in the field.

## THE LEGAL BASIS FOR MISSOURI LIBRARIES

The legal basis for free public libraries has been firmly established in Missouri. The Constitution specifically affirms the responsibility of the State and its subdivisions for providing library service for all the people. Statutes governing city libraries, county libraries, state aid to libraries and the State Library stand on the books. Financial and service regulations have been adopted by the authorized bodies at both state and local levels.

While basically sound, the statutes need revision and supplementation at various points. Appropriate adjustments in law are necessary, if outmoded prescriptions are not to stand in the way of the expanded program of library service recommended in this report.

Various important details in the present statutes require attention. The provision for discontinuing a library by popular vote after only one year of operation does not provide enough time to show what the agency can do; the minimum life for an agency, once it is approved, should be at least three years. Authorization still remains in the law for establishing new libraries in villages, school districts and towns; while seldom used, this provision is basically counter to the direction in which library development must move in Missouri, and the provisions should be removed so far as it applies to future libraries. Automatic inclusion of ex officio members on library boards is questionable, because it can result in directors whose main interests are elsewhere; all members of library boards should be chosen individually for their fitness, interest and ability to discharge their responsibilities as library trustees. The present statutes do not clearly set forth the respective duties of the library boards and the chief librarians. The provisions for special taxes for building programs are not realistic in view of current construction costs, and should be revised to permit a higher special tax rate over a longer period of time.

### Provisions for Larger Unit Libraries

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming in the statutes is their failure to facilitate the larger, more effective and more efficient units of service which must develop if unserved areas are to be reached and small units strengthened.

Present laws are oriented toward the county as the basic unit of library service. Presumably present provisions were intended to promote adequate organization of library service, but in practice county districts have often not achieved the purpose.

No legal provision is made for multi-county, regional libraries as such. While regional libraries can be established by contract among counties, present provisions require two distinct and difficult steps to achieve this end -- First, the separate county units and then the regional unit by contract. The regional libraries thus established are by law federations of autonomous units rather than single service agencies.

Similarly, provisions for establishing libraries within counties encourage separate units in the urban and in the rural areas, in particular by requiring a separate vote by rural residents on a county library in cases where city libraries already exist, and by placing sole decision on the part of city libraries for joining county units in the hands of city library boards, which in some cases can be groups with a vested interest.

### Certification of Professional Library Personnel

Another major legal omission has to do with certification of professional personnel. A library, like a school or hospital, needs more than good equipment and physical resources. It must have qualified workers, prepared to select books wisely, to organize them effectively, and to stimulate and guide their use. Incompetent personnel can waste taxpayers' money -- and worse, can misdirect the search of people for knowledge. By no means all workers in libraries need professional certification, for many perform clerical tasks, but those who judge reading materials and guide readers should offer proof of their ability to perform these duties. The future of library service depends as much on the quality of workers that can be attracted as upon any other single condition.

The State of Missouri, to protect its citizens, should certify professional library personnel through standards established in consultation with the Missouri Library Association and administered by the Missouri State Library. These standards should cover necessary general and professional education, personal ability to render community library service, and continuing education in professional developments.

Certified personnel should occupy the professional positions in minimum library units. If this provision designed to protect the readers and taxpayers of the state is not met, state financial aid should not be forthcoming to libraries.

These and other related problems have been studied by the Legislative Committee of the Missouri Library Association, which has drawn up proposed revisions in legislation to cover some of them (for example, proposed Senate Bills No. 24 and No. 25 of the 66th General Assembly, 1951.) Additional study is needed of legislation for regional libraries,

for these introduce an intermediate level of government above the county which Missouri is experimenting with in other fields at the present time. And, of course, the program of financial grants from the State here proposed will require modification of existing provisions for state aid to libraries.

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE MISSOURI LIBRARIES PLANNING COMMITTEE

1. Every person in Missouri has a right to minimum adequate library service, to help him grow through the world of books as a child and to help him live a full life as a citizen and individual when he is out of school.
2. At least one-half the people of Missouri lack minimum adequate library service.
  - a. Facilities are entirely lacking in rural districts and small towns in which almost one million people live.
  - b. Most Missouri city and county libraries are too small to provide the books and related materials the people want and need and to provide the qualified staff necessary to help readers get full return from resources.
  - c. Most Missouri libraries, large and small, operate as separate, isolated units, giving little thought to districts and libraries beyond their boundaries.
3. Library progress in Missouri must come from organization of a state-wide system of library service, locally controlled but operating within a plan that uses the complete resources of the State to help every Missourian.
  - a. Local library outlets in the form of stationary or mobile units must be provided within fifteen minutes driving time of every resident of the State.

- b. Local outlets must be integrated parts of units of library service with annual incomes of at least \$45,000, the bare minimum necessary to buy the reading and related materials demanded most frequently by the people and to provide a staff able to insure full benefit from the resources; units of at least this size are also necessary because they make more efficient use of each tax dollar through lower unit operating costs.
  - c. Adequate minimum units of library service can be achieved by several alternative methods, depending on local conditions: consolidation of separate small units, contractual agreements, and formal systems of cooperation.
  - d. Special encouragement must be given to regional libraries serving two or more counties as a means to bring service to districts with limited population.
  - e. All local library units -- city, county and regional -- should work together in systems of informal cooperation serving large sections of the state with 100,000 people or more, in order to make joint use of resources and to develop where possible centralized plans for auxiliary operations such as cataloging.
4. The libraries of Missouri must be financed at a more adequate level through joint effort on the part of localities and of the state government.
- a. Localities must move steadily toward the legal tax rate limit of two mills (twenty cents on each hundred dollars assessed valuation), which is now achieved by only fifteen percent of Missouri units.

- b. The state, under general responsibilities for education and specific constitutional obligations for library service, must rapidly increase its contribution from the present five percent of library expenditures to one-quarter of the total, a sum of \$1,000,000 per year for local library units, and in time should put state support of libraries on the same basis as state support of schools.
  - c. State funds for local library service, as at present, should be distributed in a way to give some help to all libraries and special equalization help to districts with limited local wealth, but equalization grants should be based on current costs of library service and should be made only to libraries which achieve adequate minimum size, and special consideration should be given to regional units made up of two or more counties.
- 5. The Missouri State Library should be strengthened so that it can stand behind the service agencies over the state and so that it can play a central guidance role in developing a state-wide system of library service.
  - 6. The legal basis for library service in Missouri, while basically sound, should be re-examined to meet the needs of a state-wide system of libraries, particularly in more direct provision for unified county and unified regional libraries.
  - 7. Steps should be taken as rapidly as possible to provide legal certification of professional personnel in libraries, in order to protect the people of Missouri and to insure full return from tax expenditures.





