

## THE YAKIMA VALLEY REGIONAL LIBRARY

### OUR FIRST TEN MONTHS

On March 1, 1951 the Yakima Valley Regional Library was formed by the merging of the Yakima County Library and the Yakima City Library.

The assets were such that it was possible to start at once to attempt to solve the problems.

First and foremost, we had a staff of experienced, capable people who were interested in making a success of the project of building a new library from two established ones. Another asset was the friendliness between the members of each of the former staffs. This resulted in no added handicap of personality conflicts between the staffs. We respected each other.

Secondly, the Regional Library Board, in the letter of appointment to the Acting Librarian, stated "Full speed ahead is the desire of the Board". Therefore, both the staff and the Acting Librarian felt free to go ahead as rapidly as possible.

Finally, it was both an asset and a liability for the merger to have taken place very quickly. There had been discussion and planning toward the merger for several months by the two library boards, but the actual agreement was reached only a week prior to the first of March. It was an asset, in that the two staffs had no time to get involved in long discussions beforehand. It was a liability for the same reason.

The problems facing our Regional Library on March 1, were many. They varied from serious, involved ones, to very simple ones. One never could be sure which was which.

The basic problem, having many aspects, came from the fact that we wanted to build a new library from two established ones, of comparable size but of unequal age. We also wanted to make major changes while still operating all services. Is it then, any wonder that all of us, staff and board alike, experienced some difficulty in thinking and acting on a regional basis instead of a county or city basis? Now, at the end of the first ten months, it appears that that difficulty has been successfully surmounted.

Procedures differed in the two libraries, one used Cutter numbers, the other did not, one used copy numbers, the other accession numbers, one pasted pockets and date slips in the front of the book, the other in the back, one charged fines for overdue books, the other did not; to state a few examples.

The first thing we did was to take a poll on the staff preferences. Those matters on which we agreed did not require additional discussion, but were immediately unified.

The first major change started, was that of placing the book pockets and date slips in the front instead of the back of the city library books. The active book stock in the city library was smaller, the books easily available, and those of us who had worked with both felt the front cover placing more efficient. Two typists were employed to do this work which was started in early March but not completed until August.

One of the big problems facing both the city and county libraries had been lack of space. Therefore, the first administrative problem in the Regional Library

was to plan for the best use of the available space.

The first step was the consolidation of the mending departments because the mending for the city library was done in part of the area at the rear of the city library basement which we planned to use for the bookmobile department.

By placing the bookmobile department in the city building, all the bookmobiles would have off-the-street parking. The county bookmobiles had had to park on the street and load from the sidewalk. Furthermore, the city basement was only five steps down from the alley level. The county basement where the county bookmobile department was housed was fifteen steps down from street level. Furthermore, the bookmobiles often had to be parked up or down the street from the entrance adding considerable distance in the mechanics of loading. This was very bad in rainy weather.

We planned to use the city library building, located on the corner of Third and 'A' Streets for the center of service to the public. The adult circulation department, the boys and girls room, the film and music service, the reference department and bookmobile service would all be housed there. Only the most active book collection could stay there as space was at a premium. T

The cataloging, ordering, processing and mending departments, mail service and branch service as well as the administrative office would be in the county library building (rented quarters) which was midway between First and Second Streets on 'A' Street. The room at the city hall, located on the corner of Second and 'B' Streets, would continue to house files of magazines over five years old. However, we also freed some space to house some of the more inactive book stock. The county library had just completed its fifth year of service, so the book stock was not so badly worn. The city library book stock was weeded (3,862 books from the city collection were withdrawn in 1951) but this weeding was not as thorough as it would have been had the pressure of time not been so great. However, the books were sorted. No adult book was allowed to stay upstairs in the adult circulation department unless it had circulated within the past three years. No adult book was allowed in the building unless it had circulated since 1945 (naturally reference books are not included).

We cleared an area in the rear of the basement 19' x 36' which we used for the bookmobile department. We were especially anxious to move the former county library bookmobile department before the middle of May because at that time we start discontinuing our school stops and prepare to change to our summer schedule. This results in having a greater proportion of our book stock on the shelves.

The area cleared was painted and shelving rearranged. Because it was a basement area we used cloud gray and lined the shelves with oriental red. A printed linoleum reflecting those same colors was used on the concrete floor. Only because the building was so old, and the concrete floor so unusually dry did we consider the use of printed linoleum a wise economy. We knew we could not replace our building for at least five years, but we hope it will not be necessary to use it much longer than that.

After moving the two bookmobile departments together, we still operated them on a more or less "status quo" basis for the summer. This was done for several reasons. First, we had to become used to each other and each other's problems.

Secondly, we felt we wished to preserve the best of ~~the~~ both and too hasty action might not make that possible. Finally, we did not have the extra time nor energy to work out the changes.

Some of the problems which had to be faced by the time the Fall and Winter bookmobile schedules went into effect were these:

One bookmobile had been operating on a weekly schedule, the other two on a two week schedule.

One bookmobile served the school children at schools during the noon hour, the other two were given school time.

Very little staff time had been provided for the one bookmobile outside of the actual hours of operation.

We engaged an additional bookmobile librarian. This position had been provided for in the city library budget, but had not been filled.

We decided that four long established weekly neighborhood stops in Yakima City should be continued on the weekly basis but that all new stops would be on the two week schedule. We felt it was neither fair to the library nor to the children to give service to them at schools unless school time was provided. This eliminated services to two schools formerly served. However, we added one school in September and by December a second school not formerly served had requested such service to start in January. When the traffic in the bookmobile can be regulated as is easily possible when school time is given, the children get the benefit of having a librarian's service. There are fewer cases of children taking books home they do not and cannot read, and they get much more individual attention. When noon hour stops were in operation I had members of the staff express their frustrated feeling when children would ask for a book the staff member knew was on the shelf, but because of the crush of the number in the bookmobile at the time, the book could not be reached. In cold weather, the children would suffer from the cold while waiting outside to get into the bookmobile.

The months of June and July were spent in clearing the space in the city hall room to shelve the books taken there, in rearranging the stack room in the basement so that desk space could be provided for the registration work, and in finishing the backlog of cataloging in the city building so that we could have one cataloging department, and that one housed in the county library quarters.

We also felt a regional library salary schedule should be in force because there existed inequalities. Therefore, both a board committee and a staff committee was appointed, each to work independently at first and then cooperatively in order to get the full benefit from each. A salary schedule was adopted and put into effect on July 1, 1951.

A Workshop on Regional Libraries was conducted by Mrs. Carma Zimmerman and Dr. Robert Leigh on the University of Washington Campus sponsored by the Library School. Four members of our staff attended. Two of us attended all three weeks, one for two weeks and one could be there for only one week. We felt it was a wise expenditure of time, money and effort. We had been lost in the many details and needed to lift our sights to the over-all view.

In August we accomplished our goal so far as the reorganization of the use of space was concerned. We closed the city library building for two weeks, but kept the bookmobile schedules. We did a little remodelling, a great deal of rearranging and had the entire building redecorated on the inside. The total cost did not exceed \$2,500 but only because of the cooperation of the firms and the contractors as well as the aid supplied by the staff who worked hard doing the rearranging, moving of books, etc.

We did take almost an hour each morning for 'coffee hour' over at the county building and used the time for a discussion period, talking over various ideas for improving our routines, our needs and our philosophy. The staff members on vacation during that time acted as if they really regretted missing that period of readjustment. I think it did break down the final barriers. We became one staff in fact as well as on paper. Those two weeks were strenuous for all of us because of the hard physical work but such miracles were accomplished in making the library attractive and convenient to use that we had a marvelous uplift of spirits.

The various firms with whom we dealt seemed to do all they could to help our money stretch over our needs. Mr. Yoxall, who was in charge of the painting gave us excellent workmen who used good materials, at a most reasonable cost.

The charging desk was moved from the center of the library in front of the entrance to a side position adjacent to the entrance, thus giving as good control, but providing more work space and being less obtrusive.

The linoleum was badly worn in one spot so we had to replace part of it. The Chamber of Commerce very generously arranged and paid for a 'Fruit Bowl of the Nation' inset. This is most attractive and has created quite a bit of interest.

An electric drinking fountain was installed.

One stairway was floored over and book slots were cut in the wall for the returning of books with the result that the slipping of books takes place in a more secluded spot. Formerly the piles of slipped and unslipped books were visible even from the street.

Our goal was to provide better working space for the staff and greater ease for the public to use the books and materials. We did have to eliminate some table space, but by rearranging the stacks we were able to provide enough space between the ranges for chairs. This seems to have been appreciated by the users of the library.

We also wanted to have the books featured as a person entered the library. Formerly one first met a barricade in the form of the charging desk. A second barricade was formed by the card catalog which successfully hid most of the books from sight as one entered. Now as one enters, there is a greater feeling of space, and books, not the barricades, meet the eye.

When a building is too small and the walls are not changed, no amount of illusion will overcome the problem of space.

The card catalog is difficult to use at times because of lack of space between it and the table on which slipped books are placed prior to shelving.

The reference room has only space for two people to sit. Often even that space is preempted by the staff.

The reading room has space for twenty-one readers at the tables. This in a city of 38,000 in a library serving as the main library for a region of 116,000 population!

The film and music department is in a small room formerly used as an office, a space entirely inadequate for the amount of use made of those services.

We are pleased that we can provide an illusion of space. We are pleased to have simplified some routines in order to free staff time to help patrons find their material. But we hope that more and more of the public will realize how they themselves are being cheated by having their library housed in a building of 1906 vintage with a 1917 'temporary addition' located in a fast growing area in 1952. Entirely too much time and strength of staff members goes into chasing between three buildings for materials, and doing much additional work to help give excellent service in spite of many handicaps. The users of the library wanting material not used frequently enough to keep it housed in the building must ask for it a day before they need it.

However, in spite of these problems we feel we are improving our service.

Prior to last March we were stating that the formation of a regional library would result in better service for the same expenditures, that more services could be added and that such a step would result in good for the users of both the city and county libraries.

At the end of our first ten months as a Regional Library, busy as we have been with the problems of reorganization, we find more and more evidence of the truth of those statements made prior to last March.

On December 1, 1951, we started a new service, a circulating record collection, which has been popular beyond all expectations.

The service started as a joint city-county project last year, the circulation of 16 mm sound films, has grown constantly.

The staff does extend itself to give service of a high type in spite of all handicaps of space and inconvenience.

At the workshop Dr. Leigh remarked that often in a merger of county and city libraries, service in the rural areas suffered. Those on our staff who heard this remark took it seriously. Why would it be true? How could it be prevented?

We decided that the staff is always surrounded by the city people and are very aware of their needs -- so might be quicker to meet them.

We decided it could be prevented by keeping the county people in our minds constantly. When a new service is started, how can it be planned to reach all our people? In the case of our records, our branch librarians and bookmobile librarians have lists of those we own, take reserves for the ones wanted. Postage on records is so high we do not mail them out, but we fill as many reserves as possible for each branch, sending the records with our monthly delivery of

books. The branch librarian first fills the requests and then circulates the records until time to return them with her next monthly shipment of books back to headquarters.

We send our monthly film list to the branches. However, the films have to be borrowed from and returned to the main library.

Our reference librarian has been visiting one of our branches and becoming acquainted with branch needs so she can be of more service to all of them. Likewise, she goes on one bookmobile run in a two week period as does almost every member of the staff. This keeps all of us in a more 'regional' frame of mind.

Our children's librarians keep all the children in mind and respond to requests from the branch and bookmobile departments for aid in selecting books and improving service to children.

Even though, during this first ten months, the most obvious changes have taken place in the city building, we feel all services have improved because of greater cooperation and interest.

The circulation records, especially during October, November and December, would seem to point to this fact since all services show an increase in circulation over the same period of the previous year.

We have been interested in noting the economies resulting from the merger. One of the biggest savings has been in registration costs. This has been surprising to us, because even as separate libraries, we had tried to merge our registrations. However, when we became one library, we could eliminate the duplication of the records for county borrowers kept at the county headquarters. We simplified the forms and placed the work in charge of two staff members who were given work space where they would not be interrupted by the public. As a result the time between the application's being taken and the issuing of the card has been much shorter than ever before. We have not had to hire extra help as we did in previous years and every service has benefitted. The bookmobile department has especially appreciated being able to take an application on one run and hand out the card on the next. The branches also appreciate the shortened period of waiting for the borrower's cards.

So, registration costs will be lower because we use fewer supplies, less filing space and much less time in typing and filing. Furthermore both the staff and the public are happier to have less lag between the taking of the registration and the issuing of the card.

There still remains much to be done. We have a regional shelf list now for the fiction, both adult and juvenile, but have not yet integrated the non-fiction shelf list.

We know each department has certain hopes for the improvement of service and streamlining of routines so that work is accomplished as efficiently and easily as possible.

We feel that our service has improved in quality as well as in quantity although our staff has not been increased. Since both the former county and city libraries were understaffed, using any criteria we could find, we feel that it is almost beyond belief that we could make this statement.

In conclusion, we feel the specialists on our staff have a greater opportunity to give service to more people -- that we shall discover more ways in which we can point to greater savings.

We are sure that time and money is saved in the ordering and cataloging of books. However, because of the extra work involved in integrating the work, we have not felt the full force of this saving as yet.

The high point of the year came at the final Board meeting when the Trustees asked the Regional Librarian and her staff for an estimate of space needed in a new building. This is the first definite step toward the solving of the major problem facing us.