

Lucy Hart Peaden. The First Five Years of the Charlotte County Library, 1937-1942. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April, 2011. 64 pages. Advisor: Ronald E. Bergquist

On November 2, 1937, the Charlotte County Free Library opened its doors with five service goals to meet for the rural community. As the trailblazers of "David's Children," the name given to the nine other public libraries given by David K.E. Bruce to Southside Virginia communities, the librarians and trustees of the Charlotte County Free Library worked together to make the institution an overwhelming success. Over the next five years, despite a recession, Jim Crow politics, and World War Two, the library became a vital part of the rural farming community. How these goals were accomplished and the individuals behind these achievements will be investigated in this paper against the backdrop of the history of American public libraries.

Headings:

Libraries and rural areas

Libraries and society -- United States -- History -- 20th century

Public libraries -- Virginia

Rural libraries -- Virginia -- Charlotte County

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE CHARLOTTE COUNTY LIBRARY, 1937-1942

by
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2011

Approved by

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1. Acknowledgements

Much gratitude is extended to Jim Watkins, Librarian of the Charlotte County Library, for giving me free reign of the library in performing my research. Jim has always been one of my loudest cheerleaders when it comes to working in a public library, and I treasure his advice.

I greatly appreciate the guidance of Ron Bergquist, my fascinating advisor, who always offered a thoughtful perspective. I found much inspiration in his historical research on small town libraries in Moore County, North Carolina.

Michael Taylor was incredibly patient throughout my time researching and writing. I am so grateful for him.

My dear siblings, Anne (a middle school librarian) and Thomas (a college student during my time as a graduate student), were always there to commiserate with me and to remind me to keep a sense of humor throughout this semester.

Last but not least, my parents, Liz and Bret Peaden, have always been tremendously supportive in all of my endeavors. For everything – from the hot meals on Sunday nights after I spent time researching to their incredible insight and care – I thank them.

2. Table of Contents

1.	Acknowledgements.....	1
2.	Table of Contents.....	2
3.	Preface.....	3
4.	Introduction.....	4
5.	Historical Study as a Research Method	5
	What is Historical Research?.....	5
	Why study rural library history?	7
	Research questions.....	9
	Hypothesis.....	10
6.	History of Charlotte County, Briefly	11
7.	The “Rural Problem”	13
	Library Service at the Turn of the Century and Carnegie’s Impact.....	14
	Library Conditions in Virginia from 1904 to 1936.....	17
	David K.E. Bruce’s Solution in the Era of Andrew Carnegie	19
	Chapter 7 Notes.....	24
8.	Starting the Charlotte County Free Library	25
9.	The Five Objectives	27
10.	The Major Players.....	28
	David K.E. Bruce.....	28
	Library Board Members.....	29
	Librarians and Library Aides	31
	Mary Morton Barksdale (1937-1940).....	31
	Winnie Coalson (1940-1942).....	36
	Mary Virginia Osborne (1942-1942).....	38
	Florence Baker (1942-1943).....	39
	Janie E. Johnson.....	39
	State-wide Administrators	40
	Patrons.....	41
11.	How the Objectives Were Met.....	43
	Bringing Service to All	45
	The Bookmobile.....	45
	Service to African Americans	49
12.	Conclusion	52
	References.....	53

3. Preface

In the spring of 2006, I took a class at the University of Virginia entitled “Virginia History, 1861-2005” in which I wrote a short paper on an aspect of the Old Dominion. After working at the media center in college and at my home library over the summer, I was beginning to think that I was interested in librarianship as a career. I decided to write on the history of my home library in Charlotte County and specifically David K.E. Bruce’s response to the “Rural Problem” throughout Southside Virginia.

I have continued to be interested in my home library’s legacy over the past five years, and I always assumed that I would expand this research into my Master’s Paper topic. However, such a study had already been performed by Conner (1984). I decided to give a more detailed history of all eleven libraries donated by Bruce, but I quickly realized that it would be too tremendous an undertaking in a few short months. Just as I was beginning to have doubts my topic, Jim Watkins, librarian of the Charlotte County Library, offered me full range of the archives. On Sundays and Mondays in the winter of 2011, I spent much of my time in Charlotte Court House engrossed in the late 1930s and early 1940s; on my car rides home, I had to mentally re-enter 2011. In reading the archives, I found a fount of fascinating information. Charlotte residents have much to be proud of in reviewing their history. I narrowed the topic to the history of the first five years of the library, which demonstrates the earliest days of the library system and how it survived. Although other libraries of David’s Children deserve to have their stories told, I suppose I am just partial to Charlotte County.

4. Introduction

Between 1937 and 1942, eleven counties in Southside and Central Virginia were granted free public libraries by an anonymous donor. This was unique at the time because few places in the Old Dominion could boast such an institution in their domain. Even fewer rural areas were so fortunate to have a library or anything similar to it available to all. Southside Virginia, however, did, and the region led the trend for the entire state.

The first county to receive the gift of a public library was Charlotte. Over the course of five years, Charlotte County guided its neighbors in all matters of the program. With remarkable librarians and board members, the library served its patrons with a variety of programs, carefully planned collections, and widely used services. Its donor, whose identity was soon exposed to be Ambassador David K.E. Bruce, also continued to contribute support throughout the library's first five years. In that time, the library addressed ways to better serve its populace, whether through a bookmobile or by joining other libraries in a regional system, as it also confronted the Depression, World War Two, and segregation. While the rest of the nation was trying to figure out the "rural problem," Charlotte County had solved it and was thriving because of its free library.

5. Historical Study as a Research Method

What is Historical Research?

Although some in the research field question the validity of historical research as true scientific research, Connaway and Powell (2010) demonstrate its worth, especially for librarians, by devoting a chapter of it in *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*.

Quoting George J. Mouly, they explain that “the basic purposes of historical research are to ‘provide a clear perspective of the present’ and to facilitate planning for the future by identifying general principles applicable to recurring situations” (p. 245). Such a goal is worthy of library history; unfortunately the realm has long suffered a reputation of poor quality, which does not aid in its case for being authentic scientific research. Connaway and Powell, however, point to a recent trend in which library history is becoming more current and scholarly (p. 254). By seriously examining the past, historians and librarians are able to better understand the organization: its trends, its policies, and its current role in the community.

Connaway and Powell also note Tosh and Lang’s theory of “historical awareness,” which is based on difference, context, and process. These three principles are explained in the following ways:

Difference is the “recognition of the gulf which separates our own age from all previous ages. Context means that the setting for the subject of the enquiry must be retained. Process is “the relationship between events

over time,” which makes the events more relevant “than if they were viewed in isolation” (p. 245).

By understanding these three features, librarian historians can more deeply interpret how the institution is situated within society. This method requires a more in-depth study than chronology, which essentially provides a timeline of events. By examining a library’s history in the context of its surroundings throughout time, rich interpretations may be made that can be helpful in future endeavors.

Connaway and Powell list histories of institutions and organizations among the six different types of historical research (p. 247). They also provide a list of acceptable sources of historical information. From that list, I have compiled the following list of materials that I have used for this study:

1. Official records (laws, minutes, annual reports of organizations, etc)
2. Newspapers and other periodicals
3. Archives (*County Library Log*)
4. Manuscripts
5. Letters
6. Biographies
7. Historical studies
8. Schedules, agendas, and so on (p. 248).

As evidenced from this list, a mixture of primary and secondary resources have been used to conduct this history.

Connaway and Powell also suggest the six following steps in conducting historical research:

1. Identification of a problem of historical significance
2. Collection of background information (i.e. literature review of the secondary sources)
3. Formulation of a hypothesis when possible
4. Gathering of evidence or data (including verification of the authenticity of the primary sources and the validity and reliability of their contents)

5. Organization and analysis of the pertinent data (more often qualitative than quantitative)
6. Interpretation of the findings or the drawing of conclusions

I used this guide, although I organized the parts of this historical research differently.

After stating the research problem and my hypothesis, I will offer evidence to support my theory. Intertwined with these examples will be literature reviews to fit in with the specific service and conditions of the time.

Finally, I will make a conscious attempt in this research study to be objective and unbiased. Because “historical research is often rather subjective in nature and thus relatively susceptible to researcher bias” (Connaway & Powell, p. 253), I will strive to be honest in presenting the facts and providing my interpretation of them.

Why study rural library history?

The study of library history enjoys prominence in both the scholarly and recreational realms. Journals such as the *Journal of Library History* and *Library History* provide fruitful insights to students while Stuart A.P. Murray’s recent *The Library: An Illustrated History* and numerous magazine articles offer information to other interested parties. For over sixty years the American Library Association (ALA) has hosted the Library History Round Table (LHRT), a group which “exists to facilitate communication among scholars and students of library history, to support research in library history, and to be active in issues, such as preservation, that concern library historians” (ALA LHRT, 2011). The School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) offers a class to students interested in the subject entitled “History of Libraries and Other Information-Related Cultural Institutions.”

Despite the wealth of information available to library history enthusiasts, one point has been made numerous times: rural public library history is often overlooked (Bergquist, 2006; Marcum, 1991a; Marcum, 1991b; Marcum, 1994). As Deanna Marcum (1994) explains, “urban libraries have been the subject of historical analysis [...] yet, very little in [*sic.*] known about the origins of public libraries in rural America” (p. xiii). Citing William A. Link’s study of schools in rural Virginia, Marcum (1991b) gives two reasons for the lacking understanding:

[Link] observes that the rural past is hard to comprehend fully for two reasons. First, decentralization and regional distinctions make the rural experience more difficult to understand than the urban experience. Second, the sources of rural history, in comparison to those of urban history, are scattered, largely oral and unwritten, and often unpreserved and lost in the oblivion of the past (p. 89).

This, she argues, can be translated to the study of rural public libraries, and as a result, there is often very little written. Suzanne M. Stauffer (2007) offers another reason for the shortage of rural library history:

Until recently, research into the history of the American public library has focused on the institution itself, relying on statistical data and public records to document its institutional history rather than exploring the social and cultural context in which the library was established, the community that created it and why it did so, and the characteristics of those who used it and the use that they made of it (p. 387).

This trend may be directly related to Link’s second explanation of the difficulties posed by materials available. Although Stauffer is speaking to library history in general, Marcum has made the point that any challenge affecting the broader scope is even more deeply felt by rural library history.

While it is true that there is more scholarly material focusing on urban and city libraries than on rural and small town libraries, there seems to have been a slight increase in the amount on the later in the past two decades since Marcum’s article (Bergquist,

2006; Marcum 1994; Passet, 1991; Rochester, 1995; Swain, 1995; Valentine, 1993, Valentine 1996; Valentine & Daniel, 1990). Still, finding historical research relating to rural areas is challenging, much for the reasons that Link explained and Marcum echoed.

To add to the difficulty, few studies have been conducted regarding rural library history in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In fact, this is a deficiency lamented by John T. Kneebone in a 1999 article in *Virginia Libraries*. After fielding a reference question about library history in Virginia and conducting research, Kneebone found that the archives available for such an endeavor were abundant, but “not only was there no comprehensive history of libraries in Virginia, but hardly any of the necessary scholarly foundations for such a work had been laid” (p. 16). In his capacity as the director of the Publications and Educational Services Division of the Library of Virginia, Kneebone helped establish the Virginia Library History Awards, which recognizes scholars of the subject.

Although there has been increased awareness in recent years of the lack of rural library histories both at large and in Virginia, there are still many stories untold. This Master’s Paper attempts to provide the history of one rural public library in Southside Virginia, but there are many others – nine related to the topic of this paper – that deserve recognition.

Research questions

When the Charlotte County Free Library opened its doors to the public on November 2, 1937, it did so with five objectives to adequately service its patrons. After five years in operation, were these goals met? If so, who were the major players in addressing the objectives and how were they fulfilled?

Hypothesis

The five objectives of the Charlotte County Free Library were met by 1942.

Individuals who played a large part in this were David K.E. Bruce, librarians and library aides, library board members, administrators at the State Library of Virginia, and patrons.

These goals were fulfilled through rigorous outreach, increased library service, and governmental assistance programs.

6. History of Charlotte County, Briefly

Charlotte County is a large, rural county located in Southside Virginia, which makes up the south central region of the Commonwealth. Shaped like Africa, its four hundred seventy-five square miles are populated by 12,586 residents (Charlotte County, 2008). Although the county seat, Charlotte Court House, is within eighty-five miles of three bustling cities, including the state capital, Charlotte County has remained small and quiet since being carved into a county from Lunenburg County in 1764.

Well-known figures most often associated with the county include Patrick Henry, John Randolph, and David K.E. Bruce. Charlotte County also enjoys the distinction of being the first county in Virginia to demand independence from England in 1776 (Ailsworth, Keller, Nichols, & Walker, 1979; Priddy & Price, 1930). George Washington stayed in Charlotte Court House during a visit to Virginia, and Thomas Jefferson is believed to have contributed to the design of the court house, if not to have been its architect. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Henry's last and Randolph's first debate took place in that building (since rebuilt). If this research were employing the democratic tradition of library history, these champions of democracy would be especially useful in my argument.

Although there is no indication of a public library in Charlotte County prior to Bruce's donation in 1937, the institution was not unheard of among the county's earlier

residents. In 1838, William I. Watkins of Charlotte Court House wrote to Dr. Clement Watkins of Philadelphia saying:

An association of gentlemen in the vicinity of Charlotte Court House propose making up a library on a limited scale, and have requested me to make some inquiries as to the best terms the selected books can be obtained, and as you are convenient to some of the largest establishments I will take it as a favor if you will aid me in obtaining the desired information (Eggleston, 1940, p. 79).

Elizabeth U. Gaines, who found the letter in an old trunk in 1940, suspected at the time that the collection was purchased and the private library was established, lasting about twenty-five years. She stated that there was “no record of its existence after the Civil War” (p. 79). Noticing the significance of the year of Watkins’ letter to the library that had been established in Charlotte County just three years earlier, Gaines says “it seems that its descendant, our present beautiful library, like the century plant, was one hundred years bursting into flower” (p. 79).

Other libraries existed in Charlotte County prior to the free library established in 1937, but no records of public libraries were found in this investigation. Gaines also notes the collection of the Honorable Hugh Blair Grigsby, a champion of the Virginia Historical Society and chancellor of the College of William and Mary (Priddy & Price, 1930), calling it “the most interesting private library in the county” (Eggleston, 1940, p. 78). In the 1930 *Charlotte County Geography Supplement*, Priddy and Price wrote that there were “libraries in practically all of the schools.” In order for “every child in the county [to have] a chance to obtain a real elementary education, [...] there must be plenty of interesting reading material,” among other things (p. 24). Although Charlotte County citizens made use of libraries prior to Bruce’s donation in 1937, there were no public opportunities available to all.

7. The “Rural Problem”

The turn of the twentieth century was a pivotal time for the United States. The leaders, who were boys and young men during the Civil War, had experienced the highs of the Gilded Age and were aware of the exciting technological and cultural advances exhibited at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Conversely, they had also witnessed the horrors of racial hatred and the paranoia which resulted from immigration. As the American frontier closed, forward-thinking individuals took charge of the country to give it an important international hold. During this progressive time, they undertook reformation and organization of the social, political, and economic spheres to apply lessons learned from Reconstruction, past economic depressions, and the Spanish-American War. As Theodore Roosevelt hoped, these efforts would result in the United States “[winning] the goal of true national greatness” (p. 18)

One of the ways in which the country could attain brilliance was culturally, and at a time when many aspects of society were being modernized, such an endeavor was not difficult for those in charge. With the emergence of the middle class, the availability of education and accessibility of leisure time meant that there was only the question of how to reach people. Libraries, though not a new concept, received new recognition as their systems were reorganized and gained prominence as significant places for social and educational enrichment. Even their vocabulary was given a nationalistic tone, and a

favorite quote of one library association asserted that “a public library is a democracy’s best insurance policy” (*County Library Log*, 1940).

Entities that were more public replaced private libraries towards the end of the 1920s. Such centers were already in most cities, so a greater effort was placed on reaching more rural areas. This coincided with a national effort to fix the “rural problem” which plagued the majority of the country; the openness of the areas presumably kept citizens without advancements such as electricity, without social interaction, and without higher education. In other words, rural residents were without culture as perceived by many social reformers, an unfair and untrue stereotype which still holds true for many ideologies today. In many ways, the South was the most attacked for its wide, open areas and association with the Black Belt.

The vast state of Virginia has many remote pockets, and in the years of the “rural problem” these localities were scrutinized by outsiders with a helpful albeit oftentimes condemnatory eye. Valentine (1996) has discussed how northern philanthropists were helpful in establishing libraries in North Carolina communities, but little more after the founding (p. 272). Although a mid-Atlantic state, the Old Dominion is often lumped with the rest of the South and is therefore susceptible to generalizations that define the region as unrefined, slow, and full of ‘rednecks’ or ‘hillbillies.’

Library Service at the Turn of the Century and Carnegie’s Impact

Library service changed tremendously around the turn of the century. Although the American Library Association (ALA) had been established for almost twenty-five years by 1900, much advancement was made around that time. For one thing, the role of librarian became recognized as a profession that required training. Melvil Dewey, creator

of the Dewey Decimal Classification, ushered in “a new era of librarianship” when he started a library school at Columbia College in 1887 (OCLC). Library training provided a more standard way of providing library service throughout the nation, and it was one in which women could serve. Dewey, who has been called the “Father of Modern Librarianship,” was also instrumental in helping to establish networks and a more united feel as the founder of *The Library Journal* (OCLC).

The ALA, and the state library associations that were soon established, helped to promote increased library service throughout the nation. Women’s clubs, such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs also supported putting libraries on the national agenda. Such prominence was useful to the libraries that had been formed by women’s clubs (Watson, 1994; Watson, 1996), interested parties in communities (Colson, 1976; Marcum, 1991a; Marcum, 1991b; Marcum, 1994 Valentine, 1996), and donors because they soon switched hands to the local government. In many cases, this ensured a more thorough service to all and much-needed funds.

Another cause of change in library service around the turn of the century is the Carnegie philanthropy. While other philanthropy efforts are worthy of note (Haskell, 1996; Stauffer, 2007), no library history is complete without a brief overview of Andrew Carnegie, the “Patron Saint of Libraries.” After immigrating to the United States from Scotland in 1856 as a young boy, Carnegie used his entrepreneurial work ethic to transform himself into a steel tycoon. In 1901, he sold his business then, “at the age of sixty-six, healthy, alert, and keenly interested in politics and literature, Carnegie retired and devoted the rest of his life to philanthropy” (Bobinski, p. 10). He had written much on social issues and philanthropy, saying in “The Best Fields for Philanthropy” that “the

best gift which could be given to a community was a free library” (Bobinski, p. 11).

Libraries offered the dual purpose of enlightening their patrons while teaching immigrants the principles of democracy (Mickelson, 1975).

All told, throughout 1886 to 1919, Carnegie “donated \$56,162,622 for the construction of 2,509 library buildings throughout the English-speaking parts of the world. More than \$40,000,000 of this amount was given for the erection of 1,679 public libraries in 1,312 communities of the United States” (Bobinski, p. 3). Although some are unsure of how to define Carnegie’s place in library history, with Sidney Ditzion criticizing his refusal to help libraries without the means to support themselves and others questioning his motivation for so many last monuments, there is no question that Carnegie was a major player. Bobinski lists numerous historians (pp. 184-186) who believe that turn-of-the-century library growth and library service as we know it today would not have been the same without Carnegie’s generosity. Of Carnegie, Stuart A.P. Murphy says “no other individual before or since has made a greater single impact on American public libraries” (p. 182).

While Carnegie is an important figure in library history, rural areas “were somewhat neglected” (Bobinski, p. 201). Virginia is a prime example of this. Because of its rural make-up, only two communities in the Old Dominion received grants for three public library buildings (pp. 19-20). According to Bobinski, the Old Dominion ranked forty-third of forty-six states that received Carnegie grants; the total amount of funding equaled \$78,000 (pp. 16-17).

Although the fact that Virginia was mostly rural probably played a role in it receiving few Carnegie grants for public libraries, another significant and likely cause is

that Virginia did not establish a library commission until 1904. Thomas Jefferson's proposal of a state library "became a reality in 1823" (Library of Virginia, 2004), but there was no state organization devoted to library needs available to communities or laws enabling them prior to this. Compared to Massachusetts, which enacted a law in 1848 for Boston to establish a public library (Bobinski, p. 6), it is understandable that Carnegie was wary of communities without state support.

Library Conditions in Virginia from 1904 to 1936

Although twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws enabling public libraries by 1896 (Bobinski, p. 6), the Commonwealth of Virginia did not. Only in 1904 did Virginia establish the State Library Board (Virginia Library Association, 1941). In December of 1905, the Virginia Library Association (VLA) was formed "as a collaborative enterprise between senior staff of the Virginia State Library (now the Library of Virginia), led by State Librarian John P. Kennedy, and librarians across the state" (Virginia Library Association). By having not only a state-wide library board but also a library association, library service in Virginia received more attention at the turn of the twentieth century.

One of the first actions made by the State Library Board was to survey Virginia libraries. This study found that "there were only nine small public libraries" throughout the Commonwealth (State Aid Committee, VLA, 1941). Nearly twenty years later, this number increased more than four times to forty public libraries. However, rural citizens were at a disadvantage. According to the VLA, "in 1925, 1,669,067 people, or 72 percent of the total population, were without public library service, 1,589,364 being rural and 79,903 being urban; sixty-eight counties were without any public libraries" (1941).

While “the Library of Virginia initiated a traveling library with boxes of books sent by train from town to town” (Library of Virginia, 2004), such a temporary set-up was not enough for residents of Virginia.

That the leaders apart from the State Library Board or the VLA gave any attention to the “rural problem” shows that they were trying to destroy the stigma associated with simple country folk. Governor Harry F. Byrd promoted a program for “Improving the Condition of the Farmer,” and in 1928 called for a Commission to Study the Condition of the Farmers of Virginia. A 1929 article in *Virginia Libraries* entitled “Libraries for Farmers” makes the case for the institutions. It was asserted that farmers actually *did* read, and they should not be left out of receiving information as well as enjoying the delights of leisurely reading (Tomlin, p. 14). Attention was given to “places of less than 2,500 population and the open country” in Dr. Wilson Gee’s 1928 *Public Education in Virginia*, a report which confirmed that “96.6 per cent of the rural population [was] without public library service” (*Virginia Libraries*, 1928, p. 3). Virginia’s largest population was also the least touched by academia.

There is no question that a crisis existed in Virginia, although the state was not alone in addressing its “rural problem.” Nevertheless, at a time when an estimated 45,069,897 Americans were without nearby public library service, Virginians did make up a large percentage of this number because of low funding (Johnsen, p. 63). In 1926, as the American Library Association called for swift and considerable reforms to be made nationwide to promote community outreach, literacy, and higher education, leading Virginia librarians joined the effort. A county library system was endorsed nationwide, and examples from California provided inspiration and direction for them.

In the spring of 1928, the Virginia State Library Extension Division began issuing *Virginia Libraries*, a quarterly newsletter distributed to members of the library community to inform them of meetings and conferences, political issues involving high education, suggestions for acquisitions, and more personalized notices of interest from around the state. Although sponsored by the state library, the writings of the periodical were realistic, meaning that the tone was not always positive. For example, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported on a number of occasions the mediocre state in which the library operated, and these analyses were included in the journal. With titles such as “This is the Kind of Thing You Wish You Didn’t Have to Print and “Virginia’s Dismal Library Facilities” by Virginius Dabney, who wrote many articles on the matter, there was certainly a critical attentiveness to the shortcomings of the system. Adequate funding was the principal solution, and the state was unable to provide much in the years of the Depression. Although the Virginia General Assembly passed an act “To Authorize the Establishment of County Free Library Systems and Regional Free Library Systems and to Provide for Their Operation and Maintenance” (Virginia Acts, 1936, Chap. 84 (Regional provisions of new library code) Sec. 365) in 1936, the realization of a strong library system was dependent upon private donations.

David K.E. Bruce’s Solution in the Era of Andrew Carnegie

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ambassador David K.E. Bruce, an honored diplomat, politician, and socialite joined the circle of library philanthropists as well as the nationwide effort to address the “rural problem.” A Marylander with ties to Southside

Virginia, he joined the nationwide campaign to enrich the lives of rural residents through county libraries.

Starting in 1937 with the Charlotte County Free Library, Bruce began anonymously providing funding for eleven county libraries in a region defined by its vastness—almost nothingness—and genteel lifestyle.¹ These gifts culturally enhanced the citizens' lifestyles of each locality by promoting literacy, community pride, and higher education. Focus on a better and more complete library system was addressed throughout the country and echoed in the state of Virginia by citizens, librarians, and legislators alike. For an area as isolated as Southside Virginia, the benevolence of Ambassador David K. E. Bruce was its saving grace in acquiring a significant portion of library circulation. According to Jane Stuart Conner, he “was aware of the importance of libraries to the cultural and educational lives of Virginians” (p. 2). In addition, he knew of and was inspired by the contributions that Andrew Carnegie had made in grants for public libraries throughout the country at the turn of the century. This act not only gave him the nickname of ‘Virginia’s Andrew Carnegie’ but also made him a beloved son of the area.

Bruce, a native of Baltimore with deep roots to Charlotte County through his Bruce relations, was born in 1898. As “a Bruce of Virginia,” he was aware of the fact that he was “related to the “best” families,” meaning that he was part of the state’s aristocracy (Lankford, p. 16). Although Bruce knew that he lived a life of privilege, he did not allow his ambitions to be clouded; he worked hard in school at Princeton, the University of Virginia, and the University of Maryland, fought courageously in World War I, practiced law in Baltimore, and wrote two histories before turning forty (Conner,

p. 1). In 1924, Bruce started his lifelong service to the government by being elected to the Maryland House of Delegates which was followed by a term “as vice consul in Rome during the years 1926 to 1928” and later as Delegate to the Virginia House from 1939 to 1942 while living in Charlotte County (Conner, p. 1). Furthermore, he “held numerous diplomatic posts around the world. He is the only American to have served as Ambassador to each of three major European nations – Great Britain, France, and Germany” (Conner, p. 2); he also served as the first emissary to the People’s Republic of China in 1973.

Despite being different from the average Southside Virginia resident, upon entering politics as a representative to both Maryland and Virginia, “Bruce sought to present himself to the voters as a candidate for office” because of his “notion of public service” (Lankford, p. 103). His library gifts certainly did enrich his persona, and citizens who benefited from the centers did express their overwhelming appreciation upon learning the identity of the donor.

When Bruce moved to Charlotte County in 1933 to take over the family estate, Staunton Hill, a Gothic Revival mansion built along the Staunton River in 1847, he began careers in business and farming. The exposure he gained by living in an area of great poverty showed him that the “area had not progressed much since” colonial times (Lankford, p. 102). He took the opportunity to assist the county by approaching the Board of Supervisors to offer “a public library to Charlotte County on the condition that the county would assume the expenses of the upkeep of the property” (Conner, p. 7). This was the first step in the procedure that would become Bruce’s philanthropy. As benefactor of the county libraries, Bruce did reserve his power to place guidelines for the

centers. These standards included demanding that the libraries follow section 365 of the 1936 Code of Virginia, establish and “be governed by a Board of Trustees selected by the circuit court judge,” and “employ a trained librarian” (Conner, p. 6). The average cost of such a gift ranged from \$25,000 to \$40,000 and usually included a newly constructed library building, “furnishings, equipment, and a basic collection of books” selected by Macgill James of the Peale Museum in Baltimore. Charlotte County’s library is distinct from the other donated libraries in that it did not receive a new building for its collection; instead, Bruce purchased an early building already established in the town square. Although given anonymously, Bruce dedicated many libraries to his family members.

Bruce’s contribution to Southside Virginia did not end when the buildings were constructed and the first volumes were placed on the shelves of the county libraries. His push for literacy spurred an eternal service in the endowed counties. Furthermore, Bruce’s county library system set an example for other parts of the state and set a standard for a statewide library system. In this way, an important aspect of Virginia’s “rural problem” was solved through cultural advancement. As Bruce brilliantly summed, “all libraries are good. They’re one of the few institutions that never did anybody any harm” (Conner, p. 34).

In investigating other library philanthropists, comparing Bruce’s motivations for giving to others’ is interesting. While Carnegie, perhaps because of the scope of his philanthropy, was often criticized for his largess, the recipients of the Bruce libraries showed gratitude to their benefactor. In fact, Charlotte County residents were so taken by his ability that they encouraged him to run for the United States Senate. While it may be easy to assume that Bruce was proud of his accomplishments, Nelson Lankford (1996)

believes that Bruce “looked on the 1930s as a personal lost decade” (p. 179). While some may find this debatable, thousands of Charlotte County (and beyond) residents found his library philanthropy worthy. In 1940, Randolph W. Church, Assistant State Librarian and president of the VLA called Bruce’s donations “the most important happening in the history of the county free library movement in the State” (“Rural Public Library Service,” *The University of Virginia News Letter*).

Chapter 7 Notes

ⁱ The eleven county libraries, in order by year established, were Charlotte (1937), Halifax (1938), Mecklenburg (1939), Lunenburg (1939), Pittsylvania (1939), Appomattox (1940), Brunswick (1940), Nottoway (1941), Patrick (1941), Franklin (1941), and Hanover (1942).

8. Starting the Charlotte County Free Library

With the passage of the 1936 act authorizing the establishment of county free library systems, Bruce was essentially given a template to ensure proper initiation of library service in Charlotte County. This act states that “the management and control of a county free library system [...] shall be vested in a board of five trustees” who are “appointed by the judge of the circuit court of such county” (Regional Provisions of New Library Code, 1936). H.B. “Cherm” Chermshire, the clerk of the circuit court, assisted the Honorable Robert F. Hutcheson in selecting the five board members: Dr. William R. Martin, Ruth K. Glover, D.C. Jackson, Howard F. Gilliam, and R.W. Bobbitt, superintendent of the schools.

With Dr. Martin serving as board chairman and Glover as secretary, the library board began making concrete plans for the library in July of 1937. They met frequently throughout the summer. A committee was established to create a policy of rules, regulations, and by-laws for the institution, and Martin was appointed to appear before the Board of Supervisors to discuss costs. The board decided to keep the library open from 10 A.M. until 4 P.M. every day except Sunday with an hour lunch between 12:30 and 1:30 P.M. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the library would reopen from 7 P.M. until 9 P.M. Glover was also asked to put a notice in the *Charlotte Gazette* inviting individuals interested in applying for the position of library to the clerk’s office on July 20 to meet

the library board. In each of their decisions, the board resolved to send Bruce notification, with some choices being subject to his approval.

Although at least two other women applied for the position of librarian at the new Charlotte County Free Library, the position went to Mary Morton Barksdale, with a start date of August 16, 1937 and a salary of seventy-five dollars a month. When the books had not arrived by the planned date, the board noted that “it would not be necessary for her to report until after she had completed her examinations at Columbia University” (Minutes, 1937). In September, she assisted Gilliam and Glover in selecting “suitable furniture for the Library, at a cost of approximately \$1,200” (Minutes, 1937). In her role as librarian, Barksdale was involved some of the basic stages of planning.

Although little was written on how the public reacted to the library on the day of its opening, November 2nd, 1937, much was written in the coming weeks, months, and years regarding its reception. After one year of service, nearly twenty-five percent of Charlotte County residents had registered for the library. In its second year, the library circulated materials nearly three times more than the previous year (Charlotte County Library Service – 1937-38; '38-39). By examining the five objectives established by Barksdale and the board in the library's first year, a better understanding of its first five years can be made.

9. The Five Objectives

According to a report in the *Charlotte Gazette* in November of 1938, a year after the library's opening, "objectives in administration of the Charlotte County Public Library in its first year [were] five-fold." The author (probably either Barksdale or Mrs. R. Page Morton, the secretary who replaced Glover), described them as follows:

- [stimulate] cultural interests
- [supplement] in voluntary and required educational activities
- [inform] of library services
- [meet] recreational needs
- [make] reading material accessible to all county readers

These goals were indeed worthy, and they were not necessarily confined to being objectives of only the first year. Any public library operating then (and now even) would see providing such services to its patrons as being long-term aims.

Because knowing exactly what the author of these objectives was hoping for at that time is impossible, I will attempt to interpret them in an historical sense. In some ways, it seems as if these goals overlap. Therefore, I will describe a certain service and point to how it relates to one (or more) of the five objectives. Examining how the Charlotte County Free Library operated will offer insight into how each objective was met in the first five years.

10. The Major Players

Before examining how Charlotte County residents were served by their library, it is important to recognize the individuals who worked to ensure the library's success. Some of these individuals are obvious – such as David K.E. Bruce, the donor – but others have often been ignored – such as Janie E. Johnson, whose title was “Negro library assistant.” Even the public deserves acknowledgment, for if they had not utilized the service, it would have not served its purpose.

David K.E. Bruce

Although a more thorough examination of Bruce is available in chapter 7, it is worth noting that Bruce gave more to the Charlotte County Free Library than its initial collection and the building. Before the doors had even been opened, a note was made in the minutes stating that he and his wife, Ailsa Mellon Bruce (daughter of Andrew W. Mellon) “had given to the Board of Supervisors the sum of \$5,000.00 to be credited to the Charlotte County Free Library Fund to be used for salary of Librarian for first year, to beautify the grounds, furnish the library and for such other purposes as to the Board should see fit” (Minutes, 7 September 1937). There are also multiple mentions in the *Minutes* noting his donations of books, stocks, and other funds. He was often included in the list of donated books published in the “Library Log” column in the *Charlotte Gazette*. When the library started running out of space for books, Bruce offered “a new building to

be used for storing books in stacks and shelves and to be also used as a work shop” (Minutes, 15 May 1939). He also secured an adjacent lot in 1940 for the library.

To recognize Bruce’s gifts, the library board always instructed the librarian to write a letter of thanks. When his identity as the donor of the library became common knowledge, it was included in library publications, such as the “Your Library Guide, 1938-1939” publication. In March of 1938, the library board asked the librarian to begin sending Bruce a monthly report of the library to keep him informed of its progress.

For his gifts, it appears as though Bruce was beloved by librarians and the public. Between 1938 and 1942, librarians of the Southside libraries met regularly and published the *County Library Log* with information about each of his donations. Calling themselves “David’s Children” and “David’s Rising Stars,” the librarians appear to have been happy to be associated with him and his libraries. In 1966, Goff and Marshall (1966) wrote the following of Bruce:

Charlotte County is greatly indebted to David K.E. Bruce for so much. It is hard to say just what he has done for our county for the beautiful public buildings which we enjoy would not have been possible without his generosity. Charlotte County should be, and I'm sure it is, especially grateful for the wonderful library which has meant and will mean so much to so many (p. 15).

For being so benevolent, Bruce created a lasting positive impression of himself while giving residents of Charlotte County a unique experience.

Library Board Members

As one of the conditions of the 1936 law enabling county libraries, the Charlotte County Free Library was managed by a library board. This group called themselves the Board of Trustees, and in Charlotte County, they were selected by Judge Hutcheson with

the assistance of circuit court clerk Chermiside. Chermiside's knowledge of Charlotte County residents proved useful for Judge Hutcheson. He noted the merits of possible appointees, saying of Ruth Glover that she "would be a valuable member, as she is active and a worker and takes interest in such matters" and of Howard Gilliam that he would be a "very valuable man; he is young, very public spirited and not at all narrow. He is doing fine work for the School situation and in my judgment, is a coming man in Charlotte and one who will prove valuable to the County. He is a man of very high character" (Chermiside, 1937). In consideration of another individual whom he thought Bruce would approve, Cherm warned of his health. Ultimately, Judge Hutcheson tapped Dr. Martin, Glover, Jackson, Gilliam, and Bobbitt, superintendent of the schools.

For the individuals who accepted Judge Hutcheson's appointment, the massive task that they agreed to undertake came with great honor. Each wrote to the judge expressing their gratitude for his consideration. Glover expressed this by saying "I appreciate your appointing me and deem it an honor to serve on the County Library Board. I shall do all I can to be of service in the functions [*sic*] of the Library" (Glover, 1937). Gilliam wrote "may I say that I will be very happy to serve our county in an [*sic*] capacity, to the best of my knowledge and ability" (Gilliam, 1937).

The first major change came the year after the library opened, with the departure of Glover. She was replaced by Mrs. R. Page Morton, who also took over her secretarial duties. In 1939, Gilliam was named chairman. By 1940, Chermiside joined the board. His wife had been highly supportive of landscaping the garden behind the library building.

Despite changes that occurred to the board throughout the first five years, one constant of each member is their dedication to the public library. They each undertook

important roles, often forming committees to study ways to change the library's guidelines (Minutes, 4 June 1942) or offering their time to travel to Richmond to pick out furniture (Minutes, 18 January 1938). They had the power to decide the librarian's salary. When confronted with significant issues, the board members discussed them to reach a united decision, such as in "favoring the WPA project for improving the the [*sic*] Library service in the county" (Minutes, 3 January 1939). They also took part in an investigative study to address the possibility of joining a regional system to assuage financial concerns. Although this plan had Bruce's backing, the board ultimately decided to keep the Charlotte County Free Library a one-county system.

Because much of what the Board of Trustees did was behind the scenes and the Minutes undoubtedly do not tell the full story, it is impossible to know how board members worked with each other or their impressions of their work. Still, their devotion to the library should not be ignored; their roles were vital to the beginning of the library.

Librarians and Library Aides

In the Charlotte County Free Library's first five years, four women served as librarian: Mary Morton Barksdale, Winnie Coalson, Mary Virginia Osborne, and Florence Baker. Numerous other individuals aided the librarians' efforts; they were employed by the Work Projects Administration (W.P.A.) and its National Youth Administration (N.Y.A.). Although their efforts are notable, I will closely examine the contributions of only one of them, Janie E. Johnson.

Mary Morton Barksdale (1937-1940)

Mary Morton Barksdale was the first librarian of the Charlotte County Free Library. After receiving an undergraduate degree at the Randolph-Macon Woman's

College in Lynchburg, Virginia, Barksdale earned her library degree from Columbia University in New York. While she was hired in the summer with an intended opening date in August, the delayed books put a hold on that plan. Instead, Barksdale was permitted to wait to report until after she had taken her exams at Columbia. By the time she arrived in Charlotte County, Barksdale was a qualified librarian making seventy-five dollars a month. By February, the Board of Trustees approved a ninety dollar salary.

As noted earlier in the section about the initiation of the library, Barksdale was involved in many behind-the-scenes endeavors, including selecting appropriate furniture and measuring for asphalt tiling (Minutes, 18 January 1938). As part of the agreement with the local school system, she also worked closely with teachers, notifying them of collections and managing their school library's circulation. It is important to note that before the new consolidated high schools, Randolph-Henry High School for white students and Central High School for Black students, were completed in the late 1930s, many community schools existed throughout the county. When the state library sent six hundred books in 1938 for the school libraries, Barksdale was in charge of explaining the circulation policy. She also presented monthly and annual reports to the Board of Trustees, and starting in March of 1938, she began sending monthly reports to Bruce.

Barksdale also worked closely with Macgill James, who selected the initial collection for Bruce, in choosing addition titles to add to the library. A letter to him six months after the library opened offers insight to her collection development practices as well as her impression of his:

There is, as you say, the question of what should be in a library, and that of what the community reads from points of interests and abilities. For first purchase I should say emphasize the back-log idea with consideration for community interests and abilities. I believe the library

should maintain standards of reading, create a demand and gradually influence habits and tastes of reading.

I still question the fact that 75% of our circulation is fiction. Perhaps the whole is above the average reader. There should be something for him but certainly not all. Neither do I think a library should aim down; it should stay a step ahead of its best reader.

Book selection is no small responsibility. We are delighted with our library and the selection you have made. I feel no inclination to criticize it (Minutes, 27 April 1938).

Following this, Barksdale added suggestions for new books in a variety of subjects.

Although it is clear that she did not want to offend James, she did admit that the library had been “severely criticized for [its] "datedness" (Minutes, 27 April 1938). By assisting James in selecting new books, Barksdale, who was well aware of the reading habits of her patrons, could ensure that appropriate titles reached them. Barksdale was also instrumental in securing books for African Americans, whether through the Rosenwald Fund or the Lend-a-Hand mission.

As the first librarian of the county’s first public librarian, Barksdale had much at stake to ensure that her work was successful. She became the spokesperson for the library, starting a “Library Log” column in the weekly *Charlotte Gazette* in 1938. The feature, which alerted the county of new books at the library, current and upcoming programs, humorous anecdotes, and library policies, allowed Barksdale to reach people who may not have known what to expect of the service. Other columns focused on circulation figures to show progress. One, titled “Charlotte Citizens Reading More,” stated that “small efforts at extension by the Charlotte County Public Library have widened reading horizons for many as evidenced by circulation statistics compared with last year” (*Charlotte Gazette*, 29 June 1939). Those statistics showed circulation that had more than doubled from one year to the next. Barksdale did not ignore the individuals

who were not registered users; in 1938, she asked “are you among the 850 people using the library? If you are not is there anything the library staff can do about it?” (“Library Log,” 25 August 1938).

One of the solutions to reaching Charlotte County folks who were not yet using the library was the bookmobile, a service that Barksdale embraced. In the summer of 1939, she wrote, “county-wide reading interest is obvious – county-wide service a necessity!” (“Charlotte Citizens Reading More,” 29 June 1939). Less than two months later, Barksdale and Charlotte County welcomed the vehicle and the service. By Thanksgiving that year, she joined C.W. Dickinson, Jr., director of School Libraries and Textbooks of the State Department of Education, and Dr. Douglas Freeman in Richmond to discuss bookmobile service in Charlotte County and throughout Virginia for a radio broadcast. Pleased with the reception that the bookmobile had enjoyed in its first three months, Barksdale remarked, “great interest has already been shown by many of Charlotte County’s rural population. Others are becoming interested daily” (WRNL transcript). At the conclusion of that interview, Barksdale assured the audience that “rural America reads” (WRNL transcript).

In addition to working with a variety of professionals in Charlotte County, Barksdale had a strong network of fellow librarians throughout Southside Virginia. When other Bruce libraries were established, their librarians joined Barksdale and others to discuss issues confronting their service. These meetings, the “pioneer movement started by Helen [Martin, librarian in Halifax County] and Mary [Barksdale], the foresighted librarians” were deemed successful (*County Library Log*, 27 January 1940). The women decided to meet quarterly; their gatherings were announced in the local papers.

The Southside Librarians, as they called themselves, soon began publishing a journal to highlight their discussions called the *County Library Log*. Barksdale's other suggestions for titles were *Pithaluenchame*, *Rural Record*, and *Pioneer Patter*. The illustrated *Log* was issued four times a year, between 1939 and 1941. Covering such topics as Barksdale's WRNL radio interview regarding the bookmobile and the most recent VLA meeting, *Log* entries were at times informative but at other times playful. The April 1940 issue featured a poem called "David's Rising Stars" in which Barksdale was described "Mary, the eager delight of club women, Always ready her audiences to win" beside suggestions for publicizing the library (*County Library Log*, April 1940). In the next issue, the "Librarian's Hobbies Versus Books" choices were examined; Mary's read "Mary is such a great and grand singer, To listen to her arias one would linger, But not Mary, if she can get just one look, At the very latest in a cook book" (*County Library Log*, July 1940). Also in this issue was an essay describing the merits and benefits of county libraries.

Barksdale's relationship with her colleagues offered her (and them) an opportunity of support. During the visit to Richmond in which she joined a radio broadcast discussing bookmobiles, Barksdale and Violet Ramsey, librarian of Appomattox County's library, spoke at the School Libraries Section of the Virginia Education Association's conference, which earned the two a picture in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. Clearly shown in their letters to each other is their appreciation of each other. Barksdale's knowledge was also sought-after by individuals not in the library world. In 1938, C.B. Green, Mecklenburg County school superintendent wrote her a letter explaining that a donor (Bruce) had made arrangements to give a library to their

community. He asked for her advice as well as for general information about initiating library service in a rural county.

In the 1940 *Handbook* of the VLA, Barksdale is listed as being on the Activities Committee from 1940 until 1942. However, in June of 1940, Barksdale was given a one year leave of absence to take a W.P.A. library supervisor position in Georgia. Librarians throughout Southside Virginia missed their trailblazer, with Winnie Coalson, her replacement, commenting that she hoped the alligators did not get their friend (letter, 9 September 1940). Although Barksdale's position in Georgia lasted longer than a year and, when she returned to the county, she worked as a librarian at the high school, her mark on the Charlotte County Free Library had already been made. In 1954 when she served as the president of the VLA Executive Committee, Barksdale brought a rural perspective to the group. Her mark on public library service in Charlotte County, however, is unmistakable.

Winnie Coalson (1940-1942)

In the summer of 1942, Winnie Coalson was appointed to take Barksdale's place during her year-long absence with the W.P.A. in Georgia. A graduate of Emory University, Coalson was originally from Bristol, Tennessee. Clear in the records is that she approached the Charlotte County Free Library with similar zeal of her predecessor.

Coalson quickly became acquainted with the library and the county because she had so many responsibilities. Just three days after there was a note in the minutes announcing her appointment, Coalson received a letter from Violet Ramsey of Appomattox County's library asking her to contribute to the *Log*. Coalson replied that she would help with the publication, also saying that she was "still as enthusiastic as ever

about [her] job. But with school opening and all, it's closing in fast" (letter, 9 September 1940). Despite feeling overwhelmed, Coalson assisted with issuing the *Log* as well as with sending it to a number of interested parties, including Barksdale, James, Bruce, administrators in the state library, W.P.A. supervisors, and library school directors (letter, 23 September 1940). Coalson continued her work with the *Log* throughout her time at the Charlotte County Free Library. In 1942, she wrote to the Honorable Robert K. Brock to ask him to contribute an article for the February issue regarding state aid to libraries.

Like Barksdale, Coalson was also close to her local colleagues. She also helped other "Southside Librarians" to establish a County Section of the VLA at its 1941 conference. At the same event, they "[sponsored] a booth [called] "Southside County Libraries" [that publicized] the work being done in that section" (*News Letter*, 1942).

Coalson also began working with the bookmobile immediately. When she came to the library, an agreement between Charlotte County and Lunenburg County was in the works for Lunenburg's use of the bookmobile. Two weeks after Coalson started, she received a copy of the legal agreement. In the coming months, Coalson was responsible for making plans of the shared use. In March of 1941, she sent a letter to the Lunenburg librarian asking her approval of a schedule in which the two counties alternated using the vehicle each week (19 March 1941). Coalson also gave advice to other libraries with systems interested in bookmobiles, explaining how the agreement with the state library and the W.P.A. worked as well as costs (letters, 29 January 1941).

Coalson also worked with the bookmobile in a more literal sense. In the summer of 1941, a note was made in the Minutes stating that "while the W.P.A. has delayed signing a new driver for the bookmobile, Mrs. Coalson, the librarian operated the

bookmobile for two weeks insuring the uninterrupted service to the County” (Minutes, 3 July 1941). Like Barksdale, Coalson was quick to sing the praises of the bookmobile – and to do behind-the-scenes tasks.

When Coalson’s one year appointment was coming to a close, word was received that Barksdale wished to continue in her W.P.A. position in Georgia. Coalson was kept on, which allowed for more continuity. By November of 1941, however, Coalson and Morton were appointed to begin the search for a new librarian. There is no mention in the Minutes as to why Coalson decided to leave, but her role in finding her replacement shows that she wanted to find someone who shared her interest in rural librarianship.

Mary Virginia Osborne (1942-1942)

By the beginning of 1942, Charlotte County Free Library found its new librarian: Mary Virginia Osborne of Port Richey, Florida. Osborne received her library science education at the College of William and Mary the same month she was hired. With a starting date of February 15, 1942, Osborne’s salary was one hundred dollars a month.

Osborne’s time in Charlotte County lasted only six months; some notes in the Minutes might explain why her tenure was so brief. Although she, Chermiside, and Morton formed a committee “to draw up resolutions pertaining to the use of the Public Library” (Minutes, 4 June 1942) soon after her arrival, other issues confronted the library. In June, she was asked to make an inquiry to the state library regarding funds for the Charlotte County Free Library. The library had a hard time finding a qualified person to operate the bookmobile, and Osborne and the board hoped that the state and the W.P.A. would be able to assist them find a driver. However, the W.P.A. was having its own problems. In his response to Osborne, W.A. Moon explained that W.P.A. programs had

been terminated, and it was the suggestion of the state that local libraries take over bookmobile service. By September, the board decided to hold a meeting “later in the month to discuss problems confronting the Library” (Minutes, 4 September 1942).

Despite the “problems” surrounding the library, Osborne used a spirited tone in her reports to the board. The 1942 annual report announced “LOOK WHAT WE’VE DONE! We don’t mean to be bragging but we have certainly boosted our ego by the work we accomplished during the past year!” (Annual Report, 1942). For the recent library school graduate, this first year confronting effects of the war and a tightened budget probably provided a good learning experience. By showing that the library was still successful in its circulation and patron registration statistics, Osborne provided the board with fuel to promote the library. When Osborne resigned in the fall of 1942, possibly to return to William and Mary (*News Letter*, 1942) the board offered her a vote of thanks for her service.

Florence Baker (1942-1943)

Very little information exists about Florence Baker, the Charlotte County Free Library’s fourth librarian. When she was hired in November, her appointment was to last for three months. However, it appears as though she stayed on until March of 1943, when she was called to serve in the WAVES.

Janie E. Johnson

In the 1938-1939 library report, Janie E. Johnson was introduced as the library’s “Negro library assistant.” According to the piece, she was a “graduate of Charlotte Training School and an NYA worker” (Library Report, 1938-1939). Charlotte Training School was the first high school for African Americans in the county; while Johnson was

not a library school graduate, she was educated. As an employee of the National Youth Administration, a program that was part of the W.P.A., Johnson could stay in her community and receive training.

Although Johnson was not a certified librarian, Barksdale gave her some responsibilities that went beyond the typical library assistant's tasks. In the February 9, 1939 issue of the "Library Log," Johnson contributed an article entitled "Negro History Week." In it, she announced that "we are very proud to say, that in our negro reading room, has been placed a most wonderful collection of material about the negro" (*Charlotte Gazette*). Johnson went on to list new books, including *Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois, and a collection of magazines and newspapers. She also highlighted a collection of photographs by saying, "another surprise for you! We have twelve photographs of outstanding men and women of the race and many pamphlets" (*Charlotte Gazette*). As "Negro library assistant," Johnson accepted many of the responsibilities of the head librarians.

State-wide Administrators

In 1935, the ALA surveyed the United States and found that of the forty five million Americans without library service, forty million were in rural areas. Two-thirds of Virginians were without access to libraries. For administrators at the Virginia State Library, the success of the Charlotte County Free Library, as well as the other Bruce libraries, was vital. Programs of county and regional libraries were growing in Virginia; fifteen county libraries and two regional libraries were established in six years. Administrators keenly observed the development of the libraries, creating strategies to help them whenever possible.

Administrators included individuals from the State Library of Virginia and the W.P.A. Martha Swain (1995) has noted that “in the extension of library services to people who had lost their libraries, had limited access to books, or never even had a library, that FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] and WPA programs achieved phenomenal success and made significant permanent gains” (p. 266). W.P.A. administrators at the federal level saw providing service to rural areas as a major goal. Edward A Chapman, head of the new library division, made clear that his “intent was to make library service to rural Americans more nearly equal to that now available to most people in American cities” (p. 270). Throughout the state and the nation, more attention was placed on assisting rural libraries.

Patrons

Patrons were also major players in the success of the Charlotte County Free Library in its first five years, for if they had not made use of the service, it would not have survived. In response to a question asking how the county received the new library, Barksdale stated, “great interest was shown by many. [...] For the year there was an average of three new borrowers each day” (Charlotte County Library Service – 1937-38; ’38-39). In 1939, the *Charlotte Gazette* announced that “the total circulation last year was 11,132 as compared with 26,258 for the first seven months, November through May, of this year.” By 1940, a W.P.A. official confirmed “that the daily circulation of this demonstration area [Charlotte County] in the WPA State-wide Library Project exceed that of any other in the State” (*Charlotte Gazette*, 13 March 1940). Simply by using the service to the extent that they did, patrons ensured its continued necessity.

Patrons also showed their interest in the library by staying involved through a variety of means. In 1938, the Junior Library Club was organized for monthly meetings. Individuals regularly attended programs and observed the exhibits in the library. When the bookmobile began traveling to far pockets of the county, users flocked to it.

11. How the Objectives Were Met

In a November 3, 1938 *Charlotte Gazette* column, Barksdale listed the five objectives she had undertaken in the library's first year of service. She followed by listing what actions she believed she had taken to meet those goals. Of the first, stimulating cultural interests, Barksdale explained that "art has been stressed in a program which the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, says is 'unprecedented in any rural community in the State.'" Of the second, the librarian explained that "books recommended by health, welfare, and adult education directors, agriculture agency, State Board of Education, teachers and individuals have been ordered" to supplement in voluntary activities. Such services – special exhibits offered and educational materials available – were constant throughout the first five years of the Charlotte County Free Library. However, the five objectives were also met in other ways.

The program of highlighting cultural opportunities was not a one year endeavor; Charlotte County Free Library houses a variety of exhibits throughout its first five years. Japanese wood prints, illuminated manuscripts of 840 to 1885, and paintings by Winslow Homer graced the library walls. In addition to art exhibits, the library promoted the National Book Week and held a photograph contest.

As Barksdale pointed out, the library also supplemented voluntary and educational activities simply by developing its collection and providing service to school libraries, home demonstration clubs, and through the bookmobile. In working with the

State-wide Library project through the W.P.A., the library was able to supplement its own collection to meet more of the needs of its patrons. In many ways, the library's attention to these activities also satisfied its fourth goal, that of meeting recreational needs.

Librarians also responded to patrons' needs by making the library "a war center" (1942 Annual Report). When the United States officially entered World War II, a radio was placed in the browsing room so that patrons could hear announcements. A War Information File was also established; it included "special collections of pamphlet and clipping material" (1942 Annual Report). The library also collected materials for the Victory Book Campaign, and local children created a "Read for Victory Book Club." By responding to the needs of patrons during uncertain times, the library provided a place where citizens could learn more about the world around them.

The third goal listed, which Barksdale did not examine in her column, was that of informing the public of the service of the library. Throughout 1937 and 1942, librarians were in almost constant communication with their patrons. By writing weekly columns in the *Charlotte Gazette*, librarians were able to reach a wide variety of individuals. The "Library Log" alerted readers of benefits of the institution, new books, and programs. They also kept patrons informed of librarians' professional development accomplishments, alerting them of ALA and VLA meetings. Librarians also made available the *County Library Logs*, which informed readers of the happenings at the Charlotte County Free Library as well as other Southside Virginia libraries. In addition, Charlotte County librarians created publications such as "Your Library Guide" to alert patrons to the policies of the library and to describe the institution's history. Finally,

when the bookmobile was in use, Barksdale and Coalson displayed posters to demonstrate how the service operates. Through these works, the objective of informing Charlotte County patrons of library service was met.

Bringing Service to All

Finally, the fifth goal listed is probably the most interesting, especially in the context of the county's rural make-up and the time period. The objective, to make reading materials available to all county readers, proved most difficult. While they were able to reach school children, librarians had a much more challenging time reaching adults. At other times, serving was a matter of public health. In the January 1940 W.P.A. monthly report, Barksdale noted "We have requests from a number of T.B. families for books. We, not allowing our books to go in places where there is known to be contagious diseases, are supplying these families with magazines, requesting that they do not return them" (W.P.A. Monthly Report, 1940). Although librarians strived to make this fifth goal a reality, they were confronted with far-away residents and a nation that kept its populace, according to the Jim Crow laws of the time, "separate but equal."

The Bookmobile

First, the way in which the librarians served all people – even in the furthest corners of the county, will be examined. When the bookmobile came to Charlotte County, it was one of only four in the state. As users helped multiply circulation numbers throughout the county, it was evident that the W.P.A. service was an overwhelming success.

On June 6, 1939, a note was made in the *Minutes* noting the attendance of C.W. Dickinson, Jr., Director of School Libraries and Textbooks, and Mary V. Gaver, technical

supervisor of library projects across Virginia. According to the visitors, they “explained to the board the W.P.A. setup in connection with this library and also announced that a bookmobile will be delivered the first of September to facilitate this setup” (*Minutes*, 1939). Along with this exciting news, however, the two warned “that at any time the board saw fit the W.P.A. project in connection with the library could be discontinued” (*Minutes*, 1939).

Charlotte County received its bookmobile a month earlier, in August of 1939. In helping Barksdale prepare for its presentation and celebration, Mary V. Gaver, a technical supervisor, suggested that she “invite a representative from each of the three bodies sponsoring the bookmobile – the WPA, State Board of Education and the State Library Board – as well as the members of the county library board” (Gaver, 1939).

On August 21, 1939, the event for which the library community had been waiting for months occurred: the bookmobile was presented! According to the August report, the vehicles and five hundred eighty-nine new books, courtesy of the State-wide Library Project, “were presented to the county by Mr. W.A. Smith, State Administrator of WPA. Mr. Howard Gilliam accepted the bookmobile on behalf of the library board; Mr. W.H. Crews on behalf of the school board. The public was invited to greet the bookmobile (*Charlotte Gazette*, 16 August 1939) and tea was served visitors and guests by ladies from Charlotte Court House, Keysville, and Drakes Branch” (August Report, 1939). Multiple articles were written and photographs included in the *Charlotte Gazette* alerting readers of the new service and promoting its use.

Response to the bookmobile was positive, which Swain (1995) reports was typical (p. 272). The vehicle, a brand new Chevrolet, driven by H.W. Watkins, was operated for

nearly fifty-seven hours and four hundred forty-three miles in its first month. The monthly cost to travel to the thirty-five stations was less than six dollars, and the circulation generated by then was nearly eighteen percent of the total circulation for August.

In January of the next year, W.A. Moon, Jr., Administrative Supervisor of the State-wide Library Project sent a report to the four libraries operating bookmobiles throughout Virginia. Of the four, Charlotte County's operation was the least expensive at \$39.08 for its first five months. While this low cost is a reflection of the fewer miles driven in that time (2,226 miles), it is still worth noting that bookmobile services accounted for more than one-third of the circulation numbers for that period. The January circulation results made a state record.

Over the course of the next three years, the bookmobile was a fixture in communities across Charlotte County. With stops ranging from thirty-five to sixty-nine and visits of up to one hundred forty-nine in the course of a month, the bookmobile reached citizens that otherwise would not have been able to use the library. In 1940, the Lunenburg County Free Library approached Charlotte County to request shared use of its bookmobile. By spring of the next year, the bookmobile's worth was felt in two rural Southside Virginia counties.

Supervisors of the W.P.A. State-wide Library program were heavily involved in the bookmobile project. Posters announcing the bookmobile were sent to the library to be displayed to instruct the community in its use. A month after service commenced, Ellinor G. Preston, a technical supervisor, questioned the schedule in place in which the bookmobile was run only four days every two weeks. She asked, "couldn't the

bookmobile be operated more constantly with perhaps less rush to you for each trip?” (Preston, 1939). A year later, Preston wrote to Coalson requesting the opportunity to observe the bookmobile in some demonstration areas. Coalson wrote back saying that she was eager for her visit because it would be her first run as the county librarian. In April of 1941, Moon wrote to Coalson approving the joint-use plan between Charlotte and Lunenburg.

Providing bookmobile service was not without difficulty. Extreme weather conditions made service to far pockets in the county impossible at times, a problem noted in W.P.A. monthly reports. Although the vehicles were purchased new in 1939, they accumulated wear and tear – and in some cases were involved in accidents. In August of 1942, Osborne wrote to W.A. Moon, Jr., of the Virginia State Library to request a bookmobile exchange. She wrote, “our bookmobile has developed a great deal of minor ailments due to rough treatments of the country roads” (Osborne, 1942).

Even managing employees was complicated. Moon wrote of his concern about Hugh Watkins, the original driver, to Josephine Dupuy, a supervisor of the W.P.A. State-wide Library Project. Moon disclosed “I am quite concerned about the slight accident to the bookmobile which occurred when Mr. Watkins backed it into a well pump” in addition to reports that Watkins drove on the wrong side of the road and exceeded the forty-five mile-per-hour speed limit (Moon, 1939). When Watkins resigned in 1940, Barksdale was not sorry to see him go. In a letter to Josephine Dupuy, a supervisor of the W.P.A. State-wide library program, she wrote, “cooperation of driver and other workers has grown increasingly difficult.” Barksdale requested hiring Stuart M. Andrews, a Negro WPA worker who was a high school graduate and seemed “highly capable of the job” on

a trial basis. Fortunately, Andrews proved himself to be a reliable driver, and he continued to operate the bookmobile through August of 1941, at which time the bookmobile was without a driver for a period.

On a sad note, when the W.P.A. was discontinued in Virginia, sponsorship of the Charlotte County bookmobile was also halted. In a memo to the State Librarian, Wilmer Hall, R.S. Hummel, the State Administrator, announced the liquidation of the W.P.A. Program in Virginia at the end of 1942. Hummel specified that local library units could continue to use materials and supplies obtained through the W.P.A., but the bookmobiles would have to be returned. In separate letters to Baker, the temporary librarian, Moon and Margaret Yeakley, State Supervisor In Charge of War Information Services, wrote of their regret that Charlotte County would no longer be able to use the bookmobile. Moon encouraged her to approach the board about purchasing a bookmobile, either new or used, and mentioned that they might be eligible for state aid. He also asked that Baker keep the agency “informed of the results of your efforts.”

Service to African Americans

Service to African Americans during the Jim Crow period proved problematic. Although the Bruce libraries “became the first public libraries to allow access to African Americans, [... they] were restricted to using side or back doors and didn’t have full access to the collection” (Virginia Heritage Trails marker, 2004). Because their collection was much less than that of the white patrons, African American patrons often had to find other ways to supplement their books. They relied on other programs to bring collections to the county, including the Rosenwald Fund and the Lend-a-Hand Mission, based out of Boston. In a report of 1938-1939, Barksdale listed “21 Rosenwald libraries from which a

circulation of 8,000” had been secured. Johnson, the Negro assistant librarian, worked with the collection as well. The Lend-a-Hand books were received in 1942.

Although Blacks had their own reading room and were allowed to circulate a collection, their service was not equal to whites. Notes were made in monthly reports of their collections being “cleaned” or “sprayed”; no mention is made of the same treatment for materials used by white patrons. In 1940, Mrs. S.T. Lovelace wrote Coalson questioning the need for the library to be so blatant about keeping the races separate. She asked:

Is it legally necessary that the notice of separate entrances continue to be posted? Those of us who use the Colored Entrance are already abiding by the stipulations; so it was from the first an unnecessary measure to be posted as the Colored Entrance.

We believe that at such a time as this to proudly exhibit an undemocratic measure can not create nor nourish patriotism. We are all sacrificing alike. We are all contributing our full measure of devotion for a glorious victory. Let us not allow little things to disrupt our unity. (letter, 12 September 1940)

Although no copy of the response could be located in the archives, the town of Charlotte Court House took a definitive stand in 1942. The law, which was enacted to “require public libraries to provide separate reading rooms, toilets and entrances for white and colored people using the same,” showed that town leaders did not feel the same way as Lovelace. Breaking the rule was considered a misdemeanor and carried a fine.

Although the goal to provide service to all was admirable – and the librarians’ actions are notable – this is the one objective of the five that proved problematic. By providing a bookmobile, rural residents could make use of the library. By including collections for African Americans in the library, the service was available to all.

Unfortunately, the end of the bookmobile and the town ordinance ordering separate service in 1942 made meeting the goal even more difficult.

12. Conclusion

The Charlotte County Free Library was in a class of its own in 1937 when it became the first free public library in Southside Virginia. Throughout the next five years, the library became a major institution throughout the rural community. Its major players – David K.E. Bruce, its librarians, its trustees – ensured its success by working diligently to make it the most useful to the most people. In turn, Charlotte County residents sought their library to supplement their cultural endeavors, educational pursuits, and recreational activities.

The success of the Charlotte County Free Library, and its sister Bruce libraries, provided justification for “act of the General Assembly of 1942 which appropriated \$100,000 for the biennium for state aid for public libraries” (Moon, p. 17). To the State Aid Committee of the Virginia Library Association, this act was necessary for “the rural citizen of tomorrow [who] will require an effective library service to increase his efficiency, to conserve the natural resources under his control, to comprehend his relationships with the world around him, to understand himself, and to minister to the satisfactions of his inner life” (State Aid Committee, 1941). By doing so well in its first five years meetings its five objectives, the Charlotte County Free Library not only helped its own local citizens but also helped Virginia address the “rural problem.”

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