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The Georgia Public Library Service and Georgia's Public Libraries:

A timeline of important events in Georgia public library history

by Elaine Hardy

At the end of January 2008, Peggy Chambliss and I were asked by a policy analyst with the House of Representatives Research Office for a detailed history of the Georgia Public Library Service, including when libraries were first established in the state and a chronology of major events in public library history in Georgia. The analyst needed the information within a week. We discovered that the brief histories we had were woefully out of date, spread across numerous publications and often in a fragile physical state. Given these problems, we decided, rather than send disparate reports and papers to the research office, that it would be best to expand an existing timeline on library planning created by graduate student Leann Boyd into a more comprehensive one with some narrative text. The resulting document is a compilation of the historical data on Georgia's public libraries as well as a history of the Georgia Public Library Service from its inception in 1897. It stretches from the first known subscription library created in Savannah in 1809; encompasses the first free public library in Georgia, the Mary Willis Free Library in Washington; and ends with our

current status of almost 390 service outlets for public library service in the state.

Georgia's public libraries have a rich history that illustrates the evolving commitment of Georgia's leaders and citizenry to free access to information across the state.

Georgia libraries have developed from small collections, sometimes in people's homes, to the diverse collections of media, including the virtual library GALILEO, we have access to today. One strong theme throughout the history of public libraries in Georgia is that we have accomplished much with little funding. While the Georgia State Library Commission was established in 1897, monies for expenses and services were not allocated until 1919. Yet, work to improve and

create library service throughout the state progressed with the support of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta.

We hope the following timeline is the beginning of recording the diligent work that Georgia's libraries and librarians have done to improve the lives of Georgians. ►►

"It is declared to be the policy of the state, as a part of the provisions for public education, to promote the establishment of public library service throughout the state." (O.C.G.A. §20-5-1)

*Timeline compiled by the staff of Georgia Public Library Service's Library Development & Reference Support:
J. Elaine Hardy, library services manager, and Peggy Chambliss, library services specialist*

1809

Savannah Library Society opens a subscription library where members of the society pay a fee for use of the library. The fees collected go toward the operation and maintenance of the library.

1837

Georgia State Library is established by the General Assembly from the Georgia Supreme Court collection.

1847

Savannah Library Society merges with the Georgia Historical Society.

1848

Young Men's Library Association of Augusta opens a subscription library.

1867

Young Men's Library Association of Atlanta opens a subscription library.

1874

Macon Public Library opens a subscription library.

1876

Valdosta Library Association opens a subscription library.

1878

Americus Library Association opens a subscription library.

1882

Brooks (County) Library Association opens a subscription library.

1889

Mary Willis Free Library, Washington, opens. The first free public library in Georgia; endowed by Dr. Francis T. Willis and named for his only daughter.

1893-1917

Andrew Carnegie, through his library program, donates funds to build free public library buildings across the United States. Georgia cities were also recipients of these grants. Carnegie libraries were built in many Georgia cities during this time, including Atlanta, Albany, Columbus, Dublin, Montezuma, Moultrie, Newnan, Pelham, Savannah, Cordele, Americus, Dawson and Fitzgerald.

1893

Andrew Carnegie offers \$100,000 for the construction of a public library building in Atlanta, contingent on the city providing a location and annual support money.

Clarke Library Association, Marietta, opens a subscription library.

1897-1919

The General Assembly establishes the Georgia Library Commission in 1897. Georgia becomes the first Southern state to act on their citizens' need for free public library service. The first five-member board is appointed by Governor William Y. Atkinson on July 27, 1897. The commission is charged by the General Assembly to "give advice and counsel to all libraries in the State and to all communities

which may propose to establish them, as to the best means of establishing and administering such libraries, the selection of books, cataloguing and other details of library management. The commission may also send members to aid in organizing new libraries or improving those already established" (Georgia State Library Commission 1907, 16). Although Georgia was forward thinking in establishing the Library Commission, they lagged behind other states by not appropriating monies for the commission services or any member expenses until 1919. Even without state funding, the commission fulfills its charge and provides "aid to practically every Georgia library" (Wooten 1907, 162). Work is carried on through the sponsorship of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, and the commission maintains offices in the library until 1920.

1897

Georgia Library Club (later the Georgia Library Association) forms. Their objectives are to start a school to train professional librarians, state funding of public libraries and a special commission to "oversee the library interests of the state" (Georgia Library Association 2003).

1899

City Council of Atlanta appropriates \$5,000 for the maintenance of the Carnegie Library. The Young Men's Library Association agrees to merge with the library and donate their book collection to it.

Seaboard Air Line Railroad traveling library program is established under the organization of Mrs. Eugene Head.

Brunswick Library opens a subscription library.

1900

Price Free Library, Macon, opens. First free library in Macon, the Price Library is established expressly for the

poor by S.B. Price and Bridges Smith, both mayors of the city.

1901

Municipal Library Law is enacted. Any city can appropriate money to establish and sustain free public libraries. The law also provides for the establishment of municipal library boards to govern the city library (O.C.G.A. §20-5-20).

1902

Carnegie Library of Atlanta opens, providing free public library service to the citizens of the city of Atlanta. First Carnegie library built in the state.

1903

Savannah Public Library opens with the collection of the Georgia Historical Society as its nucleus.

Mary Munford Memorial Library, Cartersville, opens a free public library. Founded and endowed by Mrs. L.S. Munford in memory of her daughter, it is an outgrowth of the Cherokee Club and uses no publicly appropriated monies.

1905

Southern Library School, Carnegie Library of Atlanta, opens with a grant from the Carnegie Library Program.

1906

Carnegie Library Program donates funds to Atlanta for branch library buildings.

Free Public Library for Negroes, Savannah, opens with a combination of city monies and subscription fees.

1907

Nine free public libraries are operating in Georgia: Price Free Library of Macon, Savannah Public Library, Mary Willis Library of Washington, Mary Munford Memorial Library of Cartersville and Carnegie libraries in Albany, Atlanta, Cordele, Dublin and Newnan. A number of free traveling libraries also operate in the state. They include the Seaboard Air Line Railroad library,

mobile libraries operated by the Atlanta Woman's Club and traveling libraries operated by the Newton County Board of Education for their school libraries.

Darien Free Reading Room opens.

1919

General Assembly appropriates first annual funds for the Georgia Library Commission (\$6,000).

1920

The Georgia Library Commission moves to offices in the Capitol, hires a professional librarian, purchases books and begins lending to all libraries in Georgia.

1922

Southeastern Library Association forms. Their goals are to adopt standards of and objectives for library service tailored to the needs of the region. Formation of regional libraries is identified as the means to provide library service to the poor, rural areas of the South.

1924-1925

The commission conducts a Vacation Reading Club for rural children from the first grade through high school.

1924

Carnegie Library of Atlanta is accredited by ALA.

1925

Southern Library School, Carnegie Library of Atlanta, is transferred to Emory University.

Library Commission becomes the circulation center for supplying the blind readers of the state with reading matter. Books are furnished by the Georgia Association for Workers for the Blind, as the commission has no funds for books of this kind.

1930s

Georgia Citizen's Library Committee forms to advance state aid for public libraries, certification of librarians and the development of regional library

systems to better serve the rural, poor areas of the state.

1930

The University of Wisconsin holds a Rural Library Extension Institute. Georgia's field librarians attend.

1931-1935

Recognizing the need for trained librarians, Carnegie, working through the American Library Association, funds professional librarians to work as field agents. Miss Tommie Dora Barker was the first Southern regional field agent.

1933-1934

The first relief agency to provide employment during the Great Depression, the Civil Works Administration (along with the Georgia Emergency Relief Administration) creates jobs in public and school libraries in Georgia. Library programs are strengthened as a result.

1935

County Library Law enacted. County governments are permitted to appropriate funds to establish and sustain free county public libraries. The legislation also allows counties to contract for library service between existing libraries and unserved areas within the county or with adjoining counties. The push for the bill is organized by the Parent Teacher Organization. It passes both houses of the General Assembly unanimously. Fulton County is the first in the state to act under the law, the county commissioners making an initial appropriation of \$5,000 to the Carnegie Library of Atlanta beginning July 1, 1935. Free library service is available to residents of Fulton County from the headquarters building in Atlanta and all branches.

Georgia Library Association, following recommendations from ALA, establishes objectives for library development in the state.

1935

Fifty-three free public libraries are operating in 44 counties throughout Georgia.

1936-1943

The Works Progress Administration (later the Works Projects Administration), or WPA, begins library demonstration projects as part of its relief efforts. The projects' goals are to organize and run free public libraries in communities with little or no library service. During the program years, WPA funds establish bookmobile service, build library buildings, buy books and pay librarian and staff salaries across Georgia. The WPA also assists in the formation of the first regional library systems in Georgia. The Athens Regional and Cherokee Regional libraries are created under the demonstration library program. The WPA expends \$1.3 million to libraries in Georgia before it ends in 1943. Free public library service was begun in 107 Georgia counties. Population without free library service dropped from 71 percent to 36 percent during the program years. The Library Commission worked closely with the WPA to facilitate and maintain their demonstration projects across the state.

1937

State law for the certification for librarians is enacted requiring the certification of librarians in state-operated libraries (except school and law libraries) and libraries serving more than 5,000.

1938

First bookmobile service is inaugurated in Thomas County as a WPA demonstration project.

1940

Athens Regional Library, the first WPA demonstration regional library in Georgia, is organized.

1941

School of Library Service at Atlanta University opens.

1943

WPA ends - WPA support of libraries in rural areas across the South creates a citizenry unwilling to give up even the limited library service they received through the demonstration projects. With the ending of the program, people turn to local authorities to provide monies to continue support of public libraries in Georgia. Local funding, while increased, is not enough for all public libraries to function. Fifty-two libraries in 21 counties close. Other libraries curtail hours and services.

Statesboro Regional Library becomes the third regional library system in Georgia.

Acting under calls from the Georgia Library Association and the Citizen's Library Committee (an informal organization made up of trustees and friends of libraries across Georgia), the General Assembly eliminates the Library Commission, transferring its services and functions to the state Department of Education's Division of Textbooks and Libraries. It is renamed the Library Extension Service.

School of Library Service at Atlanta University becomes first library school for African-Americans accredited by ALA.

1944-1946

Eight additional regional libraries form. Ten regional libraries now provide service to 23 counties.

1944

General Assembly appropriates \$100,000 for library service as part of the Department of Education's budget. First grant of special funds for state aid for the development of rural public library service in Georgia. Acquiring state aid for public libraries was a primary objective of the State Library Commission/Library Extension Service for 20 years. Several libraries closed following the loss of WPA support are able to reopen with state funding (Wheatcroft 1944).

1945-1946

General Assembly appropriates additional monies for library service. With this funding, local allotments are encouraged to increase. Matching local funds are not required to receive county allotments (which are based on the number of teachers in a county). An additional allotment of \$2,000 is given to regional libraries of two or more counties with a regional governing board and a professional librarian as director. Requirements for state aid include an effective program of library service to rural areas, libraries under the control of a legally constituted board and library directors certified by the State Board. Also, local funds have to provide sufficient support, and state funds are not made available if the local budget decreased.

1945

State of Georgia Constitution is revised. Provision is made for taxation by counties for public libraries.

Six regional libraries serve 14 counties, and 41 additional counties give countywide library service

1947

Georgia Citizen's Library Committee adopts the slogan "Books in Reach of Every Georgian."

Southeastern States Cooperative Library Survey conducted by the Southeastern Library Association.

State aid to libraries equals .30 per capita (national standard is \$1.00 per capita).

1948

Report of the Georgia Library Survey Committee.

Twenty-eight bookmobiles are providing service in 25 counties.

1949

Minimum Foundation Program for Education (MFPE) is enacted by the General Assembly. Includes provisions for funds for public libraries and payment of state salary for one public librarian per county.

1951

MFPE funding appropriates \$500,000 for public library materials, salaries and travel.

1956

Library Services Act (LSA). First federal funding for libraries is signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Appropriation is for five years and is limited to library service to rural areas. LSA provides monetary aid to the Library Extension Service's objectives and plans. Staff, materials and bookmobiles are added.

1957

Survey of Georgia Public Library Service to Negroes.

1958

Through either a county or regional library, 158 counties have free public library service.

1961

Library Services Act is renewed for another five years.

1964

LSA is amended to Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). LSCA includes two titles: Title I provides money for both rural and metropolitan areas and Title II provides funds for construction. LSA provides funds to build 49 public libraries.

1965

The Georgia Citizen's Library Committee officially becomes the Georgia Library Trustees Association and a section of the Georgia Library Association.

1966

Two additional titles added to LSCA: Title III, Interlibrary Cooperation, Title IV-A State Institutional Library Service and Title IV-B State Library Service to the Physically Handicapped.

1967

Thirty-five regional libraries serve 129 counties with countywide library service in all of Georgia's 159 counties.

1969

Georgia Library Information Network (GLIN) is founded. Located at the Library Extension Service offices, GLIN coordinated interlibrary loans between public, academic and special libraries.

1970-1971

Library Extension Service is expanded within the state Department of Education to the Division of Public Library Services (DPLS). The division continues its original directive from 1897 to give counsel, advice and aid on establishing and administration of libraries to existing libraries and to those communities wishing to establish them. Additional functions added over the years include: supervising all public libraries; encouraging and assisting cooperative library service inside and outside Georgia; gathering and compiling public library statistics; developing statewide plans concerning libraries of all kinds; supervising state and federally funded programs; facilitating programs for continuing education for librarians and staff; supplying expertise in the form of consultants to public libraries; supplementing regional and county library service by providing reference, bibliographic and interlibrary loan services; and encouraging the network model to facilitate the provision of library service and resources to all citizens (Brown and Rawles 1975, 9).

1971

Handbook on Constitutions, By-Laws, and Contracts for Georgia Public Libraries is published.

1973

Georgia Library for the Blind is established.

Cessation of federal construction funds under LSCA. The General Assembly provides funding for library construction in the state.

1974

Adequate Program for Education in Georgia (APEG) is passed by the

General Assembly, replacing the Minimum Foundation Program for Education Act.

1975

General Assembly appropriates funds to implement APEG.

Georgia has 36 regional library systems providing library service to 147 counties and 11 single-county public libraries.

Southeastern States Cooperative Library Survey, released by Southeastern Library Association, provides an assessment of libraries in the Southeast in the 1970s.

Georgia Library Survey is completed, delineating library resources, services and funding.

The General Assembly provides funds for Talking Book Centers, subregional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped.

The Georgia Council of Public Libraries is organized.

DPLS becomes a member of Solinet (Southeastern Library Network) and OCLC (Online Computer Library Center).

1976

Materials grants for public libraries increase from .16 per capita to not less than .35 per capita under APEG.

1977

Governor's Conference on Georgia Library and Information Services, a state preconference for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

1979

White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

1980

Adoption of standardized statistical measures and definitions for collection of library statistics in Georgia (Tope and Forsee 1989).

1981

First Library Legislative Day is held under Georgia Council of Public

Libraries sponsorship to facilitate contact between library supporters and their legislative representatives.

1982

The General Assembly revises state formulas for aid to public libraries and Talking Book Centers. The revision of the formulas is the result of consultation between DPLS, public library directors and the State Board of Education.

1984

Revision of library law accomplished. Article 2 of Chapter 5 of Title 20 of the OCGA is clarified on questions of creation of trustee boards, whether library boards could hold property, how a county system moves from one regional library system to another and on whether an individual is required to return books borrowed. The revisions also allow for the establishment of a public library as a tax-exempt entity.

1985

Georgia Intellectual Freedom Manual is first drafted at the Georgia Library Association Biennial Preconference.

Federal LSCA Title II funds for library construction are reauthorized.

1986

LSCA funds and local matching funds are used to open a portable library kiosk in a MARTA station. This kiosk is the first of its kind in a rapid transit station in the United States.

1988

Georgia OnLine Database (GOLD) is developed to facilitate the interlibrary loan process in Georgia among member libraries. GOLD goes online with a database of over 6 million holdings. First GOLD membership conference is held.

Emory University Division of Library and Information Science issues its final Master of Library Science degree.

1989

GLIN membership is closed to new members on July 1, 1989.

1995

Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO), a virtual library of electronic information resources for the citizens of Georgia, goes online. DPLS is downsized as part of the Department of Education's reorganization. Approximately half of all the positions in the division are eliminated.

1996

Amendments to the state education laws by the General Assembly transfer the Division of Public Library Services to the Department of Technical and Adult Education, designating it the Office of Public Library Service (OPLS). Responsibilities of OPLS include administering federal and state grant funds, coordinating cooperative library activities, providing training, coordinating children's summer programs, promoting family literacy, supporting technology and coordinating and promoting resource sharing among all types of libraries.

Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), part of the Museum and Library Services Act, replaces LSCA. LSTA funding emphasizes technology and infrastructure while retaining focus on underserved areas for library service. Funding under LSTA is extended to all types of libraries. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which oversees LSTA funding, is created by the act.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 expands Universal Service to the Internet and provides discounts to public libraries and public and private schools for telecommunications and Internet-related technology.

1997

Gates Library Foundation is created to "bring computers and Internet access to public libraries in low-income communities in the United States and Canada" (Gates Foundation 2008).

GOLD Advisory Committee and GALILEO Users Group join to become GOLD/GALILEO Users Group Advisory Committee.

1998

A telecommunication network for high-speed access for all public libraries is established.

The required annual statistical report for libraries is automated.

First Children's Services Annual Conference is held.

1999

DPLS, in consultation with libraries across the state, creates PINES (Public Information Network for Electronic Services), a library automation and lending network for public libraries in Georgia. The first phase consists of 96 service outlets across 26 systems.

Access to GALILEO becomes available on all public library computers.

Gates Library Foundation awards Georgia's public libraries \$7 million in equipment, software and training.

Glascocok County opens a public library facility for the first time. All 159 counties in the state now have a building housing a public library.

2000

The A Plus Education Reform Act makes OPLS a unit of the Board of Regents (O.C.G.A. § 20-5-2).

Georgia libraries begin purchasing and installing equipment and software purchased with Gates Foundation monies.

Standards for Georgia public libraries are adopted.

2001

Office of Public Library Service is renamed the Georgia Public Library Service.

State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is renamed Georgia Library for Accessible Services (GLASS).

PINES phase II inaugurates service in 110 additional facilities in 11 systems.

Valdosta State University Master of Library and Information Science program admits first students.

2003

GPLS closes its Trinity Avenue facility. The Georgia collection of books and materials is moved to the Middle Georgia Regional Library in Macon. The staff and professional collection are moved to the main offices on Clairmont Avenue.

Friends of Georgia Libraries (FOGL) is established.

The board of Clark Atlanta University decides to close School of Library and Information Studies, the only ALA-accredited library school in Georgia at the time.

2004

PINES Evergreen Project begins. GPLS initiates developing open source software for an integrated library computer system for its PINES network libraries.

2005

Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Studies graduates final class.

2006

PINES libraries debut the Evergreen software, revolutionizing library automation by using open source software to run circulation, cataloging and the public library catalog in an integrated library system designed expressly for PINES policies and needs. Prior to this debut, PINES contracted with vendor-developed software.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Public Access Computing Hardware Upgrade Grant (PACHUG) program awards Georgia public libraries \$1.499 million.

Regents Public Library Advisory Committee is formed.

Georgia Library for Accessible Services (GLASS) receives a 2006 White Cane Award from The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) for

assisting in the mission of achieving equality, opportunity and security for the blind.

2007

GPLS wins Mellon Award for Technology Collaboration for the development and release of the Evergreen open source library automation system.

GPLS inaugurates PINNACLE, the Public Library Institute for New and Creative Leadership Education, to ensure the future of high-quality library leadership across the state.

Valdosta State University Master of Library and Information Science program is accredited by ALA.

2008

Georgia currently has 61 library systems serving all 159 counties with 387 service outlets and 20 bookmobiles. There are 33 regional library systems providing library service to 133 counties. There are 26 single-county library systems. Forty-eight library systems with 275 service outlets are part of the PINES network, providing a borderless library for Georgians with a free PINES library card. ▶▶

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