A history of public library service to negroes in Columbus, Georgia, 1831 - 1959

Juanita Louise Jones Crittenden

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A HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO NEGROES
IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA, 1831 - 1959

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE IN
LIBRARY SERVICE

BY
JUANITA LOUISE JONES CRITTENDEN

SCHOOL OF LIBRARY SERVICE

ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
JUNE, 1960

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

For many years before 1876, public libraries were considered indispensable aids to public education. With the beginning of the free public library movement in the United States almost every segment of the country, depending upon its economic development, environmental influences, and social philosophies, has been affected.1

As revealed by a study done by Mrs. Eliza Gleason in 1941, progress in the public library field has been retarded. This retardation as well as the lack of investigations dealing with the library activity of the Negro have had long time negative effects, though much improvement has been apparent in recent years on other levels of librarianship.2

Library service for the Negroes of the Southeast is far from adequate, though it is encouraging to note that in recent years rapid improvement has been made. According to a survey made in 1947 by Louis Round Wilson, the fact was revealed that in 1913 there were only 14 public libraries in the South which gave service to Negroes. Public libraries of 12 southern states, totaling 45 libraries, offered service to 867,000 Negroes 13 years later. This figure constituted 11.5 per cent of the Negro population.


In a general sense, Negroes in most cities of the Southeast, as well as in a few states outside the region are able to obtain public library service only from separate libraries, branches, sub-branches, and deposit stations. For the most part, the entire book collection is available to Negroes under certain locally specified limitations.¹

Considerable progress has been made in the field of public library service for Negroes in the South, but the entire picture, in terms of character of service and extent of coverage, is not as encouraging as it should be. In January, 1953, Negroes in 59 southern cities and towns had free use of the main public library. At the same time, 24 communities gave limited service to Negroes at the main library, and in only 11 localities in the South did one or more branches give service to patrons regardless of race.² It is therefore necessary to trace, relate, and compare conditions of service to Negroes in order to appraise adequately the status of service as it concerns a southern city in 1959.

There is no better time than the present to relate the kind and quality of service which had been and, to some extent, still is being offered to Negroes in southern cities. A study of this nature serves to provide information for those persons interested in this area of library service, and also shows changes which have occurred since other historical studies of this nature have been made.


Purpose and Scope

The purposes of this study are: (1) to relate pertinent facts concerning the general development and growth of public library service in Columbus, Georgia; (2) to present facts pertaining to the development and establishment of public library service to Negroes of this city; and (3) to appraise and evaluate the present status, and make recommendations for the future development of public library service offered to Negroes in Columbus, Georgia.

Methodology

In developing this study, the historical method of research was employed, giving emphasis to the economic, social and cultural characteristics of the community as submitted through publications by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and the 1950 Census. These characteristics were traced as they related to the beginning of the services rendered by the Fourth Avenue Public Library, which is the Negro branch library. Permission was secured from the librarian for the use of primary and secondary materials, which were of assistance to the writer. Such materials were: minutes of the Library Board, annual reports of librarians, newspaper clippings and library publicity materials.

In order to give a picture of the current status of service to Negroes, a comparison of the existing service was made with the standards for materials, finance, quarters, equipment and services as recommended for public libraries by the American Library Association. The following were used as evaluative aids in this appraisal: Public
Library Service; A Guide to Evaluation with Minimum Standards,¹ and Cost of Public Library Service in 1956.²


CHAPTER II
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY

History

The first step in the establishment of the city of Columbus was taken by the Georgia Legislature in 1827. It was then that state engineers founded and laid out the city. An act was passed to lay out a trading town on the Indian Frontier, and to dispose of all the lands reserved for use of the State near Coweta Falls, on the Chattahoochee River.1 Because of the vast water power of the river, the city offered a challenge to industrial pioneers. From the beginning, industry has been the major factor in Columbus' growth and development.2

It is not known what influenced the Commissioners to adopt the name, Columbus; however, there is a strong belief that the great qualities of Columbus, the discoverer of America, influenced the Commissioners to do honor to the hero and perpetuate in lasting memory his name.3 In 1836, the charter of the town was amended by an act of the legislature in order that it might become a city,

1Columbus Ledger, November 5, 1922, p. 8.


3Columbus Ledger, op.cit.
and a mayor and six aldermen expended their organization to include more city officials, and thus the dignity of a city government was assumed. By an act of the general assembly of Georgia in July, 1888, a new charter was granted for the city which incorporated the name "City of Columbus" declaring due rights and powers through its mayor and aldermen. It was not until 1922 that the city under this same charter, with possibly a few amendments, changed its city government operation. Now it has a commission-manager form of government.

Columbus is located at the head of navigation on the Chattahoochee River along the western boundary of the state. It is the seat of Muscogee County which lies on the western border of the state of Georgia, midway between Tennessee to the north and Florida to the south. The city has two rather large neighbors. To the west, being separated only by the Chattahoochee River, is Phenix City, Alabama, which in 1956 had an estimated population of 25,000. To the south, is the United States Military Reservation of Fort Benning which at the same period of time, reported a total of 31,000 service men within its limits. Fort Benning is the world's largest infantry training school.

Because of Fort Benning and developing industries the city has continued to grow steadily with the passing years. In 1910

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1 Columbus Chamber of Commerce, "Columbus, Georgia - The Hub of the Southeast," Columbus, (1959).

the total population of the city was 20,554 with a Negro popul.
of 7,644 or 37.2 per cent of the total. In 1920, ten years later,
statistics show an increase of 10,571 inhabitants giving a total
population of 31,125 of which 9,093 or 29.2 per cent were Negroes.
Statistics in 1950 revealed an increase of 26,331 or 49.4 per cent
over the previous census with a total population of 79,611. Table
1 illustrates the trends in population from 1910 - 1950. This table
gives a picture of the total Negro population and the per cent of
same. Effective as of January 1, 1959, the Chamber of Commerce re-
ported that Columbus almost doubled its land area which gave it an
estimated population of 135,000.1

### TABLE 1

**POPULATION STATISTICS OF COLUMBUS, GEORGIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Negro Population</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910(a)</td>
<td>20,554</td>
<td>7,644</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920(b)</td>
<td>31,125</td>
<td>9,093</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930(c)</td>
<td>43,131</td>
<td>14,157</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940(d)</td>
<td>53,280</td>
<td>17,453</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950(d)</td>
<td>79,611</td>
<td>13,702</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Chamber of Commerce. *op. cit.*

\(a\)U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thir
teenth Census of the United States: 1910 (Washington: U. S.

\(b\)Ibid., Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 (Ibid.),

\(c\)Ibid., Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 (Ibid.),

Economic Conditions

The Columbus labor market includes all Muscogee and Chattahoochee counties in Georgia, as well as Russell County in Alabama, because commuting patterns indicate that workers come from a 40-mile radius to the city. From an industrial point of view, the city has continued to grow rapidly since the development of the textile industry in 1838. Today cotton textiles comprise the city's major industry, giving employment to some 100,000 persons; however, a wide variety of products come from the city's other 120 internationally distributed industries.1

In giving a picture of the economic characteristics of the community by race, it is reported in the 1950 Census that 31.22 percent of the white citizens were engaged in operative and kindred occupations, while 20.95 percent of the Negro population were employed in this same capacity. Private household workers consisted of 23.12 percent of the Negro population as compared to that of 0.48 percent of the white. This type of work involves the greatest number of employed Negroes. Professional and technical workers make up seven percent of the white population and 2.60 percent of the Negro. Table 2 gives a detailed outline of the occupations of employed persons by race as indicated by the 1950 Census. It can be seen that the Negro's employment role is limited, for the most part, to unskilled and semi-skilled labor.

1 Chamber of Commerce, op. cit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Per Cent Employed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Negro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Technical, etc.</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers, Officials, Proprietors</td>
<td>11.62</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm and Farm Managers</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and Kindred</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Workers</td>
<td>10.87</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen, Foremen, Kindred</td>
<td>16.20</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operatives and Kindred</td>
<td>31.22</td>
<td>20.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Household Workers</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>23.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers except Private</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Laborers, and Foremen</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers, except Farm and Mine</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>14.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations Not Reported</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social and Cultural Characteristics of the Community

There are approximately 170 churches of practically all denominations in Columbus. The Bradley Memorial Library with its branch for Negro patrons serves the community. There are 17 public parks and playground areas, and eight community centers. Four of the community centers are restricted to use by white citizens, and four serve Negroes. One of these parks which serve Negroes has a swimming pool while two pools are available for whites.¹

Fraternal organizations as well as all major civic clubs are represented in the city. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YWCA's, and YMCA's are instrumental in providing wholesome activities for both races of the city's young people. Through the Columbus Museum of Arts and Crafts the town is exposed to many historical and artistic exhibits.²

The Columbus Enquirer (morning—daily) was established in 1828 and the Columbus Ledger (evening—daily) was established in 1886. The combined average circulation of the two was audited for the year ending March 31, 1958 and found to be 53,330. The Ledger and Enquirer combine on Sunday as the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer which had an audited average circulation of 48,351 for the year ending

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¹Columbus Chamber of Commerce, "Columbus, Georgia," Columbus, (1958).

March 31, 1958. Both of the publications subscribe to major press and feature services. They also present news from an independent point of view, and the papers are distributed throughout west and south Georgia and east Alabama. Local communications agencies also include two television channels and five radio stations which broadcast national and local programs.

There are three hospitals with a total of more than 400 beds in the city. Negroes are served by two of these hospitals.

**Education**

Realizing the importance of educational facilities for its people the city in 1867 established the first public school system in the South. The Muscogee County public school system, established in 1873, and the Columbus public school system were merged in 1950 to become one independent school district.

There are 32 elementary schools for white children in Columbus, and 12 for Negroes. Of the 32 elementary schools for white youth, 29 are accredited by the Georgia Accrediting Commission. Of the 12 elementary schools for Negroes, 10 are accredited by the state accrediting agency. On the secondary level, grades seven through grade 12, white youths attend one junior high and three

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1. Columbus Chamber of Commerce, *op. cit.*
senior high schools. There are two junior high schools and one senior high school for Negroes.\(^1\) There are no vocational schools for Negroes.

Within the city there are three institutions of higher learning: one junior college, the University of Georgia off-campus center for white students, and the Albany State College (a Negro Branch of the University of Georgia System) which operates an off-campus center for Negroes offering college credit toward the four-year college degree.

Table 3 indicates the number of volumes and annual budgets of the secondary school libraries in Muscogee County for the school year 1956-1957. It is interesting to notice that the combined total number of volumes in the two junior high school libraries for Negroes is less than the total holdings of any one school for whites. The total number of books per capita for white pupils is four as compared to a little more than two for Negro pupils. One of the strengths of the library service program in Columbus is the fact that the administration of public library service is a function of the Board of Education. This means that teachers and pupils expect and receive much help through co-operative services rendered by the public library.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 124.

\(^2\)Ibid.
### TABLE 3

**NUMBER OF VOLUMES AND ANNUAL BUDGETS FOR THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES OF MUSCOGEE COUNTY, 1956-1957**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary Schools</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Number of Volumes</th>
<th>1956-1957 Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Junior High</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>$750.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker High</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>4,850</td>
<td>1,287.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus High</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>7,986</td>
<td>1,636.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Vocational High</td>
<td>2,062</td>
<td>8,044</td>
<td>2,653.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,792</td>
<td>24,980</td>
<td>$6,327.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negro</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carver Junior High</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>408.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer Junior High</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>542.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer Senior High</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>5,450</td>
<td>1,447.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>7,010</td>
<td>$2,399.75</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

Legislative Provisions for Public Library Service in Georgia

In section 32-2701 of Georgia Code it is stated in the interest of public libraries that:

Any city may, through its properly constituted municipal authorities, raise by taxation, from year to year, and permanently appropriate money for the purpose of establishing or erecting or maintaining a public library. Any such sum or sums of money so appropriated shall be expended by and under the direction of the board of trustees of such public library elected by the city council of said city.1

Power has been granted the board of trustees of a public library in Georgia to accept and receive donations, either in money, land, or other property for the purpose of erecting or assisting in the erection of suitable library buildings. Adjoining counties may enter into cooperative agreements in the establishment and maintenance of public libraries with terms which may be agreed upon between their respective governing bodies. The library board, as constituted by section 32-2701, has the general supervision of the public library and may establish branches and stations where deemed advisable.2 Since the reconstruction period, it has

1Georgia, Code of Georgia Annotated (1952), Secs. 32-2701.

2Ibid.
been traditional for southern communities to separate the races in public places. In keeping with this tradition, library branches and stations were established for the exclusive use of the Negro citizens of Columbus, Georgia.

Development of Public Library Service for White Patrons in Columbus, Georgia

The Columbus Enquirer of August 4, 1831 indicates that citizens of Columbus and a library in the pioneer days remarking that: "We have three churches, a theatre, a book store, and a circulating library." Information is not available that will brighten and make clear the picture of Columbus' first circulating library. It was noted however that Robert Carter, a druggist from Virginia, placed his large store of books in a room at the back of his drug store in order that book lovers might benefit.¹

It is evident that several of the early settlers owned excellent private libraries from which their neighbors borrowed and that certain pioneer cottages built in the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's, located on the town's oldest streets, housed these collections. The owners of these cottages had come from other states to make their homes in Columbus and had brought their books along, lending them freely.²

After the War Between the States, several cultural groups


²Ibid.
encouraged the lending of books, and on January 10, 1881, a meeting was held for the purpose of uniting the efforts of two book and music clubs. These clubs formed a subscription library which they named the Columbus Public Library. For 26 years it moved about, occupying suites of rented rooms. The names of many generous citizens stand out as making the subscription library possible.¹ The name of the first librarian is lost in the haze of time, but he is said to have been "a student and scholar."

"Neb" Battle, Judge J. G. Moon, Ed K. Cargile, Herbert Mansion, Miss Anna Hull, Mrs. Nina Holstead, Mrs. C. L. Gordy, and Miss Loretta L. Chappell in that order stand out in the early library history of this city as having served as librarians.²

In the year of 1901, the Board of Directors of the Columbus Public Library carried on much correspondence with Mr. Andrew Carnegie in reference to obtaining a donation to build a public library for Columbus. Mr. Carnegie at that time was donating funds to towns that showed a disposition for furthering education by giving public library buildings, with certain specified limitations.³

Mrs. Nina Jones Holstead is to be mentioned for her efforts in connection with bringing the Columbus Public Library up to Mr. Carnegie's requirements through planned efforts with the city, and by working directly with the benefactor. Consequently in 1906, the Association received $30,000 from the Carnegie Board, with the

¹Ibid.

²Columbus Ledger, April 26, 1936, p. 5.

³Minutes of the Columbus Public Library, July 3, 1901.
provision that the City Council would appropriate annually, 10 per cent of the donation for the up-keep. On October 15, 1907, the formal opening of the new building on Mott's Green was celebrated, and the city of Columbus had its first permanent library which was to serve white patrons only.1

After having served the white citizens of the city for 40 years on the Mott's Green location, the Columbus Public Library was forced to secure another library site. While white patrons argued about the appropriate site for the new library, a Negro delegation protested the apparent discrimination in the plans which would be exclusively for the purpose of serving only white patrons. The daily newspapers carried a series of articles concerning the protest of Negroes for equal facilities. Being taxpayers they felt it only fitting and proper that they be given adequate public library facilities along with white citizens. In spite of the protests by the Negroes, the City Attorney ruled that Columbus was within its legal rights in appropriating funds for the construction of a city-county library which would exclude Negroes.2 Hence in 1948 Columbus and Muscogee County combined their resources to finance the building of a new library which was to be located on land given by a wealthy citizen. The merging of the Columbus Public Library with Muscogee County re-organized the Columbus Public Library System, and changed it from a small town, one-building library to a

1Etta B. Horsely, Columbus on the Chattahoochee (Columbus, Georgia: Columbus Office Supply, 1951), p. 354.

2Columbus Enquirer, October 17, 1947, p. 10.
city-county library. At this time, the Library Board came under the direct administration of the Muscogee County Board of Education. The W. C. Bradley Memorial Library serving whites only and named in honor of a leading citizen of Columbus, was officially dedicated on October 31, 1950. Since 1952 the W. C. Bradley Memorial Library has been the headquarters of the Muscogee-Marion-Chattahoochee Regional Library. In this regional system, bookmobile service is offered only to the white clientele of this three-county library system.

Development of Public Library Service for Negro Patrons in Columbus, Georgia

The first mention of library service to the Negro public occurred in the Enquirer-Sun, May 29, 1938 at which time the Columbus Public Library announced the organization of a summer reading program. With the cooperation of the Works Progress Administration, the Public Library made this general idea possible. The activity of Negro children participating in this program consisted of the reading of 10 books during the school vacation period. The reading center was housed at Spencer High School. Mrs. Hattie Taylor, who had no formal training in library work, was in charge of the program for Negroes. The library was opened from nine until eleven o'clock in the morning and in the afternoons from three until five o'clock. The collection consisted of approximately 700 books. The summer


2 Enquirer-Sun, May 29, 1938, p. 7.
reading program was publicized through the schools. The Negro public showed considerable interest in this program and requested more material for adults as well as children and better library quarters.¹

With the withdrawal of the Works Progress Administration in 1941, the Negro citizens asked the Board of Trustees of the Columbus Public Library if they might continue to receive some type of public library service. Because of this interest, the Spencer High School Library was opened in October of that year to serve the Negro adult public as well as the students. Mrs. Mildred L. Rivers, who received her undergraduate training in library science at Tennessee Agricultural and Mechanical State College and Fisk University, and a Bachelor of Science in Library Science degree from Atlanta University, was appointed as a combination school and public librarian. The collection was composed of some 600 volumes. Many of these books were inherited from the Works Progress Administration collection and others had been purchased for the school. There were also some gift books which for the most part, consisted of old editions of the classics. The sum of 10 dollars was appropriated monthly by the Library Board for purchasing best sellers.²

The librarian was responsible to the School Board and therefore received her salary from that agency. The hours of the school-public library were not suitable for the public, because the library

¹Minutes of the Columbus Public Library, January 9, 1939.

²Interview with Mrs. Mildred L. Rivers, Librarian, Fourth Avenue Public Library, July 2, 1959.
only remained open one hour after the close of school when many adults were not home from work. Because of the short hours, and the need for a library during the summer months when the school library was closed, the Library Board with the co-operation of the Columbus Housing Authority opened a branch for Negroes in the Booker Washington Apartments, a Federal Low Rent housing project.1

This small library, a converted one-bedroom apartment, consisted of three rooms. Only one room, 10' x 12' was used to house the book collection. The other two rooms, 9' x 12' and 10' x 12' respectively, were used as reading areas. A rest room, 5' x 7', was used by both male and female patrons. There was one water fountain and a public telephone available. The library was inadequately lighted having only one hanging ceiling light in each room. Altogether in the reading rooms there were five tables with seating space for four persons at each table. For ventilation, there were only four windows in the entire building, one window in each room.2

The Booker Washington Branch opened with a book collection of 548 volumes. Of these, 439 were allocated by the Columbus Public Library and 109 given by the Library Extension Service of the Georgia State Department of Education. More than half of the collection was composed of fiction books for adults and children. A small number of basic reference books, periodicals and newspapers were also included. All processing of these materials was done at the main library. Mrs.

1Tbid.

2Annual Report of the Board of Education by the Columbus Public Library, Columbus, Georgia, March, 1945.
Marguerite Washington, a high school graduate, who was employed by the Housing Authority, served as librarian from three o'clock until five o'clock in the afternoons for five days per week. Although inadequate, in terms of facilities and trained personnel, it represented the only collection accessible to Negroes for public use prior to 1952.1

The first public announcement that a building would be considered for Negroes appeared simultaneously with plans for the construction of a building for whites on February 14, 1948; however, it was not until March 11, 1952 that final plans were announced by the County Director of Libraries2 and on January 5, 1953, a modern $70,000 library, named the Fourth Avenue Branch Library, was opened for Negroes.

This public library, from its beginning, was operated as a part of the Muscogee County School District Library System and is that type of school-district library in which the chief librarian reports directly to the school board. There is no separate library board.3

Mrs. Mildred L. Ribers was appointed by the Muscogee County Board of Education in 1952 to set up the Fourth Avenue Public Library. With the library's opening in 1953, Mrs. Mildred L. Rivers and Miss Margaret Walker were appointed as its first librarians. Both librarians were appointed with equal rank, and neither had responsibility

1Ibid.


3Columbus Ledger, January 5, 1953, p. 2.
to the other. Book selection, readers' advisory service, the administration of branch library activities were the duties of both librarians. In addition to these duties, Miss Walker served as children's librarian and supervisor of bookmobile services.1

Summary

The struggle for public library service for Negroes in Columbus has been a long and hard one. Though some form of service to white citizens can be traced as far back as pioneer days, the Negro public had no service of any kind before 1938. The service at this time, was limited to a summer reading program with assistance from the Works Progress Administration. Because considerable interest was shown in this very meager service, the Negro public continued to make its desires known for the need of better library facilities. After the withdrawal of the Works Progress Administration in 1941, an increase in the desires of Negroes for library service developed. From limited service in a school, and later in a one-bedroom apartment, the Negro public moved to a modern public library branch.

1Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENT STATUS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE TO NEGROES IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

Historical Development of Service to Negroes

It was not until 1953 that the Negro citizens of Columbus, Georgia enjoyed the services of adequate library quarters. The steps in the development of service to Negroes to the present include service from a school-public arrangement to a small room in a Federal low-rent housing project to a $70,000 structure. The Fourth Avenue Public Library, a branch, was officially opened on the 5th of January, 1953.

As has been stated earlier, the Columbus Public Library system is a school-district type of library under the administration of the Muscogee County Board of Education. This school-district organization is designed to serve both the school population and the general public. The main library is also a part of a regional library system which includes library service to white patrons of Marion and Chattahoochee counties. Though these counties are not in the same school district as Muscogee County, a workable plan has been devised to reach them. The director of the library meets with the School
Board only on special occasions, but keeps it advised through brief monthly reports. He works closely with the Muscogee County Superintendent of Education, to whom he is directly responsible. A library committee, composed of some of the School Board members, meets with the library director to discuss plans and problems whenever necessary. The branch librarian is responsible to the Library Director.¹

**Resources**

The Fourth Avenue Branch was opened in 1953 with an approximate total of 8,000 volumes and 30 periodicals. In 1959, the library had approximately 16,594 volumes and subscribed to 137 periodicals which were suitable for children and adults. There was a total of 718 reference books in the library, and 12 newspapers, nine weeklies and three dailies. The library keeps a special collection of approximately 75 books for the benefit of students attending Albany State College. These volumes are ones which instructors at the Off-campus Center have selected and recommended to their students in connection with class assignments. The American Lending Library's service is used by the library. This service supplies 100 light fiction books and current best sellers periodically. Needed reference, as well as circulating books which are not found in the Branch, are supplied daily by the Main Library.

Some books are selected by the branch librarian, and some are selected by the library director. All books, except gift books

¹Interview with Mr. John Bannister, Director of Libraries, Bradley Memorial Library, Columbus, Georgia, July 7, 1959.
are cataloged at the Main Library.

Non-book materials at the Library include 402 phonograph records of which 251 are adult and 151 are juvenile. The Main Library houses 70 films and 282 filmstrips and microfilms which are made available to other branches at the Main Library. Space does not permit the Branch Library to house these materials.

**Personnel**

Mrs. Mildred L. Rivers, who formerly served as school-public librarian at Spencer High School from 1941-1946, was appointed as one of the librarians of the Fourth Avenue Branch with its opening. She now (1959) serves as the branch librarian. Her administrative duties consist of book selection, readers' advisory service and the supervision of all activities of the Branch. The librarian's salary is $387.50 monthly.

A second full-time staff member is the assistant librarian, Mrs. Katie Griffin, who is employed at a monthly salary of $225.00. The assistant librarian's duties consist of serving as circulation librarian for the bookmobile, and serving in the absence of the librarian. Mrs. Griffin has a Bachelor of Science degree in education with a minor in library science from Albany State College.

There is one full-time library assistant, Mrs. Alberta Griffin, who has completed two and one-half years of college work. She is studying toward a Bachelor's degree in education, and expects to minor in library science. She is paid $120.00 per month. This full-time library assistant works at the circulation desk and also devotes a great deal of her time to the needs of children.
A part-time library assistant serves at the circulation desk in the absence of the full-time library assistant. She is a high school graduate and has had no formal training in librarianship.

One full-time library clerk, who is responsible for all library correspondence and clerical matters, is employed at $165.00 monthly. There are three pages, all high school students, employed at rates from 50 to 65 cents per hour.

Other employees consist of a bookmobile driver and a janitor. The bookmobile driver assists the librarian with slipping and shelving books in the bookmobile. He is also responsible for the general maintenance of the bookmobile and receives a monthly salary of $135.00. The janitor who is responsible for the upkeep of the building and grounds, is employed at $90.00 monthly. There are four volunteer story-tellers; a retired teacher, two high school students and one housewife. There are also five volunteer high school students who serve as hobby group leaders and also assist with some of the other activities of the library.

**Physical Facilities**

The Fourth Avenue Library is a light red brick structure with several inlets of plate glass. A large glass exhibition case is located at the right of the front entrance. The front door entrance leads to a large reading room for adults and children. The adult reading area, 45' x 25', is to the left of the front entrance. The children's reading area, 35' x 23', is located at the extreme back of the adult reading area. In this area there are five oval shaped tables, each seating eight persons comfortably, and one
A bookmobile room, 19' x 12', is located at the back library entrance which leads to a garage where a bookmobile is kept. This room holds about 200 books which are deposited for transferring to the bookmobile.

The library has such modern features as acoustical tile in the ceiling, and recessed fluorescent lighting overhead. There are 44 chairs of light wood. The floors are covered with dark green rubber tile and the walls are of light red concrete blocks. A plate glass door opens both the adult and children's reading areas to a patio which leads to a side street. A small kitchenette, 3' x 7', for the staff; two public rest rooms, 5' x 7' each; and two water fountains are also found in this completely air-conditioned building.

The library's equipment consists of a 20-tray unit card catalog, an information file, a microfilm reader, and a magazine rack.
Financial Support

The Muscogee County Library System receives money from the Muscogee school district, two counties, and the state of Georgia. However, the chief source of funds is the Muscogee Board of Education. The Muscogee Board of Education has library contracts with Marion and Chattahoochee counties which also bring revenue to the library system. State aid to supplement the purchase of materials, salaries, and travel expenses of approved library personnel is received. The fines and fees charged for overdue books and non-resident borrowing privileges are small sources of income.¹

The librarian at Fourth Avenue Library does not have a budget and no specific amount is allocated to her for the operation of the Branch. She make requisitions for what she needs to the Library Director. Since the librarian is not told how much she can spend for library materials during the year, there is no such thing as planning in terms of book or any other types of expenditures.

Extent of Use

In 1953, during the first year of the Fourth Avenue Public Library's existence, there were 2,688 registered borrowers. At the end of June, 1959, the library had 6,999 registered borrowers. During the intervening years, the extent of usage by both adults and children has fluctuated. The 1953 record reported the circulation

¹ George Peabody College for Teachers, op. cit., p. 170-71.
of 1,226 adult books and 2,355 children's books. Each year thereafter, circulation figures have increased tremendously (see Table 4). More books have always circulated to children than adults. Because the library is located in a community where the median school years completed by adults is only 4.9, the library staff has tried to stimulate the adult use of the library by visiting P. T. A. groups, civic and social clubs, homes and churches in order to acquaint the adult public with the resources of the library. In 1959, the adult clientele was charging out almost three times more books than it did in 1953.

TABLE 4

THE FOURTH AVENUE PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOOK CIRCULATION, 1953-1958

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Adult Circulation</th>
<th>Children's Circulation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>14,032</td>
<td>21,109</td>
<td>35,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>23,461</td>
<td>31,462</td>
<td>54,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>27,641</td>
<td>33,957</td>
<td>61,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>34,226</td>
<td>36,971</td>
<td>71,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>38,572</td>
<td>40,187</td>
<td>78,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>39,452</td>
<td>50,600</td>
<td>90,052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Taken from the circulation records of the Fourth Avenue Public Library, 1953-1958.
In 1958, a total of 90,052 books circulate. Of this number, 39,452 were adult books and 50,600 were children's books (see Table 5). The months of October, March, May, and September in that order, show the heaviest circulation. One may assume that school assignments for students, and a generally favorable climate for adults, attribute to this increase. The month of February shows the lowest over-all circulation figure for 1958; however, during this month, for the first time in the library's history, more books circulated to adults than children. The 1958-record shows an increase in both adult and children's circulation which surpasses the record of any previous year.

Extension Services

Because of a need for extending more service to the Negroes of the city who do not live near the library, the Fourth Avenue Branch initiated its bookmobile service in 1953. During the school months, the bookmobile gives service to the 12 Negro elementary schools of the city, and three community centers. The library has no responsibility to the high school libraries in Columbus or Muscogee County. Service goes only to the elementary schools of Columbus because the larger high schools have their own separate libraries, with librarians and permanent collections of books. The smaller elementary schools without libraries receive their entire service from the bookmobile. The bookmobile delivers classroom collections to the schools and the readers use the books picked from the bookmobile collection by the teachers and their student assistants.
### TABLE 5

**MONTHLY SUMMARY OF CIRCULATION, 1958**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Adult Circulation</th>
<th>Children's Circulation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>3,477</td>
<td>3,585</td>
<td>7,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>3,214</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>4,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3,570</td>
<td>5,648</td>
<td>9,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>3,518</td>
<td>3,908</td>
<td>7,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>3,885</td>
<td>3,983</td>
<td>7,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>3,077</td>
<td>3,683</td>
<td>6,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>3,391</td>
<td>3,746</td>
<td>7,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>3,252</td>
<td>3,759</td>
<td>7,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3,467</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>7,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>2,094</td>
<td>9,381</td>
<td>11,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>3,173</td>
<td>3,654</td>
<td>6,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>3,334</td>
<td>3,857</td>
<td>7,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>39,452</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,600</strong></td>
<td><strong>90,052</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the summer months, the bookmobile makes 42 stops. These stops include 10 school playgrounds, two small grocery stores, three churches, one cafe, and two small farms. All bookmobile service to Negroes is confined to areas within the city limits.

The assistant librarian assumes the responsibility of supervising all bookmobile services. During the winter she is
assisted only by the bookmobile driver, however, a high school student also works with her during the summer season.

Library Activities

In terms of working with young people, the library sponsors a story hour twice per week, on Thursday afternoons from four o'clock until five, and on Saturday mornings from eleven o'clock until twelve noon. Attending each story session are approximately 25 children. All story hours are held in the library's conference room.

The library sponsors two hobby clubs, 16 girls are in one group, and eight boys are in the other group which meet twice each month. The girls' group works in the area of useful arts while the boys' group works with science projects. Volunteer hobby group leaders direct the activities of the members which vary according to the interests of the majority. These activities consist of projects such as puppets, useful household ornaments, and experiments in science. Library staff members give assistance when the need arises. All hobby club meetings are held in the conference room of the library.

Service to adults include one monthly book review, given by one of the library's staff members. The average attendance at these reviews is approximately 45. Some of the books which have been recently reviewed by the library staff are Anatomy of a Murder, by John Donaldson Voelker\(^1\) (his pen name is Robert Traver); Annapurna,

by Maurice Herzog;¹ and, Advise and Consent, by Allen Drury.²

Film forums for adults are held monthly at the library. These forums are led by invited guests and volunteers. Attending the forums are approximately 15 persons. Such subjects as travel, folklore, and progressive jazz have been discussed. Films for the forums are rented or obtained free from such places as the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, the University of Georgia Film Library, private enterprises and from industrial film collections.

The library participated in the American Heritage Program. An invitation to participate in the program was extended the library by the State Library Agency of Georgia. The librarian and two local teachers from the Muscogee County School System were given a training course in order to serve as leaders in this program. State library officials and representatives from the American Library Association conducted a course in Atlanta, Georgia, for the purpose of training leaders for this program. There are 50 persons enrolled in the American Heritage Program; however, approximately 25 persons attend regularly. Some of the occupations of persons enrolled in this program are: housewives, teachers, ministers, nurses and businessmen. Such subjects as the following have been discussed: "The Negro and the Constitution," "The Declaration of Independence," "Civic and Governmental Problems," and "Juvenile Delinquency."

At the present time (1959), the library staff is making plans for participation in the Great Books Program. Many patrons

¹Maurice Herzog, Annapurna (New York: Dutton, 1953).

have indicated an interest in such a program.

**Summary**

In 1953 the Fourth Avenue Branch Library was opened in Columbus, for the purpose of serving only the Negroes of the City. Bookmobile service was also included to serve the 12 Negro elementary schools of Columbus as well as the adult residential areas. The staff of this Branch consists of five full-time persons and one of these is a professional librarian who is in charge of the Branch. The staff is aided by a part-time general assistant and three high school pages. The Branch librarian's annual salary is less than $5,000 and all others are less than $3,000.

The library building is a rather attractive one of red brick. Its interior is well arranged from a functional point of view and has aesthetic appeal.

The library has increased its registered borrowers from 2,688 in 1953 to 6,999 in 1959. More books have always circulated to children than adults but in 1959 the adult clientele was borrowing almost three times more books than it did in 1953. This trend is in keeping with the growth in population which has been tremendous from 1953 to 1959.

This Branch sponsors rather limited activity programs with children and young people. Two story hours per week attract an average of 25 children each. In addition the Library sponsors two hobby clubs, one for girls and one for boys. Altogether about 24 children attend these club meetings which are scheduled twice each month.
A monthly book review attracts an average of 45 persons. The books are reviewed by staff members and are usually current best sellers. Monthly film forums dealing with subjects of current interest usually attract about 15 people.

The Fourth Avenue Branch sponsors an American Heritage program which has a regular attendance of 25 persons. Most of the members of this group are professional people but there are also a few housewives included. An interest has been expressed by patrons in a "Great Books" program for which plans are being made.
In 1907 the city of Columbus, Georgia was proud to open its first permanent public library building, but the services of this library were limited to white patrons.

In 1948 the Columbus Public Library and Muscogee County Library merged and a new building was constructed to serve this expanded system. By 1950 two other counties, Marion and Chattahoochee joined the system to create a three-county and city regional library. Services of this multi-county regional library were also limited to white patrons.

The Negro population of Columbus did not receive any type of library service prior to 1938. In that year, the Works Progress Administration with some assistance from the Columbus Public Library instituted a summer reading program. After the withdrawal of the Works Progress Administration's assistance in 1941, Negro adults were allowed to use the Spencer High School Library. Inadequate hours and a very limited collection prohibited the adults from using this library to any great advantage. In 1945, a small branch of the Columbus Public Library was set up in a federal low rent housing project (Booker Washington Apartments) to serve tenants and citizens. This Branch was a converted one-bedroom apartment,
and was inadequate for proper library service. It was supervised by an untrained librarian for two hours, five days per week. In 1952, all services from this Branch ended and in 1953, a $70,000 Columbus Public Library Branch (the Fourth Avenue Public Library) was officially opened to the Negro public of Columbus. This Branch opened with an approximate total of 8,000 volumes. In 1959, the collection had a little more than doubled to 16,594 volumes.

The Muscogee County Library System had 135,000 volumes in 1959. The number of volumes in this system exceeds the minimum recommendation of the American Library Association which states that there should be at least 100,000 volumes of currently useful printed material in a library system.¹

The Main Library's collection supplements the Branch with materials which it does not have. This is in keeping with the American Library Association's recommendation that:

> The community library must be able to draw upon larger collections to meet the needs of readers with specialized interest and to supplement and enrich its limited resources for all readers.²

Theoretically this supplementary arrangement is a very satisfactory one. In actual practice however, Negro patrons are deprived of the use of the Main Library and must depend entirely upon the facilities of the Fourth Avenue Branch or limited inter-

²Ibid., p. 35.
library loans.

The cost of public library service in Muscogee County per borrower is estimated at $4.00. For a typical city or system of 100,000 in 1956, approximately $3.00 per capita was needed to achieve minimum standards. The American Library Association states that any community which is not satisfied with minimum facilities must provide more than $3.00 per capita.\footnote{American Library Association, Co-ordinating Committee on Revision of Public Library Standards, Cost of Public Library Service in 1956 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1956), p. 2.} It was not possible to ascertain how much per capita is being spent for the Fourth Avenue Branch. The librarian has no budget. She sends requisitions to the Main Library which are usually filled.

The Fourth Avenue Branch is staffed with one professionally trained librarian, and one staff member holds a Bachelor of Science degree in education and a full-time library assistant is working toward a college degree. The complete library staff consists of a head librarian, an assistant librarian, one full-time library assistant, one part-time library assistant, a full-time clerical assistant, three student pages, a bookmobile driver and a janitor. When this Branch first opened it had two professional librarians on its staff. One of them, Miss Margaret Walker resigned within the first year and to date her position has not been filled. In consideration of the types of programs which are being carried on by the Fourth Avenue Branch and the population served, a second professional staff member is sorely needed.
Volunteer workers seem to be performing commendable types of services but it was not possible to make any sort of evaluation of these services. The quality and quantity of expert guidance and supervision that are available to volunteers working especially with children is questionable since there is only one professional librarian on the staff. On the other hand it is reported that some staff member of the Fourth Avenue Branch reviews a current book once each month. It would seem feasible here for the Branch librarian to consider some of the local talent of the community for this purpose. The utilization of community people for book reviews would probably stimulate more interest and would also tend to serve as a public relations vehicle. This idea may also be applied to the leadership of the monthly film forums. Subject specialists, industrialists, or other well-informed persons could (and would probably be happy to) lend their services as discussion leaders. Since one of the long range objectives of the American Heritage program is to help develop community leaders it would seem that some of the members of this group might be considered as potential aids to other adult educational programs of the Fourth Avenue Branch.

The library building is physically comfortable and pleasing in appearance. The front door entrance leads to a large reading room for adults and children. This reading area is not divided, however, the "L" shaped charging desk is so located that the librarian serving the desk can comfortably serve the adults' and children's reading areas. Other rooms in the building are: a conference room, an office–work room, a bookmobile room, two public rest rooms, and
a small kitchenette.

This library system receives its financial support from a school district, three counties, and the state of Georgia. The Branch librarian has the privilege of selecting material for the Branch at anytime during the year. Because of this there is not the careful planning of book or any other type of expenditures.

The first year of the Fourth Avenue Library's existence there were 2,688 registered borrowers. Through June, 1959, registered borrowers had increase to 6,999. Circulation figures show that the Library has always been used more by children than adults. However, with each year, adult library usage continued to rise. This is due largely to the efforts of the library staff to acquaint the adult public with the library's resources.

The Fourth Avenue Library initiated its bookmobile service in 1953, after three months of its opening. During the school months, the bookmobile gives service to all the 12 Negro elementary schools of the city, and three community centers. In the summer, the bookmobile makes 42 stops. These stops include school playgrounds, small grocery stores, churches, a cafe, and two small farms.

The library sponsors various activities for young people and adults. Story hours and hobby group meetings are some of the activities in which young people participate. Services to adults include book reviews, film forums, discussion groups, and participation in the American Heritage Program.

The Fourth Avenue Public Library is open for public use from
two o'clock in the afternoon until nine o'clock in the evening
everyday except Saturday when it is open from two o'clock in the
afternoon until six o'clock in the evening.

In evaluating the present status of public library service
to Negroes in Columbus, Georgia, it is seen that much progress has
been made in recent years. In spite of this progress, it is evident
that there are still areas which are in need of a great deal of
improvement.

The classification of library employees is an area which
the writer feels needs consideration in this library system. Be-
cause professional librarians are classed on the same level with
teachers, the result is that there is only one salary grade for
librarians. Some provision should be made for the upgrading of all
staff members as they gain profitable experience and more education.

There is a definite trend in the South toward doing away
with the barriers which prohibit the use of all branches as well
as the main library by Negroes.¹ Such a forward step on the part
of Columbus citizens would not only improve the library services of
31.2 per cent of its tax payers, but it would also tend to raise
the cultural and intellectual levels of the whole community.

The fact that the Columbus Public Library is a part of a
three-county system is commendable. However, it is regrettable to
note that Negroes who constitute 33.2 per cent of the three counties
involved receive no library service whatsoever unless they live in
Columbus.

¹Anna Holden, op. cit., p. 2.
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