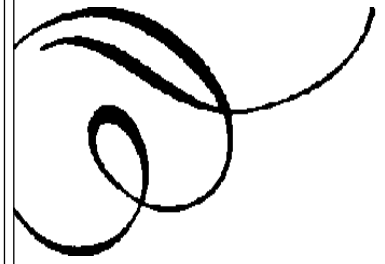


WPA LIBRARY PROJECTS

IN INDIANA

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HISTORY OF THE WPA

From its birth in 1935 until its death in 1943, the WPA (the common acronym for the Works Progress Administration and, after 1939, the renamed Work Projects Administration) hired a total of 14,000,000 Americans for a wide variety of public works projects. This massive army of WPA employees and veterans represented more than one in ten of the 132,000,000 Americans counted by the 1940 census. Some economists argued that a cutback in WPA hiring triggered a downturn in the national economy in 1937. Of all the initiatives of the Roosevelt Administration, only Social Security surpassed WPA in terms of size and scope.

In addition to involving millions of lives across the nation, both the WPA and Social Security required a state and federal partnership. Washington and each of the forty-eight states split the expense for these programs. Unlike the federally directed Social Security pension system, however, state governments ran their own WPA projects. The Federal authorities enjoyed final authority only in selecting the destinations of the grants. State officials, often acting under local pressure, made the funding proposals.

The WPA came to life as a federal initiative, albeit one which incorporated significant state involvement, direction, and cooperation. The WPA followed by two years the New Deal's initial efforts to ease unemployment which had begun in 1933 under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) when, during his first hundred days in office, Roosevelt signed legislation aimed at reviving the American economy. He directed much of this legislative effort, which was intended to provide a "New Deal for the American people," toward unemployment relief. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) hired unemployed young men to work on federal land; the National Youth Administration (NYA) provided part-time jobs to high school and college students; and the Public Works Administration (PWA) hired private contractors to construct roads and public buildings.

The WPA combined the idea of tax-funded employment with the work of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). FERA granted money directly to the states to help cover the escalating costs of caring for

destitute citizens or, in the terminology of the day, "poor relief." The WPA continued Washington's involvement in this traditionally local responsibility, but substituted public work as an alternative to direct relief payments.

The majority of WPA employees worked at enterprises such as construction of schools, government buildings, and roads that were usually considered part of the private sector domain. The decentralized nature of this agency, however, allowed the WPA to spend tax money in unprecedented ways: for example, the WPA hired actors and directors for a theater program, and many visual artists won commissions for paintings, statues and murals. This flexibility allowed even the traditional beneficiaries of tax money, such as libraries, to use resources in different ways.

THE NATIONAL WPA LIBRARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In his 1942 published dissertation *Library Extension under the WPA: An Appraisal of an Experiment in Federal Aid*, Edward Barrett Stanford points out that prior to the Depression years, not only aid to the poor and unemployed, but also support for libraries were considered to be local and state responsibilities, beyond the purview of the federal government. As the crisis of the early 1930's deepened, however, it became increasingly clear that the need for relief was overwhelming the limited resources of states and localities and that the federal government would be forced to intervene in some capacity. It was this intervention, this massive effort to create work for the nation's unemployed that resulted indirectly in the first federal aid to libraries.

In 1933 the precursors of the WPA, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) made federal financing available for state and local projects by making grants directly to the states, over which the states had complete control. At this point, the federal government had no responsibility for project operation at the national level. Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator of FERA, the CWA, and the WPA criticized the results of this initial effort in work relief in 1937:

“ . . .the local work relief activities, financed by FERA, state, and local funds, left much to be desired. The projects were frequently of little value, the work provided was almost entirely unskilled manual work, supervisory personnel and materials were inadequate, earnings were meager, and efficiency was generally low.”

In his dissertation, Stanford goes on to summarize the quality and condition of library projects during this period and to point out that despite their deficiencies, they provided a good foundation of experience on which to base the more ambitious and complex federally supported library projects which were to follow under the WPA:

“The caliber of library projects before 1935 reflected the conditions under which they came into existence. Neither relief authorities nor librarians were ready with carefully thought-out programs when federal relief was begun on a nation-wide scale in 1933. Hence it is not surprising that many of the first projects were hastily conceived under-takings of a more or less “busy work” character.

However, the first work relief projects did serve several valuable purposes. They provided much-needed assistance to libraries at a time when libraries generally were suffering from greatly decreased budgets and increased service demands. They demonstrated the efficacy of library work as a suitable type of project activity for women and white collar workers. They brought to light numerous weaknesses that could be avoided in subsequent endeavors. They revealed the need for planning, professional supervision, and adequate book collections as a basis for developing library projects of permanent worth. Finally, they helped to arouse groups of citizens to a new understanding of the role of library service in community life – an important factor contributing to the success of state-wide library demonstrations under the WPA today.”

In 1935, the WPA created a wider, more systematic, and more ambitious national work relief program which gave the federal government more direct control over the design and operation of state and national work relief projects. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA) superseded FERA, and until 1942 provided the channel and structure for federal aid to libraries.

Under limitations of WPA guidelines, federal money and federally funded workers could not be used to provide existing library services, but instead had to be used in some manner to extend or expand what has already being provided by established libraries.

Under these guidelines, Stanford categorizes four

different types of library projects that qualified for library funding:

1. the construction and repair of library buildings;
2. the preparation and publication of various indexes, and other reference books;
3. the provision of relief workers to assist established libraries in expanding their services; and
4. the operation of demonstrations to further the development of permanent library services in formerly unserved areas.

While these projects followed in the rough tracks of their predecessors for a time, their quality and effectiveness improved steadily over time and with experience.

By the time the WPA library assistance reached its peak of operations in 1938, there were more than 38,000 relief workers employed full-time in libraries nationwide. This was more workers than all of the regular librarians and library assistants put together in the United States had at that time. By June 1941, \$100,000,000 of federal money had been spent on library service projects; 100,000,000 books had been repaired; 260,000 books had been purchased; 150 counties had been helped to acquire bookmobiles, and 2664 local libraries were staffed with WPA personnel.

HISTORY OF THE INDIANA STATE LIBRARY

On June 28, 1816, the following resolution was adopted by the Indiana legislature:

“That it be recommended to the general assembly of the State of Indiana, to appropriate the money voluntarily given by the citizens of Harrison county to the State, to the purchase of books for a library for the use of the legislature and other officers of government; and that the said general assembly will, from time to time, make such appropriations for the increase of said library, as they may deem necessary.”

On February 11, 1825, the Indiana State Library was established, one of the first six state libraries in the nation.

The original concept of the State Library was as a repository and reference institution for the use of legislators and state officials; its first Librarian was the Secretary of State. The Library became an independent institution in 1841, and since that time a number of missions have been added to meet new needs and changing conditions. In 1903, by special act, the lending service was extended to include the citizens of the state, and in 1925 the library established a traveling library service for communities that had no local library service. Over 700 traveling libraries were on the roads during 1930.

In 1913, the state established The Division of Indiana History and Archives. Its material constitutes the state historical collection and includes a very large collection of books, maps, pictures, and manuscripts. Its manuscript collection has over 3 million items available for use.

The State Library obtained the first Braille editions for the visually impaired. Supported by federal and state funds, it created the Indiana Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Today the Special Services Division of the Indiana State Library is one of 56 regional libraries of the Library of Congress's National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). The Division's objectives are to make library materials and information available to the residents of Indiana who are unable to read regular print due to a visual or physical impairment.

In 1930, at the start of the Depression, there were 224 public libraries in the state. Fifteen of these provided county-wide service. Every town with a population of at least 4000 had public library service, as did every county but one. Local governments, however, traditionally under-funded libraries, and the WPA money could be used for projects that would otherwise have gone unsupported. The federal government, in its effort to end the depression and its subsequent unemployment, subsidized projects through the WPA which were important to these libraries and to the future course of libraries in Indiana and throughout the nation.

LIBRARY PROJECTS IN INDIANA

Projects undertaken in Indiana included the construction, renovation, and repair of library buildings; establishment of bookmobiles and other extension services; the creation of a genealogy division at the State Library; translation of books into Braille and other services for the blind; indexing and microfilming of newspapers and other documents; compilation of county histories; cataloging of uncataloged collections; and bookbinding and book repair.

The significance of these projects ranged from miniscule to mighty. However, simply the fact that the Indiana State Library and other public libraries in Indiana were able to obtain WPA funding to support such efforts during this depressed time was important. In many ways, it set up the framework for further development of library services in the State of Indiana in the decades to come.

THE STATE-WIDE LIBRARY PROJECT

While WPA projects were underway at the State Library and other public libraries prior to 1938, it was not until 1938 that the coordination of efforts led by the State Library came to be known as the "State-Wide

Library Project." The initial proposal for this project stipulated that one person would serve as the state's technical advisor and that the state's six WPA districts would each have an assistant technical advisor. In each instance, a professional librarian was to fill the role of technical advisor. The state supervisor worked closely with the Extension Division of the State Library and oversaw the work of all the assistant supervisors. The assistant supervisors in turn worked with the librarians in their district to set up the projects. The main purpose of the state-wide project was to extend library services to previously unserved areas. The idea was that these library demonstration projects would have a permanent effect on the development of library service in Indiana.

In July of 1938, the State-Wide Library Project was operating in Indiana with an initial federal appropriation of \$800,000. The Indiana State Library sponsored the project in coordination with the local libraries where the projects were taking place. By June of 1939, 390 individuals were employed in fifty-six different operations. After the development of a state-wide approach, the current projects superseded all earlier efforts. Because of this approach, it was easier to supervise projects and to produce more favorable results.

By the end of 1939, forty-eight libraries were receiving services from 232 WPA workers. Congress mandated, however, that individuals who had been employed for eighteen months or more were to be subject to a thirty-day lay-off, a disruption that inevitably effected productivity. However, at the same time, new assignments were underway which projected employment of 402 individuals on different 58 projects.

By 1942, the previous four years of library work had been an on-and-off pattern of fluctuation in the state-wide library projects. Then, in the early part of 1942, the funds and the time originally allotted to the project ran out. On March 7, an additional \$103,975 became available to continue some projects, but due to the war effort then underway, it was clear that the national WPA resources would have to be funneled toward defense initiatives. Because of this shift in priorities, the remaining state-wide project efforts understandably focused on the goal of victory, first by assisting communities that were engaged in preparing men and weapons for action abroad, then by supporting communities preparing for action at home.

To meet the needs in the first category, the state wide library project worked with Fort Benjamin Harrison and Baer Field, Charlestown, and Burns City. It assisted those in the Kingsbury area, Vermillion County, and in the proposed camp in Bartholomew County. The statewide supervisor worked with librar-

ians in these areas to assess the needs and to coordinate with other agencies involved.

In the second category of wartime emphasis, the state-wide library project sponsored the Victory Book Campaign. This project was given the highest priority. Wherever possible, workers were provided to all areas to collect gift books. Beyond these operations, however, all other activities were curtailed. It was clear that library projects had to be subordinated to the war effort. Wayne McDermott, the former supervisor of the State-Wide Library Project, explained that

“...libraries in wartime are even more important to the community than in times of peace. We have witnessed the increased demands upon library service in the emergency of the depression, and there is no doubt that the emergency of the war will similarly highlight its importance in the community.”

As the need to support the war efforts continued, the focus of the State-Wide Library Project adjusted. In the end, projects that provided extension services through the maintenance of stations, branches, and bookmobile service continued; projects such as indexing, cataloging, and book repair, however, were dropped.

On February 1, 1942, all WPA projects in Indiana were suspended by order of the President. Without a doubt, however, the contributions of the WPA to libraries and library service had been valuable:

“As a source of much valuable assistance during an emergency period, when library budgets had been drastically cut, the WPA enabled libraries not only to carry on when the demands for their services increased many fold but also to undertake many new enterprises usually considered impossible even in normal times. The projects in local history, library extension, work for the blind, indexing, and many other works undertaken during the depression and prewar period be of will permanent constructive value.”

On a small scale, a few of the projects started during the war years operated through 1944.

INDIANA STATE LIBRARY AND LOCAL LIBRARY PROJECTS

After seeing how the entire State-Wide Library Project came together, it is as important to focus on its impact on specific library services. As previously mentioned, the following areas are highlighted: genealogy and archives; county histories; newspapers and indexes; service for the blind; building construction and repair; book repair; cataloging; bookmobiles and other extension services; and clerical help.

GENEALOGY AND ARCHIVES

Indiana State Library WPA workers in coordination with regular library staff performed the following tasks: filing 12,000 bound volumes, 1,650 unbound filing drawers, and over 1,000 more cartons of miscellaneous documents. Overall, the workers in the archives cleaned, mended, humidified, and pressed documents that previously were in poor condition. In addition, they constructed a filing system for documents that were previously not filed. At the Vincennes Library, WPA funds provided for the long-needed indexing of hundreds of historic documents (manuscripts, papers, and deeds) which had accumulated over the years.

COUNTY HISTORICAL INDEXES

WPA workers at the Indiana State Library compiled (or were planning to compile) an index for each county in the state. Such an index comprised the names of people and firms found in any printed matter held at the State Library on the particular county. Sources for the county indexes included atlases, pamphlets, and biographical publications.

The Indianapolis Public Library, for example, used the additional help to finish a three-year effort to index material related to Indiana and Indianapolis history, including the standard references *Indiana and Indianans* and *Greater Indianapolis* by Jacob Platt Dunn.

These compilations would have far-reaching use for both historical and genealogical research. When the project ended in 1942, thirty-nine counties had been indexed.

NEWSPAPER INDEXES

The Indiana State Library had hundreds of unbound newspaper volumes with loose or torn pages as well as other types of damage. WPA workers mended, re-cased, and re-lettered these volumes so that they could again be used for research purposes. The total number of volumes included 7,850 bound volumes and 1,880 unwrapped volumes. WPA workers compiled a complete and comprehensive card index for all newspapers in the State Library. All prominent newspapers in the state at that time, including those published at Vincennes, New Albany, Madison, and Indianapolis from 1846 to present were part of this project. The subject index created for these newspapers saved needless handling. In 1938 a display of the indexes and other work produced by the WPA was set up at the John Herron Art Institute.

In Gary, a Lake County historical room was created at the public library. This project included a newspaper index created with support from WPA funds. The index (completed through 1936) included the names of every person, building, organization, or activity that ever

appeared in print in county newspapers.

According to Philip Wayne McDermott, then supervisor of the State-Wide Library project, the indexing of Indiana newspapers was one of the most important features of the project. The following is a list of libraries that have such indexes of local newspapers: Alexandria Public Library, Indiana University Library (Bloomington), Crawfordsville Public Library, Gary Public Library, Indiana State Library (Indianapolis), Kokomo Public Library, Purdue University (West Lafayette), Muncie Public Library, Morrisson-Reeves Library (Richmond), and Fairbanks Memorial Library (Terre Haute).

SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

The Indiana State Library first began operating services for the blind in October of 1935. The original plans called for transcribing ink-print books into Braille. During this project, approximately 650 volumes were transcribed, proof-read, shellacked, and bound. An average of ten workers were employed in this project. Because it was a highly specialized area, efforts were made to not duplicate titles that were already available in Braille. Many of the titles were non-fiction.

Since the Library of Congress did not supply books in Braille for younger children, emphasis was placed on creating books for this age group. Most Public Affairs pamphlets were transcribed, as well as one college textbook and several long poems for a Butler University student. Statistics from the 1939 State Library annual report indicate that WPA workers under staff supervision completed the following in "mending": new books plated, stamped, and pocketed (6,695); volumes mended (11,611); volumes rebacked (8,512); books collated and prepared for bindery (685); and pamphlets put in binders (1,012).

The addition of this service saw an eager response from individuals in Indiana as well as those in fifteen other states. In addition to requests for materials already in circulation, special requests were made for reference materials by the Indiana School for the Blind, the Board of Industrial Arts, and college students. Patrons often wrote to the State Library in Braille, and the project staff would read and correspond. As many as 150 Braille books a day were charged out and mailed. According to one annual report, 1,142 readers availed themselves of this service.

In 1937, the Indiana State Library held an exhibit of the work done in this area on the main floor of the building. The exhibit was divided into three parts: items translated into Braille (music, periodicals, deck of playing cards, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*); a chronological development of blind writing (Boston line type, Moon type, New York point, original

American Braille, and revised Braille); and the results of WPA employees work with Braille (transcribing machine, proof reading and binding of Braille volumes, illuminated pictures and a "talking book" machine).

Since the Indiana State Library served as a depository for the Library of Congress, WPA grants made it possible to distribute more than 600 "talking book" machines to borrowers on an indefinite loan plan. The titles made for use on these machines come from the master records at the Library of Congress, but up to that point, only 188 titles had been produced; this number was inadequate to meet the need, and it cost \$3 to produce each title. One note: the State Library did own two copies of *Snow White* written in Braille. Overall, these were great services for the blind.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR

While the Indiana State Library did not use any WPA money for building construction or repair, the use of WPA funds (usually in the form of labor) to help libraries was evident throughout Indiana. Building projects included the following:

- Clinton - interior completely refinished and furniture restored
- Ohio River Flood - Libraries in Aurora, Jeffersonville, Lawrenceville, and New Albany furnished with materials and labor to get facilities back in "good condition."
- New Library Buildings - Cambridge City & Winklepleck Memorial (Odon). WPA provided greater part of library in the construction of both facilities.
- Kokomo - Library branch at Highland Park is also used as recreation center (model airplane club, table tennis, checkers, and other "quiet" games)
- Kokomo - Public library holds open house (May 13, 1937) upon successful completion of its rehabilitation and redecoration project. Workers provided by WPA.
- Jeffersonville - by 1938, library has been re-opened to public with flood damage reconditioning work by the WPA.
- Bluffton - in coordination with Tri Kappa sorority, the library is being redecorated. WPA is overseeing the cleaning aspect of project.

BOOK REPAIR

9,504 books had been repaired at the Indiana State Library by 1939. The mending process combined the techniques using onion skin paper, Japanese tissue, mending paper (for filling out margins and corners), cambric reinforcement, cleaning with erasers and

vinegar solution, and sandpapering. All books were plated, pocketed, stamped, marked, and shellacked. 2,214 pamphlets were mended, along with magazines, sheet music, and manuscripts prepared for circulation. Probably the biggest effort came in the Public Documents section where within one and a half years 8,000 volumes — the entire collection — were reconditioned.

Marguerite H. Anderson, then State Supervisor of the WPA State-Wide Library Project explained that “The project is saving thousands of books for further use by the repairs given. Book collections which were once grimy and repellent looking are now clean and attractive due to the cleaning on the project.”

CATALOGING

There are very few reports on cataloging projects. What was reported included statistical reports from the Cataloging Division at the Indiana State Library. Three workers were assigned to this project. While not librarians, these individuals were given a summer training course at the State Library. With this training, the workers were considered to have training equivalent to many catalogers throughout the state, and they performed simple cataloging and classification under the supervision of a professional librarian. The Catalog Division of the Indiana State Library did lend some assistance to state-wide cataloging projects in 1940.

BOOKMOBILES AND EXTENSION SERVICES

With the help of WPA funds:

- The Fort Wayne and Allen County Public Library added a new bookmobile in January (1937) for use in rural book distribution. The body of the automobile, like the one being used in the city, was built by WPA labor. The truck served all consolidated schools in the county except those served by a branch library. It also distributed books to parochial schools and during the summer to many villages in the county.
- Indianapolis - New service created (November 2, 1939) for individuals not within walking distance of main branch. Books were sent for distribution to a central neighborhood location named the Library Extension Service. Schools, fire stations, businesses, and factories used the extension service. Books were sent free of charge.
- Logansport & Cass County - “trailer” library purchased in 1937 that visited schools and small towns (carrying 1,200 books & magazines). Trained librarian was in charge with assistance from WPA worker.
- Bluffton and Wells County - trailer branch consisted of a specially built semi-trailer pulled by a half-ton

Dodge pick-up. Equipped with shelving to accommodate 1500-2000 volumes. Branch was out five days a week. Four staff members divided the work on the trailer. During winter, when daily circulation reached about 500, a WPA worker assisted.

- New Castle - in cooperation with WPA State-Wide Library project, a new service to Henry County not already having library service was created. A bookmobile, carrying 2,000 volumes was scheduled to supply books to all schools and communities previously unserved. A member of the industrial arts department of New Castle High School specially designed the bookmobile.
- Valparaiso - WPA State-wide library project in Porter County established stations in nine townships formerly without library service. 3,500 books were circulated, with an estimate that 6,000 would soon be available.
- Rockville Public Library - with support from the WPA State-Wide Library Project, librarian Maye Jessup organized a county demonstration in Parke County. From this, the county supported a library tax rate to fund branch and station services. While just in an early stage, it was reported that the county library board and Mrs. Jessup studied the impact of this type of new service.

Whereas this was a service with widespread impact, there was an indication in 1940 that the services had not spread as rapidly as expected. This was due to changes at the administrative level and to vacancies at the local level of the State-Wide Library Project. In addition, it was difficult to generate local funding for bookmobile or library extension services.

CLERICAL HELP

The Indiana State Library reported that among the seven levels of stacks at the State Library, WPA workers helped serve as clerks, typist, and dusters. They were engaged in shelf reading, checking, and card indexing in an effort to keep the stacks in proper working order. This worked helped to run the library efficiently. Such help could not have been hired without WPA funding.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the voluminous evidence found in various sources that the funds from the WPA coordinated through the State-Wide Library Project had a huge impact on library service during the Depression. While there was concern about possible misuse of WPA funds at a national level, there was no evidence of this in the Indiana program. Librarian Ethel McCullough in her 1935 annual report for the Evansville Public Library summarized this sentiment when she stated “Almost

without exception each person has turned out an honest day's labor. Without this help the system would have been hopelessly handicapped and the service would have fallen short of the year's achievements."

While the WPA was created to help the country out of the Depression by training individuals for employment, creating jobs, and providing income for the unemployed and their families, it also benefited Indiana Libraries, improved services, and laid the ground work for future federal library assistance.

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