

1940.

NEW ZEALAND.

COUNTRY LIBRARY SERVICE.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNTRY LIBRARY SERVICE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1940.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

Wellington, 10th July, 1940.

SIR,—

The Service has made steady progress during the year. No large-scale developments were attempted, because of the outbreak of war, but the task of planning and establishing the machinery for a country-wide library service has been steadily proceeded with. Features of the year's work have been the marked growth in the number of libraries participating in the Service, together with the utilization of the Service for two important functions dealt with later—the war library service and the Central Bureau for Library-book Imports.

LIBRARIES AND THE WAR.

Those who regard a library as merely a collection of fiction or who have not taken the trouble to decide what a library should be may question the wisdom of the expenditure of money and effort on libraries during war-time. The worth-while library, of course, is much more than a purveyor of fiction—it is the most logical and economical means whereby a community ensures that reliable information shall be made available and kept available to it. There is no other practicable way of achieving this end, so that the properly supported free public library remains one of the best institutions which a democratic community can achieve, whether in peace or war. That part of the work of a public library which concerns recreation can also be fully justified in times of stress. Without unduly emphasizing the prophylactic value of fiction-reading, it is obvious that healthy enjoyment through recreational literature is valuable to the nation at this time.

GROWTH OF THE SERVICE.

During the year ended 31st March, 1940, the number of libraries and small groups participating in the Service rose from 219 to 323. A full description of the methods by which books, periodicals, and information are made available to country people was given in the last annual report. Summarized briefly, these methods consist of (a) free loans of books on a liberal scale to libraries controlled by local authorities which in turn agree to make their libraries free and maintain reasonable standards of library service; (b) loans of books to independent subscription public libraries at a small annual charge per one hundred books lent; (c) loans of books through travelling hamper collections to isolated groups of readers at a small annual charge; and (d) loans through the post of non-fiction books free of charge to readers requiring information. All libraries served under (a) and (b) received regular visits from one of the specially equipped book-vans of the Service, at least three visits being paid to each library during a full year. Further, all persons, whether served by the free public library or through the isolated group, may obtain loans of reference books by post from the headquarters of the Service.

THE SMALL COUNTRY LIBRARY.

The independent subscription library, managed by a small committee and with a number of subscribers ranging generally between twelve and twenty, has continued to provide the means through which the bulk of the distribution of books has been carried out.

It is a feature of New Zealand's rural life that so many small libraries, over five hundred in all, have been formed in the first hundred years of British occupation of the country. The labour and care expended on country libraries a generation ago is, however, not so commonly seen now, and it is frequently said that standards of book selection have deteriorated. Certainly the mobile stock of the small library is bound to correspond to the needs of its users, and by the criterion of use fiction of the "escape" type is preferred by the great majority of country readers.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some small libraries are still unconvinced of the benefits of participation in this Service, because loans of books to libraries are required to contain at least 40 per cent. of non-fiction, although the small library which borrows fifty books at a time from the Service is still able to place on its shelves ninety fresh volumes of fiction each year at a total cost of £4. The value of the remaining sixty volumes of non-fiction, chosen from the best of current literature, should not require elaboration. It would be unreasonable to expect a small library with its limited number of borrowers to *buy* many works of non-fiction, but it is reasonable to expect that some such works should have an issue value when placed on the library's shelves for a limited time.

That these benefits are appreciated is shown by the rapid growth in the number of small libraries which have participated, the number rising from 179 to 265 during the year. Twelve libraries withdrew from the Service, some because of lack of local support, others because the books borrowed were held to be unsuitable—*i.e.*, not “light” enough. It must be clearly stated that for each expression of disapproval there have been many of praise and appreciation for the benefits available.

The total number of books on issue to small libraries at 31st March, 1940, was 17,711, compared with 9,467 on 31st December, 1938. Many libraries now have loans of one hundred books or more.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The following table shows the geographical distribution of the small libraries participating in the Service at 31st March, 1940, compared with the numbers for the preceding year:—

District.	1939-40.	1938-39.
North Auckland	38	28
South Auckland and Waikato	36	24
Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, and Gisborne.. .. .	16	9
Taranaki	8	5
Main Trunk and centre North Island	11	10
Wellington and Hawke's Bay	19	8
Total, North Island	128	84
Nelson and Marlborough	25	15
West Coast	12	11
Canterbury	53	41
Otago	28	12
Southland	19	16
Total, South Island	137	95
Grand total	265	179

SERVICE TO FREE LIBRARIES.

Although the small independent libraries form the largest numerical group, the free public libraries, which are increasing steadily in numbers, represent the most hopeful and progressive elements in New Zealand's current library development. The free public library is an important institution in a democracy. Great Britain and the United States, by their widespread adoption of this institution, have clearly shown how important it is. New Zealand has yet to follow their example, but a definite beginning has been made.

Additional libraries which were made free for borrowing to local residents by local authorities during the year were Bluff, Balclutha, Putaruru, Taihape, and Kaitaia. Twenty-one free libraries at 31st March, 1940, with a total population of 28,250, were receiving changing stocks of books from the Service free of charge, with a total of 4,325 books on regular loan to them. This compares with sixteen free libraries with a population of 20,914 receiving 3,222 books on 31st December, 1938. It is encouraging to record that several additional libraries under the control of progressive local authorities are to make the change from subscription to free service during 1940.

Subscription Libraries.

In most public libraries in which it has been tried, the subscription method of finance has been shown to be a costly failure. Subsidies by local authorities for library purposes can be justified only where a substantial proportion of the population makes use of the facilities provided and where those facilities are such that commercial libraries cannot provide them. Larger libraries have been able to effect a compromise in the matter by maintaining reference collections available for free consultation by local residents, together with extensive reading-room facilities, but the subscription system has prevented large numbers of potential readers from borrowing books for home reading. The free public libraries of New Zealand at Dunedin, Timaru, Palmerston North, and the twenty-one libraries now participating in the Country Library Service, show an overwhelming superiority in numbers of users compared with libraries where subscriptions are still demanded, as well as a better standard of book stock and library service.

Small Free Libraries.

Small free public libraries, however, even with the aid of loans of books from this Service, have still some important problems to solve. The size of a local unit for library service needs to be greater than is the case with many such units at present. It is important, if the best use is to be gained from a collection of books and periodicals, for the services of a reasonably well trained librarian to be available. Unless there is a population of at least two thousand, this is impossible. In many smaller boroughs and larger town districts the population falls below this figure, and the only solution is for neighbouring counties, whose residents are just as vitally concerned in the benefits of efficient library service, to co-operate with each other and with the nearby borough or town district to support district library projects which will place free library service within the reach of all their residents.

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH SERVICE HAS BEEN GIVEN.

Hamper Service.

In places where no library exists and where it is not possible for one to be formed, the service to properly established groups by means of travelling hampers has been given. All groups are more than ten miles from any public library. Each collection of books is regarded as a unit, and is moved from one group to another at intervals of two to four months, no group being without a collection at any time. The number of groups rose during the year from twenty-four to thirty-seven, twenty of which are in the South Island and seventeen in the North.

Postal or Reference Service.

With the growth of the stock available at headquarters, more persons are using the service to individual borrowers. Sixty-three were registered at 31st March, 1940, compared with twenty-six at 31st December, 1938. The variety of subjects on which material has been made available has continued to widen.

Request Service.

The use of this service has been encouraged. Request slips, on which details of books required are entered, have been issued to each of the three hundred libraries participating in the Service. In the period from 1st August, 1939, to 31st March, 1940, during which statistics were kept, 439 requests for books were received and satisfied by the Service. The facilities of the New Zealand Library Association for inter-library co-operation were fully used. Borrowings from other libraries, notably the General Assembly Library, totalled 167 volumes, while 18 volumes were lent to other libraries.

Periodical Service.

To enable users of smaller libraries to have access to a considerably wider range of periodicals than such libraries can afford to buy regularly, some sixty periodicals have been lent to the free public libraries participating in the Service. Each library receives up to thirty of the periodicals listed, in lots of some six to eight, sending its initial lot to another library by post after one month and receiving another in the same way. The effect of this service is that many country people now have access to a range of periodical literature hitherto available only in city libraries.

Advice to Libraries.

An integral part of the year's work has been the great amount of help and advice made available to controlling authorities and librarians of small libraries. The field officers in charge of the book-vans give assistance daily during their visits to libraries, but in addition the headquarter's staff is able to help by means of correspondence and occasional visits.

BOOK STOCK.

As will be seen from the table below, the number of books in stock has been almost doubled in the year under review. The ordering, processing, cataloguing, and issuing of this number of books has fully taxed the time of the staff of the Service.

Table showing Disposition of Book Stock, 31st March, 1940, with Figures for Preceding Year in Parentheses.

—	Fiction.	Non-fiction.	Total.
On issue to libraries or in book-vans—			
North Island	7,252 (3,726)	5,874 (3,297)	13,126 (7,023)
South Island	7,143 (4,135)	5,731 (3,348)	12,874 (7,483)
In book hampers—			
North Island	660 (390)	440 (260)	1,100 (650)
South Island	630 (360)	420 (240)	1,050 (600)
In headquarters collection, postal service	385 ..	2,531 (777)	2,916 (777)
Total, all stock	16,070 (8,611)	14,996 (7,922)	31,066 (16,533)

Percentages of Various Types of Books in Stock.

General works	0·87
Philosophy and psychology	2·12
Religion	1·35
Social sciences	5·86
Philology and language	0·21
Natural or pure sciences	2·61
Applied science and useful arts	3·41
Fine arts and recreations	6·17
Literature, excluding fiction	3·51
History, travel, and biography	22·14
Fiction	51·72

100·00

NEW ZEALAND LIBRARY ASSOCIATION: LIAISON OFFICER.

Miss E. J. Carnell, F.L.A., formerly of the Lancashire County Library, took up her duties in January, 1940, as Liaison Officer between this Service and the New Zealand Library Association. Her duties will cover visits to libraries, giving instruction in methods and processes, the arrangement of plans for professional training of library workers, preparation of library publicity, and furtherance of the aims of the Association. The appointment, which will be for a period of five years, was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Association. It is confidently hoped that much good will result from it.

WAR LIBRARY SERVICE.

By lending its own stocks of books, particularly non-fiction books, to military-camp libraries where proper library facilities are available, and by co-ordinating the national collection and distribution of gifts of books and periodicals for camps and troopships throughout the country, the Service has given help in the war effort.

Method of Organization.

All war library-work has been supervised by a sub-committee of the National Patriotic Council, with the Hon. F. Waite, M.L.C., as Chairman. The New Zealand Library Association, through its members—individual and institutional—has given all the help in its power, and in addition numerous small libraries participating in this Service have assisted by collecting books and periodicals. Although these collections have taken place throughout the entire country, most of the work of sorting and distribution has been done in the four main centres. It has been the task of this Service to administer the distribution work to camps and troopships in the Wellington area, and to arrange for this work as required in other centres through the capable offices of the city librarians, who have acted as liaison officers for their provincial districts.

LIBRARIES IN MAIN CAMPS AND AIR FORCE STATIONS.

At three main mobilization camps—Papakura, Trentham, and Burnham—libraries have now been established by the Army authorities. Each library has a full-time librarian with the rank of sergeant and a stock of from two to three thousand books. Daily newspapers from many centres are received regularly and kept on file. Books in these libraries are of two kinds. Firstly, the gift stocks of books collected throughout the country are assembled at the main distributing centres in the cities, and the best of these are prepared for circulation by voluntary help under the supervision of the city librarians, supplies being forwarded to the camps periodically. These books remain at the camps. Secondly, loans from this Service are made in the ordinary way from the book-vans, the books being changed regularly. Each camp is gradually being equipped with a basic set of given reference books, such as a dictionary, a modern encyclopædia, an atlas, &c., from funds allotted by the National Patriotic Fund Board. Inquiries from borrowers in the libraries for books not in stock at the camps are satisfied by means of the inter-library loan scheme of the New Zealand Library Association. Libraries at Air Force Stations are receiving almost the same service, Hobsonville, Blenheim, and Wigram having begun very useful library work under the care of the Education Officer at each station. Libraries at Ohakea and Bell Block are being helped by the librarians at Palmerston North and New Plymouth respectively.

COASTAL DEFENCE UNITS.

The forwarding of supplies of books and periodicals to these units has been systematically undertaken. To 31st March, 1940, 3,697 books and 5,825 periodicals were despatched from Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch to many widely scattered stations. The need for this type of service is obvious, and has increased with the oncoming of the winter months. Every effort is being made to ensure that no unit is without books.

TROOPSHIPS AND ESCORTS.

The value of having a central organization responsible for the provision of books for soldiers, nurses, sailors, and airmen has been clearly shown by the ease with which sudden demands for reading-matter for departing ships have been met, in some cases after extremely short notice. Each departing troopship has been liberally provided with books and periodicals, the bulk of the sorting and packing work being done at Wellington and at Christchurch. To 31st March, 1940, 17,162 books and 17,737 periodicals and magazines were provided for troopships and their escorts. It is expected that forwardings after that date will greatly exceed these figures. The provision of books for base camps and hospitals at the port of disembarkation was not overlooked, specially marked cases of books being sent with troopships for these purposes.

Collection of Books.

The provision of the above services would not have been possible without the generosity of the people of New Zealand, who, in response to appeals made in the press and by radio, have given books and periodicals liberally. The New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association and the New Zealand Boy Scouts' Association have each collected large quantities of reading-matter. In a book drive organized in the four main cities in December, 1939, the Boy Scouts collected 30,000 books and 50,000 periodicals. The total quantity of material collected from all sources was, at 31st March, 1940, 50,250 books and 65,500 periodicals. To ensure that all camps, troopships, and defence units continue to receive the services now begun, it is essential that giving of books be continued, with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity giving.

CENTRAL BUREAU FOR LIBRARY-BOOK IMPORTS.

The 50-per-cent. restriction on the importation of books which the Government found it necessary to impose in October, 1939, would have prevented New Zealand libraries from obtaining through the usual channels book-supplies comparable with those obtained in the past. Not only would there have been fewer books available, but, as booksellers tend to bring in only those publications the resale of which is certain and the profits from which are highest, there would have been a qualitative as well as a quantitative decline in the books available in local bookshops. It is obvious that if importations of books are restricted the cultural and educational effects will be lessened if libraries are reasonably well stocked and people can have access to them. To meet the position the Hon. the Minister of Customs approved special facilities for the importation of books for public and university libraries. A Central Bureau, under the administration of this Service, was set up with authority to recommend to the Customs Department the issue of special licenses for library-book imports.

Such licenses for book imports, when granted by the Customs Department, whether to a local bookseller acting on behalf of a library, or to a library itself, are treated as additional to the licenses granted in the normal way and are not a charge against the allocation of 50 per cent. of 1938 imports which is used as a basis for the import of books and printed papers.

The book fund of each library during the year ended 31st March, 1938, is taken as the basis of calculation for the issue of special licenses. It is presumed that libraries will have no difficulty in obtaining books to the value of 50 per cent. of their 1938 book funds. The Central Bureau recommends the issue of special licenses to import books to the value of the remaining 50 per cent., *provided* that this 50 per cent. is spent on non-fiction books and periodicals, and that lists of these are submitted to the Bureau for checking, to avoid undue duplication. The Bureau does not recommend the issue of special licenses for the purchase of fiction in or translated into the English language, or for non-fiction books of a very trivial type. It also reserves the right to refuse to recommend a license for the purchase of any book of which, in the opinion of the Bureau, there is an adequate number of copies in the Dominion.

The result of the activities of the Bureau should be to encourage better standards of book-selection and to prevent any deterioration of New Zealand libraries as a result of the book-import restrictions, to eliminate duplicate buying where this would be wasteful, to discover gaps in the stocks of the main libraries, to build up a union catalogue of books in New Zealand libraries, thereby very much facilitating inter-library loans, and to stimulate the co-operative use of book stock by New Zealand libraries. These aims will take time to realize in their entirety, but it is encouraging to note that a beginning has been made.

It was necessary that any library undertaking the work of administering such a bureau should have the requisite bibliographical material and trade publications giving full information about published literature, be a large enough purchaser of books on its own account to be interested in and familiar with current books, be situated in Wellington and have recognition from the Government, and be in touch with a large number of smaller libraries. The Country Library Service, although it has been established but a short time, was able to fulfil these conditions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The past year has been a very busy one, and thanks are due to the staff of the Service for their loyal and cheerful assistance at all times.

The co-operation given in many ways by hundreds of libraries throughout the country is gratefully acknowledged.

I have, &c.,
G. T. ALLEY, Officer in Charge.

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