

## THE UNSERVED AREAS ISSUE:

### A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Indiana has a long history of efforts to extend library service to all citizens of the state. The constitution passed in 1816 included a provision that, when a new county should be created, the General Assembly "...shall cause at least ten per cent to be reserved out of the proceeds of the sale of town lots in the seat of justice of such county for the use of a public library for such county; and, at the same session, they shall incorporate a library company under such rules and regulations as will best secure it permanence and extend its benefits."

In the following years various laws were passed to allow establishment of libraries in townships and municipalities. In 1899 the Indiana Library Commission was created by the General Assembly as an agency of the state government. One of the Commission's staff, the "library organizer" whose salary of \$1,000 a year was authorized in 1901, began 'a systematic program to extend library privileges to all of the people of the state' by visiting localities which expressed an interest in creating libraries, consulting with the local people involved, and advising them in respect to the legal, building, and other problems involved. In a report to the Indiana Library Association meeting in 1907 the secretary of the Commission reported that, in the 8 years since its formation, the number of 'county seats without public libraries' had been reduced from 47 to 31." (Documents...) In 1925 the Public Library Commission was merged with the Indiana State Library as the Extension Division (now the Library Development Office) and continued in the role of advisor to libraries on extension of service and establishment of new districts.

In 1946, in preparation for the 1947 legislative session the Joint Library Planning Committee presented A Proposed Plan for State Aid. Its goal was "The development of state-wide and more adequate library service, with emphasis on larger units of service, either counties or combinations of counties." The report in the September 1946 Library Occurrent states that 23% of the people of Indiana, 790,000, were without local public library service. It was noted that Crawford County had no library. The first objective of the plan

was to extend service to unserved portions of all counties from the appropriate existing library in each county. The second goal was to secure merger or federation of existing libraries within counties, by contract or by less formal cooperative agreements, in order to provide better and more economical service to the entire county. The 1947 program of library legislation included the revision of all public library laws, which became the current library laws under which public libraries now operate. The other two bills were for state aid for public library development which was proposed to equalize library opportunity on a basis of local ability to support library service, and would have encouraged the establishment of new county libraries and the strengthening of existing county libraries; and a bill to strengthen the State Library so it could help local libraries in their efforts.

The March 1947 issue of Library Occurrent reported that the new public library law and the State Library code revision passed. However, the state aid bill died because of legislative opposition to the funding and the fear that the introduction of the proposal would jeopardize the other two bills.

The September, 1948 Library Occurrent reported that the Republican State Platform of Indiana, 1948, included the following provision:

Tax supported free libraries being an essential part of the state educational system, good library service for all the people is an obligation of government. The 1947 Republican Legislature enacted a new library law to codify numerous conflicting statutes. As more than 20% of Indiana's population is without local library service and many established libraries are inadequately supported, the Republican Party endorses the following program for our public libraries:

- Establishment of library service in unserved areas.
- Adequate salaries for librarians.
- Reasonable state aid for the improvement of local library service.

Credit for the inclusion of libraries was given to Raul R. Benson, a trustee from New Castle-Henry County Library and a member of the Platform Advisory Committee.

The 1949 legislation proposals again included a bill to create a state aid fund through an appropriation of \$500,000 for each of two years from which grants would be made to aid existing public libraries and to extend service to unserved areas. The legislation, while receiving a somewhat more favorable response, again did not pass.

The December, 1950 *Library Occurrent* reported that the main proposal for library legislation in 1951 would be strengthening the Indiana State Library, including expansion of extension services to provide more advisory help and more books for local libraries, to help establish library service in unserved areas, and to demonstrate use of bookmobiles. An expanded budget of \$106,000 for the Extension Division (currently Library Development) was proposed to carry out these functions. \$46,500 was received from the legislature, so the bookmobile demonstration had to be dropped, and the concentration was on hiring more consultants to work with libraries.

In 1953, the focus was on revising the Library Law of 1947 to clarify and remove inconsistencies, along with increased appropriations for the State Library and extension services. The library law revisions included a method for extension of services to townships, either by contract or by merger into a single library district.

The September 1955 *Library Occurrent* reported that a Library Action Committee representing the Indiana Library Association (ILA), the Indiana Library Trustee Association (ILTA), and the Indiana School Library Association had made a report to the Indiana Committee for the White House Conference on Education in preparation for Indiana's White House Conference. Under the recommendations for public libraries the first was "Adequate library service should be brought to all persons in the state by locally supported and operated library systems. Of 1009 townships in Indiana, 510 have no local library service and 54 are only partially served. Presented another way—844,000 people or 21% of the population of Indiana have no library service." In 1957 the Joint Legislative Committee drafted a proposal for legislation to establish a Library Study Commission to be set up by the Legislature for the purpose of surveying the public library needs of Indiana and the best means of meeting those needs. (*Library Occurrent*, December 1956.)

In 1965 legislation was passed to create a Library Study Committee. One of the listed objectives of the Committee was to study how to best provide library service to the 905,815 citizens without direct access to a local public library. (March 1965 *Library Occurrent*, p. 236) The Study Committee was formed in 1965 and continued through 1966, when a report was issued. The Committee held public hearings and invited representatives of various groups having library respon-

sibilities to testify. Their report recommended legislation in key areas, including the establishment of an interstate compact to authorize cooperation in providing library service across state lines. The Committee believed that this would permit joint and cooperative library services in areas where the distribution of population made the provision of library service on an interstate basis the most effective way to provide adequate and efficient services. However they also concluded that the Committee should be continued for another two years to complete their work. Therefore a bill was introduced and subsequently passed in the 1967 legislature to extend the committee.

In the meantime, a study was commissioned and funded by the Library Services and Construction Act to provide background for further development of Indiana libraries. Dr. Peter Hiatt was hired to direct the study, which focused on the needs of citizens for library services. The study concluded in 1970 with 15 volumes addressing the various aspects of library service in Indiana. The legislative study committee met a few times in 1967. The committee adjourned until the findings of the studies were available to them. The Indiana Library Studies Coordinating and Steering Committee submitted a draft report in April 1971 to the state as a whole. The report listed 14 points as necessary elements for the continued development and improvement of library services in Indiana. Point number 4 was "The need to extend public, academic, school, and special library services to areas which do not now have such services." (Outline Draft...) However, the action items in the attached draft plan were concerned with the strengthening of the State Library, the establishment of state resource centers, the establishment of Area Library Services Authorities, and the funding of these, and did not mention mandating library service.

Indiana began participating in the federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) in 1961. Initial priorities for the program included projects to fund extension of service to previously unserved areas. From 1961 through 1970 there were 18 bookmobile demonstration projects to unserved rural residents of the state. Eight other projects demonstrated service through other means than the bookmobile. Primarily because of these projects, the number of citizens without direct library services was reduced from 997,668 in 1961 to 531,985 in 1968 (statistics from August 1970 *Library Occurrent*.) However, as many of the areas with unserved populations were eliminated, the ones remaining were more difficult to convince. By the late 1980s a few counties had had multiple LSCA funded projects, and still had been unable to convince the citizens of those areas to agree to being taxed for library service. Ultimately the Indiana State Library Advisory Council recommended that federal grants

cease for extension of service because they were no longer effective.

More recent efforts to extend library service to unserved areas were bills introduced in 1972 and 1973; both died. In 1976, a bill was prepared by a library committee, but not introduced. In 1977 another bill was introduced in the House, but again did not pass.

A statewide legislative meeting was held in September of 1987 to get member input into the ILA/ILTA Legislative Program. The discussion agenda included extending library services to all the unserved areas of the state. The October 1987, Focus on Indiana Libraries reported that extending service to population unserved by libraries was the most vigorously debated issue at the meeting. As a result of the discussion, the Study and Development Subcommittee of the Indiana Library Association Legislative Committee included mandated library service as one of their areas of study for possible future legislation. However, their subsequent report recommended against introducing legislation to mandate library service for two reasons: 1) the failure of every effort in the last 15 years to get a bill mandating service passed, or even introduced, and 2) a survey of library directors rated the issue a very low priority compared to other issues facing the library community, such as fiscal body review of public library budgets. Contacts with legislators in following years have validated the view that they are generally negative towards the idea of mandated library service.

In 1995 the Legislative Committee decided to try a different approach with SB 152, which would have mandated counties having territory that is not in a library district to establish a library planning commission. In the bill the planning commissions were charged with adopting plans for providing public library services to all residents of the county. The Indiana library and historical board was charged with setting operational guidelines for the commissions, and approving the final plans for each county. Although the

bill received favorable hearings, it died at the very end of the legislative session because of complications related to property taxes. However, this bill spurred some counties to begin discussions on their own, and the following years have seen an increase in the number of expanded districts.

In 1999 a bill was introduced for one county, Hancock County, to allow funding of an expansion of service to the county through the County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT). This tax, which was originally established as an income tax to fund economic development, was seen by Senator Gard as a way to alleviate concerns over property tax increases. The bill was passed, and Hancock County has established a county system funded by CEDIT. Interest has been expressed in expanding this model to other counties in the future.

While it is a common perception that current legislation does not encourage unserved areas to join library districts, statistics show that new expanded districts continue to be formed. The Library Development Office began to keep track of the number of new districts formed each year in 1978. From 1978-1980 13 new districts were formed; from 1981-1990 42; and from 1991-2000 26 were formed, 19 of which were after the introduction of the county planning commissions bill. Legislation that mandated a minimum non-resident fee also helped raise the awareness of both library boards and elected officials.

The following table shows the progression of change over the last 40 years. Currently 40 of the 92 counties in Indiana have some unserved population in them. It ranges from 367 people to 44,775 in one county. Note that in the 1990s the Library Development Office began including contractual areas in the unserved totals, since those contracts are from year to year and do not permanently add the population in the contractual area to the library district.

Year	State population	% Change	Unserved by library	% of Total population
1952	3,934,224		849,535	22
1967	4,662,498	18.5	566,449	12.1
1972	5,195,582	11.4	496,215	9.6
1982	5,490,224	5.7	316,872	5.8
1997	5,544,159	1	464,226	8.4
2001	6,080,485	9.7	405,724	6.67

Indiana obviously still has work to do to extend library service to the entire state, but progress is being made township by township.



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