



BOOKS FOR RURAL AREAS—Along with its stops each month at the front doors of 69 rural schools, the Branch county library's new bookmobile serves eight smaller libraries in the county as well as making stops at stores and main crossroads in the farm districts. At left the traveling library, holding 1,500 volumes, pulls up at a Bronson store. At right, the interior of the vehicle permits patrons to walk in and look over the books on shelves. Near the driver's seat at the front of the truck is a stand where books are checked out.

Branch Library on Wheels Now Covers Entire County

COLDWATER—Since its new program was inaugurated six months ago, the Branch county library last October not only procured the first large bookmobile in the state outside of Wayne county but also has extended its service to rural areas so that it covers the entire county and a few places outside. Several other counties have since acquired bookmobiles.

With a five year grant of funds made by the Kellogg Foundation last June, the library secured Robert Orr as head librarian and began its expansion plan.

Staff Increased to 12

From a staff of two, its employees have increased to 12. A unit that formerly visited the 69 rural schools in the county perhaps twice a year, now comes directly to the school door each month with the new bookmobile and hundreds of books. The larger Quincy, Union City and Bronson schools are included.

School children in the county rural districts take out 3,000 books a month. Adult patronage brings the total monthly circulation to more than 4,500.

Making a chain of libraries throughout the county for adults, the Branch headquarters signed contracts with the two other libraries in the county, at Union City and Quincy, giving them the use of their books and providing part-time librarians.

Branch Units Formed

Added to these are six smaller township units at Algansee, Batavia, Butler, California, Gilead and Kinderhook. These are visited by a panel truck from Coldwater headquarters each week with new books and the stock in each is completely changed every three months. Later this year more branches will be established.

Adults are served, too, by the library on wheels and Mr. Orr makes 18 stops at stores and community halls in the territory, as well as visiting shut-ins in rural areas to exchange their books. The bookmobile has been in service for three months.

Since Mr. Orr came to the library, Mrs. Alice Weller, formerly the only librarian, has been made children's librarian and the organization emphasizes service to the rural schools.

About half of the 40,000 books available are for younger readers. During 1947 the library added \$7,000 worth of volumes to its collection.

Headquarters Renovated

Along with the enlarged staff came renovation of the library's headquarters in the basement of the county building in Coldwater. Unused rooms were redecorated and more space for the enlarged book inventory made.

Complete statistics have been kept for the past six months, for the first time since the library's formation in 1938.

"Now that the basic physical set-up of the library is in good working order," said Mr. Orr, "we are concentrating on service." A new feature, still an experiment, is making the latest popular magazines available on the bookmobile and at the permanent branches.

To Increase Service

Recent figures show that 20 percent of the 15,000 rural persons make use of the book service. In 1948 Mr. Orr hopes to increase this figure.

The county library, he feels, is just starting its development in the state and some day he hopes to see a regional traveling library formed among several counties in this area.

Mr. Orr has done library work since his high school days and formerly worked in Illinois library systems, on the staff of the Detroit public library and spent four and one-half years in the army doing similar work. Both he and Mrs. Weller are graduates of the University of Illinois library school.