

Regional Library Week Being Observed By Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library

By Ashton Chapman

During National Library Week, April 17-23, it's well to consider the diverse and continually expanding roles North Carolina libraries play in the life of the communities they serve. And the accent is on service, the libraries no longer being mere depositories for musty tomes and engaged principally in supplying intermittent visitors with "good books" to while away the time.

Take for instance the Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library. Composed of three county libraries and the Spruce Pine Town Library, it far exceeds the sum of its parts.

Although the 35,127 books in the four libraries add up to less than one volume for each of the 39,923 residents, these volumes had a circulation last year of 102,748. And this record circulation was in the face of steadily increasing numbers of TV sets in the area.

But it wasn't for book-circulation alone that this struggling regional library received last year the coveted Dorothy Canfield award made annually by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

While the \$1,000 cash award made possible the purchase of important books prohibited by the library's limited budget, it was of even greater importance in boosting the spirits of the few full-time, the part time and volunteer workers, the library board members and Friends of the Library groups. All had been devoting much time, thought and energy, not only to ways of exposing patrons to cultural aspects of life but to bringing them concrete, practical help in solving the day-to-day problems of living and of earning a livelihood.

This award of merit has spurred all concerned to even greater efforts. They remember that the region had no county-wide library

service until Avery authorized a county library in 1942, followed by Yancey in 1945 and Mitchell in 1948, and a Spruce Pine Town Library in 1952.

A small bookmobile was acquired by Avery in 1948 and the other counties soon followed suit. Today two of the small original bookmobiles are still being operated, plus a large walk-in model. One or more of these are making trips every day, often into remote sections where books and magazines might otherwise never penetrate.

Combining the three county libraries into a regional unit in 1961 increased the amount of state and federal aid available. However, last year's receipts from all sources totaled less than \$1. for each of the area's 39,923 residents. What this regional library is achieving with such scanty annual appropriations seems almost miraculous.

The 2,547 books added last year, bringing a total to 35,127, included not only purchases but donations, a number of which were memorial books worn out by readers each year. And the

cost of books continues to spiral.

All four libraries in the region have had to shift quarters several times. Only the Avery County Library now has its own building. Some additional space for the Spruce Pine Library in the town hall was recently provided; but all four libraries are still inadequately housed and will become more crowded as anticipated growth continues.

Being in the world-famous "Spruce Pine Mineral Kingdom," the Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library was several years ago designated the depository for the mineral book collection of the State Inter-Library Loan Service. Books and pamphlets now exceed 2,000. They're in almost constant use by area residents and increasing requests for loans to patrons of other libraries in the state are being filled.

Mineralogical and lapidary journals are among the 60 periodicals to which the regional library subscribes.

The regional library has on file a large number of films and filmstrips on a wide variety of subjects. On short notice, thousands of

others can be secured on loan for a nominal charge, often only postage.

The library also has several hundred records and tape recordings of music, plays, poetry, children's stories, etc. The loan of many, many others may be had for a small charge, usually only postage.

Practically any non-fiction book in print, and most fiction, not in the regional library can be secured for readers through the State Inter-

Library Loan Service for cost of postage only.

Neighborhood Youth Corps enrollees are now being trained in the regional library. These trainees are helpful in cataloguing, bookmobile trips, extending library hours and showing films to community organizations and special-interest groups, as well as using audio-visual materials to assist non-readers and poorly equipped readers. The experience the trainees are gaining should prove very valuable to them.

The three counties each has a Friends of the Library group, who help make possible the expanding of the many services the libraries can render and creating new ones, not only through donations of time and money but by sponsoring film showings, lectures and other educational and entertaining events. The Spruce Pine group is raising funds to purchase a building site, which will enable them to secure federal and state aid for a new, modern library building.

But above all, the regional library has been fortunate in continuing to have the full-time services of such a dedicated professional librarian as Mrs. Dorothy B. Thomas, whose services would hardly be available to any of the component libraries individually, even on a part-time basis.

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