

Livingston Parish Library Demonstration

Narrative Report

December 1946

The Police Jury of Livingston Parish very graciously gave up their quarters in the Court House when the problem of housing for the Livingston Parish Library headquarters and Livingston Branch came up. After careful examination by Miss Mary W. Harris and Miss Sallie Farrell, Louisiana State Library, plans for shelving were mapped out. The room, approximately 20 by 40 feet, was divided with a double petition of book shelves—one section for Livingston Branch and one for office headquarters for the entire parish. The expenses for shelving came from the \$1500 appropriated by the Police Jury. Mr. Thomas Oleson, a local cabinet maker, made the shelves from white pine and finished them with a slightly orange shellac. Floor space is now limited but shelving space is adequate. (After the original shipment of books for Springfield, Maurepas, French Settlement, and Walker are removed, more space can be made accessible.)

The initial shipment of approximately 6000 books arrived December 9, 1946. Boxes for Watson, Denham Springs, and Albany were delivered at their respective quarters and the remainder of the shipment was unloaded in Livingston. Miss Mary W. Harris, Miss Verna LeBlanc, and Miss Margariette Lorio from the State Library assisted in the unpacking and arranging the books on the shelves at Livingston, Denham Springs, and Watson. At each place books on Louisiana, science, house plans, and other subjects were displayed to look as attractive as possible. In Livingston a bulletin board display with a large green Christmas tree of poster paper was used. Small books jackets representing suggested books for Christmas reading or Christmas gifts decorated the tree.

The Livingston Parish Library Demonstration formally opened Monday afternoon, December 16, 1946. The program initiating parish wide library service was held in the court room of the Livingston Parish Court House. The new parish services were welcomed into Livingston by local leaders, influential in bringing about the establishment of the library, by staff members of the Louisiana State Library, under whose direction the library will operate for its first "trial" year, and out-of-parish persons interested in library development. All speakers expressed pride in the new library, and confidence that it would be so welcomed by Livingston citizens that its continuation was assured.

Mrs. Lois Lester of Baines, a member of the board of the Louisiana State Library, presided at the opening ceremony. She told her audience that she had recently seen the screen version of Shakespeare's Henry V, and then repeated the words of the bard in which he said that on the little stage would be given a tremendous performance, one horse was to be seen as a thousand horses, one soldier as a thousand soldiers, and that the audience's help would be necessary if such a feat were to be accomplished. "This is a small room," she went on, "but in the library room the whole world meets. Here you can use other people's imagination. A library is the meeting place of the minds of the world."

Miss Essae M. Culver, state librarian, emphasized that everybody in the parish has a part in the library, "in its opening and in its use thereafter."

"The Police Jury as a whole is proud of our new library." Mr. Guitreau declared. "If the people in Livingston want a library, it will be their responsibility to continue it a year from now."

Mr. Bankston, after saying that the library was a fine Christmas gift for Livingston, congratulated the Police Jury and others responsible. He pledged the support of the school people in Livingston to the movement.

Mr. Reeves said "the Library is one of the things I've enjoyed most doing. Dreams do come true." In paraphrasing Lincoln's famous Gettysburg address, he declared that it was "not important what was being said here, but what is being done here." "If we can direct the reading of people, life rises to a higher plane. Through the gift of books, which are the accumulated knowledge of the ages, the thoughts and the courses of mankind can be turned." He urged the group present, as leaders in the various communities in the parish, to interest others, to promote widespread use of the books and finally to promote the cause of the Library when the time comes for it to be locally supported.

Mrs. Harriet Daggett, of the Law School of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, made the dedicatory address. Dr. Daggett was born in Livingston Parish, and her library interest dates back more than 20 years, when as a member of the Louisiana Federation of Women's Clubs she assisted with travelling libraries and worked for the establishment of the Louisiana Library Commission—to assure state-wide library development—in 1920.

"This is great for me, and for the parish in which I was born. People in Livingston are exhibiting their sense of values in establishing this Library. There is nothing finer, greater, and more worthwhile. I can't help but think

what these books would have meant to me when I was a child at Springfield.”

Dr. Mary Mins, rural sociologist of the agricultural Extension Division of Louisiana State University, and who is also a member of the State Library Board with Miss Culver, met with groups and individuals in the parish when effort was made for the library establishment more than a year ago. She congratulated the people of Livingston on the library in her speech. “I rejoice with you in your Library. From it I see all the people from Livingston being fed mentally and spiritually.”

The ceremonies for the opening of the Denham Springs Branch were held in the evening at 8:00 (December 16, 1946) in the library room itself on the second floor of the City Hall with Mrs. Lester again presiding.

Miss Calver briefly traced the history of the library movement in Louisiana telling of an old library law in the early 1800's and then of the coming of the Louisiana Library Commission in 1920.

Erlo J. Durbin, state representative from Denham Springs, declared that he “was sure that the people would do all they can to make this library a success. I'm with you 100 percent.”

“On behalf of the people of Denham Springs I want to thank the State Library and all the local people responsible for the library,” said Mayor Patterson. “We have been talking about vision, about dreams. I would like to say that I could never have dreamed that this room could have been made to look like this. When the trial period of this library is over, we can carry on.”

Mr. Bankston said: “We school people appreciate from the bottom of our hearts, the progressive step this Library represents.”

A.E. Owens, president of the Chamber of Commerce, also expressed thanks to the people responsible for the library. “I hope when the time comes for tax support, it will go over tremendously.”

Mrs. Daggett talked on the library as a means of promoting understanding among men. “You come to know people and nations through books. It is a heartening thing that our parish is bringing books to the people. The future we have before us is for peace or destruction. It is well that the people are awakening to the need for knowledge, for books.”

On December 17, 1946 both Denham Springs and Livingston opened for services. Marvin Tanner from the State Library gave his services and helped Mrs. Elvira Jones assistant at Denham Springs, get started. Over a hundred books were circulated in the first day. There were requests for

books on duplex houses, radio repairing, readable biography of Robert E. Lee, and also specific titles such as Gumbo Ya Ya, Black Stallion returns, Egg and I, and others.

In comparison to the use made of the Denham Springs Branch the first day, business at the Livingston Branch was slow. However, during the two weeks 27 adults and 30 juvenile borrowers registered. As a general rule we find that the patrons prefer light reading: however, we have had some unusual requests such as—books on alligator raising, wood carving, home building, and others (River Road, New Orleans woman, and other books centered in and around Louisiana are the most in demand. The book Black Beauty is a great favorite among juvenile readers.)

Down Whitehall way where the Branch is located in a small grocery store we have a small collection of books which I think are proving quite worthwhile. On December 18, 1946 the Library was opened for service with just an open house. The custodian, who is also over the store, circulates books any time during store hours. This is a very scattered community, but when patrons come to the grocery or to the theater next door, we hope they'll drop by the library. The custodian is very enthusiastic about the progress of the library and feels that in spite of the bad weather and the busy holiday season, she has made a good beginning. The children are very interested and delighted with the books. The ones who live near come regularly—some every day and some every two days.

After the opening of Whitehall in the afternoon, Watson opened its doors the same evening. I'm not sure whether it was the band concert or the library opening, but a large group attended the opening—approximately fifty. Miss Harris and Miss Farrell from the State Library were guests. The Branch is located in the little auditorium of the Live Oak School. The P.T.A. headed the movement for the building of shelves; however, the money came from the funds that were raised to improve the high school library. During this month only a small percentage of the school children registered and became borrowers of the library, but I'm sure that after the holidays a rush will be on. In fact, I doubt that we will be able to supply enough books for the demand. The custodian reports that students going to Southeastern Louisiana College came in, looked over the text books, and expressed a strong desire to read some of the books should they find the time from their studies.

During the same week on Friday, December 20, 1946, Mr. Tanner and I went to Albany and helped to arrange the books that Mr. Bartus had previously unpacked. The library is open two afternoons a week—Monday and Friday from 12:00 to 5:00. The borrowers thus far have been largely adults. Some of the children from the school have come for registration

cards and will become library users as soon as the cards are returned. They seem to be a happy lot and promise to be enthusiastic patrons of the library.

As a whole and considering the busy holiday season, I think the library is progressing nicely. There are many things that can be done to improve the service and we hope time will permit after the new year. As soon as possible we want to open the other branches—Walker, Maurepas, French Settlement, Springfield, and Forth Ward School.