

## Slow Start for Consolidation

As the decade of the 1950s opened, community leaders were talking about a consolidated library system to replace the community-by-community approach. To investigate various options, Community Chest contracted Leo R. Rift to report on the present conditions of Jefferson County libraries and to project a future. His information was used to prepare “A Library Plan for Jefferson County, Colorado.”

Rift began by studying the existing six community libraries and three municipal libraries for his 1952 report. Tax-supported libraries existed in Golden, Edgewater and Arvada. Community Chest-supported libraries were Evergreen, Fruitdale, Lakewood, Morrison and Wheat Ridge.

Rift concludes in his study:

*No one can indeed expect good library service for the price of two candy bars or by spending a nickel on books and slightly more for salaries.*

He noted that total funds available to all nine libraries during 1951 amounted to \$9,240, or approximately 16.5 cents per capita, with 5.2 cents allotted for books and 5.8 cents allotted for salaries.

Braswell commented in “A History of Public Library Service in Jefferson County, Colorado, 1914-1970”:

*These libraries in Jefferson County had served their communities up to a point but, like any other business without an administrative, financial or legal basis upon which to operate, they could not hope to be dependent upon donations, gifts, rentals and volunteer help...*

*There was little cooperation between libraries, an absence of professional guidance, and reference service was non-existent for most purposes (only one library had a telephone).*



Rift's report set the stage for consolidation. But it was the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners that actually created the library system. The commissioners based the new system on the enabling 1947 Library Act adopted by the 36th Colorado General Assembly. It set a maximum tax levy for a county-operated library system at one-half of one mill of the assessed valuation. The resolution that was passed by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners states:

*The Board of County Commissioners of Jefferson County on Dec. 29, 1952, adopted the following resolution, by unanimous vote, upon motion by Commissioner Walter B. True of District*

*No. 2, Lakewood:*

*SECTION 1. A public library to be known as the Jefferson County Public Library, is hereby established under the provisions of the 1947 Library Act, as amended.*

*SECTION 2. The following named persons are hereby appointed members of the Board of Trustees for the terms respectively indicated:*

*William H. Johnson—Jan. 1, 1953 ending Dec. 31, 1953*

*Charles Hagaman—Jan. 1, 1953 ending Dec. 31, 1953*

*Raymond Stebbins—Jan. 1, 1953 ending Dec. 31, 1953*

*Gertrude Low—Jan. 1, 1953 ending Dec. 31, 1954*

*Charlotte H. Bradford—Jan. 1, 1953 ending Dec. 31, 1954*

*SECTION 3. Upon the expiration of the respective terms of the members of the first Board of Trustees of the Jefferson County Public Library, their respective successors shall be appointed for terms of two years each.*

*SECTION 4. The Jefferson County Superintendent of the Schools shall be an additional and ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees of the Jefferson County Public Library.*



The original policy of a free county library is still in effect today. It is based on the philosophy that libraries make information available to everyone—young and old, rich and poor.

*Timeline continued*

**1963**

- First bookmobile purchased.

**1966**

- Book catalog combining all of the county library holdings is produced by automation, and the card catalog is discontinued.

The countywide library was given space in the County Courthouse in Golden, and the Library Board of Trustees held its first meeting Jan. 13, 1953, in the Directors' Room of the Jefferson County Bank in Lakewood. Minutes of the meeting on file at the Jefferson County Public Library record that three guests were present: Gordon Bennett, state librarian; and Harold Smethills and Conrad Becker, supporters of a countywide library.

Smethills, according to the minutes, informed the board that Community Chest funding for five of the existing libraries stopped Dec. 31, 1952. That news resulted in one of the first official actions. The Board of Trustees approved an interim policy stating the board would “honor all vouchers presented by those library boards where emergencies exist for operating expenses only.”

On March 3, 1953, the Board of Trustees hired Phyllis Osteen, a librarian with 25 years of experience with the New York Public Library. Her first day of work at the Jefferson County Public Library was April 15, 1953. Under her management were the Lakewood Area Branch, the Bonnie Bonham Branch and the Wheat Ridge Area Branch. Other small libraries affiliated, including Daniels, Kittredge, Pleasant View and South Turkey Creek.

Osteen also had a dump truck at her disposal, given to the library by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners in 1953, later traded in for a station wagon for book deliveries. There was no money, however, for a real bookmobile. That would have to wait.

In September 1953 the library had about 3,000 volumes, 2,000 of which were loaned by the Colorado State Library. At this infancy stage, the county library had purchased only about 250 titles.

Braswell bluntly pointed out:

*At this time, however, not even 300,000 volumes would have been adequate to meet ALA (American Library Association) standards for the needs of the readers in the county.*

An important core policy was established by the Board of Trustees in 1954. Minutes of the Jan. 11, 1954, meeting record that the Board of Trustees concluded the Jefferson County Public Library will be a “free” library supported by taxpayers. It is a policy still in force in 2002. Attempts to change that policy and charge a fee for library cards have failed.

By 1955, the county library budget had doubled to \$20,000, and Jefferson County Public Library's book collection had grown to almost 9,000 books, which was sufficient to return the state loaned books, Braswell reported.

In 1957, Osteen resigned and was replaced by Georgia R. Coffin, a native of Longmont who had been the rare-books librarian at Cornell University. At the conclusion of Coffin's tenure in 1963, the budget had increased to \$120,000 and the book count had swelled to 61,544 titles. Also, during her term, the county started its first bookmobile to better serve outlying regions of the county. The service began in 1962 when a demonstration bookmobile was provided by the Colorado State Library. In 1963, the county purchased its own bookmobile.