



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Books for Nebraska: Roy & Aileen Cochran and the Nebraska Public Library Commission

Full Citation: Mary Cochran Grimes, "Books for Nebraska: Roy & Aileen Cochran and the Nebraska Public Library Commission," *Nebraska History* 78 (1997): 102-109.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1997-Books.pdf>

Date: 1/20/2010

Article Summary: Long before paid lobbyists for libraries, before regional libraries, before federal aid for libraries, and before bookmobiles, Democratic Governor Robert L "Roy" Cochran and his wife, Aileen Cochran, set out to help improve the core of the state library system, the Nebraska Public Library Commission. Charles W Bryan had abolished the Nebraska Public Library Commission in 1933 and transferred its responsibilities to the University of Nebraska and the budget for library services statewide was commensurately cut almost in half, so the need for public library advocates was critical. The Cochrans' accomplishments between 1935 and 1941 included: reestablishment of the Nebraska Library Commission and a tripling of its appropriations; new laws placing more attention on rural, western communities and regional libraries; and the establishment of bookmobiles to serve outlying areas.

Cataloging Information:

Surnames: Bryan; Cochran; McMullen; Doane; Carey; Lessenhop; Gantt; Hillis; Bentzen; Stark; Webster; Simms; Delahant; Cady; Kramph; Carey; Roosevelt; Rogers; Geske; Nixon; Bockes

Place Names: Culbertson; Sand Hills; North Platte; Boyd; Madison; Tekamah; Hastings; Fremont; Beatrice; Adams; Lincoln; Omaha; Douglas; Sarpy; Kenesaw; Juniata; Prosser

Keywords: "Nebraska Library Commission" "State Library Commission" "traveling libraries" "traveling library" "bookmobile" "free libraries" "Nebraska Library Association" "Nebraska library" "Nebraska libraries" "HR631" "HR 631" "HR 410" "HR410" "House Roll 96" "Nebraska Public Library" "FERA" "CWA" "Civil Works Administration" "Federal Emergency Relief Act" "Senate File 273" "House Roll 569" "Senate File 272" "House Roll 570" "Governor Cochran" "KFAB" "State Library Planning Comm" "certification" "Library Journal" "Public Library Commission" "Carnegie Corporation" "Rosenwald Foundation" "Eleanor Roosevelt" "WPA" "Public Works Administration" "Ak-Sar-Ben" "Ak Sar Ben" "Friends of the Library" "Office of Education" "Oz Black Cartoon"

Photographs / Images: Governor and Mrs Cochran 1936 with Union Pacific attorney Thomas Bockes and wife; Oz Black cartoon of 1931 in Nebraska State Journal; Gilbert H Doane portrait; Nebraska Public Library Commission bookmobile of 1936; Phelps County bookmobile in 1941; Library Commission promotional piece

BOOKS

For Nebraska

Roy & Aileen Cochran and the Nebraska Public Library Commission

By Mary Cochran Grimes

Libraries have always needed friends and influential sponsors, particularly in Nebraska during the Depression. When people needed food and jobs and when drouth and dust storms forced farmers to leave their farms, government leaders were not talking about books and libraries. Faced with numerous crises, they spoke of cutting costs and taxes. Long before paid lobbyists for libraries, before regional libraries, before federal aid for libraries, and before bookmobiles, Democratic Governor Robert L. "Roy" Cochran and his wife, Aileen, set out to help improve the core of the state library system, the Nebraska Public Library Commission.

The need for library advocates was particularly acute because in 1933 the legislature, at the request of Governor Charles W. Bryan, had abolished the Nebraska Public Library Commission and transferred its responsibilities to the University of Nebraska. The budget for providing statewide library services was cut almost in half.¹

The state library commission, established in 1901, had an ambitious purpose: to send books on request anywhere in the state, to visit and help existing libraries, to encourage establishment of libraries where none existed, to circulate traveling libraries, and to advise and assist library boards and librarians. As of 1911, it also provided libraries for state charitable and penal institutions. Commission members were the state librarian, the state superintendent, the chancellor

Mary Cochran Grimes of New Haven, Connecticut, is the daughter of former Nebraska governor Robert L. (Roy) Cochran.



Governor and Mrs. Cochran arriving in Los Angeles, 1936. Union Pacific Attorney Thomas Bockes and his wife are in the background. NSHS-C663

and librarian of the University of Nebraska, and one person appointed by the governor.²

In the early 1920s there was a desperate need for books in outstate Nebraska. Although 112 cities and towns in Nebraska maintained free libraries, only nine received as much as \$2,500 in yearly income. The picture of rural school libraries was bleak: None had

holdings exceeding \$100 in value, and twenty counties placed the value of their libraries at only \$25 each.³ Between 91 and 100 percent of the residents of thirty-three Nebraska counties had no access to libraries at all, according to statistics compiled by the Nebraska Library Association. Fifty-nine percent of all Nebraskans lacked access to libraries. Rural schools depended on boxes of books sent by the library commission. During the 1922-24 biennium, the commission loaned 993 "traveling libraries" (forty to eighty books) to groups in ninety of the ninety-three counties. Requests for books from groups or individuals totaled 10,165.⁴

Charles W. Bryan, during his first term as governor in 1923, tried to eliminate the Nebraska Public Library Commission to save money. He argued in his budget message that there was unnecessary duplication of state funded library programs.⁵ House Roll 631, which would have assigned library commission responsibilities to the University of Nebraska without any accompanying appropriation, was introduced in the legislature. A letter from a Culbertson woman reflected concerns about what Bryan's proposals would mean for many of the state's rural residents: "We hear that the governor is trying to do away with the library commission. Sincerely hope he fails, as we people in the smaller towns find it a great help in many cases, having no other source of reference."⁶ The Nebraska Library Association adopted a carefully worded resolution that did not directly address the transfer of library authority to the university, but it called on the legisla-

Library Commission

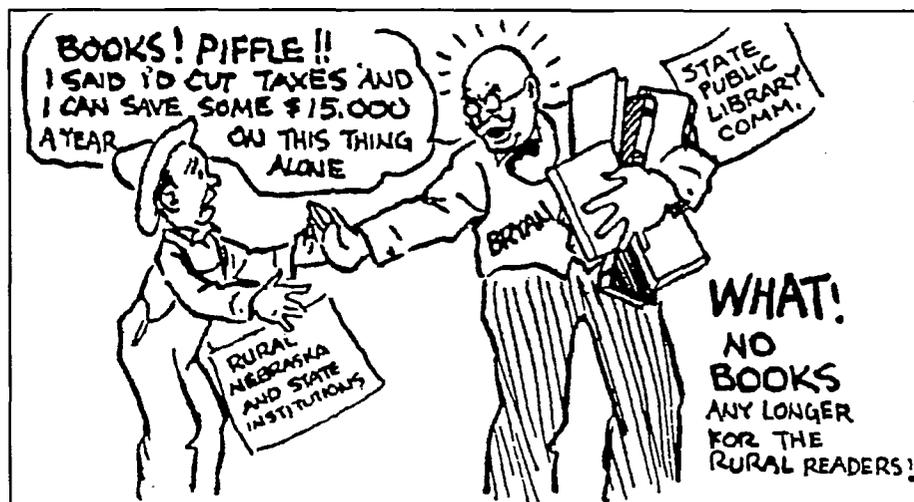
ture to provide adequate funding so statewide library services could be maintained.⁷

The expressions of concern from the Nebraska Library Association, from individuals, and from various woman's clubs probably helped save the commission, because HR 631 was indefinitely postponed. Nevertheless, the commission's biennial appropriation was cut from \$26,360 in 1921-23 to \$23,000 for 1923-25. Under the succeeding governor, Republican Adam McMullen, the library commission's appropriation rose to a peak of \$31,800 in 1927-29.⁸

By the early 1930s the entire state budget was being cut as a result of the Depression. Charles Bryan, who was re-elected governor in 1930 and again in 1932, disdained federal aid. In 1931 he renewed his call to abolish the library commission, and HR 410 was introduced to accomplish that purpose. Commission members made an emergency appearance before the house finance and education committees, and the bill was indefinitely postponed.⁹ The legislature made no appropriation for the commission during the regular session, but did provide \$19,000, down from \$29,800, at a special session in June. The commission also received \$200 in federal funds.¹⁰

The respite was only temporary, however, and Governor Bryan tried again to abolish the commission in 1933. This time he succeeded, despite protests by librarians and civic clubs. The legislature passed House Roll 96, which transferred the functions of the Nebraska Public Library Commission to the University of Nebraska under the name The Nebraska Public Library. University Librarian Gilbert H. Doane became the ex-officio public library commissioner, with no additional salary.¹¹

While the 1933 legislature appropriated \$10,000 to the university to carry on the library commission function, the 47 percent reduction from the former \$19,200 budget required elimination of a full-time and a part-time assistant from the staff. The two remaining employees,



This Oz Black cartoon appeared in the February 15, 1931, issue of the *Nebraska State Journal*.

Nellie Carey and Dorothy Lessenhop, assumed the assistants' duties in addition to their own work, although their already meager salaries were also cut by 25 percent. The two women had to handle 9,663 requests and to send out 104,115 volumes during the biennium. No longer could they provide books for patients and inmates of Nebraska institutions.¹²

In 1934 half of Nebraska's population was still without library service. The state ranked twenty-ninth in per capita spending for public libraries (twenty-two cents per person).¹³ Meanwhile more and more people were turning to libraries as the Depression deepened. New requests came from CCC camps, transient centers, and adult education centers. The Nebraska Public Library office was swamped with an unprecedented 22,458 letters and postcards, more than double the number received during the previous biennium. The two trained librarians were handicapped by the lack of stenographic help in answering mail. During 1934-35 they did receive some part-time help through the Nebraska Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA).¹⁴

When Robert L. "Roy" Cochran, was elected governor in 1934, libraries were a top priority with his wife, Aileen, and

with him. Governor and Mrs. Cochran were particularly sensitive to the needs of the western and rural areas of the state. Books had been a rarity when young Roy Cochran lived on a farm near Brady; there were no books at home and few at his one-room country school. In the fall the boys had to help harvest the corn before they could start school, and in the spring they helped with the plowing and planting. They were lucky to get four or five months of schooling a year. As Roy grew older and developed a taste for reading, he borrowed books from a neighbor two miles away, who had a collection of books unusual for that day and place.¹⁵

Aileen Gantt Cochran had been educated in North Platte and at the University of Nebraska, where she majored in mathematics. She taught math for four years at North Platte High School before being elected Lincoln County superintendent of schools. Her mission for improving rural education grew from her experiences as county school superintendent. She had travelled extensively over the Sand Hills in her Model-T Ford to visit 150 remote, one-room schools each year. She remembered how many of the schools had only meager supplies, with only old, worn textbooks, and sometimes not even a dictionary.

When driving alone, as she often did, she fantasized about what she would do for these schools if she had enough money. She wrote:

Salesmen for school book companies visited me [in North Platte] to show me their wares. I was always glad to see them and encouraged them to leave as many samples as possible. These samples I gave to teachers as they came to my office, or took with me on my visits, encouraged the members of the school board to buy new books for the pupils, and to send to Lincoln for boxes of books from the Nebraska Library Commission. When the heavy, wooden boxes with green paint now faded and scratched from hard usage, arrived, the joy and excitement of the children knew no bounds.¹⁶

It was unusual for a governor to speak out on behalf of libraries; it was unprecedented for a governor's wife to concern herself with something outside the realm of serving as hostess of the executive mansion. Soon after the election the Cochrans took action to change Nebraska's library laws and restore the library commission. In his budget message to the legislature Governor Cochran endorsed a plan to reinstate an independent state library commission. The best chance of getting cooperation from a Democratic legislature was to act early. Mrs. Cochran's sister, Edith Gantt, a county librarian from California, helped formulate the legislation.

The Cochrans worked with willing legislators to introduce companion legislative bills in the house and the senate. Senate File 273 (House Roll 569) would restore the Nebraska Public Library Commission under its former name. The public library commissioner under the university would be replaced with five gubernatorial appointments from different sections of the state. The commissioners would be "library-minded, energetic, and public-spirited citizens willing to serve without pay," according to Cochran. Their terms would be staggered from one to five years.¹⁷

The goal of the other bill, Senate File 272 (House Roll 570), was to provide a foundation for future library expansion when prosperity returned. It would en-



Gilbert H. Doane. From *Nebraskana* (Hebron: 1932)

able two or more libraries to combine to form a regional library, if the citizens of the county or counties voted for it. Other states had shown that the best way to get adequate local library service was to develop larger tax areas from which to draw for library funding.¹⁸

Promoting the library bills in his Sunday afternoon radio talks on KFAB, Governor Cochran pointed out that the rural school system, of which he was a product, was the weakest, most neglected, and most inadequately financed in the state. The majority of Nebraska's boys and girls were educated in rural schools. He was vitally interested in the passage of the two library bills to establish a "state and county library system which can . . . be developed in the future so that it will provide adequate library service for every farm home and school in the state, as well as serving the people in the towns."¹⁹ Cochran did not believe this goal could be achieved by leaving the university in charge of pro-

viding statewide library services. The university library's first responsibility was to serve the students and faculty on campus. The governor doubted whether the university could also circulate enough books, or the right kind of books, to meet the needs of schools and rural communities across the state.²⁰

When the bills came up for a legislative hearing, Mrs. Cochran appeared personally to testify on their behalf and "to battle opposition headed by Gilbert Doane, university librarian." According to news accounts, "Mrs. Cochran fought the legislative battle alone until librarians from several cities asked to appear by Doane endorsed the proposal."²¹

Naturally Doane's first duty was to serve his own department and do nothing that would jeopardize the appropriations he hoped to get for it. Initially other Nebraska librarians, as well as the Nebraska Library Association, also questioned whether it was wise to restore the old library commission only two years after it had been abolished. They felt that the Nebraska Public Library under university management could meet the needs for state library services if adequate funding were provided. They were also concerned that progress towards improved library services would suffer by frequent tinkering with the system.²²

Another concern was that the new bills did not provide for certification of state librarians. Certification had been a key part of a six-point plan for improving Nebraska library services adopted by the Nebraska Library Association in October 1934. The plan also called for the coordination of existing state supported library activities. Chairing the NLA State Library Planning Committee was Gilbert H. Doane, which may help explain his opposition to the Cochran library bills.²³

Because some librarians had questioned the need for reauthorizing an independent library commission, and others like Doane had vigorously opposed the Cochran plan, the governor realized he had not done enough to explain the purpose of the new legislation to the

Library Commission

state's librarians. A few days after the hearings, he invited the president of the Nebraska Library Association, Madalene S. Hillis, to come to Lincoln to discuss the legislation. The governor outlined his ideas for extending library service across Nebraska and apologized that there had not been time enough to consult more fully with the Nebraska Library Association before the bills were introduced. The governor also told Hillis that he planned to recommend a \$25,000 appropriation for the new library commission. Hillis responded that what the librarians wanted was "the best service possible for all."²⁴ Hillis also met with Mrs. Cochran and left the meetings reassured that the governor and first lady were truly committed to improving state library service. According to Hillis, Mrs. Cochran apologized for some of the things she had said about the work of the Nebraska Public Library and the former commission because she had been "deliberately painting a very dark picture of the present situation and the future so that there would be more point in asking for these bills."²⁵

After some delay the legislature passed the two bills. Mrs. Cochran's unprecedented direct involvement in lobbying for their passage sparked comments on the floor of the legislature. Senator Otto Bentzen of Boyd County voted against the library bills and took Mrs. Cochran to task for her clearly effective lobbying efforts:

I vote no on 272 and 273. They should never have been enacted. The people of the state have not asked for them. When legislators become puppets because the governor's wife asks it, it is too ridiculous for words.²⁶

To this, Senator Marjorie Stark of Madison County responded, "If we could have had access to libraries, there probably wouldn't be so many puppets in the legislature."²⁷

After the bills had been signed into law by the governor on May 18, Mrs. Cochran wrote to Miss Hillis and asked for her suggestions about appointees to the new commission. She also apolo-

gized for "this library legislation not being handled in the most tactful way," and added, "There has been no intention on my part to offend or disregard the members of this profession, of which I think so highly."²⁸

Although most Nebraska librarians and newspaper editorials ended up supporting the bills, an unsigned letter in the Editorial Forum of the New York-based *Library Journal* revealed that the bills' passage had not silenced all of the opposition:

Notwithstanding the protests of the leading librarians of the state . . . the Governor's wife, acting on advice from her sister, a professional librarian in California, and ignoring completely previous progress in library service in Nebraska, not only insisted upon introducing this bill, but used all her powerful personal influence to push it through. The members of the Legislature for the most part sought to curry favor with Governor Cochran by agreeing to his wife's demands.²⁹

The *Library Journal* letter continued, "The librarians of the state" based their opposition to the commission bill (Senate File 273) on two grounds. First, it created another separately supported state library activity in Lincoln, a "needless and expensive duplication." Second, the new commission was entirely an appointed commission, with a vacancy occurring annually. The law made no specifications for membership.

With all due respect to the present Governor, the way is wide open for political manipulation for the commission controlled the appointment of the secretary. A political-minded governor can easily give these appointments to his friends and pay political debts with them.³⁰

Senate File 272, which permitted the establishment of county and regional libraries, "only slightly improves the existing law," the *Library Journal* column continued. "However, the librarians of the state have approved of this bill from the first."³¹

There is little doubt that the author of this letter was Gilbert H. Doane, who in his capacity as librarian at the University, also served as head of the short-lived Nebraska Public Library. The new

bill did not require university representation on the reauthorized library commission. Whether Doane's opposition stemmed from a sincere concern that the governor-appointed library commission risked being politicized, or whether he resented losing his leading role in shaping state library policy cannot be determined.

Governor Cochran expressed his satisfaction at the bills' passage in his May 19 radio address:

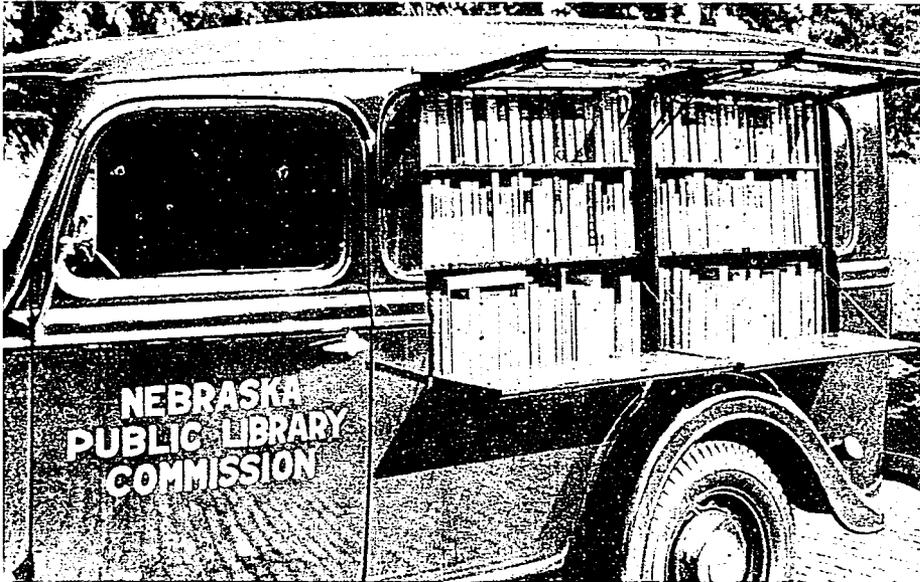
I realized that here was a start made in the interest of the forgotten boy and girl. . . . I was happy in the thought that if properly developed as the years go on, this library legislation will mean more to our boys and girls, men and women than any educational effort the state could have made in behalf of its future welfare.³²

The new members of the Nebraska Public Library Commission appointed by Cochran included H. L. Webster from Tekamah (elected president); Mrs. David Simms of Hastings (elected secretary); John W. Delahant from Beatrice; Mrs. P. L. Cady of Fremont; and Annie C. Kramph of North Platte.³³

The legislation required that the commission be moved from the basement of a building on the university campus, where it had been consigned since 1921, to the new state capitol building. Preparation of rooms and construction of new equipment was made possible through a Works Progress Administration project: \$3,917.81 of federal funds and \$727.80 from "sponsors' funds."³⁴

Cochran called on his long-time friends in the Department of Roads—he had been state engineer from 1923 to 1934—to help realize Mrs. Cochran's goal of books for children. Department of Roads engineers drew up blueprints and specifications for steel stacks for the library commission's collection of 43,000 volumes. The work was supervised by the department's chief mechanic. The Nebraska Public Library Commission moved to the new quarters on March 1, 1936.³⁵

Another big boost came with an increase in the library commission's appropriation to \$25,000 for the biennium



Nebraska Public Library Commission bookmobile, purchased July 28, 1936. Report of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, August 26, 1935 to November 30, 1936.

1935-37 even though state government continued to struggle with economic constraints. Like Bryan, Cochran recognized the need for economy and low taxes, but he had different priorities. The 1937-39 commission appropriation rose to \$40,000, four times the 1933-35 budget provided during the two years the university was responsible for state library services. The salary of the executive secretary of the commission, Miss Carey, reached \$2,500. The 1939-41 budget, however, was cut to \$33,680.³⁶

In 1935 Mrs. Cochran wrote to the Carnegie Corporation and the Rosenwald Foundation, asking for funds for libraries, but without success. She also wrote to enlist Eleanor Roosevelt's help in obtaining federal money for Nebraska libraries. The reply, which came from the director of women's work of FERA, was that numerous library projects had been popular and had given "much useful employment to women on relief." In these projects, however, the community furnished the books and building, and women on relief were assigned as librarians or library assistants. WPA policy would not allow spending relief money to purchase

books or to furnish library equipment; it was intended for wages.³⁷

FERA and CWA federal funds provided help in many Nebraska towns where library buildings were cleaned and redecorated. Some libraries were able to hire additional employees so the library could be kept open more hours. There were projects for mending and cataloging books. The Public Works Administration made possible new library buildings at South Sioux City, Ulysses, Syracuse, Beemer, and Nehawka. Other towns also applied for PWA funds.³⁸

Surprisingly, some librarians did not approve of federal aid to libraries. "Mrs. Cochran has been in New York City and Washington asking for aid to establish county libraries in Nebraska," Miss Hillis wrote in June 1935. "As many librarians who are members of ALA do not approve of federal aid, perhaps as much as we could use it we should fight shy of it."³⁹

At a meeting of the rural section of the Nebraska State Teachers Association, Mrs. Cochran noted that the legislature and many Nebraskans were more concerned about the institutions of higher learning than the rural schools, which trained the majority of boys and

girls. More than 64 percent of the state's assessed property was rural, and more than twice as many people lived in rural areas as in urban districts. "There is only one way to have a statewide library system, and that is to have it supported by taxes," she said. "It isn't necessary to raise taxes, if we just use our money more wisely."⁴⁰

Mrs. Cochran's enthusiasm for books led to the first Nebraska bookmobile, a new method of circulating books. At an Ak-Sar-Ben event in Omaha she told a dinner partner about the revival of the Nebraska Public Library Commission and how happy she was for the country schools of the state. "I must have expressed a wish for a bookmobile because the next day I received a sizable check from the Ak-Sar-Ben member." By February 1936 she had collected \$1,150 for a book truck. When Mrs. Cochran gave the check to Miss Carey at the library commission, she asked her not to reveal where it came from because she did not want it affected by politics.⁴¹

The specifications for bids for the first Nebraska bookmobile were impressive. A 1936 commercial panel truck with heater and auxiliary seat was to be rebuilt with two side doors with glass panes and two metal doors that dropped down to form a counter. Three full-length shelves and cupboards were to be built on each side to hold about three hundred books. Two metal magazine holders would be on the inside of the rear doors, which were to be equipped with strong locks. Space was provided for several boxes of books for adults and children, duplicate copies of those which could be borrowed from the library commission.⁴²

The cost of the bookmobile now seems incredibly low. O'Shea Rogers, the Lincoln Ford dealer, won the contract with the low bid of \$845.48, which included a truck plus rebuilding and painting. The delivery date was September 1, 1936. Two days later the Nebraska Public Library Commission announced that funds given by a group of Omaha businessmen had provided the state's

Library Commission



The bookmobile operated by the Phelps County, Nebraska, Library in 1941. NSHS-RG16

first bookmobile. Miss Carey was in charge of the vehicle.⁴³

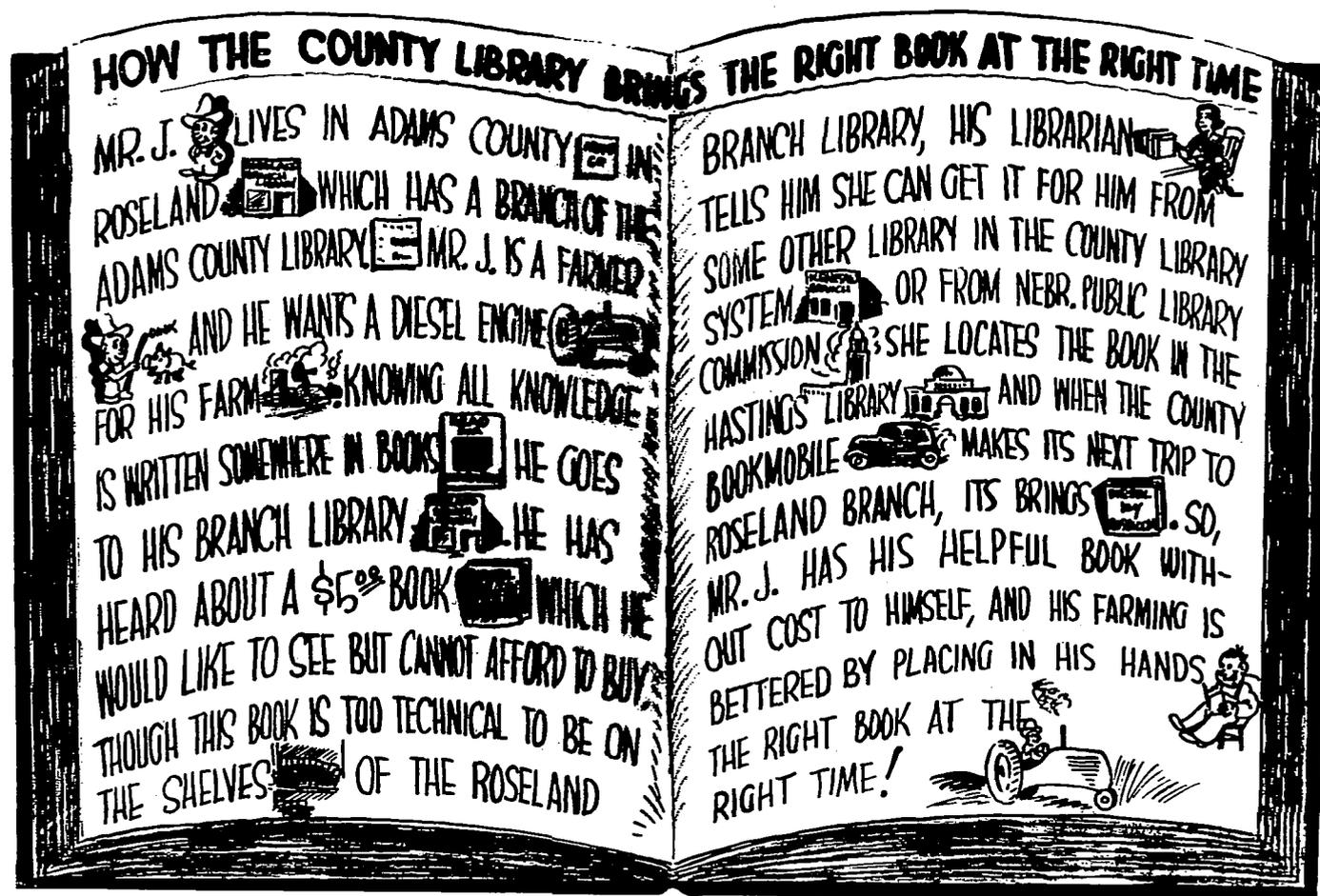
The new bookmobile attracted great interest at the state fair and at several county fairs. It demonstrated how rural schools and communities could have books delivered to them and the type of books that were available. More people learned about the Nebraska Public Library Commission's service of sending books all across the state. The question most often asked by club women visiting the bookmobile was how could they get a bookmobile for their county.⁴⁴

By the end of 1936 Nebraska had 181 tax-supported public libraries and 109 libraries supported by clubs or organiza-

tions. Women ran nearly all of these libraries; only five or six men were listed out of a total of 290 staff members. Half of these libraries had incomes of less than \$500 a year. Of these, twenty-three were township libraries. Three counties had no public libraries, but practically all towns in the state large enough to support adequate library service had established them. Many rural schools continued to depend almost entirely on the Nebraska Public Library Commission for books for supplementary reading material.⁴⁵

Governor Cochran was re-elected in 1936 and again in 1938, enabling him and Mrs. Cochran to see the two library bills bear fruit. The first county library

project under the provisions of SF 273 was started in Adams County in September 1939. The county was chosen because it was centrally located and typically rural, with a system of good roads, important to running a bookmobile. Sponsored by the Nebraska Public Library Commission, the Adams County project received the services of a WPA worker, while local communities provided the building, utilities, and furniture. Books were loaned by the library commission and the nearby Hastings Library, which was considered "splendid." Within a year the Adams County library had six branches and bookmobile service. Mrs. Cochran visited the Adams



Library Commission promotional piece describing the advantages provided by county libraries and bookmobiles. NSHS-RG16

County library and branch libraries in Kenesaw, Juniata, and Prosser in September 1940. She expressed herself "enthusiastically in favor of the libraries available in small towns of the county."⁴⁶

Thanks to the library demonstration, Adams County citizens voted approval of a county library project November 8, 1940. "It looked like a statewide campaign for establishment of county libraries was in prospect," said the *Omaha World-Herald*.⁴⁷

While Adams County was the first and only one-county project, Douglas and Sarpy counties demonstrated two-county cooperation. Omaha had the first regional library. Its operation under WPA personnel was similar to that of a

county library: A trained librarian coordinated the work of untrained persons at branch libraries. "The revitalized Nebraska State Library Commission, with some help from the WPA, was giving library service to thousands of people who had been without it," said the *Omaha World-Herald*.⁴⁸

The national movement, Friends of the Library, started at the annual meeting of the Nebraska Library Association in Fremont in October 1938. Edith Gantt, Mrs. Cochran's sister who had become "specialist in public libraries" from the U.S. Office of Education, spoke. Instigating Friends of the Library was timely because the Friends would be asked to help make the Douglas-Sarpy Regional Library

services permanent.⁴⁹ As a WPA demonstration project, it was to close in 1941.

In 1974 Aileen Cochran, then a seventy-six-year-old widow, was invited to tour the much-expanded offices of the Nebraska Library Commission. Director Jane Geske (1969-71 and 1973-76) introduced her as the "guardian angel" and "friend in need forty years ago." Mrs. Cochran asked about the present budget: nearly one million dollars, with a quarter of a million from the federal government to help with library work outstate. "Mrs. Geske, Miss Louise Nixon, and Dorothy Lessenhop really give me more credit than I deserve," Mrs. Cochran wrote. "Roy [Cochran]

Library Commission

always felt power should be used very carefully. I thought about him today and am sure he would agree that it was used very wisely and constructively that first year in office, 1935."⁵⁰

Libraries in Nebraska have made great strides since the 1920s. It is curious that some of the most dramatic progress occurred between 1935 and 1941, a period of severe economic crisis: reestablishment of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, with more than a tripled appropriation; new laws that placed more attention on rural, western communities and that encouraged regional libraries; plus a bookmobile to serve outlying areas. This growth coincided with a period of increasing federal assistance programs.⁵¹ Federal funds were likely to flow more abundantly where there was official encouragement and good planning at the state and local level. The Nebraska Public Library Commission, and therefore all state library efforts, were put on track for the following decades of growth.

Notes

¹ *Report of the Public Library Commissioner of the Nebraska Public Library, Aug. 10, 1933–June 30, 1935*, 3.

² *First Biennial Report of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, Nov. 30, 1902; Sixth Biennial Report of the NPLC Nov. 30, 1912*, 8.

³ "Centennial History of the Nebraska Library Association," *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly* 26 (Spring 1995): 30.

⁴ Map and statistical data on libraries, Dec. 10, 1920, MS3528, Records of the Nebraska Library Association, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln (hereafter cited as NLA Records); *Twelfth Biennial Report, NPLC, Nov. 30, 1924*, 8–9.

⁵ *Nebraska Legislature, House Journal, Forty-second Session, 1923*, 205.

⁶ Mrs. George Hein, Culbertson, Nebr., to Nebraska Public Library Commission, Apr. 7, 1923, B. 18, RG16, Records of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, NSHS (hereafter cited as NLC Records.)

⁷ Resolution, Feb. 15, 1923, B. 1, NLA Records.

⁸ *Eleventh Biennial Report, NPLC, Nov. 30, 1922*, 17; *Twelfth Biennial Report NPLC, Nov. 30, 1924*, 25. Minutes of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, Mar. 29, 1928, RG16, microfilm at NSHS (hereafter cited as NLC Minutes).

⁹ NLC Minutes, Feb. 12, 1931.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Laws of Nebraska, 1933*, 455–58. Doane's salary was \$5,000. *Nebraska Blue Book, 1934*, 228–29.

¹² *Report of the Nebraska Public Library, Aug. 10, 1933–June 30, 1935*, 3, 6. The magnitude of the demand for books is reflected in the 1932 biennial report as summarized in the *Nebraska Blue Book, 1932*, 225–26: There were 665 public library requests for traveling libraries, with 16,795 volumes loaned; 1,259 requests from schools, with 64,796 volumes sent; 6,783 requests from individuals; and 1,800 applications from study clubs.

¹³ American Library Association survey data, cited in *Report of Nebraska Public Library, Aug. 10, 1933–June 30, 1935*, 4–5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

¹⁵ Cochran radio address, Mar. 17, 1935, B. 67, RG1, SG31, Robert L. Cochran Gubernatorial Papers, NSHS (hereafter cited as Cochran Papers).

¹⁶ Aileen Gantt Cochran Memoirs, ca. 1973–74, copy in author's possession.

¹⁷ Cochran radio address, Mar. 31, 1935, Cochran Papers.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cochran radio address, Mar. 10, 1935, Cochran Papers.

²⁰ Cochran radio address, Mar. 17, 1935, Cochran Papers.

²¹ *Lincoln Star*, Mar. 17, 1935.

²² Madalene S. Hillis to Marguerite Nesbit, pres. NLA, to Nesbit, Mar. 20, 1935, B. 3, NLA Records.

²³ "A Six-part Plan for Improving Library Conditions in Nebraska" [Oct. 1934], NLA Records.

²⁴ Hillis to Nesbit, Mar. 20, 1935, B. 3, NLA Records.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Nebraska Legislature, House Journal, Fiftieth Session, 1935*, 1697.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Aileen Gantt Cochran to Madalene S. Hillis, May 24, 1935, B. 3, NLA Records.

²⁹ *The Library Journal*, June 15, 1935, 1715–16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cochran radio address, May 19, 1935, Cochran Papers.

³³ *Report of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, Aug. 26, 1935–Mar. 30, 1936*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Nebraska Blue Book, 1936*, 452; *1938*, 523; *1940*, 343.

³⁷ Aileen G. Cochran to Eleanor Roosevelt, Apr. 15, 1935; Malvina T. Scheider, secretary to Mrs. Roosevelt, to Ellen S. Woodward, Apr. 30, 1935; Woodward to Scheider, May 14, 1935, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, National Archives and Records Administration.

³⁸ B. 33, NLC Records, includes several files on library projects.

³⁹ Hillis to Edna C. Noble, librarian, College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska, June 7, 1935, B. 3, NLA Records.

⁴⁰ *Omaha World-Herald*, Oct. 25, 1935.

⁴¹ Aileen G. Cochran to author, Apr. 25, 1974. Nellie Carey to Grace W. Estes, American Library Association, Chicago, Feb. 17, 1936. "We now have a fund of \$1,150 which Mrs. Cochran collected for the purchase of a book truck. Perhaps this will be given some publicity later, but it is not for publication now," "Bookmobile" file, B. 27, NLC Records.

⁴² "Bookmobile" file, NLC Records.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Report of the Nebraska Public Library Commission, Aug. 26, 1935–Nov. 30, 1936*. The average salary of fifty-two librarians was \$2,150, while that of forty-four school principals was \$5,016, according to a study by the American Women's Association, *Women Workers Through the Depression* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); *Library Journal*, Jan. 1, 1935, 27.

⁴⁶ *The Adams County Voice*, Sept. 26, 1940.

⁴⁷ *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 9, 1940.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1940.

⁴⁹ "Friends of the Library" file, B. 27, NLA Records.

⁵⁰ Aileen Cochran to author, Apr. 25, 1974.

⁵¹ Jane Geske, "Coping and Planning . . . : The Association in the 1940s and 1950s," *NLAQ* 26 (Spring 1995): 45–55. Geske was Library Commission director 1969–71, 1973–76.