



NOTE: This is the eighth in a series of articles that will be released monthly throughout 2017 as part of the celebration of the NH State Library's 300th anniversary. The State Library was founded in Jan. 25, 1777 and is the first state library in America.

NH State Library Really Delivers

August 14, 2017: When you walk into your public library here in New Hampshire, you may think that the items you see on the shelves are the only ones that you can borrow. That's actually not true. Your library card can get you access to literally millions of books, magazines, music, movies and more from libraries across the state, brought right to your own public or academic library.

The N.H. State Library has a long history of providing New Hampshire's library patrons with access to materials that their libraries might not have. In the early 1900s, we mailed books we selected from our collection to rural libraries as a way for them to offer a larger selection to their patrons and to stretch their limited funds. In 1938, we moved in a new direction when we purchased our first bookmobile. That first vehicle, a half-ton panel truck with special shelves, could hold about 500 State Library books; it began making rural stops in Carroll County, soon adding stops in Coös and Sullivan Counties. Within two years, the service increased its number of stops from 25 to 233. As you'd expect, the total circulation of books to these rural sites (libraries, schools, and even grange halls and county farms) increased significantly as we added more and more stops.

The program was such a success that a second bookmobile was added in 1940, thanks to a donation from the New Hampshire Federation of Women's Clubs. By 1941, the two bookmobiles accounted for a circulation of more than 36,000 books annually—quite the increase from that first partial year, when 1,968 books circulated.

Bookmobiles continued to be a valuable part of the State Library's services to New Hampshire libraries during World War II and the decades that followed. By 1968, there were four bookmobiles operating statewide, based at our four regional offices in Concord, Exeter, Keene and Littleton, with each making deliveries to their assigned geographic areas.

At their peak of popularity, in 1977, more than 320,000 books circulated using the bookmobiles, but the focus on sharing materials from the State Library began to change soon after. Instead, a statewide union catalog of holdings from selected libraries – think of it as a card catalog with information from multiple libraries—was maintained at the State Library, and libraries used that to make requests from each other. Eventually, the New Hampshire Automated Information System (NHAIS) revolutionized the interlibrary loan program in the state, allowing hundreds of participating libraries to know what others had available to share with them and their patrons.

By 1983, the bookmobile program was phased out and the State Library focused on operating vans that transported books between lending and borrowing libraries. Growth was gradual: in 1989, we operated two vans within the state, helping to transport more than 53,000 interlibrary loan books that year. We now operate five vans delivering almost 9,000 books each week!

The N.H. State Library's InterLibrary Loan service via van delivery continues to be one of the most popular and cost-effective services we provide and is used by people of all ages and interests. Our vans travel more than 200,000 miles a year delivering to libraries from Salem to Colebrook, Hinsdale to Portsmouth each week. We have come a long way from a single bookmobile driving to remote villages in the North Country, and we're still proud to be able to help bring such a wide variety of materials to New Hampshire's library patrons.

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