

National Bookmobile Day 2013 – Bookmobiles at a Glance

Background

Held on the Wednesday of National Library Week since 2010, National Bookmobile Day (NBD) recognizes and celebrates the role of bookmobiles and direct-delivery outreach services in fulfilling the mission of libraries. An integral and vital part of library service in the United States for over 100 years, bookmobiles have delivered information, technology, and resources for life-long learning to Americans of all walks of life.

National Bookmobile Day is sponsored by the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS), the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS), and the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL).

The third annual National Bookmobile will be celebrated on **Wednesday, April 17, 2013**.

A Brief History

Modern bookmobile service is thought to have its roots in the late 19th Century.

The first bookmobile service in the U.S. is widely acknowledged to have started in 1905 by Mary Lemist Titcomb in Washington County, Maryland. Titcomb, the first librarian of the Washington County Free Library, saw the need to expand library services from the main location in Hagerstown to homes across the largely rural county.¹ Initially, the service saw materials distributed to general stores, post offices, and other locations throughout the county via the library's wagon – initially serving 66 locations.

Unsatisfied by this, Titcomb sought to create what she referred to as a "Library Wagon" and began consulting with wagon makers to design a purpose-built horse-drawn wagon. Staffed by a librarian and a driver, the new Library Wagon began its service, visiting farms and homes across the county. In 1912, the county acquired its first motorized bookmobile, and the service over time has been expanded from rural service to stops at senior citizen centers, schools, and other locations, and continues to present day.

In India, the concept of a mobile library was introduced in 1931 during a meeting of the Madras Library Association. Promoted by S.R. Ranganathan, considered "The Father of Library Science" in India, this two-wheeled cart – the first mobile library in Southern Asia – echoed his ideals of library service as a means to help improve rural education.

Bookmobiles can be found around the world, in many different forms – from the familiar bus or van-like vehicles to other means of transport, including a *biblioburro* in rural Colombia, a camel library service in Uganda, the M.S. Epos library ship in Norway, and elephant libraries in Thailand.²

¹ "The Bookmobile Collection." (n.d.). Retrieved February 16, 2011, from Western Maryland's Historical Library: <http://www.whilbr.org/bookmobile/index.aspx>.

² "Bookmobile." (2011, January 15). Retrieved February 16, 2011, from Wikipedia.

Number of Bookmobiles in the U.S.

The number of bookmobiles continues to increase to more than 930 in 2008 (there were 825 nationwide in 2005).³

Below is a breakdown of the number of bookmobiles by state, based on data from the National Center of Educational Statistics:

State	#				
KY	98	MD	15	MT	4
CA	69	TX	14	NV	4
OH	66	ND	14	WY	3
NC	41	AZ	14	NM	3
IN	37	NJ	13	AR	3
PA	37	CO	12	NH	2
SC	35	WI	11	DE	2
VA	34	OR	11	MS	2
FL	33	NY	11	RI	2
MO	30	VT	9	TN	2
IL	29	NE	8	HI	1
LA	28	SD	8	AK	1
UT	24	MA	7	DC	1
GA	23	CT	7	OK	1
WA	20	WV	7		
MI	18	ID	6		
AL	17	IA	6		
MN	16	KS	5		

Bookmobile Costs

According to the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services, the average cost of a bookmobile is around \$200,000.

Bookmobiles can often be a cost-effective means of providing library services to large geographic areas, especially when compared to the cost of building and maintaining physical branches. In a recent report from the Wayne County, Ohio, Library, the average cost of a bookmobile is approximately \$200,000-\$230,000, compared to the cost of constructing a library building, which averages around \$1.6 million.

³ American Library Association. (2010). *State of America's Libraries*

Bookmobile Services

Bookmobiles, like libraries, continue to meet the needs of their communities by offering free access to the latest technology and materials to users of all ages.

Bookmobiles visit a wide range of locations, including rural areas, suburbs, and cities. In addition to neighborhood stops, bookmobiles also serve day care centers, elementary and high schools, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, and individual residences for home delivery.

The services bookmobiles provide parallel with library branches. Bookmobiles provide a wide variety of books, newspapers and periodicals, and DVDS and other media. They also provide reference service and reader's advisory, offer programs and classes, and present storytimes and activities.

Many bookmobiles provide technology, including adaptive technology for people with disabilities, computers with Internet access, educational software, e-readers, portable media players, subscription databases, and even video game systems.

As bookmobile service expands, many vehicles are becoming specialized, and their names are changing to match their purposes--Technomobile, JobLink, Kidmobile, Cybermobile, ABC Express, etc.

Bookmobiles and the Environment

Bookmobile manufacturers have responded to changing conditions by designing vehicles that are easily accessible and environmentally friendly. Today's bookmobiles are fuel efficient and "green" vehicles.

Many of these vehicles employ the latest "green" technologies, including clean diesel engines and generators, LED lighting, and recycled materials.