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AUTHOR Espinosa-Almestica, Julio
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ABSTRACT

The St. Croix bookmobile has a greater circulation than both island libraries despite some serious breaks in service caused by equipment failures, lack of personnel, and bad weather. Radical shifts in the island population have added to the service problems by complicating the planning of routes. There has been no significant change or improvement in library services on St. Croix since 1958 when the bookmobile was introduced. The island needs an additional bookmobile to provide more regular service and to add new and proposed communities to the existing routes. (KB)

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BOOKMOBILES IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

A Study of Mobile Library Service
In St. Croix, U.S.V.I.

by

Julio Espinosa-Almestica

Librarian

Christiansted Grammar School

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PREFACE

In an era which cries for information, in fact demands information, it must be provided. The lack of available information will lead to conjecture and surmise. Naturally libraries of all kinds have traditionally provided this information. Because of the rapid expansion of population and the rapid changes in population, culturally, ethnologically, religiously, linguistically, etc., brought about by rapid and "reasonable" air travel, the "recognized" channels of information have been disrupted, and the role of the public library must change accordingly. One of the methods of bridging that gap is through the use of mobile libraries, or bookmobiles as they are more commonly known.

St. Croix, and the Virgin Islands, is fortunate to have had some experience in the matter of bookmobiles, and to have had dedicated people in the service of mobile libraries. They were on the "front lines," so to speak, and their words not only are important, but demand to be heard.

From this study, it will be seen that mobile libraries do have a place in a St. Croix Library System, and it would appear in the other Virgin Islands.

The St. Croix Library Association thanks the author of this "study" in Virgin Islands librarianship, Mr. Julio Espinosa-Almestica, Librarian, Christiansted Grammar School, for his unselfish sharing of his personal experiences with his community. Undoubtedly this study will have an influence on the planning of future Virgin Islands library systems.

Julio Espinosa-Almestica
Librarian
Christiansted Elementary School
Christiansted, St. Croix 00820

February 14, 1972

Mr. Robert V. Vaughn, President
St. Croix Library Association
Box 1122, Christiansted
St. Croix, VI 00820

Dear Sir,

Please accept my apology for not having handed you this report which I promised a long time ago. Your letter has been timely for I have found time to add two supplementary pages; and my wife has been kind enough to type out the manuscript.

As I mentioned to you before this study is based on my years with the Public Libraries in St. Croix. There is more which I could elaborate on but unfortunately I don't have more time at present; however, I'm willing to help whenever I can.

The material enclosed is solely for the use of the Association. I greatly appreciate your interest in Librarianship in the Virgin Islands. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

s/ Julio Espinosa

Julio Espinosa
LIBRARIAN, CPGS

BOOKMOBILES IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Statistically the Bookmobile has a greater circulation, and reaches a greater number of people than both libraries put together! This is truly remarkable since due to the conditions rather unique to the islands, our service is rather limited.

Periodically, the Bookmobile disappears from the public roads, and is laid up from a few days to sometimes years. This situation causes great losses both in terms of service to patrons and also in terms of books and materials which cannot be returned to the libraries. For example, our first Bookmobile died during March 1967, we did not resume service until October, 1970. Of the thousands of books out, we have been able to collect less than one hundred. In view of this possibility we started from scratch. The new vehicle was loaded with material that had been reserved for it at the Frederiksted Public Library and what both libraries could furnish from their regular collections. Members had moved, grown up, or left island, so it became necessary to re-register all patrons in order to keep our records straight.

The phenomenal growth of the island in those years further complicated the routes. Places like Castle Burke, Anguilla, Negro Bay, etc. no longer existed while communities with hundreds of families now stood on what was once farm land. These routes had to be replanned, tried and readjusted to the new situation. Of course with new residents we had to explain the purpose of the Bookmobile, and encourage them to use it.

But none of the breaks in the Bookmobile service have been as long as this one and we hope it can be avoided in the future. The frequent problems we encounter that cut service can be listed as follows:

1. No Bookmobile.
2. No Driver.

3. No Librarian.

4. Bad Weather.

Weather is no longer the problem it used to be. In the early years most of the secondary roads were unpaved and even the most adventuresome would wind up stuck whenever a heavy shower came down. So a storm that lasted a few days meant no service for that much time. Now with the majority of our roads paved, only a hurricane will stop the Bookmobile.

For the last nine years I must say we have had an efficient librarian, but lack of a good driver has hampered bookmobile service more than anything else except, mechanical difficulties or no Bookmobile at all. An inadequate salary is the main reason why none of the drivers last very long on their job.

Mechanical difficulties is perhaps the most perplexing problem. Presently the vehicle is down with brakes failure for one month. Previously it had to have its gas tank repaired. Unfortunately this situation has been aggravated since the tighter schedule calls for movement on the Mondays which before were set aside for maintenance. Repairs must be done by appointment with local garages, who usually do a fine job, but are rather reluctant to work on the Bookmobile, because in their own words "the government takes too long to pay." As a result the vehicle is put to one side while the better customers are taken care of.

When it comes to preventive maintenance there are things within our power to remedy. Probably the only reason the original Bookmobile was discarded was the deterioration. The roof rusted beyond repair, the glass windows were broken along with numerous scratches and dents inflicted by vandals. The inside was rather faded but useable. Given the proper protection of an enclosed garage it would have lasted longer and given much less trouble. This is further proven out if we consider that it is used no more than eight hours a day, and remains parked

all weekends and holidays.

The Bookmobile was originally meant to service the library needs of twelve thousand people on St. Croix. Today equipped with the same amount of stuff it is trying to cover a population three times larger. Plans are in the making to build new libraries in the major population centers like Sion Farm and Mon Bijou. Sion Farm at present has a total of some four hundred homes and Mon Bijou, counting the last section, can house over five hundred families. Each of these more than qualifies to have a small branch library of its own. The Bookmobile would then be free to visit other smaller communities like Paradise, Grove Place, and Tide Village on a regular basis.

Routes now are on an alternate schedule, which means that if you miss one day, it will be a whole month before the people in that area will see you again. The ideal is to visit every area once a week. But, even with a branch at Sion Farm and Mon Bijou this would be difficult to accomplish.

Perhaps you have asked yourself, why couldn't the Bookmobile operate during the day? Well, in the United States, Bookmobiles are operated during regular working hours. But locally this is impractical. In most homes here, both husband and wife work, and the children of pre-school age are left in the care of a maid, or grandmother. Students normally get home around three o'clock while grown-ups do not return until five or six o'clock. Because of possible mechanical problems, besides inconvenience to personnel it is inadvisable to be out beyond seven o'clock, which means the Bookmobile has only four hours to run one day's schedule.

The population and the number of smaller communities will not justify a small library in each. For one, there would be too much duplication of materials. It would also be costly to have even a number of part-time librarians and a book depository in each. On the other hand, a second properly-staffed Bookmobile

would fulfill these needs and prove to be less expensive.

This would seem superfluous at this time. But let's consider how many new communities are being planned or are in construction: Paradise, Williams Delight, W.I.M. Hodge Pavilion, the development of Strawberry, Glynn, and so on. The second Bookmobile would also be used as a back up vehicle to supplement, in case of a breakdown. This would all but guarantee efficient library service to all the island.

Some of these ideas are being considered and perhaps in another ten years they will become reality. If conditions on the Island remain the same it would just be a matter of time but, unfortunately, St. Croix continues growing at the same rate. Something must be done so we can truly "Take the Library to Our People."

Supplement - Rural Library Service, March 1971

Rural communities in St. Croix are scattered clusters of homes. These are situated on plots of land measuring from 1/4 to several acres. Most lie along paved secondary roads and can easily be reached by a Bookmobile. By far, the great majority of the people of St. Croix live in these homes which dot the entire island, except for the extreme north-west. Princess is the largest single estate that falls under this classification.

Planned communities are little towns constructed by private enterprises. Most of these have provisions for recreational and cultural centers but very few have a physical structure that could house a library. What is most striking is that some like Mon Bijou and Sion Farm have more people than the town of Frederiksted proper. From these observations we can say that when the people moved to the country the library did not go with them.

Socio-economic factors dictate the above to be the movement and growth trends in the population of St. Croix for the rest of the century. Since the advent of the Bookmobile in 1958, there has been no significant change or improvement in Public Library service. With the collective efforts of the St. Croix Library Association we can take the library back to the people. It is my sincerest hope that this short study will be reviewed critically and improved upon to make a more meaningful and comprehensive plan.

Rural Library Service, March 1971

<u>Community</u>	<u>Bookmobile Service</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Type of Community</u>
Mon Bijou	Yes	---	D
Sion Farm	Yes	---	D
Camporico	Yes	---	D
William's Delight	No	Discontinued for S.F. & M.B.	PC
A.D. Morales	Yes	---	HD
Humbug	Yes	---	PC
Profit	Yes	---	D
Paradise	No	Under Construction	PC
Peppertree	Yes	---	TP
Mt. Welcome	No	Too near to CPL	PC
Tide Village	Yes	---	PC
Princess	Yes	---	R
Soffarelli	No	Too near to FPL	HD
Grove Place	Yes	---	R
Catherine's Rest	Yes	---	D
Colquohoun	Yes	---	R
Anna's Hope	No	Not enough time	R
West End	Partial	Cut short for S.F. & M.B.	R
East End	No	Not enough patronage	R
Concordia	No	Discontinued for S.F. & M.B.	R
Glynn	No	Not enough time	R
Strawberry	No	Under Construction	PC
Golden Rock	No	Too Near to CPL	D

Abbreviations: M.B. - Mon Bijou; S.F. - Sion Farm; D - Private Housing Development or Groups of Private Homes; PC - Planned Community; R-Rural; HD - Government Housing Development for Low-Income Families.

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