



indow to the World

Special Edition

March 2006

Newsletter of the Tennessee Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped

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LBPH 35/75 Anniversary Exhibit

The Honorable Riley Darnell, Secretary of State,

The Tennessee State Library and Archives

And

The Tennessee Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped

Invite you to view an Exhibit celebrating

75 years of LBPH service and 35 years of the

Tennessee Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped

Held in Memorial Hall of the Tennessee State Library & Archives

403 Seventh Avenue North

Nashville, Tennessee

March 15 - April 28, 2006

Exhibit Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. (Central Time), Monday - Saturday

LBPH Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (Central Time), Monday – Friday

To schedule a tour of the LBPH, please call (800) 342-3308.

35/75: A Brief History

As our front page invitation indicates, this spring marks the 35th Anniversary of the Tennessee Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (TLBPH). This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the National Library Service for the Blind and Handicapped (NLS), the division of the Library of Congress (LOC) that produces most of the talking books and Braille titles that we circulate.

NLS, of course, was not the first American library for the blind or handicapped. Libraries for the blind and physically handicapped had been springing up all over the United States for many years. The most notable was probably the Reading Room for the Blind that opened in 1896 in Washington's then-new Library of Congress building. In addition to circulating embossed books and music scores, the new reading room provided daily readings, a weekly recital, and an art gallery. Obviously, blind readers of that era were cultivated and socially-polished, since the reading room hosted frequent teas for its patrons.

Prior to 1923, production of the braille books circulated by libraries like the LOC Reading Room for the Blind was underwritten by wealthy philanthropists and successful authors. Jack London's widow, for example, donated the cost of brailing one of his stories. Mary Roberts Rinehart gave \$500 for embossing her book, *Love Stories*. Booth Tarkington donated \$300 to make braille plates for his novel *Penrod*.

In 1923, Congress got into the act by appropriating \$100,000 for the Veterans Bureau to print braille books for blind veterans. This money enabled the Bureau to create and circulate a collection of about 1,000 volumes.

In 1930, Congresswoman Ruth Pratt of New York and Senator Reed Smoot of Utah introduced legislation appropriating funds for the Library of Congress to provide books for blind adults. The Pratt-Smoot Act of 1931, as it came to be known, established nineteen regional libraries across the United States to circulate braille reading materials to the blind. None was located in Tennessee. Tennessee readers had to borrow books from Ohio.

In 1968, the Tennessee State Library & Archives (TSLA) hired an enthusiastic librarian named Francis Ezell to establish a library for the blind and physically handicapped here in Tennessee. In 1970 her appointment paid off when the General Assembly voted to fund such a library through the Tennessee State Library & Archives, at that time a unit of the Department of Education. In 1971, TLBPH officially opened for business at 5200 Centennial Boulevard in Nashville, in an industrial neighborhood near the old State Prison.

In 1979 the library moved uptown to 729 Church Street, in Nashville's central shopping district, and subsequently to the State Library & Archives building on Capitol Hill, where it remains today.

The next milestone came in 1981-82, when the library automated circulation

by deploying the Tennessee Automated Circulation System (TACS). TACS was developed in-house by TLBPH staff and specialists from the State Systems Development Department (now known as the Office of Information Resources).

In 1995, after 27 years of service to the Library she founded, director Francis Ezell retired. In a nice example of promotion from within, Secretary of State Riley Darnell named Mary Lou Markham to replace her as director. Ms. Markham had originally joined the library in 1984 as Coordinator of Automation and earned her master's in library science while working here. When Ms. Markham retired in 1999, Mr. Darnell picked Ruth Hemphill of Missouri's Wolfner Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped as director.

The first major challenge that Ruth faced was replacement of the aging TACS system. After 20 years of service, the home-grown TACS software was out-of-date and difficult to maintain. The most cost-effective alternative was to adopt the READS system that NLS was already providing to smaller LBPHs. Tennessee became the largest statewide LBPH to adopt this system, which we still use today.

READS enables TLBPH to serve nearly 6,000 patrons with a staff of only fourteen people, including your four reader advisors. The library circulates more than 310,000 books, magazines and descriptive videos each year, or roughly 50 items per patron. We send out about 1000 items a day, and must check back in and reshelve roughly the

same volume. These item totals don't include circulation figures for our fleet of some 7800 players, which we maintain with the help of our Telecom Pioneers, BellSouth retirees who donate their time and expertise to repair and refurbish these devices. Our annual budget for all these operations is now more than \$900,000, with about 85% of this total funded by the state of Tennessee.

Our circulation numbers will take a big jump in 2008, when NLS will begin providing DTBs (short for Digital Talking Books) in "flash memory" format, the type of memory currently found in digital cameras and some iPods. NLS is already developing a DTB audio player that promises to be smaller, lighter and more reliable than today's cassette players. But TLBPH will continue to distribute cassette books and players indefinitely, until all our patrons have converted to the new media.

The motto of the NLS network created by the Pratt -Smoot Act is: "That All May Read". For the past 35 years the TLBPH has labored to make this a goal a reality for all Tennesseans with visual or physical handicaps. But we still reach only a small percentage of the Tennesseans eligible for our services. If you know anyone who may qualify, please pass on our toll-free number (1-800-342-3308), e-mail address (tlbph.tsla@state.tn.us) or website (<http://tennessee.gov/tsla/lbph>). We're grateful to all of you who have played a part in our history at TLBPH, and we're eager to have you play an even larger part in our future.

(Some information for this article is taken from *That All May Read: Library Service for Blind and Physically Handicapped Readers*, National Library Service for the Blind & Physically Handicapped, The Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1983.)

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Administration and Staff

The Honorable Riley C. Darnell, Secretary of State; Jeanne Sugg, State Librarian & Archivist; Ruth Hemphill, Director; Janie Murphree, Assistant Director; Carmelita Esaw, Computer

Specialist; Ann Jones, Administrative Assistant.

Circulation and Repair Staff: Larry Conner, Materials Manager; Jerry Clinard, Dwight Davis, Terry Corn, Ron Gross, Billy Kirby, Ron Peaks II, and Kenneth Rainey.

Reader Advisors: Ed Byrne, Annette Hadley, Clara Ledbetter, and Francine Sharpe.

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