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Hancock County Public Library System: History and Hurricane

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University of Southern Mississippi
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Introduction

The award-winning Hancock County Library System, consisting of four branches within the southwest corner of Mississippi, was dealt a devastating blow on August 29, 2005, as Hurricane Katrina made landfall and ravaged the Gulf Coast. The Waveland and Pearlinton branches of this library system were destroyed. The headquarters branch in Bay St. Louis and the Kiln branch sustained critical damage as well.

The impact of Hurricane Katrina, the most notorious natural disaster in our nation's history (as many have proclaimed), has historical significance in the field of library science as affected libraries, such as the Hancock County Library System, proceed through recovery.

Tragedy strikes libraries all too often. Research is easily performed in order to find a library that burned or flooded. But rare is the circumstance that provides for the opportunity to observe and learn from a library severely damaged along with its patronage, its city, its county, and its region.

Background

"Without libraries what have we? We have no past and no future." – Ray Bradbury

Bay St. Louis is a community that was established over two hundred years ago (Ellis, 1997). The current location of the Bay St. Louis library was established in 1969 on Dunbar and Ulman streets. Renovations and expansions of this branch were completed in April 1995 (Ellis, 1997, p. 87.) Since then, the library and its system has provided the community of Bay St. Louis and surrounding areas services and

programming, setting a record at the end of the 2002 fiscal year with over 250,000 patron transactions, "making it one of the busiest libraries in the State of Mississippi" (Hancock County Library System, 2002, p. 6).

Among the many awards and recognitions the library system has received, one of the most prestigious was received in September 2001; The Hancock County Library System received the National Award for Library Service from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In 2003, the Bay St. Louis library was named a National Literary Landmark for Stephen E. Ambrose, the popular historian, professor, and author of over two dozen major works, who used this library for research (Hancock County Library System Web site, 2005).

Prior to the storm, the Bay St. Louis headquarters branch provided FOCUS (Free Online Computer User Services) computers, community meeting rooms, *Computer Smarts @ Your Library* classes, toddler story times, summer reading programs and one-on-one research assistance in-person, by phone and by email, and so much more. The Bay St. Louis branch re-opened on October 12, 2005 and the Kiln branch re-opened on September 10, 2005, only 12 days following the unprecedented disaster.

In order to appreciate the consequences of the damage inflicted on the Hancock County Public Library System, it would be useful to delve into the past and learn what has made this library such a fundamental part of its community and what lead it to become nationally recognized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine data relating to the history and development of the Hancock County Public Library System through analysis of its branches. This study has shown the exploration of the history and growth of the libraries

up to Hurricane Katrina and has compared pre-Katrina statistics to post-Katrina statistics. This study has served as a comprehensive history and record of the development of the Hancock County Library System, and provided documentation of its damages and recovery. This study has served to assist others in disaster planning and management, has preserved the library system's history, has illustrated the importance of library services following a disaster, and, possibly, has revealed lessons for the future.

Guiding Research Questions

1. When were the library system and each of its branches founded, and what were some benchmarks of the system's early history?
2. What factors contributed to the library system's growth before Hurricane Katrina?
3. What services did the library system provide pre and post Hurricane Katrina?
4. What were the sizes of the collections of the branches both pre and post Katrina?
5. What were the circulation statistics of the branches both pre and post Katrina?
6. What were the staffing numbers pre and post Katrina?
7. What programming did the libraries offer pre and post Katrina?

Delimitations

This study did not regard income or expenditures. This study did not discuss specific monetary donations received by the library system following the hurricane.

Abbreviations:

BSL—Bay St. Louis
FEMA—Federal Emergency Management Agency
HCLS—Hancock County Library System
IMLS – Institute of Museum and Library Services
KN—Kiln Branch
MEMA—Mississippi Emergency Management Agency
MLC—Mississippi Library Commission
PL—Pearlington Branch

SBA—Small Business Association
WV—Waveland Branch

Assumptions

It was assumed that all data collected for the purpose of this study, including the collection data and the circulation data, were accurate and complete. It was assumed that all other data, history, news, and information collected for the purpose of this study were accurate.

Importance of the Study

Libraries may be called the infrastructure of a culture or cultures. They reflect and communicate the community's needs and curiosities in their collections and programming, provide a conduit to information in many forms, and provide free services to the public. When a fundamental component of a community is destroyed or damaged or even scuffed, it reminds those concerned with the preservation of their history, that their library is essential in that endeavor.

This study has provided a written history and compared pre- and post- Hurricane Katrina collection and circulation data of the branches of the Hancock County Library System. This study has documented this disaster's effect on the libraries, which could be useful not only as an historical study but for purposes of future disaster planning and management.

Literature Review

In consideration of how to go about researching items to include in this literature review, it was determined that attention must be paid to American, state, and local library history, of course, but in addition, attention must be paid to literature related to library catastrophe recovery. The following literature review contains scholarly work dealing with the history of libraries as well as libraries dealing with disasters, as history should be written while considering its current context as well as future implications.

American History of the Library

Edward A Goedeken (2004) pays attention to what's being written about libraries, both in quality and in quantity. In the article, "The Literature of American Library History, 2001-2002," Goedeken comments on the recent "generous outpouring of writings devoted to public libraries" (p. 180). His article provides commentary and a bibliography that includes books, master's theses and doctoral dissertations of histories of all types of libraries.

It is fundamentally necessary to record library history. This is evident in the work of Michael Harris, prominent library historian, as he points out the value of historiography of libraries and asserts in his *Reader in American Library History* (1971):

Historians point out that every age considers its own specific crises as the most significant, the most demanding, and potentially the most dangerous in the country's experience. An understanding of library history illustrates quite clearly that American librarians have faced seemingly major crises over the years; while we do not mean to suggest that we can afford the luxury of complacency at such a critical juncture in our history, it is both enlightening and encouraging to see the ways in which our predecessors perceived and overcame their most serious challenges (p. 1).

This quote has a poignant significance for this study. Robert Lee, in his essay, "The People's University—The Educational Objective of the Public Library," included in Harris's *Reader*, discusses what he calls the "turning point in American library history":

The establishment of the Peterborough Library in 1833 was significant in that it set a precedent in the use of public funds. Other free libraries were established during the next two decades in some of the small towns in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York State. The organization of

free libraries was relatively slow, however, until 1854 when the city of Boston—one of the large and culturally important cities of the country—established a public library. This marked the turning point in the history of the public library movement in the United States. The organization of a public library by a major metropolitan community, and the formulation by its founders of a rationale for free public library service, provided the impetus needed to set the public library concept into motion (Harris, 1971, p. 117).

Harris writes, "The opening of the reading room of the Boston Public Library at the Adams School House in 1854 heralded the advent of the American public library." In Harris' collection of essays mentioned above (*Reader in American Library History*, 1971), Albert Smith (as cited in Harris, 1971) describes how a part of the state bank tax provided for the purchase of library books by a vote in the spring of 1833. Though not sanctioned by the state legislature, this tax was divided among schools within one New Hampshire town and thereby established the first public and publicly supported "American town library" (p.117).

Fred Lerner, in his *Libraries Through the Ages* (1999), describes the establishment of other libraries around the country to be somewhat slower than in New England. The New York Free Circulating Library (privately founded and funded for its first seven years) was not established until 1879 while Boston's Public Library opened in 1854. Lerner further writes that the general consensus at the time the New York Free Circulating Library opened was that libraries were a "charitable enterprise" rather than "an essential municipal service" (p. 101).

In addition and prior to the *Reader*, Michael Harris assembled a large amount of history and research resources, though somewhat dated for the purposes of this study, in his *A Guide to Research in American Library History*, 2nd edition (1974). Each work listed, including published books, theses, and dissertations, includes a citation and an abstract of the work.

Another library history research starting point is Davis's and Tucker's *American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature* (1989). This work has descriptive essays by the authors on a variety of libraries from their earliest developments including public libraries. However, the citations the authors provide do not include abstracts. Both Harris's and Davis's and Tucker's works listed several citations specifically regarding Mississippi libraries.

Harris includes the final chapter of Jesse Shera's *Foundations of the Public Library* (1949), in his *Reader*. Here, Shera presents the reasons for the necessity and growth of public libraries:

Historical scholarship and the urge to preservation, the power of national and local pride, the growing belief in the importance of universal education, the increasing concern with vocational problems, and the contribution of religion--these, aided by economic ability and encouraged by the example of Europe, were the causal factors in the formation of libraries that would be free to all the people. Underlying these [factors] was (sic) the influence of the people themselves--countless individuals in innumerable towns who had faith in the public library and believed implicitly in its social value (Harris, 1971, p. 157).

Sidney Ditzion was formulating his argument for the social and historical significance of libraries at around the same time as Shera. Considered a "standard" in library history, Ditzion's *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* (1947) has been referenced many times throughout historical library literature. Harris includes a section of Ditzion's work in his *Reader* also. Merle Curti, who prefaced Ditzion's *Arsenals*, is referred to by Harris as "[praising] the author for writing one of the first library histories to be conceived and executed in terms of modern scholarship in history and sociology. His in-depth investigation of the sources and ground-breaking approach to the problem make his study extremely important" (as cited in Harris, 1971, p. 125).

History of the Southern and Mississippi Library

In research on the state level, an informative assemblage of Mississippi library history was compiled under the leadership of Willie D. Halsell, chairman of the Mississippi Library Association's Historical Committee from 1970 to 1974. Her impetus brought together the only such Mississippi library history reference to date. *A History of Mississippi Libraries* received cooperation from all over the state in submitting local library's histories (Peebles & Howell, 1975).

A History begins with description of the earliest known private library collections of colonial inhabitants, pioneers, and merchants mostly in the Natchez and Southwest areas of Mississippi. Though information such as this exists, the 1850 and 1860 censuses, according to *A History*, do not reflect how many private library collections there actually may have been. Social libraries came into existence prior to the American Civil War. These libraries required an annual fee for membership in order to borrow a book. The first chartered library by the first legislature of Mississippi once it received statehood was in 1818 and was called the Mississippi Literary and Library Company of Gibson-Port. Willie D. Halsell writes of the library company, "This was the earliest organization in Mississippi to be called a 'library' and actually set up under the supervision of a librarian" (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 31).

The 1850 census reveals only three social libraries or what are also called circulating or subscription libraries. But Halsell argues that there were more in 1850 as well as in 1860 as she obtained some record otherwise. It is noteworthy that the censuses name these libraries as "public" though as Halsell writes, "they were not tax-supported and free to all" (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 37.) The census of 1870 reports that there were nine "public" libraries with 3,710 volumes total (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 37).

Subscription and "Sunday school libraries" continue to be reported in the censuses through the turn of the century. With contributions from Andrew

Carnegie in the early 1900s, the tenacious Women's Clubs' push for "library service in every state" throughout the 20s, 30s, and 40s, the establishment of the State Library Commission in 1926 and additional Federal assistance through the Works Progress Library Project in 1934, libraries sprouted up across the state of Mississippi. The first state aid for true "public" libraries was appropriated by the Mississippi legislature in 1948 (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 172).

A History describes the "Bay St. Louis City-County Public Library" now known as the Hancock Public Library System's headquarters branch. The history related to this library begins with the library as one of the six libraries in the state organized through the Works Progress Administration in 1934 and continues through 1974 and will be discussed in depth later in this study (Peebles & Howell, 1975, pp.103-104).

A History goes on to describe the earliest inceptions of dozens of public libraries and library systems in Mississippi from the turn of the century to publication of the book. The book contains information on several different types of libraries including public school libraries and college and university libraries around the state (Peebles & Howell, 1975).

As research continued in pursuit of individual library histories, many theses, dissertations, and articles on the subject of public library histories were revealed. A variety of library histories were reviewed such as Jonathan Jeffrey's studies of Kentucky public libraries, "Looking Back: The Genesis of the Bowling Green Public Library" (2004), and "Looking Back: A History of the Montgomery County Public Library" (2003).

Jeffrey is a prolific writer of Kentucky Library history. Both of the above studies were published as feature articles in *Kentucky Libraries*. His histories document the private citizens' and communities' efforts to establish libraries in the early 1800s. Jeffrey discusses circulation statistics, collection development and holdings throughout both libraries' developments through the present, as well as

benefactors and various locations of these libraries throughout the decades. Bowling Green's public library had an especially colorful and convoluted history. After many attempts at organization and efforts and funding on the part of a variety of interested parties, the library was once located in the Bowling Green Armory, very near the town square. On December 31, 1946, the library experienced a great tragedy in losing almost \$14,000 in books in a fire (Jeffreys, 2004, p. 37). As in other library histories, where the library encountered tragedy, the community rallied, and the library reopened to the public just two months after the fire (p.38).

Shannon White's (2000) thesis, "The Development of the Statewide Tax-Supported Library System in Alabama: 1901 – 1974," provides insight to the development of libraries in Alabama. She writes, "Alabama did not witness the creation of a separate agency devoted solely to the formation, administration, and funding of public libraries until 1959. A tax supported public library system serving every county was not completed until 1974" (p.14).

The Ocmulgee Regional Library System in Eastman, Georgia began a cooperative project with the College of Library and Information Science of the University of South Carolina to create a large collection of theses, dissertations and other published and unpublished histories of libraries throughout Georgia. This project, called The Georgia Library History Project, provides a Web site that offers a bibliography containing over 100 histories of public libraries in Georgia as well as histories of academic and other library types in Georgia (The Georgia Library History Project, n.d.).

Patrick Valentine takes into account the cultural, political, and socioeconomic factors that contributed to or delayed the development of public library service in Wilson, North Carolina from the 1900s to the 1940s (1993, p. 284-287). He describes the area as "agrarian" and remarks on the reputation of North Carolina itself as "a vale of humility between two mountains of conceit" in which he is describing the state in the middle of its two neighboring states of

Virginia and South Carolina which looked down on the state as void of culture and signs of development which they were experiencing around the turn of the century (p. 287). Further, Valentine found in his research that in the mid-1800s, the Wilson area had the state's highest illiteracy rate, had high crime and high infant-mortality rates and was one of the state's most prominent cotton and tobacco producing areas (p. 287). Despite these concerns, there was, "at least some *desire* for greater cultural amenities" (p. 287). Attempts were made, especially by the local newspaper, to garner public support for a library in the late 1800s but it was not until 1921 that the Wilson Library, a subscription library, formed (p. 293). The library trudged through the depression and managed to stay afloat through civic pride, donations, several moves, and finally, during 1938-1940, the state legislature passed several acts that established permanent local funding (p. 296). The city of Wilson, a sparsely populated farming community, though "backward" in many ways, was at the forefront of spearheading the library movement in North Carolina.

Local Public Library History

On the local level, one of the more recent local library histories is Sally Donovan's master's project, "The History of the Long Beach Public Library: A Model of Persistence, Dedication and Growth" (2004). Her project is an historical study as well as a quantitative analysis of the growth factors of one of the only two independent libraries in the state, the Long Beach Public Library. Her analysis included circulation, collection numbers, library hours, and other services and compared them with the Blackmur Memorial Library, the other independent library in the state of Mississippi. Donovan also compared statistics with libraries of communities with similar population sizes.

Libraries and Disaster

One would be hard pressed to locate a scholarly article on the effect of disasters on public libraries or any libraries of a statistical nature. There is a great deal of literature, however, on disaster management

and planning as well as articles that would help with restoration of library items following a catastrophe. One such article, which is one of the more thorough in representation of the lot of disaster management articles, is by Morgan and Smith (1997). The authors state, "disaster management and planning should be one of the most important aspects of library management, but in practice it has been found to be a neglected field in librarianship" (p. 62). Their study focuses on academic and public libraries in the Greater Cape Metropolitan area of South Africa, which were affected by disasters, fire or flood, and found that, the libraries were lacking in disaster management and planning. This paper also explores library disasters over the ages from the 3rd century AD when fire ravaged the library at Alexandria through the 1966 flooding of the Arno River in Florence that destroyed over one million volumes at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale. Other disasters mentioned were concerning the results of earthquakes, hurricanes, and war on libraries and their collections. The study goes on to discuss the phases of disaster planning, which are the prevention, preparedness, reaction, and recovery phases.

Darcel A. Bryant, associate librarian at the Louis Stokes Health Sciences Library, Howard University, Washington, D.C., presented an electronic poster at the Medical Library Association Annual Meeting and Exhibition in Phoenix, Arizona this in May 2006. Named "Libraries and Disaster Preparedness and Recovery: Making Your Library a Safer Place to Be During a Natural Disaster and Making It Easier for Your Library to Recover from a Natural Disaster", Bryant presents reports from several libraries across the United States that experienced damage from flood, earthquake, hurricane, or tornado from 1994 to 2001. Her poster exhibition sought to provide others with lessons learned in those circumstances to encourage disaster planning in other libraries. Her presentation contained an ample bibliography of books and other media including CD-ROMS, videos, and more concerning planning and preparedness and disaster recovery and restoration.

Methodology

Thanks to their interest in this study, the Hancock County Library System director, Prima Plauché, the public affairs/development officer, Mary Perkins, and the library services coordinator, Jamie Elston, have generously supplied documents for perusal and analysis for both the historical narrative and descriptive statistics from both before and after hurricane Katrina for all four branches of the library system.

This study used printed primary and secondary data in order to perform a quantitative research study of the growth of the Hancock County Library System prior to and following Hurricane Katrina. Statistics gathered comprised the five years before the storm and the year following the storm. Other historical data and data related to the storm as is pertinent to this study were compiled from secondary resources such as local newspapers, published local histories, county press releases and documents, books, pamphlets, and Web sites.

Descriptive statistics were compiled from published and unpublished documents provided by the HCLS as well as from the annual *Statistics of Public Libraries in Mississippi* reports produced by the Mississippi Library Commission both in print and online. Information reviewed from this resource included fiscal year circulation, materials and items owned, services including reference and interlibrary loans, population served, part-time and fulltime staff, and volunteer hours. These statistics were compiled into spreadsheets and further into tables and graphs using Microsoft® Excel 2000© to show growth trends both pre- and post- Katrina.

The statistics from the years preceding Hurricane Katrina are provided to show activity and services provided by the library and evidence of its usage by the community it serves. The statistics provided following the disaster are shown in order to show progress in recovery and growth and may serve as a baseline for future study in disaster recovery of library systems and their branches.

Results: The History of the Hancock County Library System

"Libraries are not made; they grow."

— "Book Buying." *Obiter Dicta*.

Augustine Birrell (1850-1933)

The Beginning

The first attempt at the organization of a public library in Hancock County was The King's Daughters Public Library, dedicated to the public in 1893. The library was housed at a new public school site in Bay St. Louis. It was supported purely by donations and fundraising by the residents of Bay St. Louis. The library was later relocated to the Planchet Store building which burned down in the Fire of 1907 (Ellis, 1997, p. 86). The fire consumed a hotel, convent, church, the Planchet Store building, and many private homes (Ellis, 1997, p. 58).

No other records of attempts to organize a library exist from 1907 until 1933. Depending on which resource was consulted, it is known that in 1933 (HCLS, History, 2002, p. 1) or 1934 (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 103), the Hancock County Library System's earliest beginnings were with the organization of about 200 books and the noble efforts of Louise Crawford, affectionately known as "Miss Louise" or "Miss Weesie" (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 103; HCLS, History, 2002, p. 1). Louise Crawford "had no library training, but . . . a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and determination" (Scharff, 1999, p. 505). The library was housed for free for more than ten years in two rooms on the second floor of the Hancock County Bank building donated by the bank. The library was known as the Bay St. Louis City-County Library (Peebles & Howell, 1975, 103). *The History of the Hancock County Library System* (2002) states that, "By 1934 . . . It [the library] consisted of about 261 donated books with 100 registered borrowers" (1).

Another tenant of the Hancock County Bank building, Dr. James A. Evans, donated a table and chair to the library. Dr. Evans's dental office was across the hall from the library. The city of Bay St. Louis donated a

stove, fuel, a rug, and some money toward the purchase of an encyclopedia and hired a janitor for the library. Hancock County supplied lumber for shelving and general supplies (Scharff, 1999, p. 505) and workmen to build the shelving (HCLS, History, 2002, p.1).

Miss Crawford developed several programs to increase public awareness of the library as well as increase holdings. Among these were “periodic book reviews” which required a small fee for attendance, “book showers,” solicitation of donations, gifts to the library, from private patrons, businesses, book houses and publishers (Scharff, 1999, p. 505). Among the responses to Miss Crawford’s many letters asking for donations were Henry Ford’s donation of a complete set of McGuffey Readers and Mrs. Louise S. Brechtel’s donation of sixty-six children’s books. Mrs. Brechtel was a children’s book reviewer for the *New York Herald-Tribune* (Scharff, 1999, p. 505).

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was established under executive order by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935. The Bay St. Louis City-County Library then became one of the six libraries in Mississippi to be regulated by the WPA. Under this administration, the library’s holdings grew to 5,000 volumes by 1937. The WPA required that the library have distribution centers in the surrounding areas of Hancock and Pearl River counties. There were 16 distribution centers in all. Miss Crawford was required to visit these “outposts” each month in her own car in order to bring new books and pick up others (Scharff, 1999, p. 506). These mini-branches were in Bay St. Louis, at the Valena C. Jones School, Aaron Academy, Ansley, Catahoula, Clermont Harbor, Dedeaux, Edwardsville, Gainesville, Hoda Town, Kiln, Lakeshore, Leetown, Logtown, Nacaise Crossing, Sellers, and Waveland, once a month (Scharff, 1999, p. 523).

The library remained under WPA regulation until the end of the WPA program. During this time Miss Crawford continued to manage the libraries with the assistance of Miss May Edwards (Scharff, 1999, p. 506).

By 1948, Miss Crawford oversaw the moving of the library and its 9,000 volumes, from the Hancock County Bank building to the ground floor of the Knights of Columbus building on Main Street in Bay St. Louis (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 103; HCLS, 2002, p. 1).

In 1952, a collection of 7,000 volumes of books known as the “valuable Knowles collection,” was given to the library (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 104). This donation and the continued growth of the library’s holdings prompted a meeting of the Library Board. The president of the Library Board at this time was Mrs. Peu deMontluzin. Following the resolutions adopted for this purpose and the organization of a committee, a meeting of the citizens of Hancock County and Bay St. Louis was held where a goal of \$10,000 was established to be funded by donations for the purchase of a new building. The building chosen was known as the Plunket home at 123 Court Street. At this time the current Library Board (its origin unknown) “applied to the state for a charter of incorporation so that the property could be owned in its name” (Scharff, 1999, p. 560, as quoted from the *Sea Coast Echo*, 1958, B8). It was then that the library became known as the City-County Memorial Library (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 104).

In mid-1953, a formal opening was held in the new building where some of the “distinguished guests” representing the Mississippi State Library Commission were Mrs. Ernest Eley and Mrs. Leila Harper of Jackson, and John Paul Jacobs, Director of Libraries for New Orleans (Scharff, 1999, p. 560).

In 1959, Louise Crawford resigned from the City-County Memorial Library and was succeeded by Mrs. Catherine Wilson. In 1965, the new librarian became Mrs. Edith Humphreys (Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 104).

In 1965, efforts began at securing another library site to house the growing collection. Following a substantial financial gift of \$10,000 to the library to be used for a building fund, the Library Board of Trustees offered to the city and county, its building

and its 25,000 volume collection valued at over \$50,000 in order to gain consistent financial support. The Hancock County Board of Supervisors accepted the offer and a one mill tax was dedicated (HCLS, History, 2002, p. 1; Peebles & Howell, 1975, p. 104). In 1966 (HCLS, History, 2002, p. 1), the library then became named the City-County Public Library and Mrs. Watson Prindiville was the appointed coordinator (Peebles, 104). The Mississippi Library Commission, established by an Act of the Mississippi Legislature in 1926, could then assist the library since now it was a public entity. This stands as the first major benchmark of the development of the Hancock County Library System as this early predecessor library would no longer have to depend on donations for operation.

Still, there was the need for a more appropriate, larger and permanent building to house the library's collection. This need was met in 1967 when property was purchased on Highway 90 and Ulman Avenue in Bay St. Louis for \$17,000. A fundraising campaign earned enough donations to pay for the debt on the property and the Library Board applied to the MLC for funding from the Library Services and Construction Act, a federally financed legislative act. Seven years later, funding for construction of a new library was finally approved (HCLS, History, p. 2).

In the meantime, however, despite a defeated bond issue in 1968, the library continued to operate and grow with the loan and later purchase of a bookmobile in 1969. The bookmobile opened as a branch in Waveland, which "suffered severe damage and loss" in 1969 following Hurricane Camille. The hurricane hit while the library was in the process of moving to a building on Dunbar and Ulman Avenues. Despite its losses, the library reopened in only three weeks (HCLS, History, 2002, p. 2).

It is unknown as to when the Friends of the Library fundraising and support organization was founded in the Bay St. Louis area but it is reported that Hurricane Camille "completely disrupted the activities of the Friends of the Library" and the organization became inactive in March 1971 (Scharff, 622). The Friends of

the Library Organization was reformed in 1973 along with combining efforts later that same year with the Friends of Mississippi Libraries, Inc. Scharff states that in 1978, the organization had 114 members and expanded to include Waveland and Kiln, thereby becoming Friends of the Hancock County Library System (1999, p. 622).

In October 1990, through a Library Services Construction Act grant, the Hancock County Library System was able to go "on line" with a new integrated computer system (Dynix) which automated inventory and circulation (HCLS, History, 2).

The Hancock County Library System received the following awards and acknowledgements, which seems to provide evidence of the library system's reputation and service to the community:

- 1996—Hancock County Chamber of Commerce Community Pride Award for continued commitment to community service, community economic development and community beautification.
- 1996—Mississippi Municipal Association Making Mississippi Move Award for innovative programs that improve quality of life.
- 1997—Mississippi Library Association Public Relations Award for *Renaissance: The Revival of a Community*, a community mosaic mural for the Headquarters Library.
- 1999—Mississippi Library Association Public Relations Award for the Hancock County Library System's Annual Holiday Tree Gala.
- 2000—Hancock County Chamber of Commerce Community Pride Award for continued commitment to community service and economic development.
- 2001—Institute of Museum and Library Services National Award for Library Service a national award recognizing outstanding libraries nationwide that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities.
- 2002—Mississippi Library Association Public Relations Award for Richmond Barthe': An Exhibit

of His Locally Owned Works at the Hancock County library System.

- 2002—Mississippi Municipal League Municipal Excellence Award to the City of Waveland for the Waveland Library Literacy Program.
- 2003—Friends of Mississippi Libraries Chapter One Award to the Library Foundation of Hancock County for outstanding volunteer contributions and exemplary service.
- 2003—National Literary Landmark Register Designation by Friends of Libraries USA and Friends of Mississippi Libraries for the Bay St. Louis-Hancock County Library where Stephen E. Ambrose researched *Nothing like It In The World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869*, and other titles.
- 2004—Mississippi Library Association Public Relations Award for the Kiln Public Library Community Tree Lighting.
- 2006—Sirsi/Dynix Building Better Communities Award for providing a vital community service by restoring Internet and telephone service for community use in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath (Hancock County Library System Web site).

The Branches

Below are landmark dates and descriptions of highlights of each of the branches within the Hancock County Library System

Bay St. Louis

It is reported in Peebles's and Howell's *A History of Mississippi Libraries* that by the end of 1974, the Bay St. Louis branch held 31,800 items. An annex had also been opened at the library for the much needed space (1975, p. 104). On September 3, 1974, seven years after the initial application was made to the Mississippi Library Commission for funds from the Library Services and Construction Act, a legal agreement was entered into by the MLC, the Library Board of Trustees, and officials from Bay St. Louis, Waveland and Hancock County, for the construction of a new headquarters library in Bay St. Louis (HCLS, 2002, pp. 2-3).

On Sunday, July 13, 1975, a groundbreaking ceremony was held and less than a year later, on June 27, 1976, the new Hancock County Library Bay St. Louis branch was dedicated. At the time it consisted of 10,500 square feet and held 60,000 media and books (HCLS, 2002, p. 2). In 1993 the Bay St. Louis headquarters branch broke ground for additions and renovations to its building. In the meantime, the library had to be moved to temporary quarters in the McDonald Building nearby for this project. The library reopened in 1995 in its present location, nearly doubling its size, with total square footage of 17,000 (HCLS, 2002, pp. 2-3; Ehrbright, 1994, p. C01).

Waveland

The city of Waveland occupies six miles of beachfront along the Bay of St. Louis and then five miles over to Highway 90 in Hancock County. A bookmobile had been purchased and placed next to the Waveland Town Hall and opened as a branch in 1969. This branch expanded when it was moved to the inside of the Waveland Town Hall and opened officially in 1971 (HCLS, 2002, p. 2).

Later, in 1976, the library was located next to the Waveland Civic Center. The library was renovated and dedicated in 1983 and renovated once again in 1995 and renamed the Waveland Library Literacy Center (HCLS, 2005). In 2001, a \$600,000 renovation and expansion project (Sun Herald Editorial Board, C12) was begun on the Waveland Library Literacy Center funded, in part, by a \$500,000 capital improvement grant from the city of Waveland. The library was expanded from 3,000 to 5,000 square feet and officially reopened on August 14, 2003 (HCLS, 2002, p. 4; HCLS, 2005).

Kiln

A library branch was established in the Kiln area of Hancock County approximately 15-20 miles away from the Bay St. Louis branch of the library system to serve the population of over 2,000 Kiln residents. The branch also serves the nearby Diamondhead community which currently has over 9,000 residents.

The Kiln branch opened in April 1977 in a temporary facility until it was moved to the former Farm Bureau building in 1980 and occupied approximately 1,100 square feet. The Kiln branch had about 4,000 volumes at this time (HCLS, 2002, p. 3).

A new building began construction in 1999 and was completed in February 2000 with the assistance of a Library Services and Construction Act grant through the MLC. The Hancock County Board of Supervisors allocated matching funds, along with an additional \$1.2 million to construct the building. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held and more than 500 people attended the branch opening. The new facility is located on Mississippi Highway 603 and occupies 10,000 square feet. The library includes adult and young adult reading rooms, a special children's area, a large community meeting room with a separate entrance and sixty parking places (Ehrbright, 2000, p. A4). The Kiln branch of the Hancock County Library System was featured in *Library Journal's* December 2000 architectural issue and was the subject of a feature article in *Mississippi Libraries* (HCLS, 2002, pp. 3-4).

Pearlington

Pearlington, located along the Pearl River, was once the home of a large lumber industry. This small community sits right across the river from St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana and once had a Mississippi-Louisiana ferryboat terminal. Through the years, the town of Pearlington became more and more isolated as a new highway bypassed the area and economic and job opportunities shifted to other parts of the county. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the population was over 2,300. The town had no supermarket, no shopping center, and only a few small businesses and an elementary school known as Charles B. Murphy (HCLS, 2002, p. 1). In a Project Overview Press Release (2000), the Hancock County Library System Director states,

Charles B. Murphy Elementary School serves almost 200 children, but an equal number of children and young adults are bused [sic] daily on a fifty-mile round trip to the middle, junior

and high school . . . Upon their return to the community, they have no library resources or after-school activities. Transportation out of the community is not a possibility to many of these children. Pre-school children have no opportunities to attend reading enrichment story times. Adults are isolated from the Library System's adult education and literacy program and there are no community facilities to house extensions of the Community Education Program or the School District's GED program. To remedy this educational and informational inequity, the Hancock County Library System and Hancock County School District have entered into a partnership to provide a joint-use facility in Pearlington (HCLS, Project Overview, 2000, p. 1).

This partnership marked the first of its kind in Mississippi. The library was utilized as a public library as well as the media center for the Charles B. Murphy public school. The media center overall was 6,600 square feet, the public library area was 2,100 square feet and the office, work room, and storage was 825 square feet (HCLS, Pearlington Public Library Fact Sheet, 1999, p. 2).

The school district spent \$1.1 million for renovations to the school and the construction of the attached library media center. The HCLS operated the library, purchased and cataloged items, and provided equipment and software for automation. The library provided access to tens of thousands of books and media to the teachers and students of Charles B. Murphy and the residents of Pearlington. In addition, the library system provided programming including the Summer Reading program and other library services such as fax, copier, inter and intralibrary loan and other reference services (Ehrbright, 1999, p. A3; Plache, 2000, pp. 1-3).

The following tables show the populations of the various communities within Hancock County. Population has remained steady in the past five years; however, library resources and circulation

have steadily increased and show a slight leveling in the past two years. Volunteer assistance and the

HCLS staff have also increased in the past year.

Table 1. Population

Population

Year	Hancock County	Bay St. Louis	Kiln	Pearlington	Waveland
2001	41518	8209	2040	1684	6674
2002	41518	8209	2040	1684	6674
2003	44031	8131	2040	1684	6732
2004	45933	8209	2040	1684	6674
2005	46711	8209	2040	1684	6674

(www.census.gov and HCLS unpublished raw data)

Table 2. Hours of Operation -- Weekly

Year	Hancock County	Bay St. Louis	Kiln	Pearlington	Waveland
2001	180	53	48	43	36
2002	180	53	48	43	36
2003	192	53	48	43	48
2004	195	56	48	43	48
2005	195	56	48	43	48

Table 3. Personnel

Fiscal Year	Volunteers	BSL	KN	WV	PL	HCLS Total
2001	1	23	5	3	2	34
2002	1	12	5	3	2	23
2003	1	25	5	3	2	36
2004	1	25	5	3	2	36
2005	55	25	5	3	2	90

Table 4. Hancock Library System Personnel by Branch

Fiscal Year	ALA Librarians	Other Librarians	Other Staff	Total Staff	Volunteer Hours
2001	4	11	19	30	523
2002	4	15	17	32	657

2003	5	15	22	37	886
2004	5	0	31	36	1651
2005	3	0	33	36	2252

Table 5a. Services Provided by the HCLS System-Wide.

Fiscal Year	ILL Loans Provided	ILL received	Library Programs	Attendance at Library Programs (adult)	Children's Programs	Attendance at Children's Programs
2001	0	1365	156	9923	75	13610
2002	0	1516	172	8158	82	10372
2003	1551	1188	195	7598	101	11609
2004	0	1209	219	22605	117	12099
2005	1088	873	183	22514	97	12157

Table 5b. Services Provided by the HCLS System-Wide.

Fiscal Year	# Public Terminals	Users Per Year	Reference Questions	Library Visits	Per Capita	Registered Patrons	Percentage Population Registered
2001	18	56212	23379	79739	2	10949	1
2002	16	52000	27686	89813	2	36413	1
2003	13	52000	28535	93241	2	38598	1
2004	21	50389	34860	109140	2	40227	1
2005	21	65884	32560	103179	2	41754	1

Table 6. Circulation.

Fiscal Year	HCLS Total	Bay St. Louis	Kiln	Pearlington	Waveland
2001	235088	175514	45165	8581	5828
2002	259487	185070	60643	10444	3330
2003	286156	192296	74750	16351	2759
2004	289144	170265	72638	16886	29355
2005	278852	161693	67264	17044	32851

Figure 1. Circulation

Table 7. Collection Statistics for HCLS System-Wide.

HCLS	Total Print	E-Books	Audio	Videos	Databases	Total Electronic	Print Subscriptions	Electronic Subscriptions	Total Subscriptions	Other	Grand Total
2001	89210	0	3201	4001	30	9623	145	0	145	945	100663
2002	96454	0	3842	4236	31	9828	156	0	156	1126	115829
2003	101189	0	4785	4911	132	9828	160	0	160	1438	112615
2004	106084	0	5186	5605	31	10822	175	0	175	188	117269
2005	106084	0	5186	5605	32	10823	159	0	159	1149	110457

Table 8. Holdings Pre-Katrina, All Branches as of June 2005

	BSL	KN	WV	PL	Total
Adult Regular	51249	13264	5774	2407	72694
Adult Large Print	1440	989	148	12	2589
Adult MS/LA	1940	469	95	100	2604
Professional	416	11	4	6	437
Juvenile	5304	1873	940	3325	11442
Children's	4324	1911	1289	1924	9448
All Print Materials	64673	18517	8250	7774	99214

Audios	1463	1053	610	148	3274
CD books	668	459	379	264	1770
Videos	3023	1405	873	442	5743
DVDs	436	255	313	88	1092
Non-print	5590	3172	2175	942	11879
Total All Print	64673	18517	8250	7774	99214
Total Non-Print	5590	3172	2175	942	11879
Total All Materials	70263	21689	10425	8716	111093

The above statistics, unless otherwise noted, were provided courtesy of the Hancock County Library System unpublished raw data and notes. Some statistics were retrieved from the *Mississippi Public Library Statistics* (2001-2005) both print and online versions (<http://www.mlc.lib.ms.us/AboutMLC/MSPubLibStatistics.htm>).

The Hurricane

Bay St. Louis, Kiln, Pearlinton, and Waveland are four towns situated at the southwestern most corner of the state of Mississippi, in Hancock County, bordering the Louisiana state line. Pearlinton sits on the state line on the Pearl River. Bay St. Louis and Waveland sit on the Bay of St. Louis, an outlet to the Gulf of Mexico. The National Weather Service set Katrina's landfall, when the eye comes ashore, at 6:10 a.m., August 29, 2005, in Plaquemines Parish, La., and a second time at 10 a.m. on the Mississippi and Louisiana line (Fitzhugh, Tarter & Wilson, 2006, p. 3). Hurricane Katrina, upon making landfall, was described by the National Weather Service as Category 3 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (Chrostowski, 2005, p. 23).

The Mississippi Library Commission reports from a "Library Collection Information Survey: Damage and Assessment of Needs" in February 2006, that Hurricane Katrina brought with it winds of around 150 mph and a storm surge of "at least 30 feet above sea level" (p. 3). It describes the infrastructure of Hancock County, with its population of about 46,000, sustaining "catastrophic damage" with "75% of the structures in the City of Bay St. Louis . . . severely

damaged or destroyed; 90% of the structures in the City of Waveland . . . severely damaged or destroyed" (MLC, 2006, p. 3).

The reports further describes the assessment of damage,

Of the four HCLS branches, two were completely destroyed—the two-year old Waveland Public Library and the six year old Pearlinton Public Library. The ten year old Bay St. Louis—Hancock County Library (the headquarters branch) and the five year old Kiln Public Library also sustained damage. The destruction of the two branches included complete destruction of at least 30,000 materials. This amounts to a loss of 1/3rd of the library system's collection. Damage at the headquarters branch included water damage to walls and flooring. Water damage at the headquarters was primarily from roof leaks and seepage; the core collection of 70,000 materials, their shelving and other equipment remain usable. Access is limited because many materials were moved in order to remove wet carpet and dry wall (MLC, 2006, p. 3).

Among the 30,000 books lost, some could be accounted for in people's homes or among the damaged or destroyed libraries during Katrina. For concerned citizens seeking to return books weeks and months following the storm, no fines were being charged by the library system but the library was

happy to get back more than 700 items checked out prior to the hurricane (Firmin, 2005, p. 15).

With the insurgence of casinos over the last 15 years, south Mississippi was marching steadfast into the 21st century prior to this hurricane. The area was growing as indicated by population and physical signs of economic prosperity. The Hancock County Chamber of Commerce Web site reports that Hancock County has experienced a 35% population increase over the last decade (2005, n.p.). Due to the loss of industry, including casinos, the loss of property and the fact that the HCLS receives income from millage on assessed property valuation from the City of Bay St. Louis, the City of Waveland and Hancock County, "the income from these ad valorem taxes will plummet over the next several years" (MLC, 2006, p. 3). The report also notes in the "Needs Assessment" that ten of the 36 HCLS staff members did not return following the storm (MLC, 2006, p. 3).

In an American Library Association Status Report on the Association's Web site, the assessment of loss and damage for the entire system was six million dollars. In the year following Katrina, only necessary, temporary repairs for basic function have been made to the two open branches. Though the system has received donations:

Damage assessment for the Hancock County Library far exceeds the donations and anticipated insurance settlements and FEMA funding . . . FEMA funds are made on a reimbursement basis and require 10% local cash match. Thus government entities must have significant cash flow to proceed with repair and rebuilding projects. With tax bases devastated, local government funding . . . does not exist and funds for operations is significantly reduced. Thus funding remains the most significant barrier to restoring library services and programs to the children and adults of Hancock County, Mississippi (ALA, 2005, n.p.).

A New Beginning

Despite the devastation, the Hancock County Library System reopened quickly. A November 4, 2005 article from the Sun Herald reported that the system had two branches open: the Bay St. Louis-Headquarters branch and the Kiln branch. Among the services offered to the community were "satellite phones, laptop computers, copying machines and fax machines . . . [fax machines were free of charge to local residents for storm-related issues]" (Biffle, 2005, p. D2). In addition, the libraries had clean restrooms and air-conditioning which was a luxury in post-Katrina Southern Mississippi at that time. These two branches were open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and until 1 p.m. on Saturdays (Biffle, 2005, p. D2).

In a January 2006 edition of GulfCoastNews.com, a post-Katrina update revealed that both open branches were offering free Internet, fax and copy services, free tax forms, disaster recovery information, and traditional library and information services. Both the Bay St. Louis and the Kiln branches offered VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) and AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) members to provide free tax assistance and electronic filing (GulfCoastNews.com, n.p.).

Unique to this post-disaster situation was the opportunity for the library to play an integral role in assisting patrons, countywide, in the recovery effort. Beyond simple library services, the following encompass the services provided to the people of Hancock County housed within the two remaining branches of the HCLS, primarily in the Bay St. Louis headquarters location: food pantry, Habitat for Humanity, FEMA and MEMA assistance, SBA, Corps of Engineers, Project Recovery Foundation for Hope (provided counseling for mental health issues), Volunteer Referral Center, Corps of Engineers at the Kiln branch (registered citizens and provided and installed tarps known as "blue roofs" to cover damaged roofs), Disaster Survivors' Legal Assistance provided help with insurance matters, applications for Mississippi Home Help grants, and H.A.N.D.S.

(Helping Americans Needing Disaster Support) provided basic kitchen supplies and clothing among others (HCLS, 2005, n.p.). In an article in the *Clarion-Ledger*, Library Director, Prima Plauché is quoted as saying, “I never thought that we would be an access point for some of the things we’re doing right now. It’s great to see the role we’re still playing in the community” (Bolger, 2005, p. 1D).

The table below shows patron visits and services used by patrons at the Bay St. Louis-Headquarters branch in the months following the hurricane. The table seems to show that patrons increasingly took advantage of valuable services provided by the Hancock County Library System in the months following Katrina.

Table 9. Post-Hurricane Katrina Statistics--Public Service Statistics Mid-Year (For October 1, 2005-March 31, 2006)

Month 2005-2006	Patron Visits	Reference Questions	Copies Made	Faxes	Internet
October	455	234	172	128	296
November	1968	562	592	604	1492
December	2146	639	784	802	778
January	2204	733	982	924	856
February	2432	849	1034	998	1855
March	2506	2545	1200	1106	3076
April	2362	2769	1042	1098	2769
May	4995	3070	1122	955	2833
June	5581	2696	1044	982	3343
July	4840	3352	976	937	3244
August	5127	3150	982	915	3293

Figure 2. Growth—Patron Visits following Hurricane Katrina October 2005-August 2006.

The Headquarters branch meeting room was used for many reasons, some even before the library officially opened, immediately following the hurricane. The meeting room was used by the Florida Emergency Management Agency as a Visitors Reception Center, by the Humane Society of Hancock County, the Governor's Commission, and to register disaster victims for Emergency Relief Food Cards where more than 6,500 people registered (HCLS, 2005, n.p.; *Mississippi Libraries*, 2005, p. 93). Both the Kiln branch and the Bay St. Louis branch functioned as a Volunteers Reception Center, matching volunteers with citizens who needed demolition or rebuilding help (MLC, 2005, p. 1).

While a commercial company helped to dry out damaged books at the Bay St. Louis branch of the HCLS and the branch itself was called into service, as described above, almost immediately following the storm, efforts on the part of many individuals, library systems and other agencies began in order to help out the damaged library system of Hancock County. The Hancock County Library System has been adopted by eight cities and organizations plus 22 libraries throughout the nation (*The Sun Herald*, 2005, p. C1).

Friends of Mississippi Libraries, Inc. in conjunction with the MLC and the Mississippi Library Association began the "Rebuild Mississippi Libraries Fund" to "supplement insurance funding to libraries that apply for aid" (Bolger, 2005, p. 1D). John Grisham, Mississippi author who began the "Rebuild the Coast Fund" stated that he would use some of the funds to help rebuild Mississippi libraries (Bolger, 2005, p. 1D).

Librarians from First Regional Library in Hernando, Mississippi almost 400 miles north, drove down to volunteer for the recovering library. They installed drywall, replaced damaged ceiling tiles and painted. Other volunteers came from Lafayette County and the Oxford Public Library in Mississippi, to name only a couple (Risher, 2006, p. DSB1).

Among the many gifts the HCLS has received following the storm, one of the most notable was the donation of a bookmobile for Pearlington. The Allegany County Library System of Maryland, the

Anne Arundel County library system, and the Maryland Library Association partnered together when they learned of the library system's need and drove down to Pearlington to deliver the donated bookmobile, thousands of new books and money to purchase new materials. The financial assistance and books came from the network of Maryland library systems, businesses, private individuals, and professional associations (Anne Arundel County Public Library, 2005, n.p.; Horseman, 2005, p. B3). The bookmobile was donated the week before Christmas 2005 (CNHI New Service, n.d., n.p.). The HCLS held a "Kids Day" at the Pearlington Mobile Library on August 27, 2006 where it was reported in the *Sun Herald* that the bookmobile library is now stocked with "close to 4,000 books," including children's books, DVDs, books on CDs, and books for adults (Hallemann, 2006, n.p.) SirsiDynix donated hardware and software to enable the bookmobile to checkout books electronically (SIRSI Corporation, 2005, n.p.).

Another optimistic occurrence post-Katrina was the award given to the Hancock County Library System by the SirsiDynix Corporation. The award, \$10,000 and an etched-glass award, called the SirsiDynix 2006 Building Better Communities Award, was presented at the American Library Association annual conference in New Orleans in July 2006. The award, given to five libraries across the country and Canada, "recognizes libraries for creative and enterprising uses of technology to improve their communities" (Knight-Ridder, 2006, p. B5). This seemed to be evident in the assistance the library provided its community immediately following the hurricane.

Conclusion

The Hancock County Library System has a long history of service and dedication to its community along with a community dedicated to it.

In peaceful, unaffected times, libraries have proven themselves to be steadfast, fundamental fixtures in the lives of the average citizen. In times of crisis and confusion, the Hancock County Library System, though wounded, stood as a beacon to those seeking help through information and assistance. It may have

taken a regional disaster to introduce many to the numerous advantages and conveniences a library holds. It may have taken this disaster to prove to a nation that libraries are essential providers of free access to information, education, and in this case, many helping hands.

This document serves several purposes. It provides a history of the Hancock County Library System and highlights its expansion and progress along with the development and growth of its branches. This document provides a window in which to view the potential devastation Mother Nature can wreak on any library and its surrounding communities. Consequently, this paper should serve to prompt libraries to have disaster and recovery plans in place and to safeguard libraries' precious commodities.

The Hancock County Library System rose to the occasion and did what it could as soon as it could in order to serve its community above and beyond its mission, which is, "Our mission as a library system is to provide the people of Hancock County and its communities with the right information, in the right form, at the right time. Our library staff puts a high priority on excellent customer services that are accessible, available and affordable to everyone in Hancock County" (HCLS, 2005, n.p.).

The Hancock County Library System, despite its setbacks, seems to be on track with its recovery and will continue to be a beacon of information and education to the communities it serves.

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