The Bookmobile and Shut-In Service

The Bookmobile was the vehicle that made Orange County the first in Florida to provide county-wide service to its residents. Again it was the Soros, the same group that had the first lending library in the area and helped in the campaign to open the Albertson Public Library in 1923, that was instrumental in making this service a reality. Under the coordination of Ruth Gilbert Smith, the Soros divided themselves into twenty teams to raise the $6,000 necessary to buy a school bus and convert it into a traveling library. As one of their first projects, the Friends of the Library sponsored a local bill in the State Legislature in 1949, a bill that enabled the County commission to appropriate money to operate the bookmobile, and Soros members helped them to secure its passage. The County Commission then appropriated $10,000, and bookmobile service began on December 1, 1949. Stops and stations were established at population centers throughout Orange County, and the stops with the highest circulations eventually became prime considerations for full-fledged branches as the county-wide system developed.

After hundreds of thousands of miles, this Bookmobile was taken off the road and a new $20,000 Gerstenslager bookmobile was dedicated in May of 1961. The Orange County Commission paid almost $12,000 of the purchase cost with the rest coming from a bookmobile fund drive.

By 1963, the first Bookmobile was no longer roadworthy, but neither was it completely ready to retire. Instead it was set up in Washington Shores as a Library Station. This lasted until August, 1965, when the Washington Shores Station was moved to new quarters in the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist at 1000 Bethune Drive. When the Church expanded its own building, it also provided additional space for the library, and that is the location of the Washington Shores Station today.

Osceola County Bookmobile service, using the Library's Traveling Branch vehicle, began in March 1969. It serves outlying communities (Intercession City, Narcoossee, and Pine Grove), as well as the minimum security Road Prison, retirement communities, nursing homes and the children's home.

Almost like a bookmobile service but much more personalized is the library's shut-in service that brings books and records and other library materials to those who can't get out of the house to a branch. The Orlando Public Library is one of the few in the country that continues to provide staff for such highly individualized delivery systems to its patrons. Several other use only volunteers.