



Texas Talking Book News

Texas State Library and Archives Commission Winter/Spring 2011

Happy 80th Birthday, Talking Book Program!

Texas has a long history of providing library services to people who are blind. In 1918, the Texas Legislature appropriated \$1,000 to purchase raised-lettering books for the blind. Texas was one of the first states to join the National Library Service (NLS) established by the Library of Congress on March 3, 1931.

The Talking Book Program (TBP) grew and changed during the last 80 years. From 1931 until 1961, materials were housed in the Capitol's basement. By 1940, the TBP had 1,119 boxes of books on phonograph records and served 480 patrons. The Texas Commission for the Blind lent phonograph players to TBP's patrons. It took a lot of records to hold the longer books. For example, the 1930s best seller, Gone with the Wind, had 20 long-playing records.



(From the Texas State Library and Archives Commission files.)

In 1952, NLS allowed children who were blind to become eligible. By 1954, TBP had 1,300 patrons. TBP began circulating books on reel-to-reel tapes in 1959.

Many changes occurred in the 1960s. In 1961, TBP moved from the Capitol's basement across the street to the new Lorenzo de Zavala State Archives and Library Building. The Summer Reading Program began in 1963. In that same year, TBP added large print books to the collection. In 1966, NLS

expanded its eligibility criteria to include people with physical disabilities. By 1968, TBP had 7,701 patrons and circulated 363,725 volumes.

In the 1970s, TBP started offering books on cassette tapes. A public awareness program began in 1970. More Spanish language titles were added to the collection. TBP initiated toll-free telephone service for patrons to interact with TBP staff. In 1978, TBP began recording books and magazines of a Texas interest to supplement the national collection.

In the 1980s, TBP's circulation operations moved to a new three-story facility on Shoal Creek Boulevard in central Austin. Three new, state-of-the-art recording booths were installed in 2009.

TBP began offering books on digital flash cartridges in mid 2009. By mid 2010, every patron who requested a new player had one.



(National Library Service Business Plan, 2006. Retrieved 23 January 2009 at www.loc.gov/nls/businessplan/playerdescription)

Downloading book and magazines is the latest innovation. TBP patrons use BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) to download a book or magazine to a patron's computer, unzip the files, then transfer it to a blank cartridge or thumb drive and play with the TBP's digital player. Instead of the 20 records needed for Gone with the Wind in the 1930s, the entire book will fit onto one cartridge.

TBP now serves 18,000 patrons and sends out an average of 4,500 items every weekday. In the fiscal year ending August 31, 2010, TBP circulated 917,816 books and magazines.