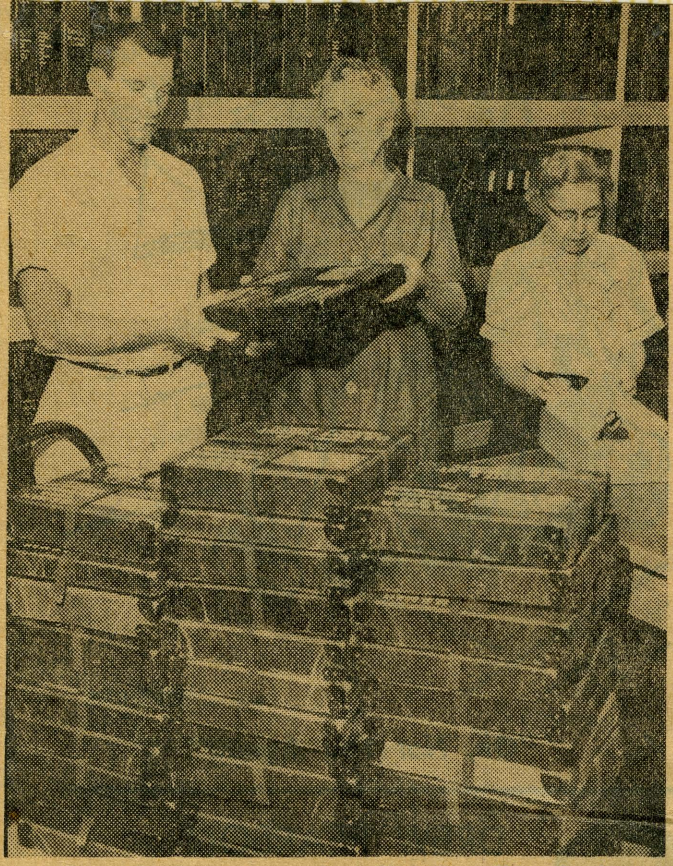

Shown in the process of carding the talking books are Frank Hemphill and the two librarians, Mrs. Florence Sams and Mrs. Dorothy Lessenhop. (Star Photo)

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# Books For The Blind— A Porthole In Darkness

By Margarethe Plum

Eight thousand five hundred volumes ranging from Dr. Zhivago to Newsweek magazine are found in the only Books for the Blind library in Nebraska, located on the first floor of the State Capitol Building.

What is the Books for the Blind library?

In 1934 the first Books for the Blind library was founded in the Library of Congress. The idea has spread until at the present time there are over 30 regional libraries in the United States.

Books for the blind, opened in Nebraska in 1952, is a service of the Nebraska Public Library Commission and in some ways is very similar to Lincoln Public Libraries.

**By The Month**

Books are checked out for a month. They can be renewed for a month but each time a book is returned by a borrower, another book is sent back.

This system of distributing books is rather unique.

Each borrower has a card that is kept on file in the library. On this card are listed the borrowers age and the types of books he prefers. It is from this list of preferences that the librarians choose books to be sent to the borrowers.

If the Nebraska library gets a request for a book that is not in stock, the book can be ordered from the Library of Congress or one of the 29 other Books for the Blind libraries in the country.

**Personal Service**

"It's a real personal service that we give," stated Mrs. Florence Sams, one of the librarians. "We get to know the people who borrow books and their families very well."

"One borrower in North Platte writes us the chattiest letters," commented Mrs. Dorothy Lessenhop, librarian. "He reads about 6 braille volumes a week, which is equal to two regular books. Once we sent him the 13 braille volumes of Gone With The Wind. He wrote and thanked us and added 'but, ladies, you should see the stack in my closet."

The library's borrowers range in age from two to 90 years. There are books for all of them as the library keeps two copies of each of the childrens books and 4 copies of the adult books on hand.

Though the library is in no way a correspondence school, the books on file are of such quality that they are used for supplementary reading and as reference material for pupils and teachers alike.

**1,500 to 2,000**

Between 1,500 and 2,000 books are loaned monthly, with new shipments of books selected by the Library of Congress arriving each month.

The library has an even distribution of all types of books, but according to Mrs. Lessenhop and Mrs. Sams, the religious and travel books are the most popular.

Library records show that 584 people read the talking books and 45 read braille. The talking books, which are read by professional readers, are recorded on plastic, nonbreakable 33 1-3 rpm records and according to Mrs. Lessenhop, often come out before the printed editions.

There is no expense involved in the sending or returning of the talking books as there are no mailing costs.

How worthwhile is the library?

Mrs. Lessenhop states, "The people are so appreciative of the facilities. It gives our readers something to do and to talk about. They just love it."