

Beal, Helen Marjorie ^[1]

Beal, Helen Marjorie

By Elaine Von Oesen, 1979

30 Mar. 1887–27 July 1965

Helen Marjorie Beal, librarian, was born in Oneida, N.Y., the daughter of Joseph and Helen Clark Beal. She attended [Syracuse University](#) ^[2] and was graduated from the Carnegie Institute Library School, Pittsburgh. She held positions in public libraries in New York City, Eau Claire and Madison, Wis., and Kenwood, N.Y., and was librarian of the [Stout Institute, Menomonee, Wis](#) ^[3], and assistant supervisor of school libraries and public library organizer for the State of New York before coming to North Carolina in 1930. She became secretary and director of the [North Carolina Library Commission](#) ^[4] in 1930 and served in that capacity until her retirement on 30 June 1950. She died in [Raleigh](#) ^[5].

As executive officer for the state library commission, Miss Beal was instrumental in extending public library service to rural North Carolina. Under her jurisdiction, North Carolina had more bookmobiles than any other state and more counties with county-wide library service than any other southeastern state. When she came to North Carolina in 1930, only 38 percent of the population of the state had any access to a public library; when she retired in 1950, 95 percent of all North Carolinians had access to free public library service. Speaking to all kinds of groups around the state, Miss Beal was able to arouse interest in and enthusiasm for public library service. This popular support resulted in the first State Aid to Public Libraries Act, passed by the General Assembly and ratified on 8 Mar. 1941. For the first time, the state declared its policy "to promote the establishment and development of public library service throughout all sections of the State." One hundred thousand dollars was provided in 1941–42 "for promoting, aiding and equalizing public library service."

Working with agricultural extension, Miss Beal helped to plan the [Home Demonstration Reading Program](#) ^[6], still in existence, and provided the annually revised reading lists for the clubs. In recognition of her contribution to rural cultural life, Miss Beal was named by the [Progressive Farmer](#) ^[7] in 1943 as "the Woman of the Year in Service to Rural North Carolina because of her outstanding service to farm families of North Carolina in helping to provide every family of every county in the State with an opportunity to know good books." The announcement of the award in the January 1944 issue of the *Progressive Farmer* cited the increase in bookmobiles from three in 1930 to thirty-nine in 1944. By 1950, North Carolina had eighty-eight bookmobiles serving ninety of the one hundred counties. The choice of Miss Beal as "Woman of the Year" was lauded in several newspapers. In the 2 Jan. 1944 *News and Observer* ^[8], [Nell Battle Lewis](#) ^[9] wrote, "No nicer person than Miss Beal lives in this State, and it rejoices me to see her more generally appreciated." A *Greensboro Daily News* editorial on 5 Jan. 1944 cited progress in library services and stated, "All this improvement is due in large part to Miss Beal's common sense, tact, energy, knowledge of her job and devotion to it."

Miss Beal was an active and contributing member of the [North Carolina](#) ^[10], [Southeastern](#) ^[11], and [American Library associations](#) ^[12]. She twice served as chairman of the Library Extension Board of the American Library Association, as well as a member of its governing council. She was a charter member of the Tennessee Valley Library Council. She was president of the Southeastern Library Association from 1938 to 1940; served on the Advisory Committee for the Southeastern Library Survey, 1946–48; and edited the North Carolina Survey returns that were published in 1948 as "Libraries in North Carolina, a Survey, 1946–47." She was the author (with R. A. Felton) of *Library of the Open Road* (1929) and contributor to professional journals. Miss Beal was also a member of the [North Carolina Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[13], the [North Carolina Conference for Social Service](#) ^[14], the Daughters of the American Revolution, and Christ Episcopal Church, Raleigh.

References:

North Carolina State Library (Raleigh), for MSS

Progressive Farmer and *Raleigh News and Observer*, scattered issues

Public Laws of North Carolina, Session 1941, chap. 93

Who's Who in Library Service, 1943–44

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[15]

[Public service](#) ^[16]

[Women](#) ^[17]

Authors:

[Oesen, Elaine Von](#) ^[18]

Origin - location:

[Wake County](#) ^[19]

Raleigh ^[20]

From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[21]

1 January 1979 | Oesen, Elaine Von

Source URL:<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/beal-helen>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/beal-helen> [2] <http://www.syr.edu/> [3] <http://www.uwstout.edu/> [4] <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/commission.html> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh> [6] https://digital.ncdcr.gov/documents?adv_title=Home%20demonstration|AND&searchtypes=Full%20text|Metadata&applyState=true [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/progressive-farmer> [8] <http://www.newsobserver.com/> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/lewis-nell-cornelia> [10] <http://www.nclaonline.org/> [11] <http://selaonline.org/> [12] <http://www.ala.org/> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/literary-and-historical-association> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/north-carolina-conference-social-se> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-service> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/women> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/oesen-elaine-von> [19] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/w> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-0> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>