

The Indiana History Project

Making Indiana Materials Accessible to Handicapped Hoosiers

Jeanette Vanausdall
Project Assistant
Indiana History Project
Indianapolis

As director of the Indiana History Project, Carol Horrell realizes that she is in a unique and enviable situation. Though it functions as part of a national service, her program is blessed with private funding, a luxury that few library projects of any kind enjoy.

The Indiana History Project records material about Indiana or by Indiana authors for circulation on cassette tape to the blind and physically handicapped. Abundant general "talking book" titles have long been available to Indiana residents through the Indiana State Library's participation in the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a program of the Library of Congress. But materials of primarily local interest or by more obscure Indiana authors were unavailable until 1977 when the Indiana Historical Society (a private corporation) began the project in cooperation with the library.

With its recording studio located in the Indiana State Library's Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and with access to the vast resources of the state, the project has blossomed. Established as a memorial to the late Eli Lilly, an active member and patron of the Indiana Historical Society and an enthusiastic user of

talking books in his later years, the project is now in its 10th year. It boasts more than 350 titles and monthly circulation of 1,600 tapes.

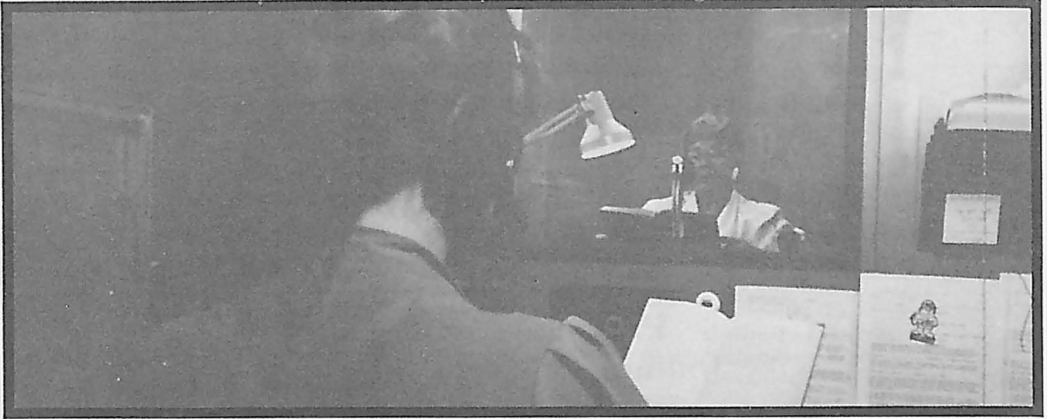
Why (Talking Books)

Ours is a print-intensive society and most of us take our ability to read for granted. But a sizable portion of this state's population, some 82,000 individuals, lack ready access to books and magazines because of visual impairments or physical handicaps that prohibit the use of printed materials.

The Society researched the controversy between proponents of braille and supporters of talking books. Though sensitive to claims that talking books deprive readers of independent interpretation and a degree of visual stimulation, it elected to record for several reasons:

Producing braille books is prohibitively expensive. Statistics from NLS for 1986 reflect total production costs of \$78 per copy for braille books and \$6 per copy for cassette tapes. Another advantage of cassettes is that, once a master tape is recorded, copies are quickly generated and are easily handled in the mail.

A greater number of blind people don't use braille than do. Many



Step One: Volunteers record the "talking books."

newly-blind elderly people, in particular, are not braille users. Sighted patrons with physical handicaps don't always need braille and some handicaps which prohibit use of conventional print automatically prohibit use of braille as well.

Finally, braille requires more storage space than do tapes. The American Federation for the Blind found that, on the average, one page of standard print requires two pages of braille. Horrell's staff averages 50-75 pages of text per cassette.

What (Selection of Titles)

The Indiana History Project operates with a clear collection policy. It records only published materials of historical relevance or cultural significance to the state or materials by Indiana authors, as well as the publications of the historical society. While the project exists to provide materials of interest to Indiana residents, it still has to consider broadness of appeal. Publications of such exclusive local interest that few patrons would request them, such as individual church or county histories, cannot be considered.

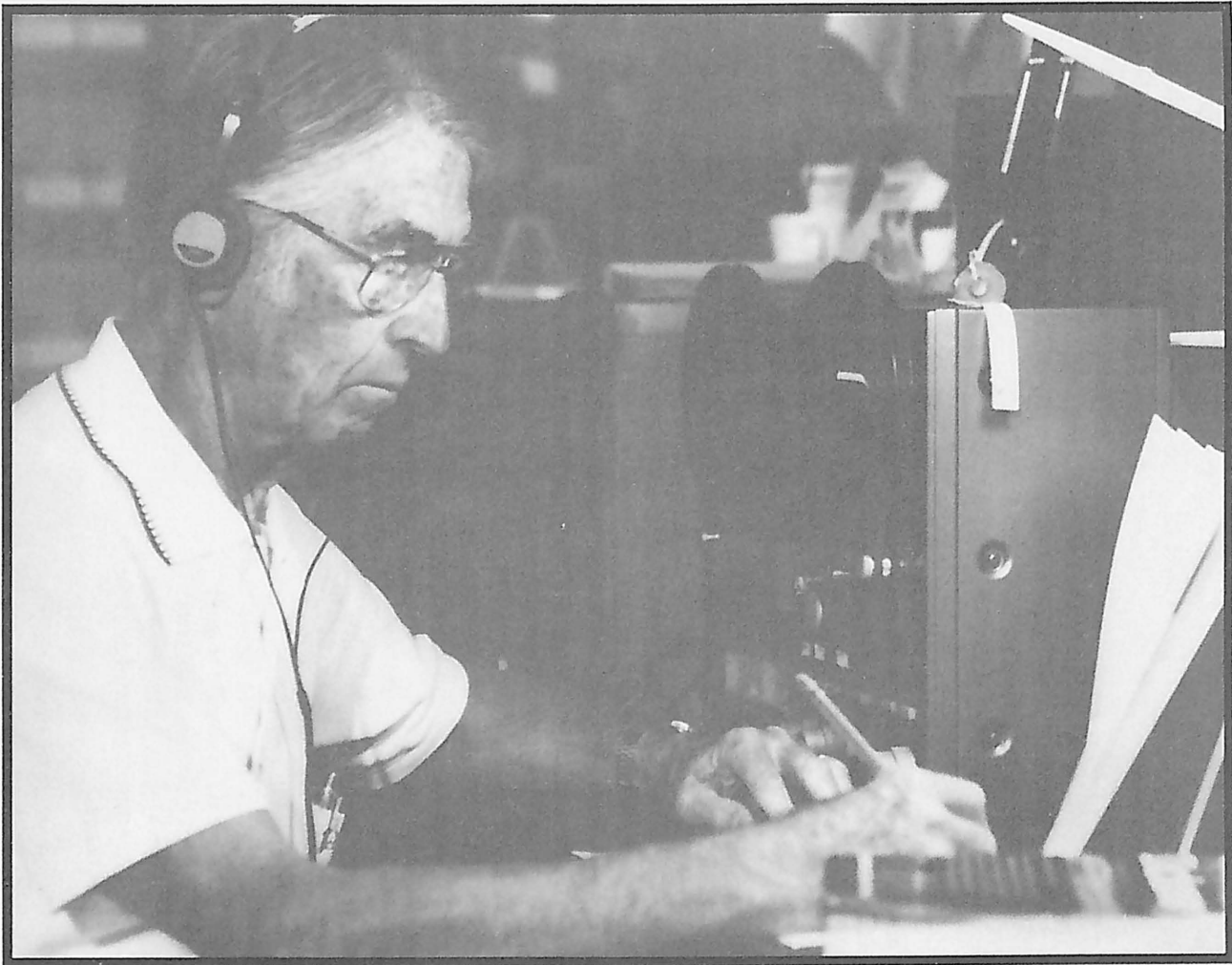
The same concern often causes offensive or propagandistic materials

to be rejected, not because the project "censors," but simply because limited resources necessitate making choices and broad appeal is an efficient, logical and equitable method of determination.

The project routinely surveys patrons to determine majority interests. Biography, fiction, history, and "life in Indiana" are the most popular categories. But available tapes also include such items as an Indiana cookbook, books about Indiana jazz, a trivia book by an Indiana author, and children's books. The project even has one picture book to its credit, recorded because the captions were so informative and masterfully written that they were useful without the accompanying photographs.

Who (Volunteers and Training)

The Indiana History Project depends heavily on volunteers. Two full-time and two part-time staff members coordinate approximately sixty volunteers from all segments of the community. The project also employs a technical support person on an as-needed basis. Volunteers function as narrators, monitors, reviewers, tape technicians, cassette book inspectors, and clerical assistants.



Step Two: Original tapes are edited for best cuts.

Narrating is the most popular job among volunteers, perhaps because the narrator is the person whose voice is captured for generations of patrons to enjoy. Narrating is often perceived as the most immediate, active component of the recording process.

But narrators are only part of a team, and the "silent partner," the monitor, is every bit as critical to a quality product. Monitors operate the recording equipment and follow the text as the narrator reads. Monitors must have an extensive vocabulary and a superior sense of syntax. It is the hardest job to fill because it requires a degree of alertness and control and precision operation of tape machines that can intimidate new volunteers.

After recording other volunteers called "reviewers" proof the completed sound track against the printed text. The tape is then returned to the recording team for correction. Finally, the tape technician duplicates the master reel onto cassettes, and clerical assistants help prepare for circulation by typing labels, brailleing and boxing cassettes.

At the present time there is no accreditation system for projects like Indiana's. But Horrell stresses that a program of this kind can be as professional as the staff and volunteers are willing to make it. She is insistent that the patron deserves a quality piece of material that reflects both sophisticated equipment and sophisticated volunteers.

Horrell demands professionalism from her volunteers and encourages it by providing intensive training sessions and ongoing evaluation. All volunteers attend a mandatory three-hour workshop that covers all aspects of tape production, no matter what their particular job assignment is. The project has learned that perform-

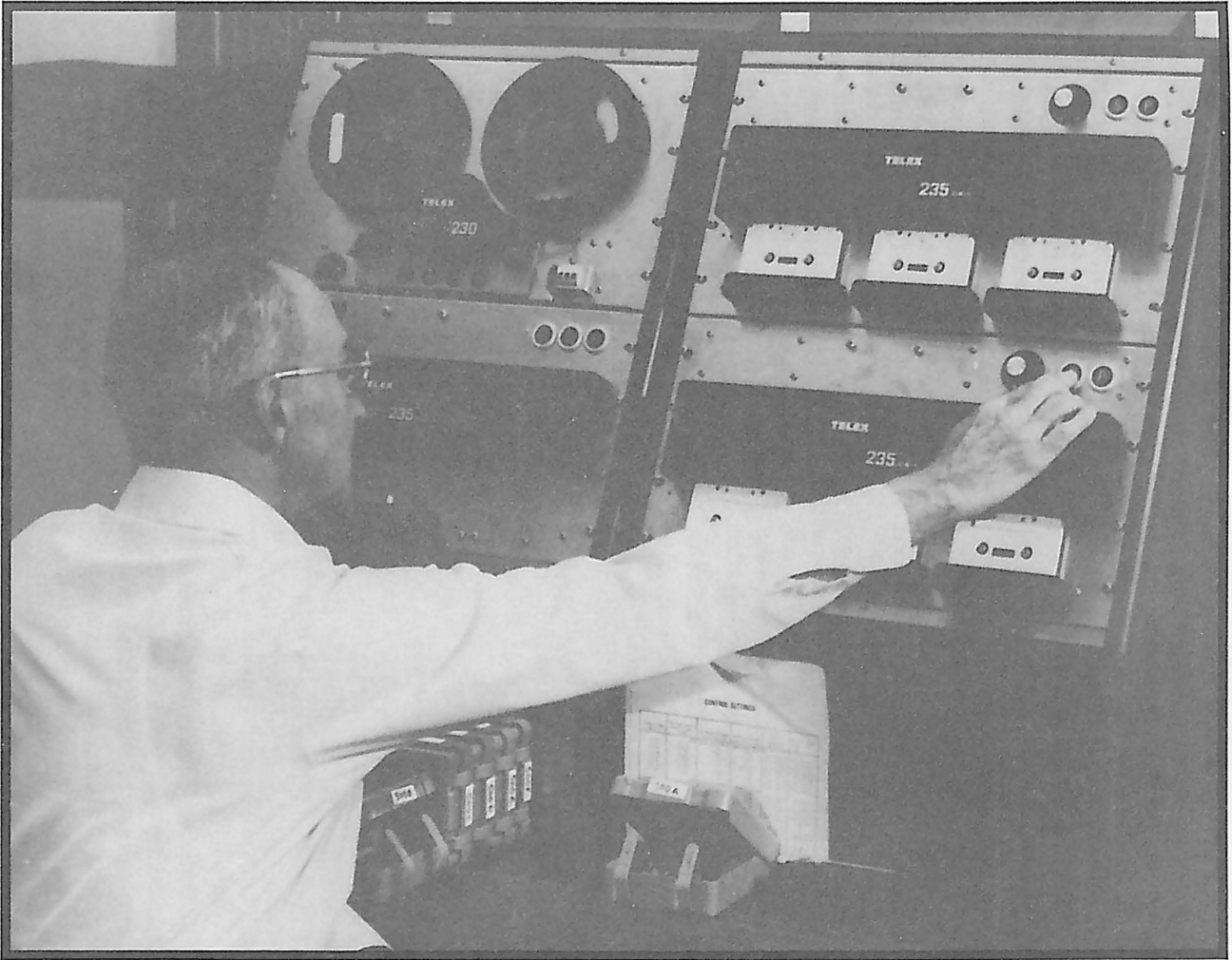
ance is enhanced and communication facilitated by each volunteer's familiarity with the other volunteer positions.

Narrators must pass a strenuous audition. Auditions are taped and evaluated by a review board which includes talking book patrons. Monitors must observe several recording sessions before beginning a book of their own and reviewers are asked to start out with a book that has already been reviewed by an experienced volunteer, so that their error-spotting abilities can be assessed before they become independent "critics."

Monitors and narrators follow the National Braille Association's *Tape Recording Manual*, which contains comprehensive standards and guidelines for the production of recorded material. It is the final authority on form for reading such things as footnotes, symbols and abbreviations, and for communicating effectively the information on graphs, tables, diagrams and maps.

Accuracy is a hallmark of quality recording programs of course. But the concept means much more than just a tape free of stumbles or extraneous noises. It means tireless, almost obsessive attention to detail. Horrell issues a "skeptic's license" to all volunteers, a humorous way of encouraging them to question and confirm at every opportunity.

Average reading vocabularies are much more extensive than spoken vocabularies and often volunteers are surprised to discover that pronunciations they have assumed for a lifetime are not correct. Horrell is quick to ask for help to ensure accuracy. She routinely calls the reference divisions of libraries and contacts post offices and police departments in other cities to check the pronunciations of street names. She has called law libraries



Step Three: Final tapes are duplicated for distribution.

for the proper, spoken format for statutes and codes and the Indianapolis International Center for help with foreign language expressions. She has even called people listed in the phone book who share an unusual surname found in a book being recorded.

How (Equipment, Production, Circulation)

The project records master tapes on reel-to-reel machines for optimum sound quality, and then duplicates onto cassettes. The books are recorded at a special speed that requires special equipment for listening. In this way copyrights are protected and the free service is preserved for qualified patrons.

Eligibility for the free National Library Service is open to any person certified by a competent authority to be unable to use conventionally-printed material. The classification includes physical and visual disabilities and reading disabilities due to organic dysfunction. Patrons submit an application through the Indiana State Library which belongs to the cooperative national network of 56 regional libraries. If accepted, patrons may obtain special tape machines and/or record players that play the slower-speed tapes and discs. They also receive catalogs and quarterly newsletters.

The Indiana History Project records about 25 titles per year. Under ideal circumstances a 200-page book takes six months to record, but circumstances are seldom ideal. Scheduling is always a problem, and some titles are more tedious to record than others because of print size, technical language or obscure pronunciations.

Many patrons allow the project staff to make selections for them based on their stated interests. While some may specify such things as "any

fiction," the fact that so many patrons state no subject or genre preference at all indicates to staff that the hunger for talking books is so great that patrons are eager for *anything*.

In 1982 the Indiana History Project entered 175 titles in the National Union Catalog for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and made its talking books available nationwide. The quarterly catalogue, produced by NLS, is available in microfiche to participating programs. Patrons from outside Indiana acquire the project's titles by process of Inter-Library Loan through their regional libraries.

Because its tapes are distributed nationwide the Indiana History Project is especially conscious of quality. But Horrell keeps reminding her volunteers that quality and the high standards that ensure it, should be "given" in any library service to the handicapped. It shouldn't just be a consideration when promoting the reputation or visibility of a project. Patrons of the Indiana History Project are discriminating readers, consumers for whom a product is being provided. As one volunteer put it, "to think in terms of service might be a *disservice* to our patrons because it's a bit patronizing, and tends to make us complacent. The dignity of both the producers and the patrons should be reflected in a solid product, produced with pride."