1968: Books by Mail

In 1968, CLR funded the San Antonio Public Library System $22,500 to explore the feasibility of books by mail as a regular feature of public library service in San Antonio and Bexar County, Texas. While the concept of library lending to users by mail was not new, the practice had become all but unknown in the twentieth century.

Direct lending by mail would allow libraries to extend their services beyond traditional interlibrary loan and bookmobiles. In the experiment, the would-be borrower called the library with their request. Assuming their account was in good standing, the book would be mailed within 24 hours. The borrower paid only return postage.

The experiment was popular with patrons, and by 1970, San Antonio Public had permanently installed books-by-mail as a service to the user. Additional findings of the study included that:

- Book loans by mail amounted to 17% of total loans
- Phone service was at least as quick (for the librarian) as walk-in service
- The working area required was less than 90 feet
- The service was a public relations boost
- On-time return by mail was better than with walk-in patrons