



The History of Washington Talking Book & Braille Library

The Washington Talking Book & Braille Library (WTBBL) is a program of the Washington State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State. Located in Seattle, they provide library services state-wide, at the library and by mail or download, to any Washington resident unable to read standard print material due to blindness, visual impairment, Deaf Blindness, physical disability (cannot hold a book or turn pages), or reading disability.

1906 Seattle Public Library (SPL) began library service to individuals in Washington State who read braille.

1931 Washington library became part of the national braille and talking books network started by the Library of Congress (Pratt Smoot Act).

1934 Talking books (later called audiobooks) were introduced on special phonograph records that played at 33 1/3 rpm (commercial records at the time played at 78 rpm).

1983 The National Guard, Boeing, WTBBL staff and volunteers moved the Library from 811 Harrison to 821 Lenora Street on October 1, 1983.

1985 The Washington Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped circulation was automated. Using adaptive equipment, blind staff members were able to access the system.

1994 On January 1, 1994, the Washington Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped changed its name to the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library (WTBBL).

2008 On July 1, 2008, administration of the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library moved from Seattle Public Library to Washington State Library, under the Office of Secretary of State.

2009 The first digital talking book players are issued to WTBBL patrons.

2009 WTBBL makes its locally produced talking books available for download at wtbbl.org. It is the first library in the NLS network to offer such a service.



2012 Mayor Mike McGinn proclaimed June 5, 2012, as Washington Talking Book & Braille Library Day.

2014 WTBBL ships its one millionth talking book on digital cartridge: Dancing to the Concertina's Tune by Jan Walker.

2021 WTBBL's new duplication on demand service for audiobooks began, allowing for the creation of customized digital cartridges with multiple books per cartridge based on a patron's preferences and requests.

Sources:

- Reading Matters Newsletter - First Quarter 2025
- Washington Talking Book & Braille Library | WA Secretary of State

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/washington-talking-book-braille-library>