

MANITOBA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION BULLETIN

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Meetings of the Association

Margaret Ashley

News items

Some Observations on Reading

Elizabeth Dafoe

The Great Books Program

MacDonald Coleman

GENERAL MEETINGS

An afterchime of the chord of enthusiasm sounded at the Brandon conference was still faintly echoing at the season's first meeting of the Manitoba Library Association held November 17, 1955, at the Winnipeg Public Library. Miss Violet Parker, president of the Association, as chairman, gave an encouraging summary of recent library developments in the Winnipeg district. The opening of the St. James Public Library on October 15, the formal opening on October 30 of the new quarters of the French branch of St. Boniface Public Library and the passing of the library referendum in Fort Garry on October 26, were indications of a slow but steady promotion of library service in the urban area, Miss Parker told the meeting, striking a note of subdued optimism only slightly flatted by the recent failure of the Winnipeg Public Library branch by-law.

Another optimistic, if somewhat uncertain, note was sounded by the reading of a letter from the Minister of Education. In reply to the resolutions forwarded to him from the Brandon conference. Mr. Miller stated that the long-awaited report on the library survey sponsored by the Government was expected to be ready within the month and that the Government had the matter of the vacant post of Director of Libraries under consideration. (On Dec. 1, 1955, Miss M. Morley was appointed Provincial Librarian and Director of Library Service.)

The feature of the meeting was a program on the use of films as a medium of communication and education. Mr. H.H. Easton, Assistant Librarian of the Winnipeg Public Library, introduced the topic, sketching the history of the film department of the Winnipeg Public Library and of its work in conjunction with the Winnipeg Film Council and the National Film Board.

Mr. Easton then presented Mr. Walter Lee, district representative of the National Film Board. Mr. Lee hailed Canadians as the world's greatest users of informational films. He outlined the work of the Film Board, now a government agency whose main purpose is to interpret Canada to her citizens. He described the methods used by the Board in reaching all parts of the country so that in 1954, 15 million Canadians saw documentary films in 200,000 showings. A lively demonstration of the type of film used to stimulate group discussion concluded the meeting.

Since lack of library service in Manitoba continues to be a major preoccupation of the Manitoba Library Association, the Program chairman, Miss Margaret Tupper, of the Winnipeg Public Library reference department, has organized for this season a series of three meetings on the theme of regional library development.

The first of these meetings, in the form of a panel discussion on regional libraries systems in Great Britain and Canada, was held at the Cornish Branch of the Winnipeg Public Library on February 2, 1956.

Acting as chairman for the panel, Miss Tupper introduced the speakers and presented the subject, giving a definition of regional and county library systems in general.

Miss Elizabeth Dafoe, Librarian of the University of Manitoba, then described the somewhat complex but efficient cooperative county library system of Great Britain which serves the whole rural population of that country.

The history of regional libraries in Canada was sketched by Miss Margaret Ashley, Cataloguer of the Winnipeg Public Library, who told the meeting that in seven Provinces flourishing regional library systems serving

rural areas, have been set up with government assistance. Manitoba and Quebec are the only Provinces without regional library service.

At succeeding meetings the Association will hear about the Metropolitan Library planning commission and library development in Manitoba, past and future.

HAVE YOU HEARD??

On December 1, 1955, Miss Marjorie Morley was appointed Provincial Librarian and Director of Library Service. Miss Morley served as assistant librarian under Dr. J. L. Johnston, and has been Acting Librarian during the past several months. Miss Morley has been a member of the Provincial Library staff since 1943. She received her B.A. from the University of Manitoba and a degree in Library Science from McGill University. Miss Morley's appointment is part of a new library program under Hon. W.C. Miller, Minister of Education, who now holds the library portfolio. Mr. Miller stated that a major part of Miss Morley's duties will be the encouragement of regional libraries and the co-ordinating of all library services in the Province.

Miss C. Combaz, Reference librarian, has assumed additional administrative responsibilities as senior assistant to Miss Morley.

Mr. John S. Russell has accepted the position of Librarian of the St. James Public Library.

Mrs. Erika Fuerst has been appointed librarian of Fort Garry Public Library which is now being organized.

Mr. R. C. Wright, in charge of documents and periodicals, Provincial Library, has joined the staff of the Library Extension Service, Adult Education Department, University of Manitoba.

There's a motion picture headed for release soon that should be particularly interesting. It is called "Storm Center," and it tells the story of a small-town librarian who spunkily refuses to allow a lot of self-righteous bluenoses to tell her what books she can, and cannot, keep on her shelves. The original title was "The Library," but it was discarded when one exhibitor scoffed, "Why don't you just hang out a sign reading "This Theatre is Closed"? The author also wrote the scripts of "From Here to Eternity" and "Picnic." He battled for over two years to put his library story into production and it was Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures who finally made a studio available for this controversial picture. Mary Pickford originally agreed to star in "Storm Center," but somewhere along the line she lost interest. This gave Bette Davis the chance to step in and give what is reported to be the greatest performance of her career.

Saturday Review, Feb. 4, 1956

Mrs. M.F.C. Grimsey has been appointed librarian of the St. Boniface Public Library - Norwood Branch to replace Mr. John Russell. Mrs. Grimsey was one of the original planners of the St. Boniface Library in 1952, also one of the first members of the St. Boniface Library Board and was Assistant Librarian at the University Extension Library.

Mrs. G.A. MacMillan joined the staff of the Norwood Branch of St. Boniface Public Library as assistant to the Librarian on September 1, 1955.

Mrs. D.M.S. Woollard is on the staff of St. James Public Library as stenographer and general assistant.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON READING

by
Elizabeth Dafoe

(A modification of the address given to the Manitoba Library Association, March, 1955.)

So much emphasis is placed now upon techniques of library service, so much pressure is put upon us to keep up with professional publications (which have become rather formidable) that we are often tempted to spend such leisure as we have in learning about methods of service, or reading about books, rather than getting our noses inside the covers of the books themselves. The librarian who reads is not "lost"; far from it; the librarian who does not read may well be a "lost librarian".

Some of my observations will inevitably be trite and obvious. For example, this: it is quite evident that we can, and do, read for any number of ends: to obtain specific information; to satisfy our curiosity; to keep abreast of world events, or the happenings in our own community; to defend an attitude, or refute an argument; to increase our knowledge or enlarge our understanding; to beguile the hours; or because we just can't help it, "I was so allured to read that no recreation became me better welcome" as Milton said. Those of us who read to any extent, read at one time or another for most of these purposes, and so we should.

As the child is father of the man, so is the home library the parent of the institutional library. Though much can be done by the school library to instil the habit of reading in the young, and some few mortals can even be saved on the threshold of manhood or womanhood by the good offices of the public or college library, it is the library in the home that makes the first and most lasting impression.

The importance of the personal library, no matter how small, can scarcely be over-estimated. "I like books," Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "I was born and bred among them, and have the easy feeling, when I get in their presence, that a stable boy has among horses." No infant in this age of maternity pavillions is likely to be born among books, but a few of them may have the good fortune to be bred among them, and that is the surest way known to me of acquiring an "easy" feeling in their presence.

A public library is a necessity in any community (and, according to Harold Laski, "a fortress of democracy"); a school library is as essential to teacher and pupil as an artery to heart and body. A college or university library, I am sure you have heard is "the heart of the institution", or, as the University Grants Committee describes it "the basis of all teaching and study...and the essential condition of research." Let us, by all means, have more and better public, school, college and university libraries, and let us make better use of them. But a personal library is something else again.

Anyone who was born and bred among books will almost

certainly collect some sort of library of his own. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our patrons. Certainly we who are members of the staffs of school, college, or university libraries, ought to consider it a part of our responsibility to encourage the students to begin to collect a library. This is a duty that should be shared with teachers and professors.

Bruce Truscot, in his interesting book "Red Brick University" deplores this lack in today's students. He points out that many school children do not have to buy a single book throughout their attendance at elementary, or even secondary, school. The books they use are the property of the Department of Education and lent to them for the duration of the school term. When these young people enter University, he claims, the shock of having to buy books is almost more than they can bear, and, in consequence, they borrow their texts or share them with other students if this is at all possible. Moreover, Mr. Truscot says, no sooner have they secured their parchments than they hasten to the nearest second-hand book shop laden with the books they were forced to buy, intent upon selling those dearly bought keys to knowledge. "It is just," he writes, "that they have never been convinced of the value of book-buying. It is not a subject taught in schools, or, as a rule, in universities." "The joy of having a book - loved tool - continually at hand and by careful and constant use making every page of it a familiar friend is something they have never even imagined"... "In no respect," he sums up, "is the importance of close personal contact between professor and student so marked as in this. We must teach our pupils, both by example and by precept, what the possession of a library, however small it be, can mean to them."

Something else we can do is encourage students to make more intelligent and experimental use of their school, college and public libraries.

For one thing: I have observed a tendency of late on the part of professors and teachers of English to discourage students from reading what the established critics have said about the masterpieces of literature. The students, on these occasions, are instructed to write their essays "plain", after having become familiar with the book under discussion. This practice, I am told, is followed because it has been found that all too commonly, students merely pass on what they have read; sometimes without quotation marks, often without thought or reflection on their own part, frequently without any understanding of the words or intention of the critics.

I think it is unwise ever to advise a student not to read unless he is suffering from severe eye strain. The way to correct the habit of thoughtless repetition surely is to help the students to learn to read and reflect, to accept and reject, to modify, and to know why. I see no reason either, why a student should not quote, provided he does not appropriate the quotation. "Quotation is pedantry" said Wilkes. "No, Sir," retorted Doctor Samuel Johnston, "it is a good thing. There is community of mind in it." Obviously I am on the learned doctor's side.

One of the things that worries me - it pricks my conscience, too - is that so few of our students, when they leave the university, capped, gowned and hooded, take with them any real knowledge of the mechanics of using an institutional library, any great awareness of the contents of such a library, or any overwhelming curiosity about those contents. Furthermore, and to my mind this is very serious, many of them go out into the harsh world without the realization that there are comfort and excitement and plenty of springboards for thought between the covers of books. I'd like them all to be "so allured to read".

One of the deterrents to what school librarians term "free reading" is the Examination, that indispensable evil. Now it may be that some of our students would read almost nothing if they weren't faced with the necessity of reading at least the prescribed texts and one or two collaterals, in order to answer the questions on the examination paper. But how these examinations crib and confine the natural-born explorer!

I sometimes wonder if the time will come when our universities will offer at least one course that will encourage students to read, not in order to complete an essay or to pass an examination but simply for the living, personal adventure reading can be.

And that brings to mind the matter of reading comprehension and the sheer mechanics of dealing justly with the printed word. Far too many of us fall by the wayside because we have not learned that there are various methods of reading for various purposes, and that whatever method is used, the ultimate aim is comprehension. Some things can be skimmed, some things, though they must be read in their entirety, can be read very rapidly. Other books must be taken very slowly, with time out to ponder. The practice of forming the words with the lips as we read is frowned upon by the educators, and rightly so, but when reading poetry we should sound every word, we should, in fact, read it out loud if possible.

This talk has only been by way of a reminder that it can do no librarian any harm to know what books fill the shelves of the library and what is to be found inside the covers of those books. He (or she) cannot possibly know more than a fraction of them, of course, but the more he knows the better he will be, and the habit of reading is a good habit for him to acquire and retain.

Do you remember some of the unkind, and in some instances, unjustifiable, criticisms Jacques Barzun made of librarians in his book, "Teacher in America"?...."is it so arduous a task," he wrote, "to learn the Dewey classification system and the use of bibliographies that there is no time left for librarians to learn about the insides of the treasures they hoard?" He complained of the "inattentiveness" of librarians and accused them of a lack of "general knowledge".

Well, you and I know that librarians do not "hoard" their "treasures" but conserve and administer them that they may be used intelligently by their patrons. By and large, librarians have pretty fair "general knowledge". Yet, one of the pitfalls of our profession is a temptation to succumb to superficiality; though no one should know better than we that you can't judge a book by its cover. And, as a profession we have not yet acquired sureness and poise. We are, perhaps, a little too inclined to think of ourselves as individuals working in libraries instead of as members of the whole society of libraries.

The Great Books Program

The Great Books Foundation is a non-profit educational corporation with headquarters at 59 East Monroe Street, Chicago 3, Illinois. It claims to sponsor the most extensive adult education program in the world. Great Books Groups are active in every State of the American Union. Approximately fifty groups operate in Canada. Of these about ten are in British Columbia, one is on the Prairies at Brandon, several are active in the Maritimes, and about thirty-eight groups function in Ontario and Quebec. As a general rule these groups are sponsored by the Public libraries or colleges in each community.

The Great Books program is built around the reading and group discussion of a selected list of books dealing with the basic problems of mankind. The whole program is based on the belief that people, through reading the Great Books of the past and by discussing them with their friends and neighbors, can educate themselves and find better solutions to their daily problems. It is designed to make the benefits of a liberal education available to all adults. Willingness to read and to express one's views are the only qualifications necessary for membership in Great Books.

The group has no teachers except the authors of the books themselves. It is not a book-review club. A leader serves to guide the discussions and to ask questions but the leader definitely does not lecture nor does he even express his own opinions.

The Great Books Discussion Group has a never-ending program designed to last as long as the enthusiasm of its members endures and as long as the supply of classics is not exhausted. Headquarters in Chicago has already drawn up a reading course for the first ten years and will no doubt be extending it since people who really get going on Great Books are not likely to return to the random reading of today's best-sellers. The third year course, which is what we are presently taking at Brandon, is fairly typical and includes the following selections:

- The Book of Job;
- The Oresteia by Aeschylus;
- Selections from Aristotle's Politics;
- Selections from St. Thomas Aquinas' Treatise on Law;
- Book 1 of Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel;
- Selections from Calvin's Institutes;
- Shakespeare's King Lear;
- Book 1 of Bacon's Novum Organum;
- Locke's of Civil Government;
- Voltaire's Candide;
- Books 1 and 11 of Rousseau's Social Contract;
- Chapters XV-XVI of Gibbon's Decline and Fall;
- Selections from Dostoyevsky's Brothers Karamasov;
- Freud's Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis

The Great Books Program in Brandon had its beginning in the fall of 1953 when approximately eighteen people began study of the first year course. In the fall of 1954 a new first year group was formed and the original group went on to study the second year course.

This Fall, since both groups had been reduced in numbers through people dropping out or moving away, the two Great Books Groups joined together and approximately fourteen people are now taking the third year course.

The person who succeeds as a member of Great Books has to work hard to master the contents of each selection and has to attend the meetings regularly. (In Brandon meetings are held every two weeks from October to May.)

The person who does succeed can find in Great Books one of the most exhilarating and thrilling experiences of life - the feeling that one has met and talked with some of the great men of our storied past.

A Library or Club that organizes a Great Books Group should spend months of careful planning before embarking on such a project but once embarked they will have the satisfaction of knowing that they have had a part in a truly worthwhile program.

The Great Books Foundation at 59 East Monroe Street, Chicago 3, Illinois, welcomes inquiries about its program and is most generous in the help it gives in the early stages of organization.

MacDonald Coleman,
Group Leader, Brandon.

The Membership Chairman is aiming for
a paid-up membership of 100!

Have you paid your fee?