



# LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## **Our libraries and the war : report of preliminary committee to the American Library Association, at its annual meeting at Louisville, June 22, 1917.**

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# OUR LIBRARIES AND THE WAR

Report of Preliminary Committee to the American Library  
Association, at its Annual Meeting at Louisville,  
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This Committee—appointed by the Executive Board a little over a month ago—was in terms temporary and preliminary. Its object was “to assemble the various suggestions which have been made [for such service] and to bring them before the conference with some sense of proportion, possibly with recommendations as to what might be most practical and most helpful to the government.” It was assumed that the result might be the creation of a “Working Committee” that might represent the association in the activities actually determined upon.

At the outset a distinction may be drawn between the services suggested for libraries individually or in cooperation with the local authorities, city and state, and those suggested for our national association as such. The former would include numerous measures to inform and stimulate the local community, to register its potential energies for service of various sorts, and to aid in correlating these, so as to secure the maximum of efficiency, with the least duplication and waste. It would of course include the record for history of the actual participation of the community in every phase of its war time activities. The latter—the service for the A. L. A. as an organization—would involve a close touch, through a specially constituted committee, with the policies and plans of the federal authorities, the acquisition of information which those authorities desire to diffuse, and a systematic method of diffusing it through our libraries, which, next to the newspapers and periodicals and by means of them, are the best agencies for diffusing it generally.

But there is another form of service which makes a special appeal to us as an organization:—the supply of reading matter to the troops. Such a service was early instituted in Germany, and is performed there by “travelling libraries” for the various army corps, each library consisting of from 1,500 to 2,000 volumes, fitted up on shelves in a car of its own, equipped and sent out from the Royal Library in Berlin. It has been undertaken for the British troops through no less than four volunteer organizations, a description of which, by Mr. Koch, will be summarized to you by Dr. Bostwick. It was attempted last year in a very imperfect measure for our troops at the border. That it will be desirable now, and on a vast scale, is obvious. For within a few months we shall have over a half million men in cantonment, training camp, or at the front. Among them will be men hitherto dependent upon books, men trained to the use of books, men untrained to their use but who might, under the unusual conditions, be brought to it, men taken from professions, arts, and trades in which the books supplied might later benefit them, and men of

all sorts to whom the inactive hours of camp or field bring depressing tedium and dangerous temptation, and to whom merely recreative reading would be a saving resource.

Note—To librarians these prospects and what they imply scarcely need exposition. They were outlined by Mr. Gilchrist in an article in the *Library Journal* for May; and they are summarized in a statement by Miss Martha Wilson so compact that we append a copy of it.

They include still some uncertainties: for instance as to how much leisure for reading and how much energy the men here will have, after the arduous drill of each day; or indeed how much interest in any but tactical books during the novelty of these first exercises and experiences. [The situation of the seasoned troops on the actual front during the past three years affords no parallel.] It is uncertain also how long any particular group of men will remain in training here before going to the front. But as fast as they go their places will be taken by others, as long as the war lasts, and the chief uncertainty is as to how long the war itself will last. But we must prepare as if it were likely to last for several years.

Here, then, seems an extraordinary opportunity—for a service distinctly appropriate, of undoubted value to the government, and of permanent effect. Can the association undertake it? If not completely, can the association contribute to it?

There are individual libraries already undertaking it for small units within their vicinity. There is, we hear, a prospect that it may be finely undertaken by Louisville, for this large unit here. There are some states, notably New York, where the State Library, or the State Library Commission has undertaken it for training camps and guard outposts within their jurisdictions. The great concentration of men—in the sixteen main cantonments—will, however, for the most part, be in areas little likely to be served by such means. And there will be the men abroad, and the men on the ships. For all of these the supply must be vast—thousands of volumes; the work of gathering these must be nation wide, of selecting and discriminating them—especially those which are to be informing and stimulating—must be expert; and the means of gathering, forwarding, accommodating and administering them will require ample, thorough and intelligent organization. Books will have to be bought, large expenses met. The mere housing of the collections at the camp units will require a building, or rooms in an appropriate building, recognized by the authorities. Funds as well as books will have to be solicited. An appeal for them must carry authority. If facilities are to be asked from the government, from railroads or from express companies for forwarding them, the appeal for these also must carry authority.

To undertake such a service independently might prove within the abilities of the A. L. A. To accomplish it successfully would add notably to the prestige of the association. But, just as in other matters tempting to duplication of organization and thus waste of effort, it is our duty to avoid this by coordination, so in this matter it would seem wise for us, before deciding to organize such a service independently, to consider whether there are not other agencies already existing with which we might as efficiently and more economically cooperate.

Now there are three such agencies which would welcome our cooperation: one governmental, one quasi-governmental, the third private. The first is the Commission on Training Camp Activities—an auxiliary of the War Department; the second is the American Red Cross; the third is the Young Men's Christian Association. The second and third are two of the four great agencies in Great Britain. The Red Cross there limits its service of reading matter to the men in the hospitals. This may prove an especial concern of the Red Cross here, though our Red Cross also distributes

some books with the soldiers' kits. It also gives away other books and periodicals given to it for the purpose. It does not propose to maintain libraries or lending collections.

The Commission on Camp Activities also expects to gather reading matter, and, if funds prove available, to purchase some. Its plan is, however, to turn all of this over to the Y. M. C. A. to be administered by it. The buildings maintained by the Commission will be primarily auditoriums for lectures and entertainments.

The Y. M. C. A. expects not merely to solicit and to buy material, but to administer it from its headquarters in camp and field—amplifying in this respect the work it did at the border. The buildings proposed provide for shelving and reading space; inadequately, to be sure, in the initial plans, but doubtless capable of extension, if the need can be shown. [A full statement by Mr. Orr himself, of what the Y. M. C. A. proposes will appear in the July Library Journal.]

These various intentions, ascertained by representatives of our committee in conferences with authorized representatives of the three agencies, in particular Mr. Hammer of the Commission, and Mr. Orr of the Y. M. C. A., have not yet been formulated into definite plans. And certain details remain yet to be determined; for instance, what funds will be available for the purchase of material; whether such of it as is gathered locally shall be sent to a central or to regional headquarters, for classification prior to distribution; and the means and method of transportation. But the representatives made clear that in any case they would welcome and value highly the aid which our association and our individual libraries might render.

The obvious forms of aid would be these: By the association, through its special committee, in the compilation of lists of books desirable for purchase or to be sought as gifts. [An example of the latter, undertaken locally, is that issued by the Syracuse Public Library. Experience proves the need of such if a mass of proffered material likely to prove futile is to be avoided. In addition to specific lists there are needed also categories of the general type of literature desired, especially in the informing and stimulating groups. The two needs have been recognized by the Y. M. C. A. in requesting assistance from a committee of New York librarians of which Mr. Adams is chairman.] The committee could also aid in giving wide publicity to the project, could inform and advise libraries in their relation with it, could give added authority to the appeal for funds and material, and could advise with the representatives of the agencies as to the developing details in the administration.

The important services of the individual library, besides aiding in the publicity, and in the appeal for funds and material would be to receive and sift the latter, and to forward it. In England the local postmasters receive any proffered for the purpose and forward it without charge. No such arrangement offers here. But one or two railroads have undertaken it locally; and an inquiry is before the Railroad Board as to whether our railroad systems might not undertake it generally. Should they agree to they must be safeguarded against the burden of carrying what may not be wanted; and the inquiry was coupled with the suggestion that the local agents need only be authorized to accept for transmission shipments examined and certified by the librarian of the local library. [See a memorandum, appended, from Mr. Johnston of the Bureau of Railway Economics. It is the Bureau which has addressed the Railroad Board in the matter.]

Finally, there is possible a major service which, organized by the A. L. A. Committee, would have to be recruited from individual libraries. This is the supply of trained library workers to aid in the actual administration of the collections in the camps. The advantage—indeed from our point of view, the need—of such expert service is obvious, if the most is to be made of the opportunity. And it seems prob-

able that a number of volunteers could be secured sufficient to provide at least one for each cantonment, and perhaps one for each unit building. They would have to be men—as the determined policy of these camp agencies requires this; and of course men not subject to draft. They would have to serve without pay, except as their present salaries might be continued by their respective libraries. But the Y. M. C. A. and the Official Commission are to consider whether their maintenance expenses might be met by them.

Such being the possible forms of cooperation, if the service of the libraries is to be cooperative, it is for the association to determine whether it shall adopt them, or attempt a service wholly independent; or, perhaps, adopt them in certain connections and certain localities, yet undertake an additional and distinct service of its own.

The latter must imply funds for four major items of expense: (1) The purchase of [selected] books; (2) [probably] transportation; (3) the erection of independent buildings, and (4) the maintenance of those buildings and of the administration within them. Were the service to be complete, to attempt to reach every unit reached by the Y. M. C. A., for instance, the sum necessary could scarcely be hoped for. If, however, it should be limited to this country, and if, here, it should be limited to one building at each main center—say one to each of the sixteen cantonments—very possibly funds might be secured for both buildings and maintenance. Any solicitation of them should be accompanied by a clear statement of the project, a clear distinction between it and the projects of the other agencies, well considered plans for the buildings and careful estimates of cost. The service on the ships and abroad will involve administrative problems which it seems to your committee unwise for the association to undertake independently.

The supply of reading matter to the patrol boats on our own coasts—a much needed service—will doubtless be taken care of by the seaboard states under the initiative of their Library Commissions.

One element in the general prospect clearly requires attention. There are already three agencies making appeals for funds and material. According to a recent announcement the Knights of Columbus may be a fourth. [It has just appropriated a million dollars for camp "recreation" for Roman Catholics.] The Young Men's Hebrew Association might conceivably be a fifth. If the A. L. A. is to be a sixth its appeal must be discriminated. Indeed they all should be, for a multiplicity of appeals to an apparently identical purpose is confusing. The public should be assured that the several services will at least be effectively correlated. And if the appeal could be from a single agency in the joint behalf it would undoubtedly be most convincing.

We have dealt first with this question of reading matter for the troops because it seems to have the largest and most general interest for the association as an organization. Within their respective jurisdictions, however, State Library Commissions and individual libraries will have duties and opportunities special to themselves.

As to those of the State Commissions, Mr. Dudgeon, of our committee, has drafted a memorandum which we attach as part of our report. Assuming the function of the commission to be to see that every library under its jurisdiction performs to the full its duties in the exigency, the memorandum emphasizes the primary duty of each library to act "as an agency of patriotic publicity," as well as a center for and an active aid in the organization of practical economic and relief work. The commission must urge this publicity service, supply material for it and complement it by direct efforts of its own. It should furnish lists of books on topics timely to the exigency, and where necessary provide the books themselves.

It will especially secure in quantities, and distribute, publications of the federal bureaus and commissions explaining their activities and intended to promote production and conservation of food and other resources.

A prime duty of a State Commission will be to inform libraries, as well as the public, of the various state agencies, governmental and other, available for, or applying themselves, to war time service; and, aiding in the correlation of these, avoid unnecessary duplication, as well as direct the volunteer to his appropriate task. Mr. Wyer, also of our committee, is preparing a statement showing that such agencies for state-wide service now exist in New York, and so far as defined, the relation between them. A similar statement prepared, published and distributed by every Library Commission for its particular area would be obviously useful.

One exhibiting the agencies national in scope has been prepared and published by the Library of Congress and copies of it—which will, of course, be sent to its mailing list—are also available here.

As in the nation so in the state, new or subsidiary agencies are constantly being created, new relations established. The first such bulletin should therefore be followed by others, bringing the statement to date. And for the national organizations the "Official Bulletin," issued by the Governmental Committee on Public Information, should be carefully followed for views of new agencies, and the developing plans of the existing ones.

*The Individual Library.* For this, dealing directly and intimately with the public, there is a duty to perform, an opportunity to stimulate, and a possible participation, through its staff and facilities, in the actual conduct of certain activities. It will endeavor to inform its public as to why the United States is engaged in the war, what is to be its participation, what is being done by various agencies—national, state and local—and what is the opportunity (for service) of the latter, and of the individual citizen. In pursuance of this purpose, and in aid of every legitimate stimulus, it will employ all of its resources for publicity: its bulletin boards, its publications, its exhibits, its influence with the local press. It will secure for its own collections and exhibits, and also for distribution to its readers, copies of all publications issued by federal, state or other agencies for instance Food Ordinance which describe what they are trying to do and wish to interest the public in. It will freely lend its rooms for lectures, talks and organization. It will make prominent collections of selected books; expository, narrative, descriptive, hortatory; and it will issue reading lists, informing and patriotic. And the collections and lists will by no means be limited to the political, still less to the martial, aspects or incidents of the war. They will, even more especially, illustrate and promote the service open to the ordinary citizen in industry, home economics and relief-work. It may, as in places it already does, aid directly in the registration of recruits, or agencies, for various forms of service. It will, as in cases it has already done, widen its actual loans of books and periodicals to include nearby army posts or outposts; this, independently of the service it may be asked to do in relation to any national effort of this sort. It may even, as in the case of Dayton, proffer the services of members of its staff, without loss of pay, in productive or relief work.

And on the historical side it will have a distinct duty: to gather and preserve every evidence of the participation of its community and of the citizens composing it. The importance of this need is recognized by the creation of a committee of historians which among other efforts will prepare for circulation among our libraries pamphlets describing the material to be preserved most solicitously. [See letter from the secretary of the American Historical Association to the secretary of the A. L. A. appended.]

All these various activities are such as would occur to any trained librarian, and need no argument. As illustrations, however, of the actual initiation of some of them by typical libraries, we attach extracts from statements invited from five libraries as to what they are already doing or planning [St. Louis, Springfield, Minneapolis, Dayton and Washington]. Various other forms of services will doubtless develop; and from time to time be commended to libraries by the State Library Commissions.

Useful in themselves for the exigency at hand these services may incidentally strengthen each library with its community by proof that it is something more than a building and a collection of books for normal times; that it is in fact an *organism*, sensitive to new sprung impulses and emergency needs of the community, and not merely responsive to them, but with potential energies within itself, capable of invigorating and guiding the effort to meet them. It should show that our library system, now an accepted axiom in times of peace, is also an indispensable equipment in time of war, and that the provision for its maintenance and enlargement should be enhanced rather than diminished during the present exigency; as, indeed, its opportunities are, not merely for war time service proper, but for the sort of service that it renders at all times. There is a disposition to forego various social activities and amusements. In proportion as they forego them people will have greater leisure for reading. Numbers of them will be eager to improve their efficiency for "war work" by the study of books of a practical sort. But there will be other cravings also. The gravity of the time tends to seriousness of thought and of purpose, and this to the reading of serious books. Any thoughtful consideration of the present issues must take people back into the past, any susceptibility to the times must take them away from the trivial. They will be moved to consider the "philosophy" of things, and in a mood to be affected by the expressions of man in his deeper and most artistic moments. They will be, therefore, peculiarly in need of just what we most rejoice to give them. And they should not be prevented from having it, nor we, in the amplest measure, from giving it.

Your committee concludes with this emphasis not because you have any doubts requiring it, but because there is fear that municipalities may be disposed to curtail appropriations for our libraries, as a measure of war time economy. We can scarcely believe such an intention to exist; but if it does it must be resisted, strenuously.

It would be most illogical. In calling our citizens into its service the state asks them to perfect themselves for it. In certain essentials our libraries offer the best means of perfecting them; and the means they offer are direct, simple, and familiar. They are free. They reach all classes, every community, continuously; yet they are organized in a system which assures them the guidance of a central intelligence and authority. They are the *only* agency which combines these elements.

Our people are urged to refrain from waste in recreation and luxuries. Our libraries offer them a welcomed substitute. They will be called upon for sacrifice, bereavement; to many of them books will yield the best solace.

And meantime they are cautioned against hysteria. The best resistant is books. And a library which furnishes them, profusely yet discriminatingly, is a great "stabilizer," aiding to keep us aloft and erect in a vortex of dizzying currents and counter currents.

But it is also, with the school system, a fundamental institution of our democracy. It is an essential part of the apparatus which gives our democracy such efficiency as it has. With democracy itself on trial, we cannot afford to have it appear that in a crisis such as this its fundamental institutions are set aside, their normal processes suspended, their normal activities curtailed. Rather should such

a crisis bring them into greater relief, a more active operation, and a more evident utility.

The recommendations of your committee are these:

1. That a War Committee be appointed to continue the investigation of this subject in its various phases, and under general direction of the Executive Board, to represent the association in the various relations which it involves.

2. That as such a committee should take benefit of the discussions of this conference, it be appointed immediately, by the present executive, instead of by the next incoming Board.

3. That for convenience and efficiency in the executive part of its duties its membership be limited to seven; but that it have power to create a larger committee, advisory and auxiliary to itself, also sub-committees from within or without its membership.

4. That for its guidance and that of the incoming Board upon one important prospective activity, there be discussion by the association as to the participation of libraries and of the association in the supply of reading matter to the troops, and such an expression as shall enable the committee to speak authoritatively for the association in any appeal that it issues, or undertaking that it enters into.

5. As a basis for such a discussion and expression we recommend consideration of the following resolution:

(a) That the American Library Association welcomes the information reported as to the aims of various agencies in the supply of reading matter to the troops; and that it will gladly aid to develop and especially to coordinate the service proposed by them; assisting as an association and through libraries individually in the preparation of lists and in the collection, scrutiny and organization of material.

(b) That it assumes that the efforts of the several agencies may by conference be so differentiated as to avoid both confusing competition and unnecessary duplication. It assumes also that consistently with their organization and aims in other respects, they will especially welcome such a cooperation on the part of the association as shall insure skilled service in the actual administration of the collections, without which, in the judgment of the association, full advantage cannot be taken of the opportunity.

6. If, in addition to various measures of cooperation with other agencies concerned in the supply of reading matter to the troops, there shall appear to the A. L. A. War Committee a prospect of funds for the erection, equipment and maintenance, *under the auspices of the association*, of distinct library buildings with suitable collections and expert service in each of the sixteen main cantonments, the committee is especially authorized to represent the association in soliciting the necessary funds, material and service, in all measures of organization, and in the actual administration of the libraries themselves.



