

Library Services to Children and Young Adults: 1930-1939 (An Outline)

1. Built on achievements of 1920's, with expansion of youth services and school librarianship.

- Last decade of powerhouses such as Anne Carroll Moore (New York) and Alice Jordan (Boston)
- First decade of innovative service by Margaret Alexander Edwards (Baltimore), Charlemae Rollins (New York), Augusta Baker (New York), and Siddie Joe Johnson (Dallas), to name just a few
- Publishers continued to pursue juvenile market, with separate divisions for children and specialist editors (May Masee of Viking; Bertha Mahoney Miller of Macmillan and *Horn Book*) and commercial book lists **[pp. 9-10 of hand-out]**
- Furniture advertised for children's library needs
- Professional recognition and organizational structures advanced within ALA, esp. for youth services and school librarians
- More attention focused on youth services, recognition of the adolescent, and specialized training for youth librarians

1a. Literary values for children and children's librarianship.

- Firm belief in power of literature to enrich and uplift—duty of librarians to cultivate love of good reading; fine arts of reader advisory and creative promotion
- Corollary: what is "good" reading? Differences of opinion concerning intellectual freedom; informal censorship; traditional debates over popularity vs. quality

[overhead: graphic from Plummer 1935 ("A Children's Librarian Views the Future")]

- Storytelling continued to develop as a performed art (Ruth Sawyer; Pura Belpré).

[overhead: story hour in Pittsburgh, mid-30's]

- Initiated Caldecott Awards as separate category for picture books (1938)
- Newbery winners: **[p. 7 of handout]**
 - 5 1930's medalists are about characters who are not white Americans
 - 2 are biographies (rare for Newbery)
 - 5 have female protagonists (white Americans)

2. Faced the privations of the Depression with extraordinary creativity and determination to meet needs of children and youth.

- Needs increased while budgets and wages collapsed
- Took advantage of radio and film to connect with patrons
- Go anywhere, do anything: WPA and other model projects encouraged experimentation in outreach via every kind of wheeled conveyance, pack-horse, and unusual “branch” libraries in barber shops, paint stores, etc.

[overheads: packhorse librarian in Kentucky + General Store library in Minnesota; bookmobile storytelling in Cleveland]

- Toyed with ideas to combine efforts of school and public librarians, building up school libraries as public library branches.
- Pursued low-cost projects such as letter campaigns to celebrities, bulletin boards for art collection displays, book clubs and poetry discussions, etc.
- Made the most of Children’s Book Week
 - “Bookland Village” in St. Louis, with cardboard castle covered with book jackets
 - Good Book Week in South Bend, IN, where children’s authors were solicited for letters that were displayed across 5 windows
 - Katherine Watson’s Book Lists of Famous Men and Women project in Denver provided long-term programming material
 - Annual Doll Reception at Forbes Library in Northampton, MA, between Christmas and New Years
 - St. Paul Book Week Fair, with library decked out in heraldic banners, weapons and tapestries and librarians dressed in Medieval costumes

2a. Job opportunities rarely advertised.

- Librarians connected with work through training programs and personal persistence
- *Library Journal* section on “Opportunities” discontinued by 1934 in favor of paid Classified Ads (with even fewer jobs listed).
 - “Opportunities” almost always *seeking* jobs, not offering them.
 - Examples from 1930:
 - “Trained school librarian, four years’ experience, desires position in the East. Salary \$2,500.”
 - “Position in children’s department wanted by responsible young woman with library summer school training and three years’ experience, who has also had experience as a teacher.”
- 1931 *LJ* ad for American Librarians’ Agency in Windsor, CT. “Do you want a position? / Do you need a librarian?”

3. Grappled with educational trends emphasizing contemporary realism and New Psychology.

- IQ Testing and skills assessment tests in full swing; integrated into research on children's reading
- Progressive education prioritized "here and now" experience of modern American children—dismissed "Long Ago and Far Away" fantasies and folklore, long the staples of children's literature
- Frances Clarke Sayers spearheaded librarians' advocacy of imaginative literature in 1937 ALA address, "Lose Not the Nightingale," decrying dry, mechanical nature of "progressive" reading materials for children
- Some teachers resented implication that personal reading for pleasure was the only productive encounter children could have with the written word, and that children couldn't possibly enjoy their schoolbooks or benefit from them

3a. Debated role of women in librarianship and accusation of "feminization" of children's literature. (Christine Jenkins, 1996)

- Came to a head at 1939 ALA Pre-Conference Institute on Library Work with Children, when author Harold Pease blamed women's influence on book publishing and promotion for making men unwelcome and degrading the quality and appeal of children's books (essentially pitting boys against girls). Made some valid points, but confrontational tone only alienated and angered audience.
- C.C. Certain of *Elementary English Review* followed with vitriolic editorial, "What Are Little Boys Made Of?" criticizing 1939 Newbery winner as too girly, providing further evidence that the female propensity for sentiment and nostalgia was hurting children's literature. Called for inclusion of teachers and other (male) professionals on Newbery selection committee.
- Sparked necessary debate over value of realistic contemporary fiction and balanced appeal.
- Controversy led to calls for reason and ultimate rapprochement (aided by C.C. Certain's sudden death in Dec. 1940 and the succession of his wife Julia to editorship of *Elementary English Review*)
- ALA retained control of Newbery selection.

4. Conclusion: Decade of consolidation of gains, flaring of controversies, and expansion of ideas to meet needs in changing (and hard) times.