

## LIBRARY TALK

It was suggested to me that I talk about our library in general. I am glad to have the opportunity to do that, to tell you a little of the background, what the library is and what it does, what services are available, and something of our problems and plans.

The D.P.P.L. is a city library. It is financed by the taxes our residents pay to the City of Des Plaines; a very small part, about ~~4¢~~ (pennies) out of each \$100 tax bill go for the support of our library. The library is one department of the City. It differs from the Fire Dept., Police Dept., and other departments in that it is governed by its own Board of Directors, nine citizens appointed by the Mayor, who serve without remuneration. The Library Board hires the Librarian and staff, within the limits of Civil Service regulations, sets up the annual appropriation and presents it to the City Council for approval, and forms the policy for operation of the library. The Librarian and Staff carry out the policy of the Board.

Our library is located in the City Hall building, the west wing with entrance around the corner on Graceland Ave. We have a staff of 4 librarians and 2 part-time librarians.

Any inhabitant of Des Plaines may have a library card. In applying for a card, you identify yourself and give a local resident as a reference. If you live outside the City limits, you may have a card, but there is a non-resident fee of \$5.00 per year per family. Since the School District extends beyond the City limits, there are a few school children who must pay a fee. Our Library Board has reduced the fee for the non-resident child attending our schools to \$1.00 per year per child, if he is in grade 6 or lower. In some Illinois communities an arrangement is made between Board of Education and Library Board in this situation.

Today over 8000 persons have borrower's cards at the library. That is, 8000 people come to the library; many of them come regularly week after week for books, magazines, pamphlets, to use the reference works, to ask for information of all kinds (we answer hundreds of reference questions), and for various purposes. We have about 150 new borrowers each month; last year, in 1955, we had a total of 1819 new borrowers.

The use of the library increases constantly, of course, as our city grows. The circulation record shows what use is made of the library. Last year the circulation was 109,000, which means that in 1955 109,000 books and materials were borrowed by our patrons. In an average month about 9000 items are charged out to borrowers, and in a very busy month the circulation is over 11,000. July of this year was by far the busiest month we've ever had with a 14,000 circulation. The library is a very busy place.

You might ask, how do you decide what books to buy? Who decides and what standards are used? We have a collection of 23,000. Since the principal commodity of a library is books, their selection is a very important responsibility, and much study and time go into it. The Book Committee of our Library Board forms the policy, and aims to make available the very best collection possible. The librarian and staff select the books for purchase. We place on our shelves nearly 250 new books per month. In choosing from the thousands of books published each year, librarians all over the country study carefully the authorities recommended by the American Library Assn., which include the Booklist, Library Journal, Horn Book, Saturday Review and other such publications. (Book Sections, which appear in the Sunday issues of the N.Y. Times, N.Y. Herald Tribune and the Chicago Tribune are highly recommended also). We study carefully these aids to book selection, which contain critical estimates by librarians of note and by authorities in the subject field. Also, we study our own collection of books to build up any weaknesses, and we invite and consider the suggestions of our patrons.

Standards for book selection are concerned with the intent of the author and the sincerity of his purpose; literary excellence; the effect of the work as a unified whole -- what the book has to say, what values it has to contribute. A high standard is maintained, and it is gratifying to find that when lists of the outstanding books are published at the end of each year, the books are to be found at the DPPL.

(The Board's policy is to present all sides of controversial questions.)

In addition to the book collection, more than 130 periodicals are available to tell the reader what goes on in the world today. We keep the back issues (5 years back), and the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, an index, enables anyone to find almost any information new desires. We have a pamphlet file and a picture file; there is a wealth of good, free and inexpensive material, and we wish we had room to handle more of it. We have a Des Plaines historical collection.

Work with children is an important part of the library program. How the child reads and what he reads will affect his attitudes, personality, ability, and his work throughout a lifetime. The child who becomes a good reader has in his possession the most effective means of continued life-long education. In addition to our regular program for children, for the past 8 years we have had a summer reading club for boys and girls. It encourages them to enjoy good reading and to maintain reading skills during summer when school is closed. The theme this summer was the most popular we've ever used, "Modern American Explorers".

Each child was given a map of the U.S. at the beginning of the summer, and for each book read he was given two states in color to paste on his map. 600 children took part in the 8-week program, and the Friends of the Library organization arranged to have a magician perform for those children who completed the program. Candy was given them by the Knights of Columbus

Other items I'd like to mention are these. We use the excellent services of the Illinois State Library at Springfield. Each summer we borrow 500 juvenile books to supplement our collection for use in the summer reading club. Also for individual library patrons we borrow books that are of so specialized or technical a nature, or so expensive that we feel we must not buy them. Each November during National Book Week, we feature a display of 200 of the best books for children. Come to the library to see them. With Christmas coming soon after, you will get some good suggestions for Christmas gifts. During the entire year we have a series of exhibits of all kinds.

The librarians, all of us, attend the library institutes and the library conferences to learn the trends and to exchange ideas. We visit other libraries. Each July we attend the annual McClurg Book Party, when publisher's representatives present the books to be published in the fall; this helps us with book selection.

Now, to review our history briefly, 6 civic-minded citizens formed our first Library Board in 1906. First meetings were held in their homes and in the old Village Hall. They planned and worked for our first library. They met with the village fathers. Several lots were purchased for a library building at the corner of Minder St. and Graceland A ve. Andrew Carnegie was contacted and his gift of \$5000 paid for the new building, which was opened to the public in the fall of 1907; you see we'll have our 50th anniversary soon. (At that time the streets were unpaved, gas lights were used, and plumbing was primitive.) We outgrew the first building and in 1937 we moved into the present facilities, in the west wing of the new City Hall, which was erected on the site of the old library.

That was in 1937, nearly 20 years ago, and at that time the population of DP was 9000; today it is 28,500. Then the library had 2400 borrowers; today there are 8000. Then we had a collection of 6300 books; today we have 23,000. We have more than tripled-- the population, borrowers (users), book stock, and the resulting services and functioning of the library. But we still use the same space we had in 1937. That is the problem today--crowded conditions, lack of space.

The problem is greater than these statements show. Our city has grown tremendously. New families have come to DP by the hundreds, and new industries have located here especially in the last few years until they number nearly 60. There are many more schools, more civic, business and social organizations to serve. We have made improvements as we could, such as our fine fluorescent lighting system, air-conditioning units, a modern charging desk, and the installation of electric charging machines for increased efficiency and improved operation. We have good books, excellent services, and a capable staff eager to serve. What we have is good.

But, a city our size, 28,500, should have a much bigger and better library. We should have twice as many books, according to library standards. We have run out of space for more book stacks or shelving, and very soon we'll have to use the window sills and tops of the present stacks, and we'll probably have to rent space to store some materials. Moreover, each time we have placed a new book range on the floor, we've had to reduce the space allotted to readers and students. Today we can seat only 40 people in the whole library. We should have a separate reference room to take care of that many, for it is impossible to maintain peace and quiet for any scholars. One evening a short time ago every chair was taken and 2 young people sat reading on the front steps. We do not offer certain services at all because there is no room--and our pamphlet and picture files should be much larger than they are.

Our Children's Room, which is an old store room in the basement, is the size of an average living room, 11 by 25 feet. In that small room we have the juvenile collection of books, a charging desk, two picture book desks and two benches, and the card catalog. We have had as many as 1000 children there in a week's time. Some teachers refuse to bring their school rooms to visit the library because our facilities are inadequate. We cannot offer a story hour. We do not publicize our summer reading club as we might, for we couldn't handle more children than we handle now.

The public doesn't realize that in our present library we have no work room for processing the 250 new books we buy each month; we have no office for the librarian (any reports, book selection study, notes for newspapers, and similar matters the staff carry home where there's a place to work with no interruptions); there is no staff room, no meeting room for Board meetings and library-related projects, such as Friends of the Library, Scout reading projects, etc. We have long since reached capacity in our present quarters. Now we must do something about it. Our Library Board is working on the matter. They have been meeting with the City Aldermen; a Citizen's Committee has been formed; the Friends of the Library exists to help the library. Every effort should be made for a new library building.

In conclusion, a library should promote an enlightened citizenship and enriched personal lives. It should serve the community as a general center of reliable information. It should provide opportunity and encouragement for children, young people, men and women to educate themselves continuously. It should be a cultural center. These are our objectives at the DPPL, and we invite and urge you all to use your public library.