

REMARKS OF HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, U. S. REPRESENTATIVE SECOND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND AT DEDICATION OF THE MARIAN J. MOHR MEMORIAL LIBRARY, JOHNSTON, RHODE ISLAND ON SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 1961 AT 2PM

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN A DEMOCRACY

Public libraries in the United States date back to the early history of our Nation, an outgrowth of mercantile and private subscription libraries as well as of the vision and public spirit of our forebears. In 1833, the town of Peterborough, New Hampshire, created the first publicly supported town library in the United States. A basic principle was introduced then, and one which is still maintained today, that the vast book and other resources of our country should be made equally available to all the people and that communities libraries should have public support.

Throughout the years, the public library movement has grown and been strengthened through the support of men and women of vision and public spirit. Here in Rhode Island we have a long tradition of which to be proud, from the days of Francis Wayland, an early pioneer, to today when men such as Ralph S. Mohr--men of dedication and perception--

have contributed and are contributing to the growth and development of the free public library movement.

The donation, which has been recognized as being instrumental in getting underway the principle of public support of libraries was that given by Francis Wayland when he was president of Brown University. It was during 1847 commencement proceedings at Brown that President Wayland first told a friend of his intention to give five hundred dollars to the town of Wayland, Massachusetts, for a public library provided the town matched his donation. This was done, and the public library of Wayland went into operation on August 7, 1850, supported by an assessment optional with the individual taxpayer. A year later the Massachusetts legislature passed its law permitting towns to tax their inhabitants for the support of free libraries, an important milestone in the history of public libraries in the United States.

It was Wayland's steadfast conviction that the universal provision of educational and cultural opportunities was a prime requisite of a democratic society. This concern was so aptly set forth in the first annual report of the Boston Public Library in 1852: "It has been rightly judged that...under political, social, and religious institutions like ours...it is of paramount importance that the means of general information should be so diffused that the largest number of persons would be induced to read and understand questions going down to the very foundation of the social order, which are presenting themselves, and which we, as a people, are constantly required to decide, either ignorantly or wisely."

Today as in 1852, public libraries fulfill their role as "the university of the people." Free for use by all, the public library serves children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens

alike. Its resources are made equally available to the business executive, the mechanic, the farmer and the professional man, as well as to the school child, the college student, the housewife, parent, or retired worker. To the entire community, the public library is a source of aid in self-education, in increased vocational competence, in citizenship, in cultural appreciation, and in the constructive use of leisure time.

It is therefore with pleasure that I join you today in the dedication of this beautiful new library, a library which will help bring to the residents of Johnston the rich resources and treasures found in the world of books and other library materials.

This Marian J. Mohr Memorial Library has come into being in the best of American traditions, spearheaded by the foresight and generosity of a leading citizen and civic leader, Ralph S. Mohr, together with an appropriation from the town, and the

cooperative efforts and contributions of many of the people of Johnston. This is truly a living memorial, one which will benefit the entire community and will continue to contribute to the educational and cultural life of its citizens in the critical years that lie ahead.

Although considerable progress has certainly been made nationwide in public library development, many serious deficiencies still remain. Notable among these deficiencies are the 24.5 million Americans who are still without direct access to local public library service, and additional millions who are receiving only token service.

Adequate public library service is dependent upon several interrelated and key factors at the local, state and national levels. The absence of any one factor seriously affects the strength and success of the total program. The basic elements for a successful public library program include the provision of the following:

First: professional and other library personnel to provide the necessary trained and experienced leadership and service;

Second: book and other library resources in all fields of knowledge and at required reading levels, appropriately and efficiently organized for use;

Third: physical facilities, attractive in design, convenient for use, and sufficient in number; and

Fourth: financial support, continuing and adequate to meet at least minimum library standards.

How well are we meeting the nation's needs in these four categories? Rhode Island's needs?

As the result of the Library Services Act, Public Law 597, first passed in 1956 and subsequently amended and extended for an additional five years by the 86th Congress, funds have been allotted to the States for the promotion and further development of public

library service in rural areas. During the first four years of the program, these outstanding results have already been noted:

Thirty-four million rural people now have new or improved public library services available to them as a result of State plans under the Act. State funds for the development of rural public library service in rural areas have increased 75 percent since 1956, a significant and impressive gain. Local appropriations for rural libraries have increased 50 percent since that date. County and regional library developments have brought public library service for the first time to over 1-1/2 million rural residents and substantially improved service in specific library development project areas to eight million more.

Over 100 rural countries and an equal number of New England towns formerly without any public libraries are now receiving library service. Approximately 250 new bookmobiles have been placed in operation in rural areas under Library Services Act

projects. More than 6 million books and other informational materials have been added to the resources of rural communities.

State library agencies have been able to strengthen their staffs by adding over 100 field consultants, which represents an increase of over 100 percent in total field personnel since 1956.

In addition, over 200 other professional librarians have been added to State library agency staffs.

Scholarship programs under the Act are now in effect in 10 States and are assisting in filling the need for trained librarians to carry out State plans.

Here in Rhode Island, the results have been no less impressive even though it was not until 1958 that the Library Services Act program got underway in our State. Forty-two community libraries are now participating in the Rhode Island Plan receiving book grants, advisory and consultant services, centralized ordering and book processing, and in-service training opportunities. In

addition, bookmobile service has been made available to those rural areas which have been without adequate public library service. What has this resulted in? These expanded resources have resulted in an improvement in many areas including the number of hours which community libraries are now open. It has resulted in increased circulation of books; and increased town support for local public library service bearing out one of the prime purposes of the Library Services Act, that of stimulating local financial effort. These are notable achievements.

While discussing the present role of the State in developing public library service, it might be well to go back into history and mention another Rhode Island achievement and milestone in public library history. It was in 1875 that Rhode Island enacted state aid, believed to be the first such law providing state aid to public libraries. The State Board of Education was permitted to

pay sums up to \$500 to existing libraries depending on the size of their book collections. Results were immediate and salutary. In some instances, proprietary subscription libraries were opened free to the public. In others, libraries which had ceased to be free and public because of lack of support were revitalized. And, finally, some new libraries were created. But we cannot rest on past achievements; we must consider how to meet present day needs.

Where do we go from here? There is still much that remains to be done, both in rural areas and in urban centers. There are still, for example; approximately 215 counties in the United States with no public library service within their borders.

Since the Library Services Act is a rural program, our larger communities, those serving populations over 10,000 are

not eligible to receive any Federal assistance for public library development. Urban areas, and particularly metropolitan centers, are faced with growing populations, competing demands for services and a lack of adequate funds to meet these needs. Complicating these factors is the very natural and human tendency of people in search of information, ideas and books to disregard boundary lines. The Providence Public Library is one of the Nation's large libraries facing just this kind of problem today. Let me quote from the library's latest annual report:

"The Providence Public Library is one of the first municipal services in Rhode Island to become widely used as a metropolitan resource. A 14-day sampling of persons using the Central Library in October (1960) revealed that 43 percent were nonresidents. An accounting study revealed that it costs the Library \$160,000 annually to provide this service to persons from 39 Rhode

Island cities and towns, and from nearby Massachusetts.

"It is obvious that intellectual progress cannot be confined and that the demands of education are crossing and rapidly erasing town and city barriers. The Library through external demands has become a city-state library--the major book resource center of the state and a center for professional guidance about librarianship. Thus, a new concept of library service in Rhode Island has evolved. What needs to be devised now is a new concept of financial support to reimburse us for these services.

"Since the services of this institution have proven so vital to every corner of the State, to students, businessmen, industry and to housewives, we must look to the State for adequate reimbursement. State and local government must also do their share to provide financial support to up-grade school and community libraries everywhere."

It is encouraging to note that Brown University has received a grant from the Council on Library Resources to study university, school and public library coordination with a view to improving the opportunities for learning in Rhode Island. It is hoped that this pilot project will present findings and recommendations which will be of assistance not only to Rhode Island but also to other States and their metropolitan and suburban areas in their efforts to improve library services.

A critical problem facing libraries of all types is the personnel shortage. We must find ways of encouraging young people to enter the library profession and of providing the financial aid that will make it possible for them to complete their professional education.

Today, almost every public library in the Nation seems

to be faced with a serious shortage of personnel. Recently, one metropolitan library, the Free Library of Philadelphia, estimated that over 200 new positions, professional and non-professional, were needed if that system were to meet minimum standards and the sharp increase of daily use in their main library and many branch agencies.

But as one librarian in one of our midwest cities has so graphically stated:

"Statistics are all right but they don't tell the whole story. They reveal and substantiate the over 100 percent growth in the library business the past ten years but they don't give the part of the picture that is aggravating. They don't tell how windows are blocked with book shelves, how shelves have had to go up the walls as high as eleven feet and require the use of ladders, how they fill in a balcony,

obscure murals and are lined out on the floors where tables should be. They don't tell about students standing in the stacks or sitting on the stairs in order to have a place to study, or of people patronizing the main building and the branches so heavily that, with the limited space, they could not be given service. Nor do they reveal the continuing 'operation saturation', as we have come to call it, of this steady growth in demand against a deadline dwindling of space in which a staff, tested daily by not having room for work desks, must give an expected top service with materials that are constantly being forcibly disorganized in order to house them."

It is indeed a tribute to the librarians of America that dedication to service and the diffusion of knowledge keeps them on the job, and that the public's hunger for books has

become a challenge and not a deterrent to public library use. These conditions, these lacks must not continue. The public library is too important an aspect of the educational fabric of our nation to be allowed to subsist on a starvation budget. For so many of our people, the public library is the one continuing source of learning. It offers its services and resources to all who care to enter its doors -- no examination need be passed, no educational requirements must be met. The public library is open, and without charge, to anyone who cares to enter, whether to study, to learn or just to relax for the sheer pleasure and enjoyment that books, recordings, films and other library materials can give. For, as President Kennedy has said, "If this Nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries."

So, to Mr. Mohr, to the governing officials of Johnston, and to the many citizens of this community who have contributed to this lasting memorial, may I say you have indeed proved what Abraham Lincoln stated over a hundred years ago: "With public sentiment, nothing fails, without it, nothing can succeed."