

March 15, 1962

It is a real pleasure for me to join my fellow Rhode Island Library trustees at this first statewide meeting of our trustee's committee. It seems particularly appropriate for us to come together during National Library Week to consider the role of the library trustee in working toward better library service for all of the people in our State and Nation.

The National Library Week theme for 1962 is "Read, and Watch your World Grow." I would like to suggest that we library trustees might use as our theme tonight, "Work and Watch your Library Grow." As each of you in this room has already learned, it is library trustees, working closely with their librarian, who determine to a large extent the quality and quantity of library service which their community receives.

This newly-formed committee reflects the present resurgence of statewide interest in Rhode Island library development. In planning its future activities, this group will want to define its goals clearly and to become thoroughly familiar with the tools now at hand which will help reach these goals. The national standards for public library service as adopted by the American Library Association can serve the trustee committee well as a point of departure in defining good library service for the people of our State. I'm sure you will agree that the basic objective of both this committee and of the individual trustee is to secure for our citizens the kind of library service which will effectively meet their needs.

This is a big and important job. We in Rhode Island are fortunate, however, in that we are not facing this task without assistance. For the next few moments, let's look at some of the tools we have to work with and how some of them can best be used.

One such tool which, properly used, can be of great value to library development is the event which we are observing tonight--National Library Week. This effort to focus public attention on the values of reading is now a year-round program helping to build the use and improvement of libraries of all kinds. We believe that libraries are an important means for developing an informed, creative citizenry, willing and able to make the decisions required of free men and women in a complex, troubled world. The alert trustee can help his library demonstrate that belief by relating both the services and the needs of his own library to this national effort.

I know you are all familiar with another important source of aid to those public libraries in communities of under 10,000 population. The Library Services Act (Public Law 597), first passed in 1956 and subsequently extended through 1966 by the 86th Congress, allocates funds to the States for the promotion and further development of public library services in rural areas. Rhode Island began participation in the Act in 1958 and since that time this program has been ably administered by Miss Elizabeth Gallup Myer. Forty-three rural community libraries have participated in the Rhode Island State plan receiving book grants, advisory services, centralized book ordering and processing and inservice training opportunities. Miss Myer has reported that the number of books loaned from these libraries nearly doubled between 1956 and 1961 and that the local financial support increased 95% over the same period. This substantial increase in the use of books is heartening evidence of the improved ability of these libraries to meet the needs of their users. Of equal significance to us is the continued financial effort which the local communities are making to support these services. This fact

demonstrates the success of the Library Services Act as a partnership program in which State and local governments share with the Federal Government the responsibility of financing good library service. Funds under the Act are allotted to the States in proportion to their rural population and are matched by the States according to their per capita income. This matching provision is reminiscent of a donation made in 1847 by Francis Wayland who was then President of Brown University. Mr. Wayland offered the town of Wayland, Massachusetts, five hundred dollars for a public library provided the town matched this amount. The community then levied an assessment, optional with the individual taxpayer, and the Wayland Public Library began operation in 1850. This early partnership of public and private funds became formalized in Massachusetts one year later when the State Legislature passed a law permitting towns to tax their inhabitants for the support of free libraries.

In addition to the matching concept, the Library Services Act also contains a "floor" provision. This means that State and local expenditures for public library service cannot fall below the amount spent in 1956 if the State is to be eligible for the Federal grant. These provisions are consonant with the intent of the Act which is to stimulate and to promote Statewide library development and not to relieve State and local governments of their responsibility to provide their fair share of the total cost of library service. The success of the Act as a stimulant can be seen in the fact that, since 1956, appropriations by the States for rural public library service have increased 92% and appropriations by local units of governments have increased 74%. The Library Services Act has in fact been so successful in developing rural libraries that I believe its benefits should be extended to all areas including urban and metropolitan areas.

At the present time 27 States, including Rhode Island, have cash grants-in-aid programs to local libraries and three other States have grant programs consisting of books and other library materials. Many of these, however, are quite inadequate, amounting to very small grants of only a few cents per person in each community. I don't believe Rhode Island trustees will be content with the status quo. I suggest that one important job to which this committee can address itself is the careful evaluation of the role of the Rhode Island State Government in public library financing.

A third important tool with which this committee can work is the report of the Brown University Study of Library Service in Rhode Island. I know that the information we have been given at this meeting stimulated your thinking and I hope that every library in the State gives high priority to a careful study of these findings and recommendations. It may be noted in this connection that similar comprehensive studies have been implemented with outstanding success in such States as New York, Pennsylvania, and New Mexico. In each case the efforts of library trustees were a vital factor in the progress library development has made in those States.

Closely related to this study and its implications for every library in the State is the legislative commission which was created on January 30 by the State Legislature. As you know, the task of this commission will be to study existing library laws as well as to review the survey report. Then, based on all available information, this commission will recommend legislation which will be appropriate to the organization of modern public library service. All Rhode Island library boards will want to follow closely the deliberations of this commission

and to take advantage of any opportunity to make their needs and opinions known to this group.

Turning again to the national level, I might call your attention to the Small Libraries Project of the American Library Association. This project is designed to assist the small library by publishing a comprehensive series of 16 handbooks and guides to good public library practice. The handbooks will be devoted to the basic principles of librarianship as they apply to the small public library. The guides, which will accompany the handbooks, will be specific aids in handling the day-to-day operational problems which small libraries face. The entire series will be distributed free to libraries in communities of less than 10,000 population. One of the handbooks will deal specifically with the role of the trustee of the small public library and several others in the series will be of value to library boards in working to improve their library. It is my understanding that these will be available very soon through the State library extension agency and your trustees committee may want to consider ways in which the effective use of this series can be promoted.

Thus far we have looked at some broad library goals and we have discussed some of the tools which librarians and trustees can use in reaching those objectives. It might be well at this point to give some thought to specific library needs and to identify those which require a high priority.

The stimulus provided by the Library Services Act, the increased use of library facilities by people of all ages, and the increasing national emphasis on excellence in both formal and informal education, have been accompanied by a change in the ways the library is used.

Modern readers are in a hurry; the majority come on specific missions and they expect prompt and complete service. To meet this demand more and more librarians, many with special skills, must be secured. Even today there are four or five job openings for every library school graduate and it has been estimated that by 1970 twice the present number of full-time professional librarians will be required.

Facing critical situations realistically will take courage by every segment of the library profession, but especially by library administrators and their governing authorities. An aggressive imaginative, and continuing recruitment program is essential, but it must be backed up by a number of elements. Professional responsibilities must be clearly defined and adhered to, status and working conditions of both professional and non-professional staff members improved, and salaries must be maintained at attractive levels. Scholarship, fellowship, and inservice training programs must be increased at all levels of government if our libraries are to cope with both the increasing flow of recorded information and the increasing quantity and quality of public demand for convenient access to these resources.

Library service as we have known it in the past will not meet the needs of our citizens in the years that lie ahead. Bold and imaginative planning, and action on an unprecedented scale will be required of both librarians and trustees.

The changes now taking place and those which can be foreseen will call for important adjustments in the present pattern of library organization and distribution. Many of these changes have already been felt by Rhode Island because we are a small, heavily urbanized State. Tomorrow we can expect even more people particularly more young people and older people, who will be more highly educated and who will have

more leisure time. Future increases in the labor force will take place most rapidly among the professional and technical workers whose demands for research information and resources will strain the facilities of all our libraries.

In addition to the increased number of people and their changing characteristics, we should also be aware of the amazing mobility of the modern American family. They may choose to live in one community, earn their living in another, and send their children to school in a third. Already they shop, go to church, and seek their recreation on this basis, crossing city, town, county, and even State lines almost daily, often without being aware that they are doing so. The vast majority of Americans have little patience for arbitrary political boundaries which, to them, complicate rather than simplify their daily lives. They also have little tolerance for public officials who try to maintain such barriers for the benefit of a few, rather than eliminating them for the benefit of all.

Library users are as diverse and as mobile as the general population. They expect to use whatever library facility happens to be the most convenient for taking out and returning library materials. Under these circumstances, every library trustee must study carefully the kinds of library administrative structures which will give the user convenient access to all library resources. The kind of partnership I am now suggesting is that libraries at all levels should form a network of resources which will make available the widest possible range of services and materials.

The national library standards which I mentioned earlier conceive of this kind of network in a way which is not projected downward from the Federal or State level, but rather is built up from the individual needs of the single reader in the local community.

As the network is formed the barriers now caused by various governmental jurisdictions will be easier to cross. A bill now before Congress would grant the consent of Congress to inter-state compacts between two or more States for the "development or operation of library facilities and services." Several States already have State legislation permitting inter-state library arrangements and at least five more States are now considering similar laws.

The attempts to erase artificial barriers to convenient library service include the possibility of statewide registration and one borrower library card which can be used anywhere within a State. In 1960, Ohio began plans for the development of a special library card to be issued by the State. This card would be honored by any community library in Ohio under certain mutually agreeable conditions. Massachusetts as part of its new State aid law, has incorporated some features of reciprocal borrowers' privileges among the libraries qualifying for State funds. Arkansas, California, and Michigan officials are also studying the feasibility and probable costs of providing this service. The point is that the particular need of the individual, and not his place of residence, will be the major consideration. This concept merits study by librarians and trustees in order to determine what legislative, administrative, and financial arrangements may be necessary.

Other efforts to provide easier access to greater resources are now achieving considerable success. The pattern of library systems in New York State, the tri-state film service in Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire, the development of regional library resource centers in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts all illustrate methods of improved accessibility to library materials.

Here then, for your consideration, are two serious problems with which Rhode Island trustees ought to be deeply concerned. We must find patterns of library organization which will function efficiently and economically to meet present and future demands. In addition, we must attract and retain skilled and experienced librarians who can put into action an adequate public library program. I believe that the library trustee has a vital role in helping to solve both of these problems. Two elements are needed and both relate to the job of being a good library trustee. One important factor is adequate financing. Good libraries staffed by good librarians cost money, and much of the responsibility for sound fiscal planning and obtaining the needed funds from appropriating bodies rests with the library board.

In the early days of publicly supported libraries, real property accounted for 75% of our wealth; today, real property accounts for only 25%. Yet local governments still rely primarily on the property tax for the support of schools and public libraries. To provide the funds needed for adequate library support new sources of revenue must be found and the size and distribution of existing library service areas must be re-evaluated.

Greater flexibility in fiscal resources must be obtained in order to provide a sound financial foundation for library services. Library trustees have an important obligation to the people they represent for striving to establish equitable means of library support. Private endowments and gifts should be encouraged. Trustees should work for maximum local support which will, of course, vary with the ability of a community to pay for all public services. The extent and type of State and Federal support should be carefully studied by both trustees and governmental officials.

The second way in which library trustees are intimately involved in working to solve these problems is through alert and vigorous leadership. Every trustee has a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of his own library. Armed with this knowledge, the trustee should begin an exploration of outer space--the space beyond the service area of his own library. He may well find that these regions are inhabitable and that the creatures there are friendly. What productive relationships can be established with your neighboring public libraries? What forms of cooperation among different types of libraries will help to improve the services from each? What role can be played by our largest urban library in Providence? What responsibility has our State Government for the development of good local libraries? Every library board and each individual trustee should come to grips with these and related questions. Then, acting through the Rhode Island Library Association, and through your own trustee committee, and local boards, the steps necessary to a systematic, statewide program of library development can be undertaken.

It is only as we lift our eyes to the horizon that we begin to develop a sense of true perspective on our daily concerns. Any plans we make for our own local libraries will be realistic and effective only if they are based on a clear view of the relationships between each library and the other library facilities and services existing throughout the State and region.

I have urged you to "work and watch your library grow" and our work may indeed be difficult. I'm sure we agree however that this work is highly important and that the rewards are great. You know of my deep commitment to the improvement of all our educational facilities. You know of my belief that the public library has a major role to play in providing the necessary educational opportunities to every citizen. If we work together as trustees, if we build effective relations with our librarians, with officials of government, and with other libraries we will accomplish our goals. If we can provide public library service of high quality, we will contribute significantly to the educational excellence of our country. To this end, let us all pledge our best efforts to work and watch our libraries grow.