

VANPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Annual Report August 1943 through July 1944.

The past twelve months, filled as they have been with new and challenging problems, interesting experiences and amusing incidents, have flown by so quickly that we can scarcely believe that the Vanport Public Library has completed its first year of operation. From a professional point of view the work has been richly rewarding both in terms of people and books. Ordering a collection of reading material for a population as heterogeneous as we have at Vanport is a thrilling experience, and talking with countless people from all sections of the country, learning their special viewpoints and particular problems, has been highly educational. We feel, too, that we have been especially privileged in having been afforded the opportunity of noting the effect upon the individual and the family unit of totally changed living habits.

Irritations have been surprisingly minor in nature we realize as we look back over our monthly reports. Although we constantly expressed concern over the disappearance of our books, we have discovered to our delight that out of a collection of 4256 volumes (exclusive of about two hundred children's books which are out on indefinite loan to the Nursery Schools) only 156 so far are permanently lost. The large amount of fine money we have accumulated during the year should amply compensate for this loss. During the winter months both staff and patrons suffered a high degree of discomfort from the temperamental tantrums of our furnace which never seemed to strike a happy medium, alternately freezing and roasting us, but we realize that our problem was not an isolated one. We feel confident that our complaints on this score will be heeded before another winter sets in.

Our initial lack of equipment (it will be remembered that when we opened our doors the desk consisted of three tables placed end to end) instead of proving a hindrance to our work spurred us on to greater



activity and the first month, without too much confusion we registered 1250 borrowers and circulated over 4000 books. Already we have outgrown our handsome but too small desk, and even though we feel that we have reduced our files to a minimum by constant weeding out of inactive registrants, we will welcome the two new sections of desk complete with drawer space which we ordered early in the summer. Completion of our cataloging to date has also filled our catalog full to overflowing and we must add at least another half dozen drawers before long.

Constant turn-over in clerical staff and the absence for the past two months because of illness of the assistant librarian have added to our administrative problems but they have tested our ingenuity in a manner which we have found highly challenging. Resultant errors in fine notices and the slipping of books have caused a few complaints, but in the main our Vanport patrons have been surprisingly kind and understanding. During the entire year we have not had one complaint of staff rudeness or even lack of graciousness, and we feel that this is of far greater importance. A truly friendly atmosphere more than compensates for a few card numbers transposed by an inexperienced clerical assistant!

A subject analysis of our book collection is comparatively heartening, for in doing our ordering we have often suspected that personal preference might have resulted in a somewhat lop-sided book stock. However, we find that the number of volumes ordered in each field is fairly consistent with the demand. For example, since over 70% of our monthly circulation has been fiction, it is logical that we have bought 1643 books of fiction. (All these in addition to the 600 or 700 borrowed from the Portland Library.) Western and mystery reprints figure prominently in this group, but we have also bought all the better fiction as it is published. Knowing that war books are apt to be of ephemeral interest only, we have tried to be especially care-



ful in our selections for purchase, and we are happy to learn that out of 694 books added in the entire field of history, only 226 deal directly with the war. This we feel is an admirable restrained number when one considers how the market is deluged with them and how persuasive much of the advertising can be.

Technical books and manuals of domestic science are naturally much in demand and we find that we have purchased 457 volumes in this class. Vanport people are especially interested in art and music and we now have a collection of 253 first-rate (we are told) books dealing with these subjects. In the field of sociology we have concentrated on books dealing with the negro problem. Out of 270 volumes more than a third are concerned with this subject. Dr. Alain Locke, noted Negro educator, on a recent visit to Portland complimented us on our "progressive collection of books." Apologetically, we note that we possess 69 religious books, but since our circulation of books on this subject has been consistently negligible, we have not felt justified in building up a larger collection. Language books number only 51 and this is not due to lack of demand, but because the technique of teaching languages has been revolutionized since the war and we have bought only the most up-to-date manuals, not many of which have been published for general distribution.

Vanport people clamor for books of humorous cartoons and we have bought copies of all published recently, classifying them with American humor rather than under art as many other librarians do. This may account partially for the 245 books we own under the heading of literature, but the librarian's personal tastes may also have something to do with the relatively large number purchased in this field. Biography is not as popular at Vanport as it is elsewhere, but we believe that a well-rounded collection must contain good biographical works so



we have bought 187 volumes in this field. High school students, reading on assignment have borrowed most of them from time to time.

As far as library publicity is concerned, we have tried to take advantage of every opportunity but we know that in spite of having registered more than 4300 residents of Vanport, we have reached only a small proportion of the population. Our folder advertising the Vanport libraries was widely circulated and highly complimented with many people requesting copies "to send the folks back home," but we have not been able to rival the shopping centers which receive hundreds of copies of True Story Magazine and are all sold out by noon of the same day. Under the sponsorship of Project Services we tried to have a series of afternoon book talks with a view toward organizing a book club, but no listeners, apart from a few teachers appeared, so we gave up. However, the librarian was asked to speak before numerous groups in Portland and Vancouver during the year and she eagerly complied in an effort to spread a little much needed favorable publicity about Vanport and its citizens. An article written by the librarian (really a report of our initial adventures in librarianship here) was given first place in the January issue of The Library Journal, and elicited comments from as far away as Washington D.C. A feature story based on this article and written by Margaret Thompson Hill appeared in the Sunday Oregonian under the title "Test Tube Library" and also brought forth some interested queries. Mrs. Hedges, publicity director for the Portland Housing Authority calls us frequently and uses any items we give her in her Vanport column in The Shipbuilder.

Since we believe implicitly that the library should constitute the community center we feel that it should have available all possible community information, so last Fall we ordered a large bulletin board but it has not arrived as yet, so we have had to get along with the two



small ones we have. A bi-weekly paragraph in the Neighborhood Bulletin and a bi-weekly annotated list of new books in the School Bulletin, with extra copies for distribution in the library, constitute our only other publicity channels, and results from them have been surprisingly gratifying.

With the library located directly across the street from the Vanport Hospital it was an easy matter to establish hospital service, so each week we wheel our book truck through the traffic and into all the wards in order that the patients may have books to read while they are convalescing. The gratitude of many of these people is very touching and if a particular book is requested which is not on the truck, it is only a matter of minutes before an assistant can run back across the street and procure it. Busy hospital staff members take advantage of this service frequently also.

(We want expecially to stress the importance of our inter-library loan with the <sup>L A P ?</sup>Portland Library for without it we could not have given as nearly adequate service as we feel that we have. The Portland Library staff members who selected the initial collection could not have possible foreseen our specific demands and it has been a tremendous advantage for us to have a large and diversified collection to draw upon. Many of our patrons from other large metropolitan areas have been particularly impressed when we have told them that we would be able to fulfill a request for some unusual book in a few days. time.)

The contribution made by Miss Nell Unger, Librarian of the Portland Library to the success of our year's work is immeasurable. The many hours spent by her in planning the building and equipment have borne fruit in the ease with which we have become a smoothly functioning library. Her wise counsel and friendly understanding have



helped to unravel many administrative snags and her constant personal interest in our professional welfare has been a great inspiration to us.

The splendid cooperation we have enjoyed with the administrative staff of the Vanport Schools under whose general supervision we have worked is also deserving of special commendation. Not once have any of our requisitions been refused, and we have been given an entirely free hand in serving our public in the manner we thought best. Our experiment in cataloging the school library books along with our own has worked out very well we believe, and only the problem of speedy distribution remains to be solved.

With the circulation of books abnormally low in public libraries throughout the country during war time, and considering that the spring exodus from Vanport took many of our best readers back to their homes in the middle West, we do not feel too discouraged by our modest circulation statistics. We know that good will cannot be measured, but judging by the friendly greetings we receive daily on the streets of Vanport, on the busses going to and from the city, and from the comments we hear in the library, we have found a secure place in the community. That is what we have striven for, and that is what we feel certain we have attained. Our future course lies in the same direction.

Respectfully submitted,

*Eleanor Touhey*

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