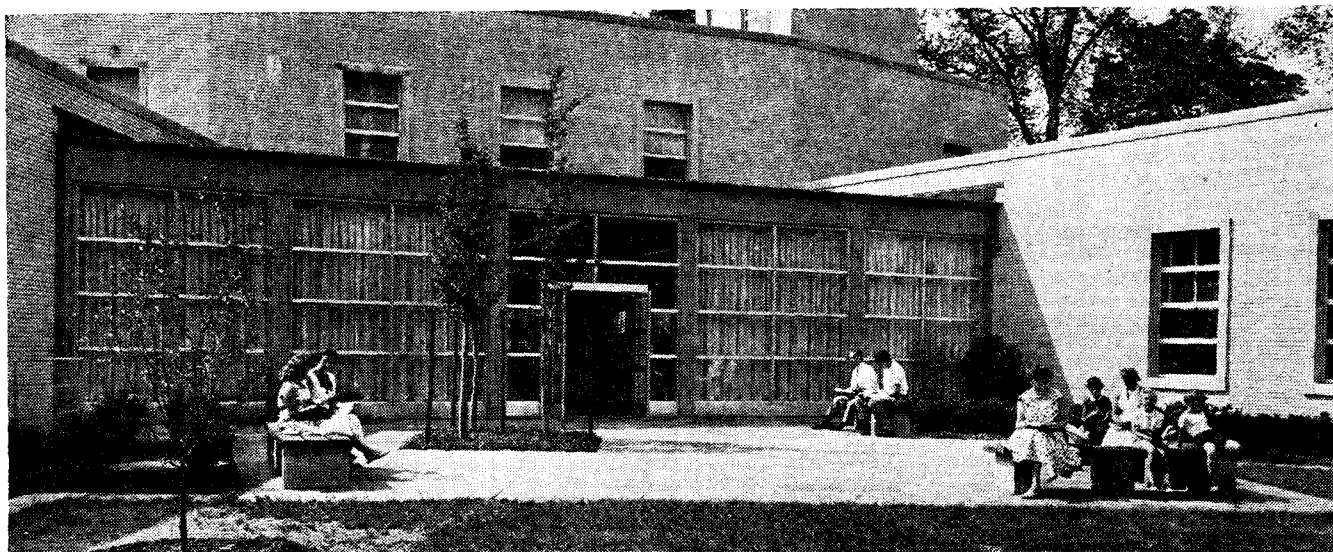


NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK



—Patio, Flushing Branch, Queens Borough (N.Y.) Public Library—Arden Studio.

“Wake Up and Read!” is the theme of the first National Library Week, March 16-22. Sponsored by the National Book Committee and the American Library Association, this vigorous celebration will bring to the attention of the American people the importance of reading to the individual and to the nation as a whole. The first emphasis of

Library Week will be on the libraries of the United States. Beyond that it will focus attention on the significance of the school, college, and home libraries. On this and the following pages of this issue of SR are controversial and informative articles which indicate how much libraries and reading are a part of our daily existence.

1. The Library's Business Is Books

By LELAND HAZARD, *Vice-President and General Counsel, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company.*

THE American library could disappear. I don't mean to say that the familiar edifices—from the panelled, Renaissance halls of New York's famed archives, guarded by lions couchant, to the red-brick Carnegie memorial tucked cozily away on the town square—are likely to crumble and vanish. Buildings are made of concrete and steel, and will survive. But the library's function may wither away. It's easy enough to affirm that the libraries are “couriers of culture”; our fathers and grandfathers taught us that, and we take it for granted. But what if our society's notions of culture radically change? What if we come no longer to care for the kind of “culture” the library was designed to enhance? What if we no longer care to read, and lose most of our skill at it? What if we no

longer care to relate the information we can find in libraries to the problems of our lives? Then the library has died.

There are some small but perceptible signs that a serious undermining of the library's poise in our society has already commenced. But these signs are masked by the fact that never have there existed so many libraries, and never have so many persons—from schoolchildren first introduced to the stacks by their teachers to retired elders reading yesterday's newspapers in the corner—felt free to make use of the library's facilities. Not for America the austere-ities of the great Alexandrian collection, reserved for kings and priests and famous savants; it is more usual with us to class the library among the prominent meeting-houses of the community, with rooms in the basement for citizens' clubs and staff ready to act as secretariat.

However, if the library is expected to take the place of a meeting-house

and community recreation-room, how well can it function as a library—the quiet repository of records ordered for thought, word, and study? How can a trained librarian perform properly her primary job when she is constantly overwhelmed by the sort of questions which follow, taken from a real-life example (and presumably asked by individuals who had somehow passed through the public schools):

1. “What is the meaning of the word ‘Obviescence’?” Of course the dictionaries fail to disclose such a word. But the inquirer may be a taxpayer; so he is courteously asked for an illustration, which comes quickly enough: “Time is of the essence.”

2. “Where can I get married?” The question comes often, and the librarian knows that the young lady means, where can she get married *quickly* without waiting unduly for the holy bonds of wedlock to enfold her. (From Pittsburgh it means a drive to Maryland.)

3. “My friend has been acquitted in court. What is the proper note of congratulation?”

4. A male patron comes in person



for filmed copies of a certain story in a certain newspaper of a certain date. It develops that he has just finished his prison sentence for assault, journalese for rape, and now wishes some copies of the published account.

5. "I am going to take a vacation. Please tell me in what states the gasoline and liquor taxes are lowest?"

And so it goes. What is the best toaster, washing machine, radio; how much is spent annually for gambling (a question which seems to assume that all gamblers lose); how do I give a cocktail party; which books on the Civil War have been written by Harvard professors; compare the Brazilian and African forests; what shall I call my baby girl, I had expected a boy (this question comes from excited fathers); I saw an article about a streetcar trip from Pittsburgh to Chicago—is that possible; where does the Mona Lisa hang; how can we best spend a thousand dollars for a business library; tell me something about the apple in myth and literature—just a short paragraph?

SHALL we show our disgust, we intellectuals, and remind the taxpayers in our raw America that the modern dictionary, the book index, bibliography, and the specialized journal are but recent techniques of administration in a vast proliferation of facts, comments, opinions, and mere phrases—all, according to I. A. Richards, too extensive and diverse to form any coherent, much less directing or confirming, view of essential human purpose. Or shall we laugh in the cloisters of our monastic intellectualism. Neither, I think. We do not have enough votes to implement our disgust. And the sensitivity which brings us laughter will also bring us tears that our earnest America, however intellectually awkward and naive, should wish so much to be right, should believe so deeply that all questions are answerable.

This almost superstitious faith in the adequacy of the library for any human problem has its counterpart in our indiscriminate demands upon universal education. We say that in a democracy we must have an informed

citizenry. It sounds right. But informed of what—vast congeries of specifics, each good for the momentary need and, so far as the learner knows, unrelated to anything else, or a few fundamentals, difficult to learn but, once learned, anchors to hold the citizen in place as the torrents of trivia rush past?

I enjoy the story of the little boy who, when criticized by his parents for low marks in arithmetic, retorted, "Yes, but I got a '100' in postwar planning." One of the more bitter critics of modern elementary and secondary education complains, "We parents used to take our children to the zoo and the schools taught them arithmetic; now the schools take them to the zoo and we teach them arithmetic at home."

I disclaim any pretense to expert judgment in this field. But I have had some contact with certain aspects of the problem. For example, our educational television station in Pittsburgh, WQED, has occupied a considerable part of my time for several years. More often than not I am advised to drop the word educational. There will be more viewers if we call it community television or anything but educational, it is maintained. In the work of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development cultural affairs are assigned to a committee of which I have been chairman. Frequently we are advised to avoid the word cultural as much as possible. Every plain fact, whether in education, business, politics, or other realm of thought, must be treated as a numerator and carefully placed above a denominator of great magnitude. To change the figure, no Jovian bolt of thought must frighten the least sparrow in our tender democracy.

So it is that we may have to consider the possibility of libraries without new books. I do not think that this will be the case, but we must face the possibility. For one thing, the cost of publishing books is increasingly precarious. Granville Hicks points out that when a serious novel could sell for \$2.50 the publisher would take the risk if he thought two to three thousand copies would sell. At \$3.50-\$5 the number must increase to five thousand copies. At that number the I.Q.'s seem to be short, as the economists would say, on the demand side. And he concludes dolefully, after having stirred up a small town to the Herculean task of achieving a modest library, "Some of the persons who worked hardest on the building have never taken a book from the library and never will. . . ."

There is some basis for Mr. Hicks's pessimism. Other agencies of mass communication reach far larger groups

and reach them more frequently and regularly. The public library cannot match this quantitative distribution without a drastic revolution in its operations. Radio, the pictorial magazine, film, and television all raise questions about the future of the printed word. High-school texts give increasing space to pictures and illustrations.

And now as we Americans become increasingly aware of the more than a billion and a half people outside our Western World ken, we learn of whole preliterate societies showing signs of skipping print entirely and going directly from the oral tradition to the screen image.

WHEN I was in Japan recently a Tokyo newspaper executive talked with me at length about his hard-headed businessman's dream of a television hookup to reach to the innermost depths of Asia. "Words cannot educate Asia," he told me; "there are too many languages and there is too much incurable illiteracy. But pictures can do it." Then he painted in words the scene of lonely cameldrivers learning by television under the Asian stars.

The president of the American Great Books Foundation says that, "It may well be that the Toynbee of the twenty-fifth century will record in the ebb and flow of the human race that it took man more than 200,000 years to move from the cave to the printing press, and then there was a moment when reading written words became almost fashionable, only to die out quickly before the onslaught of pictures, inertia, speed, and the sense of impending disaster." One recent *Pittsburgh Press Magazine*, under the caption "Is Your Hobby Really Fun?" produced sixty suggestions for seven categories of tired workers, but reading was proposed only twice—a 3 per cent claim on their leisure time.

I am aware of the various movements to take down the walls of libraries and museums: to bring in television sets, make the library a community center, entertain the fans of Jackie Gleason and hold meetings of the Great Books discussion group and Alcoholics Anonymous by night and of the Garden and the Poetry Clubs by day. The Louisville (Kentucky) Library has a great collection of records from which learning and culture are piped to the schools, hospitals, and other institutions; has its own FM radio station whose call letters, WFPK, stand for "World's Finest Public Culture"—culture spelled with a "K." W. Stephen Thomas, chairman of the U. S. Committee for the International Campaign

for Museums, puts it this way: "We museum people everywhere have altered our viewpoint. We used to think of ourselves rather strictly as custodians of the treasures of civilization. Our best efforts were directed toward leaving a completed artistic record for the benefit of future generations. Now we believe that our first duty is to educate, inform, and—yes—amuse people who are living right now."

THIS hedonism may be all right. It sounds alert to changing times. "other directed." But we "inner directed" people have not yet entirely lost in the mass conformity our power of protest. I think that recipients of "Kulture" from libraries and museums may suffer no particular harm; may indeed acquire some benefits. But I am apprehensive about the loss of the cloister. And I am concerned about mass library programs of the type which have brought many of our public schools and many of our universities to mediocrity, deprived them of the energy and the will to educate best the most educable of our people.

If taking down the walls of our libraries and museums is to substitute noise and clutter for quiet and order; if there is to be no cell for the scholar, or not enough cells for scholars; if too much time of librarians is to be devoted to what any and every taxpayer may opine, or to what may favorably or unfavorably affect tax money appropriations, then the library function is imperiled.

We must ask ourselves whether the printed word is still important. It is not necessary to disparage radio, pictures, and television to say a word for the printed word. David Riesman says that the book, "like an invisible monitor, helps liberate the reader from his group and its emotions, and allows the contemplation of alternative responses and the trying on of new emotions . . . opens doors within and closes doors without."

We dare not discourage and so lose our writers. It is in the book that the writer, the thinker, makes his commitment for all time, agrees to stand alone, unafraid and unashamed of his thoughts, impressed forever upon the page which men yet unborn will hate or love only to find themselves and the course of enduring life changed. The book is the catalyst which brings into reaction the thoughts and emotions of the changing generations, the record from which men extrapolate from the ephemeral now to the eternal future.

What if there be but a few who read the book? They are, as they have always been, those who nurture the flickering flame of culture—spelled

with a "c." And no means yet devised tells in advance who shall come to keep these vigils. But when they come, there must be for them the

quiet place, the withdrawn place, where the old record may speak, far from the sound of the crowd, to fresh minds and to new hearts.

BECAUSE OF CUTS IN OUR BUDGET
WE ARE FORCED TO
LIMIT DIRECT PUBLIC SERVICE

READERS' SERVICE, FILM SERVICE
AND REFERENCE SERVICE
WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE UNTIL NOON ON
TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY
BEGINNING JUNE 1st

THE CIRCULATION DESK WILL BE OPEN.
**BOOKS MAY BE BORROWED
AND RETURNED AS USUAL**
IF NO ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED

THE STAFF ON DUTY ARE WORKING ON THE
ROUTINES WHICH MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU
TO HAVE MAXIMUM ASSISTANCE DURING THE
OTHER HOURS IN THE WEEK.

FURTHER CURTAILMENT IN SERVICE INCLUDES:
FEWER BOOKS, FEWER COPIES OF POPULAR TITLES,
REDUCTION IN MAGAZINE AND NEWSPAPER
SUBSCRIPTIONS, LIMITED PURCHASE OF NEW
RECORDINGS AND FILMS.

—BOARD OF TRUSTEES—FITCHBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY

2. The Battle of the Sign

By JOHN R. TUNIS, *sportswriter
and author of boys' fiction.*

WHAT is a public library? A public library is more than a building on Main Street. It is not just another city institution. It is not a collection of books on steel shelves. A public library is people: a janitor, a cataloguer, a librarian with a widowed mother. This is the story of one of those libraries.

Fitchburg, Massachusetts, is a town of 43,000, about fifty miles northeast of Boston. In short, a typical New England industrial city. The present mayor of Fitchburg, "Farmer Bray," is something of a character. A real dirt farmer from the environs, Hedley Bray was first elected two years ago on a reform ticket. His chief reforms proved to be slashing the municipal budget and eliminating what he terms "political fat." Thus, he threw out plans for revising the school system and replacing some of the 100-year old buildings; refused to allow new appointments whenever city employees

died or resigned. He assumed control of the Public Works Department, neglecting to salt the streets of the hilly town in winter. Through a period of rising costs, he cut all appropriations. But it wasn't until he took on the public library that any city department fought back.

The 1957 operating budget of the library was \$2,450 less than in 1956, which was itself \$2,700 below the 1955 figure. Thus, the heart of library services to the public was over \$5,000 less than two years previously, at a time when the cost of books was up 40 per cent and the cost of supplies up 70 per cent. Consequently, Miss Ruth Hyatt, the librarian, made a study of ways and means to retrench. A meeting of the board of trustees accepted her report, which suggested suspension of service from the Readers and Reference desks three mornings a week, fewer films, books, periodicals, records, newspapers, as well as less work with children in the city schools. A letter to the mayor explaining these cuts was signed by Mrs. George R.