

**PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
HELD AT COLORADO SPRINGS,
COLORADO JUNE 2-7, 1920; PP.135-360**

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AMERICAN LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

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JUNE 2-7, 1920

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1920

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COLORADO SPRINGS CONFERENCE

JUNE 2-7, 1920

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND THE LIBRARY WORKER

By CHALMERS HADLEY, Librarian, Public Library, Denver, Colorado

Reposing in a secluded corner of our book stacks and disturbed only by the brush of the vacuum cleaner, stand the dark clad *Papers and Proceedings* of the American Library Association. Like a row of elderly people, decently attired in black, who sit quietly on their porch and watch the busy world pass by, these books view the scurrying readers who seldom pause before their shelves. And yet, like the quiet elderly people, whom they fancifully represent, what energy, what enthusiasm, what ardent desires lie concealed beneath their somber attire.

The *Papers and Proceedings* of the A. L. A. not only contain the enthusiasm and the library history of the past, but in their pages are the hopes and plans of Winsor and Poole, of Dewey, Crunden, Legler, Miss Plummer and Mr. Brett, for the high accomplishment of library work on this continent. Few fundamentals in library work have since been voiced that were not comprehended in principle by the founders of this Association.

Many of the present cries for professional standards are but echoes from these same *Proceedings*, but what a gap there is between the principles enunciated and their actual, definite accomplishment in the present. It is sad to see the visions of the past remain so frequently as dreams. It is more sad to realize that the Association itself, after calling forth such visions, was, through lack of sufficient organization and financial means, unable to galvanize many of them into life.

Following the annual conference of the Association a year ago, a committee was appointed to investigate the causes of this condition, to take an inventory of the pos-

sibilities of the American Library Association, and to make recommendations for the future. It was to act as a sieve, as it were, and screen for present use the valuable from the valueless past. It was to outline a program in an attempt to bring the resources of this Association for a definite contribution to existing problems, and it was to suggest the means of financing this effort, if made. After months of work, the Committee submitted a tentative program for the A. L. A. which not only sought to outline the definite problems within the Association itself, but also to suggest possible activities and co-operation between the A. L. A. and other agencies.

The program as submitted by the Committee was never a finished product, nor was it a contract calling for the performance of specific duties. It did embody many suggestions from past experience, for the betterment of library conditions in the present, with a suggested application of effort which the Association's achievement during the war gave hope for success.

The scope of the Program and the diversity of library interests involved, brought an equally diversified response. Proposed work with the Merchant Marine and the continuation of library work with the Lighthouse Service, could not arouse fever heat in this land-locked interior which has never seen salt water since it emerged from the sea. Library extension service among the scattered Rocky mountain libraries meant much more to us than did the proposed International Index of Humanistic Literature. Books for the blind aroused the interest and sympathy of all

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of us, as the proposed standardization and national certification of librarians aroused our general apprehension.

But to me the specific suggestions made by the Committee were relatively unimportant, for the proposed Enlarged Program in its significance and import is immeasurably greater than the sum of its recommendations. It was also relatively unimportant what the Program advocated and what it ignored, as compared to what the Enlarged Program represents and signifies in American library history. To me it means that the library workers in this country, comparatively small in number, representing varied types, scattered over a vast territory, nearly submerged in the vortex of surrounding commercial and industrial life, and quite inexperienced in the harsher side of that life—these workers decided to use what strength they had acquired, particularly during their war service, and to make for themselves and their work a place in the sun. We have realized that precious as is our heritage as represented by the *Papers* of this Association, they will remain mere "scraps of paper" if their potentialities are not given a better outlet for realization than the A. L. A. has heretofore provided.

But I am not here to represent the Enlarged program at this time, but as president of the A. L. A. for this last year, to say that in my opinion this Association cannot limit its concern to any program that does not concern itself with a more definite, intensive development as well. The A. L. A. today cannot afford any policy of *laissezfaire* or propose any program whether enlarged or restricted, that does not consider more fully than has ever been done before, its definite relations and concern with the well-being of our library workers.

I am not so concerned with the high priests in our profession who have access to that library holy of holies, the trustees' room. They are quite able to take care of themselves. But we must concern ourselves as never before with the inarticulate thousands of fellow library workers,

toward whom the A. L. A. has inadvertently been too remote, indirect and impersonal. Our present constitution reads, "The object of the American Library Association shall be to promote the welfare of libraries in America," and to meet the present crisis, this must be changed to read, "The objects of the American Library Association shall be to promote the welfare of libraries and of library workers in America."

I believe the word "crisis" in our library affairs is used advisedly, for the present situation menaces the very stronghold of library work—its morale. It has been morale which kept librarians at a high state of effectiveness through long years, while the demands were great and the financial returns were small. It was morale which kept their eyes clear to the compensations in library work other than money received, and if morale disappears, we shall become a body of drudges irrespective of any salary returns.

It has been remarked that morale and morality are first cousins and I believe the A. L. A. must investigate this close relationship at once. A sense of injustice among library workers, whether well founded or not, must be met by full justice both from the A. L. A. and from library institutions.

We are told the loss in morale among all workers results from the reaction of war tension. Be that as it may, I believe the decrease in morale among library workers comes from other causes as well, and to protect what we may lose, we need with other things, more democracy in the organization of library institutions, salaries more commensurate with the investment made for library work, some protection to library workers in accident or disability, and definite direction and sponsorship by the A. L. A. itself in associating library workers into groups, instead of leaving them to work out their problems single-handed.

In an admirable address given at the Ottawa conference of this Association eight years ago, one speaker said, "Whatever is

done to promote the happiness and best instincts of the rank and file of a library organization will result directly in instilling in the public service rendered by them a spirit of sympathy, ready regard for the rights and needs of the public and an eagerness to serve loyally. Any library management conceived and executed in this spirit, may be depended on for achievements in what is really library economy."

The speaker of these words would be the last to advocate better working conditions solely for a larger and better output of work. Better library conditions must not be sought for only as a business investment, but as an ethical question as well, involving our fellow library workers.

In this same address the speaker continued, "Invite the confidence of every member of your staff, allow your assistants to voice the conclusions their experience and service bring home to them, listen with sympathy to suggestions prompted by loyalty and daily pondering. There are times when we may well forget our official gradings, when it will prove profitable" (and may we add Christian) "to learn from the members of the crew how our theories stand the test."

To make a general statement explicit, we must make our libraries responsive, not only to the public's demands, but also to the hearing of our library employees.

It is not easy to forget official gradings in our libraries since they have an important place in library organization, but if such gradings impose silence on any group of employees to the point of suppression and inarticulation, such organization is defective.

I entirely agree with a library assistant who recently wrote to me, "If democracy is not an empty word, it certainly must mean that our workers should be taken into the councils, where decisions governing their every-day existence are made and executed, and that no longer shall they be considered as a commodity, but as separate entities whose intelligence should and must be recognized."

It is not easy to secure self-expression for every individual in any organized group of people, and frequently the head librarian cannot be an adequate mouth-piece for his library assistants. To secure a fuller and representative expression from these workers in our larger libraries at least, I believe there should be several committees in such institutions. These committees should not concern themselves with the administrative problems and library policies for which the library trustees and the head librarian are held directly responsible. They should concern themselves with the problems and conditions in our libraries which directly affect their own physical, mental and professional welfare.

Such staff committees should not be appointed by the librarian, nor should the heads of departments be ex-officio members of them. Generally there should be no such distinctions drawn in a library's attitude towards its heads and assistants, the only permissible distinction made being between its workers and its wasters. Membership on these committees should consist of those elected as representatives by the staff members themselves. A head librarian frequently receives more credit for the excellence of his staff than he does blame for its defects. Staff representatives before a library's governing board will also help to place more properly credit or blame where either is due. Staff representation on committees will avail little unless there be points of contact between the staff and the library trustees, but we must not trespass on a later program in this conference. But as has been recently remarked, "While we may not be able to eliminate the discontent due to defects in human nature, we may remove the discontent due to harsh, discouraging, depressing and unfair conditions of work."

Library salaries have advanced sharply in many cities this last year, but taking the country over, they remain a menace to library morale. Statistics on library salaries and conditions have been numerous, but may we call attention to the ad-

mirable and latest survey just made by the Chicago Library Club, of the 27 libraries in the Chicago library district, doubtless a typical one in this country. To quote and summarize: there are 109 unfilled library positions in this district. The proportion of salary expenditures to library incomes varies from 19 to 68 per cent, the average being 47 per cent. Three libraries report provision made for automatic salary increases within certain limits. Of the ten libraries connected with educational institutions, only three of the nine replying report salaries equal to those of faculty members. One librarian, a library school graduate with over ten years' experience, who works eight to nine hours a day, receives less than the lowest paid stenographer in the college office. In the industrial and commercial world, the regular rate for over-time work is 150 per cent of that paid for work within hours. Only one library in Chicago and vicinity pays this rate and then for holidays only. Salary increases have varied from ten to 100 per cent, while the cost of living in Chicago advanced 94 per cent. Only two libraries reduce working hours in summer from the winter schedule. Six libraries report a conscious effort made to vary work and relieve fatigue and monotony. A sabbatical year is unheard of. Sick leave is general. Four libraries have staff organizations. Only one-third of the libraries report any attempt to provide lockers, rest and lunch rooms for their employees. Only eight of the 27 libraries report that individual soap and towels are provided. Only three, all municipal libraries, provide employees' pension systems or retiring allowances. These conditions, as set forth in the Chicago survey, doubtless are typical of the country.

Salary raises during the last year have advanced the minimum considerably, but I do not believe the salaries of the better educated, specially trained or experienced library employees show a proportionate increase. Ten or 15 dollars a month's difference in salary does not sufficiently represent the usual difference in value be-

tween a college or university graduate with one or two years library school training, as compared to a high school graduate with six weeks' training in a summer library school. The difference in minimum salaries paid in different libraries of the same type emphasizes the need of a stabilizing influence in this country. When we hear of a minimum salary of \$480 a year paid in one institution, and of a \$1,500 minimum proposed in another, we believe the American Library Association should lead the way in establishing some proposed market value for library work. No market price can be placed on pronounced native talent or unusual personality for library work, but it can apply to the average library assistant on a basis of education, special training or experience. Some stabilizing influence and a fair market value must be brought forward, based on a dollar's purchasing power in decent, healthful living conditions and some recreational life. If this is not done, we may soon see one city depleted and another surfeited with library assistants, a condition detrimental to both.

Fortunately there are many compensations other than salary in library work, but an increasing number of library employees are unable longer to afford them. On a strictly money basis, considering the necessary education, special training or experience required, library work at present is not a paying investment. A year ago the National League of Women Workers called attention to the bad example we were setting, for not only were library workers underpaid, but this by comparison was preventing workers in other educational and social fields from obtaining what otherwise would be granted them. Our municipalities have not yet granted their library employees what the individuals comprising those municipalities expect and take for themselves.

The question of retiring allowances for library employees has been pertinent this last year and Mr. Kaiser's recent presentation of this was excellent. Those of you who have seriously considered this ques-

tion, quickly realized that its appearance of simplicity was deceptive. If you are not so convinced, examine Mr. Lewis Meriam's authoritative book, *Principles Governing the Retirement of Public Employees*, and realize that this subject as applied to library employees, should receive the best thought of this Association. The question is too complicated for a discussion now, except to say, that it too, greatly affects the morale of library workers. The usual two sides of a question are evident, in this case the employer and employee.

On the one hand is the library worker, whose morale cannot but be affected, when her community demands some education and many personal qualifications of her, and while she serves by helping it to see and think clearly, it pays in return a salary barely sufficient for her to live as the community expects, not to mention its insufficiency to afford protection against the accidents of life. No responsible library worker can long give her best spirit and enthusiasm in her work, with the specter of unprotected old age ever peering at her from the future.

On the other hand are the claims of the library board and the city or state. To paraphrase Meriam, some objects which the library's governing board will obtain through retiring allowances include: the elimination from its active force of those who have lost their efficiency because of advancing years or too long service; elimination of those who have lost efficiency through accident or disease; the retention in the service of the best of its present employees, many of whom, without such a system, will resign to work elsewhere; the attraction to library work, because of the protection offered, of a higher grade of service; the general improvement of morale in the staff by eliminating the inadequate workers and so removing stagnation by opening advanced positions to the ambitious ones.

But, you may say, this is the work of individual libraries; what has the A. L. A. to do with all this. This is true, but as

the representative organization of library work and workers in this country, the A. L. A. should take the initiative, define the principles and then drive them home. The great defect in the past has been the inability of this Association to transform its convictions into actualities, and this has resulted largely from the lack of acquaintance and relationship between the A. L. A. and the library trustees of the country.

But it seems to me the greatest present service the A. L. A. can do for library workers and for itself is to sponsor and direct the spirit of organization which exists today among our people. The desire to organize is everywhere rife, and library employees have responded by joining staff associations, labor unions and the Library Workers' Association.

The A. L. A. should recognize this spirit immediately and officially, and without distinguishing between the departmental head or junior assistant, the specially trained or the untrained, men or women, organize these employees into groups or chapters and then assist in directing their activities.

I believe the American Library Association should define the proper and improper activities of these groups, issue charters for their organization, and then sponsor and support them in the activities which the A. L. A. itself believes are right. In return, membership in these local chapters should require also, membership in the American Library Association itself. Chapters could be organized in the larger libraries, while those in smaller cities and towns could be grouped together into one chapter. Provision should be made to take over as chapters such existing library clubs and staff associations as wish the support and united strength which such an organization will give.

Some of our members in eastern public and western university libraries have affiliated themselves with the American Federation of Labor. The proposal that the American Library Association organize its workers under its own direction, is not