

THE COLORED BRANCHES OF THE LOUISVILLE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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they will be remembered by some of them and it may lead them to want to know more of the children of other countries and perhaps to the reading of French."

This was twenty-one years ago in the era of the first art wave which swept over American schools leaving a trail of the old masters in the form of Perry pictures and all sorts of prints.

School rooms and libraries were decorated with pictures and busts bearing little or no relation to the interests of children and contributing nothing to the atmosphere of the place. Such a book as Boutet de Monvel's "Joan of Arc" was purchased by libraries for their art departments rather than for their children's rooms, where it has so long been a favorite book that few remember how rash seemed the children's librarian who first ordered it for the use of children.

"What do you think of the Bookshop?" asked Miss Hewins. "I think it is a dream come true and I wish every librarian might not merely see the room but realize what lies behind it," was my reply.

For I believe that Miss Mahony has dramatized and produced in the Bookshop for Boys and Girls our old slogan for library work with children, "The right book for the right child at the right time," and that she has done it in a way to enlist the interest and inspire the confidence of a book-loving and book-buying public. The shop, like the catalog, is up-to-date, yet no good thing out of the past is missing.

Neither a children's library nor a bookshop can long survive if it remains static or segregates books for boys and girls to the exclusion of great books for young and

old—great thoughts out of the present as well as out of the past must find a place there in books and in pictures. So I am not surprised to note in the list of vacation reading recently issued by the Bookshop the headings "Our allies," "The war," "Books for young and old." I should wish to add to the list "The letters of Victor Chapman," with the memoir by his father, John Jay Chapman, whose paper on "Children's reading," read at the Conference last year, was Miss Plummer's last gift to our work for children in public libraries. The book is one of those rare memorial tributes in which we feel a sure sense of life from childhood to the heroic aviator who met his death in France on June 24, 1916.

May I, in closing, speak from the first generation of children's librarians to those who are taking up the work in a new era—I believe far greater and richer opportunities for service are to be yours in the next twenty years. You are *living* history from hour to hour. We were trying to bring in pictured fragments—bits of France, of England, of Germany, of Scandinavia, of Russia, of Japan and of China, with the hope that we might enlarge ever so little the world of the American boy and girl. We assumed that the great principles of freedom, liberty and human rights were assured by our democracy, we celebrated our Independence Day and the birthdays of Lincoln and Washington as days of remembrance.

The call to you is to revive and recreate in your children's rooms feeble memories of great principles, of great ideas and great ideals and make sure that the children of today are in touch with them.

## THE COLORED BRANCHES OF THE LOUISVILLE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY BERNICE W. BELL, *Head Children's Department, Free Public Library, Louisville, Ky.*

The organization of the Louisville Free Public Library is unique owing to the fact that we have a library system within a system. Libraries exclusively for the colored citizens of Louisville conducted by

colored librarians under the supervision of our librarian, Mr. George T. Settle, have passed the experimental stage and their value is recognized.

The establishment of this library system

for colored people was begun in 1905 and the twelve years that have passed since its organization have been years of steady growth. The success of our experiment and the value of the Colored Branch libraries as laboratories for the study of the colored race have attracted the attention of other cities desiring to provide library facilities for their colored citizens. Houston, Texas, Memphis, Tenn., and Evansville, Ind., have branches and their librarians have studied in the apprentice class conducted by the Louisville Free Public Library.

At first it was difficult for our colored citizens to realize the fact that they were to have a library system of their own. In no other place in America was there such a system and there were only a few who realized the educational, civic and social advantage it would prove to the race in the years to come. Our colored children's librarian has made the following statement in regard to the advantage of colored libraries: "We know our own people; we know each teacher by name; we know the ministers, the doctors, the lawyers, the merchants and most of the others who frequent our libraries. Those of another race cannot know our wants, our habits, our likes and our dislikes as we do. They are not thrown among us in the various walks of life and are therefore not as competent to deal with us as we ourselves are—if we are prepared. However much they might try it would be impossible for them to give us the service that one of our own race can give in an atmosphere where service and freedom are the predominant elements; and this is surely the condition in the colored branches in Louisville."

Although the colored people of our city were not a reading people, in this atmosphere of "service and freedom" there has been a growing interest on their part which is very gratifying. This evening I shall confine myself to the children using the colored branches, as our interest is chiefly with them.

When the library was opened the children responded readily to our school visit-

ing and accepted joyously our invitation to attend the story hour. We have always made quite a feature of the story hour at both branches and it has meant much in the recreational and social life of the children. It has also been a means of directing their reading. Several years ago Prof. Joseph S. Cotter, principal of the S. Coleridge Taylor Colored Public School, suggested having at the close of the story hour season a Story Telling Contest among the children. He offered a prize to the child who could best reproduce a story heard at one of the story hours during the year. The popularity of this contest among both children and adults led to our organizing it as a permanent part of the work. The rules governing the contest are, in part, as follows:

#### Rules Governing Contest

"There shall be a story-telling contest at the Western and Eastern colored branches, and a final contest between the winners; with a first, second, third, etc., prize awarded to both the primary and intermediate grades at both branches. The names of the winners in the final contest shall be placed on a loving cup, which is to be the property of the library and exhibited equally in both branches. The cup is to be known as the "Cotter Story-Telling Contest Cup."

The number of children entering shall be limited to eight at each branch, four from the primary grades (1-4) and four from the intermediate grades (5-8). Each child entering shall have attended at least eight story hours during the year; shall be a registered borrower of the library and in good standing; shall be a regular attendant at school and the teacher's report may be required if necessary.

"The story told at the contest must be one heard at the story hour during the year. The judges shall be selected from the principals and teachers of the public schools, ministers or other colored citizens interested in education."

This year many more children than the limited number desired to enter. From among those applying sixteen children were chosen, eight using the Eastern Colored Branch and eight using the Western.

The two first-prize children at each branch contested before the Kentucky Negro Educational Association for the

honor of having their names engraved on the Cotter Story-Telling Contest Loving Cup. The loving cup was given by the library. At the close of this paper Blyden Jackson, aged six, who won the primary prize in the final contest this year, will tell the "Ginger bread boy," and Virginia Allen, aged 10, who won the intermediate prize, will tell "The fisherman and his wife."

Special entertainments, story hours and clubs mean far more in the life of the colored child than in the life of the average white child. He owns few toys or books; in fact, recreation in any form is almost unknown to the large majority.

For this reason we feel that one of the greatest services the library can render the colored people is to develop the community center idea by giving them branch library buildings exclusively for their own use. They need it, as poverty, ignorance and a lack of race pride have prevented friendly coöperative intercourse of the race. The auditoriums and classrooms in the colored branches of Louisville may be used at any time for non-political meetings. The club meetings held in the two branches last year numbered 498.

We endorse all of these activities and believe that clubs among the adults foster civic pride, stimulate and encourage general education and elevate the social life of the colored people. Through clubs and story hours for the children we can to some extent direct their reading, but we feel that it is only when the schools take a deep interest in the subject that all the children, white and colored, can be led to form the right reading habits.

In our city the interdependence of the school and the library is recognized by both institutions. The head of the children's department meets frequently with the supervisors of the public schools to consider ways and means of interesting white and colored parents and teachers in the children's reading and also the best way to encourage children to read the books suitable for their age and grade.

One method we have used to interest the

parents and teachers in the children's reading has been to compile a booklet entitled "Reading according to school grading." This booklet, which contains lists of stories to tell, books to read aloud and books for the child's own reading, was compiled jointly by the supervisor of the kindergarten and primary grades and the head of the children's department and printed by the library. It has been brought to the notice of parents through talks to Parent-Teacher Associations on juvenile literature and kindred subjects. The percentage of colored parents interested in this subject has been very small and we reach their children principally through the colored teachers.

Another method was to take a survey of reading in the fourth and sixth grades throughout the city. We were impressed by the fact that the colored children who are reading are using library books. In taking this survey the children were given slips of paper calling for the author and title of some book they enjoyed. We all were very anxious to see just what the children would write and in no instance was the child's choice influenced by supervisor, principal or teacher. The slips did not bear the library imprint and the children were not told that the library was interested in their choice.

A very small percentage of the slips, less than two, were illegible or not filled in at all and had to be cast aside. Those that could be used proved to be material for a study of what books children would select when given about fifteen minutes for thought on the subject.

From the colored schools, out of 636 returns in the fourth and sixth grades there were only sixteen books mentioned not recommended by the library. You may be interested to know that these were Alger books. Out of one thousand eight hundred and ninety four (1,894) slips returned by the children in the fourth grade of the white schools, twelve per cent were titles not recommended by the library. These were books in series like the Motor Boys and the Boy Aviators. The per cent in the

sixth grade was slightly higher. Another interesting and encouraging feature was the fact that not a child mentioned a vicious book.

These results certainly seem to indicate that our colored staff was correct when they made the statement that Good Book Week, Christmas exhibits and lectures as a means of enlisting public opinion *against certain types of mediocre and pernicious books* need not be pushed among the colored people to the extent necessary among the white. Colored parents can buy few books, are not particularly interested in Sunday School libraries and trust without question the librarian's judgment in the selection of juvenile books.

This is true in Louisville and very likely true throughout the South, where the schools and libraries are entirely separate. It is interesting to note in this connection that the proportion of fiction in the colored libraries varies according to the season of the year from about twenty per cent to forty per cent, the average being thirty-seven.

It is most necessary, though, to use some means of publicity to advertise the library among the many who think it is only for the best-educated colored people. There is only one way this idea can be uprooted and that is through making the children love the library. Very little can be done with the thousands of illiterate adults.

Kentucky has one of the best child labor laws in the United States. Our children, white and colored, must attend school until they are fourteen. This law is strictly enforced in Louisville. Here is our opportunity to see and know the children and we make every possible use of it. They are visited regularly in the school and invited to the library.

At a recent meeting of the supervisors of the schools and head of the children's department, it was decided that visits to the library during school hours by the children with their teachers would be an excellent plan to bring the library to the notice of all children, white and colored. Our superintendent of schools and our

librarian were very much in favor of the children being taught the use of the catalog. Mr. Reid, superintendent of schools, allows each class one hour of school time for this instruction. Since March 1, about 4,000 children have come with their teachers for an hour's lesson in the use of the catalog. The lessons were outlined by the head of the children's department, and model lessons given at the main library. All the children were required to write a composition on their trip to the library. I have selected from many, one written by a little colored girl in grade six.

#### "OUR VISIT TO THE LIBRARY"

On receiving permission from our principal last Friday, May 8, we were taken over to the library by our teacher just after the last recess and were over there one hour. The purpose of our going was that we might from this on know how to use the library as it should be used and know how to find a book and the name or author of the book, without the assistance of the librarians unless we positively could not get along without their aid.

We all went over there prepared with a small piece of paper and our pencils ready to take a note of everything that was said so that we would not forget anything.

On entering the library we were asked by our librarian what branch the library is and we told her it is the Eastern Colored Branch Library. She also asked us the meaning of "Free and Public," to which we all expressed our ideas of free and public as meaning that anyone could get books from the library without paying and go there and read at any time they wished, and anyone who desired to could go there and that the library was not built for any special persons.

This being finished we were given information of call numbers. For example, the call number might happen to be j942

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The top number is the class number and the bottom number is the author number. The two together are the call number. The books are on the shelves numerically by the class number and alphabetically by the author number. Then we found books by their call numbers on the shelf.

The last and best of all was the use of the catalog. It was very interesting and of the greatest importance as most of us scarcely knew what a catalog looked like, especially the one in the library.

Besides the information given us we

were tested by each of us being given a drawer from the catalog and a small card bearing the name and initial of an author whose name was in the drawer and we were to find the author's name on a card in the drawer and the name of all the books that the same author had written. This was done without the least bit of trouble and she let many of us read our author's name and all the names of the books we found that he or she had written. Then we looked up a title and a subject the same way. Then we went to the shelves with our cards bearing call numbers and hunted for the books, which we found without any trouble.

I am sure we all enjoyed our visit to the library and we feel that we have been much benefited by it and that hereafter we not only know how to go into the library but that we can go in without causing any trouble whatever, and also find any kind of a book or anything we may desire."

We use the Western Colored Branch as the center from which all extension work for colored readers in the city of Louisville and Jefferson County is conducted. Graded classroom libraries are sent to the schools through the school division at this colored branch library. We require that these collections be circulated at least once a week for home reading. The teachers' interest in the class room libraries has been very much quickened recently through the introduction by the schools of a new method of reading known as "silent reading." In this system every child is required to have a different book. The library is the only institution equipped to supply this material. Interpretative reading instead of the old method of formal reading calls for the use of many books. Dramatization and story telling by the children as a means of teaching language and expression also calls for the use of library books. These and other new methods in education are largely responsible for the teachers' growing respect for juvenile literature.

The forming of accelerated classes, re-

tarded classes, classes of motor-minded children, open air schools, prevocational schools, and continuation schools and also of special classes of various kinds for the colored children calls for the selection of books for individual classes and in many cases for individual children. Meeting the needs of the modern school system is becoming a far more difficult task than awakening a sleeping school system.

One question that is asked us more often than any other concerning our colored work is "What do colored children like to read?" According to our statistics the percentages of circulation according to fiction, folklore and non-fiction for white and colored are as follows:

White		Colored	
Fiction .....	48	Fiction .....	39
Folklore .....	16	Folklore .....	26
Non-fiction .....	38	Non-fiction .....	38

The survey of reading in the fourth grade showed the following interesting results as to the percentage of fiction and non-fiction:

White		Colored	
Fiction .....	32	Fiction .....	16
Folklore .....	29	Folklore .....	50
Non-fiction .....	39	Non-fiction .....	34

All of these facts have been collected from the city schools. We hope soon to have some interesting reports from the rural schools in Jefferson County.

By action of the fiscal court in January the library has been given an appropriation for extension work in Jefferson County. Arrangements have been made to place class room libraries in the 77 white schools and 21 colored county schools.

In closing, let me say that we feel very much encouraged by the progress of our work with the colored readers.