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BULLETIN

of

THE RHODE ISLAND LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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TO READ WELL: ONE FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE ON CENSORSHIP

by Anthony Agostinelli

There is current in our state an issue which involves a most serious question. Should one segment of society decide for all segments of that society, what another's children should or should not read? It is not a new question. It is as old as the printed word. It might be interesting to know what one family does about what it reads.

The issue has prompted this query for our family: should my wife and I encourage our children to read well by setting an example by our own choice of reading, or should we make it impossible for our children to read books or other publications which we

personally do not like? The former course of action seems preferable to us than the latter. If we have learned anything about our children, it is this nugget of homely wisdom: if there is something that we do not wish the children to do, issue an ultimatum to them not to do it, and chances are good that they will do it! The consequence of that learned observation naturally leads us to feel that if we were to set up a list of what not to read, the children's list would probably include most of those selections which were listed in our "not-to-read" roll.

My wife and I assert that we have a responsibility to de-

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side jointly and collectively with our children during these early years, and in later years, what we believe is appropriate reading. We say that we as parents have a persuasive obligation to steer our children towards literature which we have found to fulfill values which we hold dear. However, to compel our children under threat of indictment that they follow our pre-conceived ideas and choices in literature is to distort their ability to choose what they read.

A few years ago, in an article on literature and censorship, we read a set of principles which were suggestive of what could be the case for a public policy on censorship. We have taken these principles and have shaped them to formulate our guides in the selection of reading material. These are our guides:

"We as a family:

- (1) have a right to provide access to what we have collectively and jointly decided is well worth our while to read,

- (2) will not impose our choices on any other family,
- (3) will suggest and often persuade other families to enjoy what we have read and have found to be beneficial, and
- (4) under no circumstances will enforce our choices upon others.

While these are not an elaborate set of principles, they do provide for us a working guide.

Carrying on in public about what families and others may or may not read, not only incurs the wrath of our peers, but is much like setting up a "not-to-read" or "you-must-read" list. Others will resist our coercion as to what we should or should not read, as we will most certainly resist theirs. What seems to be at stake is neither the protection of another's taste in literature, nor the preservation of another's choice from what we conceive as imperfect literature, but, the basic right of individual families to choose what they read. The

denial of this inalienable right is something more terrible to consider.

Since our family orients its own standards and tastes in reading to what we see as excellence, we become hard pressed to appreciate anything that falls beneath those standards and tastes. It is much like the difference between the gourmet and the gourmand -- the former seeks to eat well, while the latter will eat for the sake of eating. In trial and error fashion, we seem to have enhanced our ability to choose well and to suggest a direction for that choice.

Freedom to read for us implies that judgements are made by us, and not by the imposition of choice from outside. We have felt that it is incumbent upon us to selectively perceive what we may read, from what is available to read. We do not approach everything that is available with equal delight. We read that which adds to our learning and living in a positive way, as we see it. We strive to be gourmets about reading, and not gourmands!

It is easier for us as a family if we make our own choices and selections, rather than have someone else make them for us. While we often rely upon others for assistance in that choice, our choices should not be limited by any outside group seeking to ban certain books -- even if those books are those which we wouldn't have chosen anyway. We expect to be assisted by those whom we as citizens hire to staff our schools and libraries; we value the professional judgment exercised by them and we value what integrity they bring to the community. Although we will consider their views as they assist us, theirs will be an advisory view, and not an absolute one. We also would feel disturbed if we were placed in a position to review the selections of others,

The American Library Council in 1953 stated, and for us is still applicable, "we believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society.... (and for libraries and publishers).... to give validity to that freedom by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a

variety of offerings."

Our family has committed itself to a course of reading well. We may not always succeed, but we have learned to think in new directions because of that reading. We have been exposed to the excitement of vision provided by that reading. We believe that it is better to speak on behalf of reading well, than to ban books; books or make certain books unavailable.

I guess you can say that we have become what we have read.

Mr. Agostinelli is Executive Director of the Urban Coalition of Rhode Island, Inc., and is a member of the Corporation of Providence Public Library.

A new Chairman of the Coventry Library Council, Mrs. Francoise Anderson, has been appointed. She is also a trustee of the Anthony Library in Coventry. She is replacing Mrs. Corbein.

NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

Island Region

Barrington Public Library will be host for a Public Safety Collection for the Island Region in order to aid the policemen and firemen who are taking courses for self-advancement. The Barrington Chief-of-Police will give his time on a regular basis to teach and guide these men toward higher grades on their tests through regular classes and reference service using the new Public Safety Collection.

Southern Region

Kingston Public Library has a new librarian, Mr. Charles Emmons, who began his new duties on December 13th. He has had 7 years experience in the Sea Bee's Davisville library and 3 years in a school library in Voluntown.

Cocumscussoc Association held a reception on Dec. 9 at Smith's Castle in honor of Dr. Carl Woodward, President Emeritus of U.R.I. His new book, Plantation

in Yankee Land, a publication of the Cocumscussoc Association, was published by the Pequot Press.

Northern Region . . .

Elaine Doull has been hired as Acting Librarian at Weaver Library. She holds a bachelor's degree from Pembroke College and an M.L.S. from the University of Rhode Island

East Providence was presented a group of Portuguese books by the Portuguese Cultural Society this month.

Mary Ellen Hardiman is Union Free Library's professional librarian. She is a graduate of Albertus Magnus College and holds a master's in library science from New York State College at Geneseo.

\$100 was raised for the North Smithfield library by a recent book sale.

CRANSTON PLAN ADOPTED by James Giles

At their November board meeting the trustees of the Cranston Public Library adopted a policy which gives parents the opportunity to restrict their child's use of the library. The Plan for Parental Control of Children's Use of the Library became effective December 15. To implement the new plan, registration procedures were changed and parents were notified of the new policy.

tinues to have a juvenile card for children through age 12 and an adult card for persons who have reached age 13. However, a parent's signature will be required on all applications for persons under age 18. In a new section on the application form, parents will indicate whether or not they want to restrict their child's use of the library. Also, they can indicate at what age the restriction will be lifted.

Under the plan Cranston con-

Restricted library cards will



be marked with an R and the expiration date on these cards will be the birth date that parents want the restriction lifted.

Public notice of the new policy with an appropriate form appeared in the newspapers to insure that parents of current card holders were given an opportunity to restrict their child's use of the library. Also, notices of the new policy were posted and forms for parents to sign were available in all branch libraries.

Under the new plan, books and other materials will circulate on restricted cards at the discretion of the librarian.

NEWS!

The Cumberland Public Library's Valley Falls branch is now the domain of Ellen Moreau, a young college graduate.

Pat Bullard is now Director of Library Services for the Cumberland Public Library.

Western Region . . .

Miss Jean Nash has been appointed as Assistant Director of the Robert Champlin Memorial Library in West Warwick.

Miss Michele Vallee has been appointed as a second children's librarian at Cranston's Auburn branch.

?????????????????
FROM PROVIDENCE
SYSTEMS OFFICE

William Faulkner. Politics, 973.8
Reform and Expansion, F
1890-1900. Harpers (A
New American Nation
Series)

On table of contents
page is # 12843.

Does anyone recognize it as
theirs?
?????????????????



RILA EXECUTIVE BOARD:

The RILA Executive Board met on December 15, at 10a.m. in the Providence Public Library Meeting Room. Members present were Mr. Alexander, Mr. Whitney, Mr. Crosby, Mrs. B. Wilson and Mrs. S. Wilson, Mr. Olsen, Mr. Guilbeault. Guests: Mr. Denomme, Mrs. Mundy, Mrs. Kelly and Mr. Giles.

Agenda for the meeting consisted of reports from Mrs. Kelly on the Continuing Education Committee of NELA and the RILA Education Committee's investigation of the new Library/Media Techniques Course being set up by U.R.I. Extension Division. A motion was passed by the Board to endorse the program with the understanding that syllabi for the courses will be received by the Education Committee. A further motion required the Board to review the L/MTC program in a year's time.

Mr. Denomme presented a two page start on a Library Trustee's Handbook for R.I. trustees, which was formally approved by the Board.

Mr. Giles told of his work in cooperation with DSLS, Trustees, and Government Relations to anticipate developments on H1607 (the Marshall Bill). They plan to work toward stopping any amendment which would apply to libraries, and plan to have material to present for members' consideration at the Mid-Winter meeting.

The date for the Spring Annual Meeting was set as Tuesday, May 18th, 1972.

The next Board meeting will be held at DSLS, February 16th.

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