

LIBRARIES AS WAR INFORMATION CENTERS¹

By *Gerald Naseath*

Within the last year or year and a half, a number of libraries in this state have been designated as War Information Centers by the American Library Association, while three of them have been called Key Centers of Information by the United States Office of Education.¹ It is the purpose of these centers to make available to all citizens information concerning the war. One of the key centers is the library at A. and M. College. While this paper is concerned primarily with the problem of the War Information Center, it should concern representatives of all libraries, because today they are all dispensers of war information—all libraries are centers of war information whether officially designated as such or not.

Despite the fact that our staffs are leaving for better paying war jobs, our book budgets are dwindling, and even our patrons are becoming less faithful, it is our task to provide our public with the best information about the war, its causes, and the results we are hoping for. Many Americans, including librarians, have vague notions concerning the problems our country, our economic structure, our government, and our international obligations. When I reflect upon the aimless wanderings of our international policy at the end of World War I and the resultant struggle which culminated in the present war, I cannot help hoping for a much more intelligent and forceful approach this time. Our libraries have a grave and definite responsibility in marshalling all forces for the right.

In discussing a few of our specific subject problems, let's begin at home. Our War Information Center has collected a number of items containing meat-saving recipes, sugarless cookery, suggestions for wartime cooks, and helps for the army cook. These recipe books have "sold" like hot cakes among our Stillwater wives. I am still impressed by the recipes for the army cook; they are good ammunition for stopping the perennial complainer about short rations. People, too, have become increasingly aware of nutrition problems, finding them challenging when considered along with ration points and threatening price rises. The center is well fortified with items issued by the Federal Government, A. and M.'s Experiment Station and any number of food producing agencies. To mention just a few: *Robbins' Meat Saving Recipes*, *Nutrition Study Kit*, issued by General Mills; *Diets of Families of Employed Wage Earners and Clerical Workers in Cities*, by Hazel Stiebeling; *Recipes to Match Your Sugar Ration*, by the Bureau of Home Economics.

¹Adaptation of an address delivered before the Oklahoma Library Association, May 19, 1943 at the annual meeting in Oklahoma City.

Our government has advised strongly this year the planting of victory gardens. Some of our attempts look pretty pale, while others are real gardens; needless to say, they are well watered now. Gardeners too are interested in how books can advise them, so each year we cull the *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly* for their best suggestions. We have supplied ourselves further with the best bulletins of the Department of Agriculture, our Department of Home Economics and our Experiment Station.

Our first fever over civilian defense has evaporated. We are no longer apprehensive of a sudden air raid tonight or tomorrow, with resultant fire and destruction. Nevertheless, our responsible citizens intend to remain alive to the possibilities of enemy infiltration, hence they still wish to keep abreast of trends and developments in civilian defense. Therefore, our library must keep a file of the latest bulletins of the Office of Civilian Defense, as well as lists of local and state civilian defense workers, for emergency reference. Not only has the OCD published much, but many state and city defense councils have published excellent guides and bibliographies.

War is a great breeder of intolerance and bigotry. One of the most serious accusations hurled against the axis has been their treatment of the Jew and the minority nations. The intolerance of our enemies has caused us to be more aware of our own failings, our own treatment of the negro, minor religious groups, and even the Jew. We have been warned by events in other countries of what might happen if we were to let some of our less savory ideas get away with us. The American public must continue to study the problems of minority groups. They should read, for example, Gustavus Myers' new book, *The History of Bigotry in the United States*, and Louis Adamic's *From Many Lands*. We should make available these books and many others; we might do well to invite contributions from many of the organizations interested in the welfare of lesser groups. For one instance, the Jewish Welfare Board sends us some new items each month.

I remarked earlier how important it is that we approach the end of this war intelligently. We must not consider it a trite remark to say that we cannot win the war unless we win the peace that follows. It is encouraging to note that Congress is beginning to give some thought to postwar problems, although to date their thinking has been pretty much home-centered. It is certain that the library will have a definite part in the rehabilitation of the veteran after the war. Already at A. and M., for instance, it is possible to complete a major in occupational therapy, including one course on the work of librarians in rehabilitation. A faculty Committee of Vocational Rehabilitation is busy preparing for the returning veterans, in order to give them the right kind of college work. A

member of our college faculty engaged in this work, who has also had experience at Ohio State and Dartmouth, says that our library at A. and M. is as well prepared in basic books on vocational rehabilitation as any library with which he is acquainted. The work we are doing in our library in this connection is typical of that which is being done and will be done by libraries throughout the state and points the way to one of the valuable services the library can give during the remainder of the war and the postwar period. Our readers will want to study these problems, as well as any attempts to forestall a repetition of the economic fluctuations and depressions we experienced before this war. Certainly some of them will want to read the recent report of the National Resources Planning Board.

It is equally important to consider the questions of world economic relations and our place in the international structure. We might urge the public to read carefully, for example, Nicholas Spykman's *America's Strategy in World Politics*, trying to determine whether we Americans can any longer isolate ourselves and divorce ourselves from the problems of other nations. It has failed to work recently, and perhaps those days are over forever. If so, it is high time that all Americans give consideration to their new place in the world. They must study more carefully the proposals of various leaders for a world federation, international police, a rigid world economy. Perhaps it would be advisable to revamp the League of Nations on a more firm foundation, giving it our support this time. Perhaps Louis Adamic has the problem solved in his *Two-Way Passage*. Maybe the old bridge maestro, Ely Culbertson, has settled everything in his contribution, *World Federation Plan*. Over a hundred organizations in this country are already studying this tremendous question; it is doubtful whether any of them will solve everything, but their findings should be of some help. Many of their publications are free for the asking and may be just the answer to some of the questions put by our patrons. It is not a laughing matter, but one affecting the future of the world; it is our duty to interest our patrons in studying these problems and to furnish them with whatever ammunition they need.

Our War Information Center in Stillwater (which we have called by the familiar name of Wicky) has been motivated by these problems. It may interest you to know how we have organized this collection, and how we have met some of our problems.

We organized Wicky because it was the wish of the Office of Education and our college administration that we do so. We placed Mrs. Murphy in charge, requesting as many members of the staff as possible to contribute of their spare time to the project. A number of faculty and townspeople also donated many valuable hours, partly to servicing the public and also to the preparation of a large clipping file. It is true that we might have carried on Wicky

through our normal processes, cataloging the books, placing the pamphlets and other ephemeral material in our verticle file, and supplying Miss Campbell in the Documents Room with multiple copies where needed. Since we feared that this might interfere with our normal services, and since we hoped that by making Wicky a separate entity, we might make it more useful, we established it adjacently to our Loan Department in the Main Library. We built a long desk, with deep filing shelves, making it possible to afford easy access to a quantity of pamphlet material. We placed little emphasis on the processing of this material, simply stamping it with our mark of ownership and preparing a brief author and subject file, which was placed beside the War Information desk, and not filed into the public catalog.

We set out to secure as much good free material as we could, and in multiple copies when possible. We selected a number of public service organizations, and wrote them for their publications, explaining our purpose in asking. Most of them responded in a gratifying manner. Many of the others sent price lists, since their material was more expensive. We began to watch the *A. L. A. Booklist*, the *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Wilson Bulletin* and others for suggestions of free and reasonably priced material which would fit well into our collection. Always we tried to keep in mind the probable needs of a war-minded people.

Our one large buying campaign centered about the list entitled "The Citizen and Defense," published in the *Library Journal* for January 1, 1942, a four-page list on many of the subjects I have mentioned and many more. As far as funds permitted, we secured five or ten copies of each item; most of this material circulated well.

All told I believe that we spent about \$300.00 in buying books and pamphlets for the War Information Center. We tried when practicable to secure five or ten copies of each item, so that we might circulate them adequately. When they cost too much, of course we were more modest in our buying. It may be no surprise to you to be told how difficult it is to secure some ephemeral material. It is a job in itself to establish the publishers and addresses of much of it, not to mention the endless correspondence and financial transactions to complete the securing of the material.

By means of newspaper publicity and booklists, we advertised the material available in Wicky, and strove in all respects to complement the work so ably performed by the Oklahoma Library Commission. I might mention that we built a special exhibit box, which could be filled with materials concerning any phase of the war effort and shipped to anyone asking for it for cost of transportation only. For a time, we concerned ourselves about the return of all material lent, but we have come around to the view that it is

ephemeral material, to say the least, and is expendable in wartime; if it didn't come back, some one probably is making good use of it.

To summarize our remarks, the fact remains that the library is a potent force in the shaping of public opinion, in determining the course of future world development. Therefore, librarians must continue to provide information about all aspects of the war, by supplying themselves with reports, bibliographies, digests, magazine articles, clippings, government documents, maps, pictures, discussion outlines, and anything which will promote further understanding. It is necessary to emphasize the preparation of subject bibliographies, for without them the splendid material we may have collected will be poorly publicized. So let's renew our enthusiasm for the task to which we have all dedicated ourselves, let's give the people the best we can and as quickly as we can.