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American Library Association

Leaders in Library Work with Immigrants: John Foster Carr (1869-1939), Propagandist for Americanization: Part II

by
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(Continued from last issue)

ALA Committee on Work with the Foreign Born

Along with Carr, the following librarians were appointed members of the committee: A. L. Bailey of the Wilmington (DE) Institute Free Library, Anna A. MacDonald of the Pennsylvania State Library in Harrisburg, Adelaide B. Maltby of the New York Public Library, Annie P. Dingman and Eleanor (Edwards) Ledbetter of the Cleveland Public Library, and Frances E. Earhart of the Duluth (MN) Public Library. Earhart was also a board member of Carr's Immigrant Publication Society. The ALA Committee on Work with the Foreign Born was charged with the mission "to collect from libraries and supply to them information on the desirable methods of assisting in the education of the foreign-born in American ideals and customs and the English language."²⁶

The missions of the ALA CWFB and the Immigrant Publication Society appeared to be compatible, since Carr directed both. During 1919 and 1920, when Carr chaired the ALA committee, the work of the committee and the society merged.

Carr urged librarians to exercise extreme care in the selection of foreign language books for immigrants. "If the librarian depends upon the chance and irresponsible advisor," Carr warned, "she will soon find her shelves crowded with books of radical socialism, anarchism, bar-tenders' guides, books of religious propaganda, trash."

Along with care in the selection of materials for immigrants, librarians were admonished that the use of "rigorous and 'Prussian' methods of Americanization accomplished nothing but bitterness, stirring incredible resentment and antagonism among our foreign born. They directly nourish the Bolshevism that we fear."²⁷ Carr's postwar paranoia with regard to Communism would haunt him throughout the remainder of his life.

ALA Enlarged Program

During the war, approximately \$6,000,000 had been pledged to carry out varied programs of the ALA, over 4,000,000 books had been donated for the use of the armed services personnel, and over 700 librarians had served in war-related activities. The year 1919 was full of possibilities for a professional organization with a yearning to expand its mission. Dennis Thomison, historian of the ALA, summed up the ambivalence, anxiety, and enthusiasm exhibited by the ALA and its membership during this heady time. "Although the members had always seemed to have a missionary spirit about their organization, the war work was the first proof that ALA was capable of being welfare oriented, rather than being strictly a professional organization."²⁸

In May 1919, after months of preliminary discussions among ALA members and the ALA Executive Board, George B. Utley, secretary of the ALA, announced plans for an open meeting of the ALA Council, during the Asbury Park (NJ) conference of the ALA to be held in June 1919, to discuss potential peacetime initiatives.²⁹

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As a result of the debates and discussions among ALA members at the open meeting as well as the deliberations of the ALA Executive Board at the Asbury Park conference, a Committee on an Enlarged Program for American Library Service was appointed. The chairs of all ALA standing committees were asked to attend at least one session with the Enlarged Program committee to present ways in which the proposed Enlarged Program could effect beneficial changes in their committees' areas of responsibility. Carr, as chair of the ALA CWFB, spoke of the accomplishments of libraries and librarians in their work with immigrants and pleaded for funds to establish new programs and to sustain and expand existing citizenship programs.

In October 1919, the Enlarged Program committee presented its preliminary report. Between October and December 1919, librarians throughout the country, including then ALA President Chalmers Hadley and Milam, voiced their support for the Enlarged Program. Orpha Maud Peters of the Gary (IN) Public Library spoke in favor of funding for the citizenship component of the Enlarged Program, concluding that "there is no doubt that libraries have a most important role to play in Americanizing the foreign people in our midst and in making better citizens not only of people of other nations but of American people as well."

In December 1919, ALA Secretary Carl Milam established headquarters for the Enlarged Program in New York. Carr, who had worked previously under Milam in the ALA Library War Service, was now assigned to the Enlarged Program headquarters. Carr's duties included publicity and preparation of the budget for the Enlarged Program. ALA President Chalmers Hadley reported the association's plans to the

membership in an article in the December 1919 issue of Library Journal.

A special meeting of the ALA membership at large was called by the executive board for January 1920 to discuss and debate openly the details of the Enlarged Program. Although discussions were heated and lengthy, the En-larged Program was approved by a majority of those in attendance.³⁰

Books for Everybody Campaign

In February 1920, Frank P. Hill, chairman of the Enlarged Program committee, set into motion the wheels of the campaign to raise \$2,000,000. To facilitate the massive fundraising effort for the Enlarged Program, officially dubbed the "Books for Everybody" campaign, the country was divided into ten regions with a regional director appointed for each region. In March 1920, Carr presented a proposed budget for the "Books for Everybody" campaign to the ALA membership. Of the \$2,000,000 budget, \$75,000 was budgeted for citizenship and other library programs for immi-grants.³¹

Despite official approval of the Enlarged Program, many ALA members did not hesitate to express in print their misgivings, particularly with regard to the expansive nature of the Enlarged Program and the expense involved in its implementation. Mary Eileen Ahern, editor of Public Libraries, led the opposition to the Enlarged Program. She and other ALA members suggested that part of the proposed \$2,000,000 to be raised should be set aside as an endowment fund.

Still other members became more willing to express their criticisms as a direct result of a circular letter dated 31 March 1920 and signed by thirteen influential

librarians from across the nation. This letter had been mailed to the ALA membership, and was later published in the 15 April 1920 issue of *Library Journal*. The thirteen librarians who had signed this petition argued for more stringent guidelines of accountability.³²

To reassess the support of the ALA membership at large, a second special meeting of the membership was scheduled to be held in Atlantic City (NJ) in late April and early May of 1920, in conjunction with the bi-state meeting of the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Library Associations. At this meeting, Frank P. Hill, sensing the lack of unity among the ALA membership regarding the Enlarged Program, resigned as chair and was replaced by William N. C. Carlton.

A compromise was struck at this second special ALA membership meeting. The "Books for Everybody" campaign for the Enlarged Program would proceed as planned with the provision that half of the money raised would be set aside for an endowment fund. As a result of this compromise, Carr developed a new budget for the Enlarged Program that allowed for the \$1,000,000 endowment. He presented a revised budget to the executive board in which the funds ear-marked for the "citizenship" area were reduced from \$75,000 to \$60,000 over a period of three years.

Carr and Milam began negotiations for a joint appeal for funds in the Greater New York area on behalf of the Immigrant Publication Society and the ALA respectively. Carr would remain on the ALA payroll throughout the campaign, and, as director of the Immigrant Publication Society, would assume personal re-responsibility for raising the \$60,000 budgeted in the Enlarged Program for the citizenship component.

Carr, in a letter to Milam dated 14 April 1920, proposed that, if the appeal was successful, the Immigrant Publication Society would assume the bulk of the responsibilities now vested in the ALA CWFB. By 19 May 1920, a formal agreement was made among Milam as ALA Secretary, Carlton as chair of the Enlarged Program committee, Raymond B. Fosdick as chair of the Greater New York "Books for Everybody" campaign, and Carr as director of the Immigrant Publication Society.

On 26 May 1920, Fosdick released a statement on the "Books for Everybody" campaign, clarifying the fact that "[a]ssociated with the American Library Association in New York in this effort is the Immigrant Publication Society, an organization that is producing books breathing the American spirit in many languages and is cooperating closely with public libraries throughout the country."³³

In early June 1920, in the midst of all the debate over the Enlarged Program, Carr received notification

that he had been proclaimed an Officer of the Order of the Crown of Italy in recognition of "his profound and helpful friendship toward Italy." His exuberance was brief, pending the need to prepare for the Colorado Springs (CO) annual conference of the ALA, which was to be held on 7 June 1920.

At that lackluster conference, the Enlarged Program, including the endowment provision and a revised budget, was surprisingly approved once again. It was widely known that many members known to disagree with the Enlarged Program had refused to participate in the discussions, and others left the meeting before the final vote was taken.

The date for the conclusion of the financial campaign was set for 30 June 1920, but was later extended. By September 1920, the prospects for an unsuccessful conclusion to the campaign were foreshadowed in an editorial in the 1 September 1920 issue of *Library Journal*. The editorial stated simply that "the appeal for funds for the Enlarged Program has suffered both from the heat of discussion and the heat of summer, and so has progressed but slowly up to date."

On 16 September 1920, Carr wrote to Charles F. D. Belden of the Boston Public Library, who served as regional director for New England of the "Books for Everybody" campaign. Carr confided to Belden that "things are going badly with the Enlarged Program here, and, as I gather, the condition is not local." Carr, who was scheduled to speak to the Lake Placid meeting of the New York Library Association, urged Belden to come if he possibly could to provide input and moral support for the failing Enlarged Program.

On 22 September 1920, Carr delivered an address, "A Greater American Library Association," at the Lake Placid conference of the New York Library Association. Speaking to an obviously divided profession, Carr warned that the campaign was "on the verge of a spectacular failure and the disruption of the Association." Carr intended his Lake Placid address as a rally cry for the failing Enlarged Program. Instead, response to his speech was as divided as the ALA membership was over the looming issue of the Enlarged Program that nobody seemed to want anymore. The 1 October 1920 issue of *Library Journal* responded editorially that although Carr gave "a rousing shake-up" at the Lake Placid meeting of the New York Library Association, "he rather over-stated the difficulties within the ALA." In the same issue of *Library Journal* was the report of the regional directors of the "Books for Everybody" campaign that only about \$68,000 of the \$2,000,000 had been collected or pledged.³⁴

Alice S. Tyler, Chalmers Hadley's successor as ALA President, called for more "tolerance and

cooperation." Mary Eileen Ahern, perhaps unwittingly, gave support to Carr's scenario of a divided ALA membership: "First and foremost, Mr. Carr is an employee of the ALA which he assails so bitterly, because the larger part of its membership does not see the subject of the Enlarged Program as he and his group see it."³⁵

The responses to Carr's remarks from individual ALA members were not all adverse. In her letter to Carr, Mary L. Titcomb, regional director for the Middle Atlantic states of the "Books for Everybody" appeal, referred specifically to the negative reaction of Ahern. She confided that she disagreed entirely with Ahern, and added with an ironic twist: "I think it quite time that someone should speak out as you did, and tell us at least a part of the disagreeable truth about ourselves."³⁶

Anna A. MacDonald, consulting librarian with the Pennsylvania State Library and Museum and member of the ALA CWFB, told Carr that she was in substantial agreement with him with regard to his view of the ALA's internal administrative and managerial problems. "Every word you said was true, and the sooner the librarians wake up to the fact the better it will be. The ALA has been in the control of a certain group of people and has not grown with the library needs. As loyal as I have always been to it, I cannot help but recognize these facts."³⁷

Carr confided in Arthur E. Bostwick, then librarian of the St. Louis Public Library. "May I not say to you confidentially that, in my view, perhaps the crux of our present distressing difficulties is the wretched mismanagement of the Executive Board?" Carr criticized the board for providing "nothing whatever in the way of active leadership."³⁸ Although disappointed, Carr could not have been surprised that the Enlarged Program campaign was terminated as of 30 November 1920. The final tally, after receipts and expenditures were reconciled, was a balance of approximately \$80,000, barely 4 percent of the funds needed to carry out the Enlarged Program as planned. The share of proceeds of the campaign raised in conjunction with the joint appeal of the ALA and the Immigrant Publication Society was \$2,000, out of \$60,000 budgeted for the citizenship component of the Enlarged Program.³⁹ Carr stepped down from his position as chair of the ALA CWFB and terminated his membership on the committee.

Carr's only hope of salvaging the Immigrant Publication Society was through his own ingenuity. He could no longer rely on the assistance of the ALA. The failure of the Enlarged Program had thwarted Carr's dream of the Immigrant Publication Society working in tandem with the ALA CWFB. He resumed with renewed vigor his letter-writing campaigns to solicit succor from

new and continuing members of the Immigrant Publication Society and to try to attain grants from foundations. His enthusiasm reached almost pathetic proportions in his attempts to raise funds for a matching grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a dream that was never realized.

In 1923, in a letter to a supporter in New Haven (CT), Carr reaffirmed his unswerving commitment to his calling and the unchanging need for the society's publications. "Our books are teaching the reality of American brotherhood, obedience to law, the winning facts of American life and ideals. . . . The schools need them; the libraries need them; every kind of organization doing this so-called Americanization work needs them. There is nothing they can use in their place."⁴⁰

If Carr was not defeatist in attitude, he increasingly expressed paranoia in his fundraising letters regarding the threat of revolutionary elements taking over the United States. Carr often commented on the need for libraries to exercise extreme care in the selection of books in English as well as in foreign languages. He was convinced that Communist propaganda was not only highly persuasive, but also more readily accessible to the common man than American patriotic literature.⁴¹

Carr's goal of educating the immigrant population was now expanded to include the revitalization of the patriotism of old-stock Americans as well. Although the Immigrant Publication Society would never recover the popularity of its golden years from 1914 to 1919, Carr was able to hold things together financially long enough to publish the final publication to appear under the society's imprint. The Declaration of Independence and the Colonies, with a Literal Reprint of the Declaration of Independence was published in 1924 and reprinted in 1926.⁴²

In the latter years of his life, from 1927 until his death in 1939, Carr was plagued by ill health compounded by the constant worry over finances. The Immigrant Publication Society was steadily losing the financial support it needed to survive, much less to thrive. Carr's failing health rendered it impossible for him to continue his lecturing schedule. This source of income had often been the critical hedge against total financial insolvency.⁴³

In 1927, Walter F. Willcox, a professor of economics at Cornell University and brother to Mary Alice Willcox, who served on the Council of Direction of the Immigrant Publication Society, called upon Carr to express his opinions on the recently passed National Origins Act of 1924, which set quotas on immigration from various countries, favoring immigration from the Western Hemisphere rather than from Europe and Asia. Ironically, the National Origins Act would not become

fully operational until 1929, two years after the correspondence between Willcox and Carr.

It was revealing that Walter F. Willcox, a statistician and member of a national advisory committee studying this issue, would turn to Carr for his opinion. As usual, Carr was well informed on the subject and had definite opinions. Carr was not only sympathetic to the feelings and pride of immigrants, but also believed strongly that the proposed legislation was alien to American ideals. He stated that a serious drawback of the quota system was made painfully apparent in immigrants' as well as Europeans' attitudes toward America and Americans. "In several of the nations I believe it to be one of the important contributing causes to the now almost rooted dislike of us." Carr was insistent that the arbitrary limitation on immigration belied "our national need of labor, that varies with the years," and also that it failed to take into account the infusion of vitality and richness accompanying the immigration of peoples of diverse cultures.

Carr revealed to Willcox that he was not opposed to tighter, more rigidly enforced immigration regulations, but he was opposed to setting arbitrary limits according to nationality. "My experience leads me to one conclusion: That this tangled problem of immigration legislation will never approach satisfactory solution until the law makes the test exclusively that of the worth to our country, of the country's need, of the individual man or woman. The tests should be physical, mental and moral."

While seeing no need to discriminate according to nationality, Carr was not as resolute with regard to discrimination by race. Carr's matter-of-factness regarding the desirability of excluding Japanese immigrants was not consistent with his usually liberal views, even though the comment was in keeping with the Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 with Japan. "There are necessary restrictions as to race that would require careful definition, considerate definition,—perhaps with Japan reverting in some form to the 'gentleman's agreement.'" Carr reaffirmed his faith in the immigration process and in the individual immigrant who was willing to conform to Anglo-Saxon ideas and ideals.⁴⁴

The last decade of Carr's life must have been the occasion for reflection. There were no more society publications forthcoming. Restrictive immigration legislation coupled with rigidly enforced immigration quotas had reduced the demand for them.

Carr's Legacy

Carr's lapse into obscurity in the annals of American public library history is tied undoubtedly to his

association with the failed ALA Enlarged Program. The publications of his Immigrant Publication Society and his leadership in those initial, formative years of the ALA CWFB together set the tone of library opinion toward immigrants and immigration—a progressive tone, which was not in accord with the restrictionist reverberations emanating from the Congress. Librarians relied on Carr's publications and the advice they contained for the selection and acquisition of library materials for immigrant clientele. For a brief time, librarians, both individually and as a profession, valued Carr's persuasive propaganda for the public library as the ideal agency for the Americanization of the immigrant.

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