

# Leadership in Library Work with Immigrants: Eleanor (Edwards) Ledbetter

Part II

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by

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## *Cooperation with Foreign Language Information Service*

The cooperation between the Foreign Language Information Service and the ALA CWFB was based on a common understanding of the needs of immigrants and informed by a mutual advocacy of cultural pluralism. The Foreign Language Information Service was created in 1918 as an agency of the federal government, lost this affiliation within three years, and emerged as an independent agency by 1921. According to Daniel Erwin Weinberg, the Foreign Language Information Service "was perceived, and indeed perceived itself, as liberal," and although it was ardently committed to the Americanization process, saw its mission as "enlightened reform." Throughout its years of service from 1918 to 1939, the Foreign Language Information Service was driven by "a vision that not only had room for diverse kinds of men, but one that posited the absolute necessity for variety."<sup>68</sup> Believing therefore that their missions were compatible, the two organizations worked closely together in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

Ledbetter, throughout her tenure as chair of the ALA CWFB, furnished the Foreign Language Information Service with a series of general articles, prepared in the form of news releases, on libraries and library work. These were translated subsequently into immigrant languages and disseminated widely by the various foreign language bureaus of the Foreign Language Information Service to almost nine hundred newspapers published in the United States in seventeen foreign languages as well as English. One series of articles supplied by the ALA CWFB in 1926 was reportedly published 124 times in seven languages. In reciprocity for these news releases, the Foreign Language Information Service, through its various publications, particularly its periodical *The Interpreter*, drew their readers' attention to articles and publications produced by the ALA CWFB.<sup>69</sup>

## *Cooperation with the Christian Science Monitor*

From 1926 to 1928, concurrently with the Foreign Language Information Service writing project, Ledbetter was requested by the editor of the *Christian Science Monitor* to write a series of articles for its library col-

umn. All of the articles Ledbetter contributed were related to some aspect of library work with immigrants, and in their context Ledbetter made direct comparisons between librarianship and social work, as she had done in prior writings throughout her career. She stressed the fact that considering the three classifications of social work—case work, family social work, and group service—"all three types exist in library relations with the public."<sup>70</sup>

## *Bibliographer and Translator of Foreign Literature*

From 1922 until her retirement from the Cleveland Public Library, and particularly after her final year as chair of the ALA CWFB in 1928, Ledbetter concentrated all of her spare energies in the areas of Polish bibliography and Czech translation. The issue of language as it affected her work with immigrants had always been critical and, indeed, problematic for Ledbetter, who implied in her writings that she had a grasp of the rudiments of spoken German but never admitted to fluency in speaking any language other than English.<sup>71</sup> Through daily contact with Czech and Polish immigrants and through intensive study on her own, Ledbetter did acquire a reading knowledge of Polish and Czech sufficient for the work she was to accomplish with regard to the literatures of these Slavic languages.<sup>72</sup>

Notwithstanding her feelings of inadequacy with regard to facility with foreign languages, Ledbetter delved into an in-depth study of Czech fairy tales and folklore. She had for many years advocated this form of literature as a medium for bridging the generation gap between immigrant parents and their American children. She believed that "the library has possibilities in this situation and through books and the development of the child's imagination, it can help to create a common background."<sup>73</sup>

With this conviction concerning the efficacy of fairy tales in the child's development as well as in the bridging of the generation gap, Ledbetter chose for translation into English the folktales of Czech author Bozena Nemcova, whose stories deal with the richness and variety of Czech country life. The Shepherd and the Dragon: Fairy Tales from the Czech of Bozena Nemcova, with woodcut illus-

trations by William Siegel, was published in 1930.

One year later, in 1931, the Czechoslovakian consul in Cleveland presented Ledbetter the gold medal of the Order of the White Lion from the Czechoslovakian government. She was honored for her work in three areas: (1) cultural work among Czechoslovak immigrants in America, (2) promoting, among Americans, an understanding of Czechoslovaks and appreciation of their culture, and (3) translation of Czech folktales.<sup>74</sup>

Ledbetter's fascination with Polish bibliography had begun as early as 1922, with the publication, under the auspices of the ALA CWFB, of her two-part article, "The Polish Immigrant and the Library."<sup>75</sup> By 1924 Ledbetter had written an article entitled "Polish Literature in English" for Poland magazine, which was in turn reprinted in summary form for librarians in *Library Journal*. Ledbetter pointed out that translations of Polish literature into English were at that time comparatively few, with many Polish authors of the first rank being without representation. That same year the ALA CWFB published her pamphlet "The Polish Immigrant and His Reading," with an extensive bibliography including English translations of Polish literature. This was the pamphlet for which, as has been noted earlier, she was decorated by the Polish government.<sup>76</sup>

Ledbetter's *Polish Literature in English Translation: A Bibliography with a List of Books about Poland and the Poles* was published in 1932 and marked the end of ten years' labor. Alliance College in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, had offered the financial guarantee to the H. W. Wilson Company for its publication. Tadeusz Mitana, professor at Alliance College, a college affiliated with the Polish National Alliance, wrote the foreword. According to Mitana, the bibliography "is, to the best of my knowledge, the first and a wholly successful attempt at bringing together all important bibliographic items of Polish literature, history and art ever published in English."<sup>77</sup>

Shortly after the publication of the bibliography, the Polish Academy of Literature awarded her its silver medal and presented her with a certificate indicating that she was named for this prestigious honor by the Polish Ministry of Education in recognition of her "sincere interest in our literature in foreign lands." Although the wording of the certificate was not specific, Ledbetter herself believed that this honor was, at least partially, in recognition of the bibliography of Polish literature in English translation.<sup>78</sup>

#### *Final Years at Broadway Branch and Retirement*

The six years before Ledbetter's retirement in 1938 saw many occasions for Cleveland to honor her. A signal

honor was bestowed upon Ledbetter in 1932, on the occasion of her twenty-third year as the librarian of the Broadway Branch. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* declared her a "distinguished citizen."<sup>79</sup> Two years later, in celebration of her twenty-fifth anniversary at the Broadway Branch, she was feted with a reception attended by local dignitaries and library officials, including distinguished Clevelanders who had served under Ledbetter as library pages.<sup>80</sup>

When Ledbetter retired in 1938, after almost thirty years' service to the Cleveland Public Library, all of the major newspapers of Cleveland ran editorials and news releases in her honor. The headlines of the columns in themselves were indicative of the respect, admiration, and affection of Clevelanders: "More than Librarian" proclaimed the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and "Mrs. Ledbetter, Librarian Friend of Broadway Neighborhood, Retires" announced the *Cleveland Press*. The *Cleveland News*, in the most familiar tone of all, heralded Ledbetter as "Eleanor of Broadway."<sup>81</sup>

Ledbetter was undeniably glad of the opportunity afforded by her retirement to relax, travel, cook, garden, be a doting grandmother, and get more involved with church work, but in September 1938 after her retirement in July, the Broadway Branch and its immigrant clientele were still very much in her thoughts. Concerned about the appointment of her successor at the Broadway Branch, Ledbetter wrote to Charles Everett Rush, then librarian of the Cleveland Public Library, who had succeeded Linda Anne Eastman upon her retirement during the same year as Ledbetter's. Ledbetter wrote that "naturally I am greatly interested in the naming of my successor. The Broadway neighborhood is definitely non-responsive to strangers. I have noticed in clergy, school principals and others who came among us that it takes at least two years for a friendly person to get sufficient footing to get ready to start."<sup>82</sup>

She maintained her residence in southeast Cleveland, not far from the Broadway Branch, and continued to work on her bibliography of Polish literature in English translation. Toward the end of her life, Ledbetter passed on the mantle with regard to her bibliographic research to her friend Marion (Moore) Coleman, whom, ironically, Ledbetter never met in person. Coleman published the definitive bibliography of Polish literature in English translation, dedicated to the memory of Eleanor (Edwards) Ledbetter, in 1963, nine years after Ledbetter's death in her beloved Cleveland.<sup>83</sup>

#### *The Legacy of Ledbetter to Librarianship*

Although the name of Eleanor (Edwards) Ledbetter may have receded into the oblivion of a bygone era, her

legacy endures in the annals of the Cleveland Public Library and the ALA CWFB. More important, however, her abiding influence lives on in the descendants of Polish, Czech, German, and Slovenian immigrants. These immigrants, while strangers in a new land, were once welcomed at the entrance to the Broadway Branch by a sign that proclaimed Free Public Library in a language they understood.

## NOTES

39. Ledbetter, *Winning Friends and Citizens for America*; and Carr, "The Library in Americanization Work," 60-61, which summarizes Ledbetter's approach to library work with immigrants.
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42. *Ibid.*
43. Ledbetter, "Is the Public Library Democratic?" *ALA Bulletin* 16 (July 1922): 366-70; and Ledbetter, "Factors that Should Determine the Proportion of a Library's Book Fund to Be Spent for Reading of the Foreign Born," *ALA Bulletin* 22 (Sept. 1928): 475, which was summarized in *LJ* 53 (Aug. 1928): 670, and *Libraries* 33 (Nov. 1928): 476-77.
44. Ledbetter, "Is the Public Library Democratic?" 367.
45. ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 16 (July 1922): 228.
46. ALA CWFB Minutes, *LJ* 48 (1 May 1923): 406, *ALA Bulletin* 17 (July 1923): 209-10, *ALA Bulletin* 20 (Oct. 1926): 399-400; and Eleanor E. Ledbetter, "Books in Immigrant Languages," *LJ* 50 (15 Jan. 1925): 73-75.
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49. Martha Ann Aikin, "New-Old Lands Wait Arrival of 'American Lady'; Broadway Librarian Tells How Foreign Born Friends Arranged for Reception Abroad," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 7 Sept. 1923, Ledbetter Papers; Ledbetter, "A Gallant Institution: The Warsaw Public Library," *Poland* (Jan. 1924): 28; and Ledbetter, "Libraries and the Attitude of Tolerance," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 Nov. 1926, Ledbetter Papers.
50. CPL/BB AR 1923-24, 8-10, AR 1926, 11; Coleman, "Eleanor E. Ledbetter: Bibliographer of Polonica," 38-39; Ledbetter, "A Gallant Institution: The Warsaw Public Library," 28-29, 52, 54; *LJ* (1 June 1924): 540; Ledbetter, "June in Czechoslovakia," *Survey Graphic* 52 (1 June 1924): 301-3; and Ledbetter, "The Girl Queen," *Poland* (Nov. 1926): 681-82, 708, 710-11, 714-15.
51. ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 16 (July 1922): 228-29.
52. *LJ* 43 (Nov. 1918): 841; CPL/BB AR Jan. 1919-Mar. 1920, 5-6, AR 1920-21, 4, AR 1921-22, 8; Ledbetter, "The Religion of the Rusins: The Greek Catholic Church in America," *Czechoslovak Review* (Jan. 1920): 14-19; Ledbetter, "My Serbian Christmas," *Survey Graphic* 49 (1 Dec. 1922): 306-9; Ledbetter, "Easter in the Karpathians," *Spirit of Missions* 85 (Apr. 1920): 209-15; and *LJ* 47 (1 Jan. 1922): 42.
53. CPL/BB AR 1921-22, 8, AR 1922-23, 7; and ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 19 (July 1925): 220.
54. ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 16 (July 1922): 228; Ledbetter, "Recent Development in Library Work with Immigrants," 587-93; CPL/BB AR 1927, 6; and "Library Is Rival of School, Opinion at Reading Meet; Voluntary Study by Foreign Born Children Is Biggest Aid; Helps Understanding with Their Parents," *Grand Rapids (MI) Herald*, 8 May 1927, Ledbetter Papers.
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56. Eleanor (Edwards) Ledbetter, *The Polish Immigrant and His Reading, Library Work with the Foreign Born* (Chicago: ALA, 1924), 4; May M. Sweet, *The Italian Immigrant and His Reading, Library Work with the Foreign Born* (Chicago: ALA, 1925); and Alison B. Alessios, *The Greek Immigrant and His Reading, Library Work with the Foreign Born* (Chicago: ALA, 1926). The ALA CWFB also published in 1929 one other pamphlet in this series after Ledbetter's tenure, Peschke, *The German Immigrant and His Reading, Library Work with the Foreign Born* (Chicago: ALA, 1929).
57. Ledbetter, "Suggested List of Titles for a Beginning Collection in the Polish Language," in *The Polish Immigrant and His Reading*, 24-40.
58. "Medal for Librarian; Mrs. Ledbetter to Be Decorated by Polish Group," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 21 Feb. 1928, Ledbetter Papers; "Poland Honors 5 Clevelanders; Haller Crosses Bestowed at Vets' Banquet," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 21 Feb. 1928, Ledbetter Papers; and ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 22 (Sept. 1928): 475.
59. ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 16 (July 1922): 229.
60. CPL/BB AR Jan. 1919-Mar. 1920, 5-7, AR 1920-21, 3-4, and AR 1921-22, 4-7.
61. Ledbetter, "Recent Development in Library Work with Immigrants," 592.
62. CPL/BB AR 1922-23, 6, AR 1923-24, 5-7, AR 1924-25, 7-10, AR Apr. 1, 1925-Dec. 31, 1925, 4, AR 1926, 11, AR 1928, 3, AR 1929, 5-6, AR 1930, 7; Ledbetter, "Is the Public Library Democratic?" 369; Ledbetter, "Recent Development in Library Work with Immigrants," 591; and Ledbetter, "Group Service to Immigrants—II," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 July 1927, Ledbetter Papers.
63. CPL/BB AR 1923-24, 6-7.
64. CPL/BB AR 1924-25, 9.

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67. Ledbetter, "The Human Touch and the Librarian," 454.
68. Daniel Erwin Weinberg, "The Foreign Language Information Service and the Foreign Born, 1918–1939: A Case Study of Cultural Assimilation Viewed as a Problem in Social Technology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1973), 20–22 (quotes, 20, 21), 261 (quote).
69. CPL/BB AR 1922–23, 6; Panunzio, "The Immigrant and the Library," 969–73; ALA CWFB Minutes, *ALA Bulletin* 18 (Aug. 1924): 250, *ALA Bulletin* 19 (July 1925): 220, *ALA Bulletin* 20 (Oct. 1926): 400, 563; Hrbek [i.e., Hrbkova], "The Library and the Foreign-Born Citizen," 98–104; Ledbetter, "Books in Foreign Language," *Public Libraries* 27 (Dec. 1922): 599; Ledbetter, "Recent Development in Library Work with Immigrants," 589; *LJ* 51 (1 Nov. 1926): 979; *Libraries* 31 (Nov. 1926): 472; Ledbetter, "Foreign Language Press Publicity," 603; and Ledbetter, "Channels of Foreign Language Publicity," Ledbetter Papers. See also various issues published between 1924 and 1926 of *The Interpreter*, vol. 1 (1922)–vol. 9 (Nov.–Dec. 1930) [all published].
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73. Ledbetter, "Immigrant Parents and Their American Children," *Christian Science Monitor*, 25 May 1927 (quote), Ledbetter Papers; Ledbetter, "Library for Bohemians," 260; and Ledbetter, "Library Is Rival of School, Opinion at Reading Meet," Ledbetter Papers.
74. Bozena Nemcova, *The Shepherd and the Dragon; Fairy Tales from the Czech of Bozena Nemcova*, translated by Eleanor E. Ledbetter, illustrated by William Siegel (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1930); S. H. Steinberg, ed., *Cassell's Encyclopedia of World Literature* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954), s.v. "Nemcova, Bozena," by R. Auty, 2: 1287; Van Tassel and Grabowski, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, s.v. "Ledbetter, Eleanor Edwards," 623; "Edits Book," *Cleveland Press*, 22 Sept. 1930, Ledbetter Papers; *Libraries* 36 (May 1931): 235; Ida M. Gurwell, "Chats with Cleveland Writers: Eleanor E. Ledbetter," Ledbetter Papers; and "Medal of White Lion Is Given Librarian," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 12 Mar. 1931, Ledbetter Papers.
75. Ledbetter, "The Polish Immigrant and the Library"; and Coleman, "Eleanor E. Ledbetter: Bibliographer of Polonica," 38–39.
76. CPL/BB AR 1923–24, 10; Ledbetter, "Polish Literature in English," *Poland* (Apr. 1924): 229–33, 249, and in summary form, "Polish Literature in English," *LJ* 49 (1 Sept. 1924): 738–39; Ledbetter, *The Polish Immigrant and His Reading*, *LJ* 49 (1 Dec. 1924): 1044; "Medal for Librarian; Mrs. Ledbetter to Be Decorated by Polish Group," Ledbetter Papers; and "Poland Honors 5 Clevelanders; Haller Crosses Bestowed at Vets' Banquet," Ledbetter Papers.
77. Ledbetter, *Polish Literature in English Translation; A Bibliography with a List of Books about Poland and the Poles*, with a foreword by Tadeusz Mitana (New York: Published under the Auspices of the Polish National Alliance by H. W. Wilson, 1932), 3 (quote); *WLB* 6 (June 1932): 672; and CPL/BB AR 1931, 7, AR 1932, 3.
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79. "As a Distinguished Citizen, the Plain Dealer Presents Eleanor E. Ledbetter," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 7 Feb. 1932, Ledbetter Papers.
80. "Librarian of 25 Years to Be Honored at Party and Reunion," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 Dec. 1934, Ledbetter Papers; "Saluting Mrs. Ledbetter," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 10 Dec. 1934, Ledbetter Papers; and "All Neighborhood Honors Librarian; Mrs. Ledbetter, 25 Years at Broadway Branch, Given Party," [unidentified newspaper], [1934], Ledbetter Papers.
81. CPL/BB AR 1938, 8; "More Than Librarian," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 June 1938, Ledbetter Papers; "Mrs. Ledbetter, Librarian Friend of Broadway Neighborhood Retires," *Cleveland Press*, 7 June 1938, Ledbetter Papers; and "Eleanor of Broadway," *Cleveland News*, 7 June 1938, Ledbetter Papers. For other tributes, see also "Veteran Librarian Resigns," *Cleveland News*, 7 June 1938, Ledbetter Papers; "A Rich Life," *Cleveland Press*, 8 June 1938, Ledbetter Papers; and Grace V. Kelly, "Broadway Librarian Quits Post," Ledbetter Papers.
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