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What Shall We Read This Winter?

Any Nebraska Community May Provide Its Homes With Good Books at Small Cost—State Maintains Library for This Purpose

By J. H. Frandsen, Associate Editor

MORE than three-fifths of the people of Nebraska are without access to public library facilities. And the greater percentage of these three-fifths is included in our rural population. These facts are shown in a recent survey by J. O. Rankin of the department of rural economics in the College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska. The very people who have the least access to such educational and entertainment facilities as moving pictures and theaters as well as a variety of social activities, and who as it happens, have the most leisure during winter months, are, under present conditions, deprived to a large extent of reading good books. It is in the long winter evenings and during spells of bad weather that wide-awake farm folks turn their attention not only to plans for making next year's work more productive and profitable, but also toward plans for recreation and self improvement.

These plans call for good reading matter—newspapers, magazines, and good books—the most essential tools for the development of such a program. Has your community every educational advantage along this line? Is it getting just the right books and all the

books it needs? Good library facilities ought to be within the reach of every family. James Russell Lowell says: "The better part of every man's education is that which he gives himself, and it is for this that a good library should furnish the opportunity and means."

Easy to Get Rural Libraries

Nebraska, along with other states, appreciates this need for a better distribution of library facilities. In this state we have the State Library Commission, public libraries, school libraries, library extension service, and laws providing for the establishment of rural libraries. Thus the groundwork already has been laid thru legislation, making it fairly easy to establish rural-minded libraries when once public sentiment in their favor is created.

The plan which seems most feasible for bringing library facilities to rural communities is what is known as the "county library." Any county desiring to organize a county library may call upon the State Library Commission at Lincoln for advice and assistance. This organization maintains field workers who will go into the county and help

with the organization work. They also will help in selecting and cataloging the books. In short, will assist in getting the library in good working order.

For the location of the county library, an easily accessible, central point usually is chosen. The library is in charge of a competent librarian, who with the help of the state library board, purchases all the books, and makes all plans for their distribution. Branch libraries then are established in all the smaller towns and villages, and small collections of books may be placed in schools, churches, stores or even in homes where competent persons volunteer to distribute them. Book wagons or trucks are used to convey the books from the central county library to the branch stations and in some cases even may carry books to isolated farm homes not otherwise likely to get in touch with the library.

The county librarian sees to it that the books are kept circulating among the various branches so that every family may have access to the whole collection within a reasonable time. Telephone service, rural mail delivery

and parcel post service make it an easy matter to reach individuals in most parts of the county when special requests are made. The county librarian always is eager to assist farmers' clubs, women's clubs, debating clubs and literary societies in getting the help they need for papers, debates and programs of various kinds. She also assists rural teachers in making collections best suited to the needs of their particular schools.

The county plan, supported usually by a small tax, not to exceed 5 mills, or by an appropriation from the general county fund, is found to be less expensive than maintaining libraries in every town. It gives access to a much larger collection of books than the small town library possibly can afford. But most important of all, it also reaches the folks outside the towns and villages.

Even under the county plan, towns

having already established tax-supported libraries can continue them if they wish, and if they do, they are not taxed for the county library.

The county librarian comes into close co-operation with the county farm and home demonstration agents, the county farm bureau headquarters,

as well as with other farm organizations, with boards of education and the county superintendent of schools. In this way her knowledge of the literature best suited to the various needs is made available to them and she in turn gains a broader knowledge of the work in which rural communities are most interested and with which they need the most help.

The smaller stations or township units of the county library, if housed in moderate, convenient buildings, often can serve as a community center for all township or community affairs, and the branch librarian coming in such close touch with the individual families can be of especial help and service in the educational activities of the center.

A plan which seems to be working out very successfully in states where

it has been tried, is that of fitting up a wagon or truck with shelves of books and carrying them to the parts of the

county farthest away from the library center. The collection of books carried is designed to meet the needs of all members of the average family. Any family, with the help of the librarian who accompanies the traveling library, is permitted to choose its own books, a dozen or two at a time. The arrival of the book truck is a much looked-for event in many country homes otherwise out of reach of good books. It may be added that the librarian's visit often is as much appreciated as the books she brings. I have no doubt that many outlying farm families in Nebraska would appreciate just such service as this. In some townships, in neighboring states, this book truck makes the rounds of the township daily, stopping at crossroads to meet patrons and at community centers and schools to deliver the fresh supply of books which always is eagerly awaited.

Communities as yet unable to avail themselves of the county unit plan will be especially interested in the traveling libraries sent out by the State Li-

brary Commission to all parts of the state. According to Miss Williams, secretary of the commission, books are sent out under several plans, details of which will be sent to any interested persons. The general traveling libraries, consisting of about 40 or 50 volumes each, are lent for three months with the privilege of extending the time. Usually these traveling sets contain adult fiction and children's books in about equal numbers. But a group consisting of only adult books or only children's books can be arranged for if so desired. For unusually large communities a larger set can be obtained. To any general traveling library non-fiction books along special lines can be had if requested. The commission has 450 traveling sets of this nature which were sent out many times during the year.

Special Study Books Available

Groups of books for special study will be sent to responsible study clubs who may desire them for special class work. The same privileges are ex-

tended to debating clubs or literary societies. Arrangements may be made for keeping such books for the club season. Individuals may borrow books up to the number of 12 or 15 with a time limit depending upon the special needs of the case. Usually it is a month. In all loans there is no expense to the borrower except the transportation charges. The commission has no printed lists of books but depends on patrons to tell what they wish and these wishes are complied with as far as the commission's resources permit.

The Nebraska Library Commission was created in 1901 and already has accumulated some 25,000 volumes. Most of these books are being sent out in traveling sets of from 40 to 50 in a set to communities, both rural and city, in all parts of the state.

The common funds and the staff are said to be wholly inadequate to meet the demands upon it, altho in most cases it has been able to supply most of the books requested from its own collection, or from books it has borrowed from the University historical or research library or some similar source.



This Little Girl is Acting as Temporary Librarian for the Traveling Library Sent Out by the State Commission to This Remote Rural Community



Showing a "Library Truck" Which Makes Regular Trips Thru Rural Communities, Bringing a Large Variety of Good Books Direct to the Homes



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