

# History of Reading News

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## WILLIAM S. GRAY COMMEMORATED AT IRA

### Reading Hall of Fame Session

The International Reading Association commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of William S. Gray (1885-1960), a founder and first president of the IRA, at a Reading Hall of Fame session held during the IRA's 30th annual convention at New Orleans, May 5-9, 1985. SIG member Nancy A. Mavrogenes, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Gray, at the University of Chicago, gave an overview of key influences on his life up to 1916, with a slide presentation.

Helen M. Robinson, Emeritus, University of Chicago, made her first appearance at an IRA convention in nine years to talk about Gray's scholarly achievements. Calling Gray her "guide and professional father from 1931 to his death," Robinson highlighted some of Gray's activities. His *Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs* (1915) set the pattern for oral reading testing for half a century; and he made the case study approach to reading disability respectable at a time of group assessment. This had the effect of moving research from the laboratory to the classroom, and of attracting neophytes to study at the University of Chicago. Gray's work also began to help secondary and even college teachers, and sparked an interest in dealing with poor readers which ultimately led to the creation of reading clinics. Robinson identified Gray's school surveys (from 1916 on), his UNESCO study (1956) and his monographs on adult reading (from 1925 on) as some of his key research publications. She also pointed to his unique ability to synthesize and summarize research, which resulted in the *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading*.

The quality of Gray's work never suffered from its quantity, said Robinson, calling Gray a "one-man Book-of-the-Month Club." Noting that this was probably her last public address, Robinson dedicated her paper to Gray "as I have dedicated all my professional life." She received a standing ovation.

Nancy Larrick contributed her reminiscences of Gray, whom she described as "always prompt and precise, always thoughtful and caring." Early in 1956, Gray had pushed through decisions that left his colleagues first gasping, then proud. He had insisted that the first national conference of what would eventually become the IRA be held in May, less than four months away. He also insisted that the proceedings be published, and the footnotes be checked. "But all of the authors are scholarly people," demurred Larrick. "That's right. They are the ones we have to be most careful about," was Gray's retort.

More details of Gray as a person emerged from Larrick's talk and from the comments of Helen K. Smith and Ralph C.



Helen M. Robinson and William S. Gray at the Univ. of Chicago in 1954.

Staiger, the session's chair. Gray had a passion for detail, which included recording all his expenditures in a little black expense book. He was famous for the speed at which he walked, walking two miles to work daily to arrive by eight. He wore a three-piece suit and white starched shirt even at the picnics held for his reading workshops.

Albert J. Harris, remarking that Gray was always called "Dr. Gray," described Gray's *Annual Summaries* as "invaluable" and "meticulously accurate." He noted Gray's influence: scores of his students went from the University of Chicago to senior positions in other universities; his basal reading programs influenced the learning of millions of schoolchildren; and his amazing number of lectures affected thousands of teachers. The session ended with a tribute from Theodore Harris, read by Leo C. Fay, organizer of the presentations.

An IRA publication edited by Jennifer A. Stevenson was made available for the first time at this session: *William S. Gray: Teacher, Scholar, Leader* (1985). It includes the full texts of the papers presented by Mavrogenes and Robinson, as well as a complete bibliography of Gray's 519 publications.

Another IRA publication on Gray is John T. Guthrie's edition of William S. Gray's *Reading: A Research Retrospective, 1887-1941* (1984), based on an article by Gray that originally appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* in 1941, under "Reading." SIG member Jeanne S. Chall, Harvard University, who wrote the sister article for the *EER* in 1982, has contributed a foreword.

## UKRA PUBLISHES STUDIES ON HISTORY OF READING

A collection of essays on the history of reading has recently been published in England by the Centre for the Teaching of Reading at the University of Reading and by the United Kingdom Reading Association. *Studies in the History of Reading* (1984), edited by Greg Brooks and A.K. Pugh, presents the papers given at a History of Reading Colloquium held at the University of Reading, England, last year.

Pugh introduces the collection with a discussion of the relevance of studying the history of reading. He detects a growing interest in the subject, despite the small number of studies undertaken so far. Redmond A. Burke addresses some problems of methodology inherent in studying the reading interests of earlier civilizations. He issues cautions on defining literacy; on identifying the kind of reader (such as a scholarly, devotional, or popular reader); and on measuring book popularity by library catalogues and best seller lists.

Michael T. Clanchy discusses "Learning to Read in the Middle Ages and the Role of Mothers." He notes that it was not until the 14th century that the Virgin Mary began to be depicted as praying with an open book—and that this was also the period at which books became familiar and desirable objects in the homes of the better-off. Mary, therefore, the ideal of motherhood, was being shown as a user of books in a domestic setting. "The role of the pious mother, as the mediator of book-learning," suggests Clanchy, "may emerge as crucial in the early history of literacy."

### Early Use of Whole-Word Methods

Ian Michael evaluates the early use of whole-word methods in the teaching of reading. From the evidence of some 500 textbooks (mostly spellers) published before 1840, he concludes that the whole-word approach was the policy of only a tiny minority of teachers until the middle of the 19th century. One writer in 1677 expressly repudiated a whole-word approach:

The best way of teaching to read is by calling every Letter by some name. As for example: if thou wert to teach a Child to read this sentence 'And the Word was made Flesh' thou wouldst not point to it with thy finger, and tell him this word is 'and', this 'the' . . . but thou wouldst call every letter by some name, and teach him that *a, en, de,* spells and; *te, ach, e,* spells the.

Joyce M. Morris titles her essay, "Phonics: From an Unsophisticated Past to a Linguistics-Informed Future." She identifies *Reading Without Tears* (1857) as the first influential reading primer in Britain to include a phonic method. Nellie Dale's imaginative *Dale Readers* (1900-1902) demonstrated that a phonic approach need not be synonymous with repetitious drill. Phonics were still in vogue from 1900 to 1921, but went into a decline after 1922, the year that American basal reading programs (which incorporated a predominantly "look-and-say" approach) began to be adapted for the British market. Morris outlines the subsequent "phonic revolt" led by John Daniels and Hunter Diack, and traces developments after 1959, including the recent interest in reading instruction taken by linguists. She concludes that "today, although there are published phonic resources in abundance . . . there is still comparatively little choice of materials

for teachers who want to use or even learn about linguistics-informed phonics."

J.L. Dobson criticizes the assumption that a signature in 19th-century England and Wales indicated an ability to read, and that therefore a count of signatures is an adequate measure of literacy. He draws on reports by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, who found all too many children reading without comprehension, to challenge the claim that illiteracy had virtually disappeared in England and Wales by 1900.

In other essays, M.D. Vernon reviews the history of the experimental psychology of reading, and Peter Horner follows the development of reading books in England after 1870. Horner points to the longevity of some reading textbooks. Mrs. Trimmer (whom Horner calls a "self-appointed guardian of juvenile reading taste") first published her *Charity School Spelling Book* in 1790: it was continuously reprinted over the next 100 years. Favel Lee Mortimer's *Reading Without Tears* (1857) was the book from which Winston Churchill learned to read: he recalled that it "certainly did not justify its title in my case."

### The Silent Reading Method of the 1920s

Brooks completes the collection by investigating the genesis of the silent reading method of the 1920s. The method, which relied heavily on written commands, reached its most extreme form in the United States. By 1938 over 3,000 children in 79 Chicago schools were involved, thanks to the enthusiasm of the Chicago assistant superintendent of schools, J.E. McDade. Absolutely no oral reading, according to McDade, was to be done until the third grade, and parents were requested to cooperate by not asking their children to read aloud at home. When the method, not unnaturally, met with considerable opposition, Guy Buswell was brought in to lend weight to the non-oral case. Brooks suggests that the wilder claims for the non-oral method have been disproved, but that the reintroduction of some commands into children's readers (which today contain virtually nothing but declarative sentences) would at least indicate to children that writing serves a communicative purpose.

*Studies in the History of Reading* is available for \$9 airmail, or \$7 surface mail, from the Centre for the Teaching of Reading, University of Reading School of Education, 29 Eastern Avenue, Reading RG1 5RU, England; or from the Administrative Secretary, UK Reading Association, Edge Hill College, St. Helens Road, Ormskirk, Lancs. L39 4QP, England.

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY

The History of Education Society will hold its annual meeting at the Atlanta American Hotel, Atlanta, GA, from November 8-10, 1985. Sessions include discussions of aspects of the history of 19th-century American Catholic education, controversies over public schooling, and "Ruralism, Religion and Literacy: Persistent Themes in Southern Education." One of the papers in the latter is by **Harvey Neufeldt**, Tennessee Technological University, on "The Southern Illiteracy Campaign, 1911-1930: A Study in Ideology and Southern Progressivism." (For further information, contact Wayne J. Urban, Box 655, Georgia State University, University Plaza Atlanta, GA 30303).

# The Annual Summary as a Source in the History of Reading

By Peter J.L. Fisher

State University of New York at Buffalo

Each year the International Reading Association's *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading* identifies and abstracts research related to reading which has been published during the previous year. The *Summary* was begun by William S. Gray in 1925, and has appeared annually ever since. Gray authored the *Summary* until his death in 1960, when Helen M. Robinson assumed the role. She remained the major author until her retirement in 1968, when Sam Weintraub took over. This continuity has the advantage that the research into reading has been examined under similar categories for much of the *Summary's* history. Each of the six major categories is divided into subcategories, and History of Reading SIG members may find that studies included in certain of these subcategories are of interest.

A brief examination was made of the last ten *Summaries* to be published to identify studies which related to the history of reading. The number of abstracts for each year (including the number of books) is shown in the table below. Most of these studies appeared in the subcategories entitled "History of Reading Instruction"; "History of Newspapers and Magazines"; "History of Print and Books"; and "Publication and History of Juvenile Books", although occasionally investigations of historical interest appear elsewhere. It can be seen that the number of historical studies over each of the past six years has averaged 30, and in that period 39 books have been abstracted. Although there have been no major trends in the subject matter of the investigations, it appears that there has been a developing interest in the study of literacy in a historical context.

Historical Studies in Reading in the *Summary*

	Abstracts	Books
1974/75	7	4
1975/76	15	1
1976/77	17	4
1977/78	14	2
1978/79	44	11
1979/80	33	5
1980/81	19	2
1981/82	28	5
1982/83	25	10
1983/84	32	6

One way the *Summary* may be of help to History of Reading SIG members is in the identification of historical research which appears in journals they would not normally examine. In the latest *Summary* (1983/84), for example, the following studies appeared. Reeves (1983) describes reading instructions given to convicts who were deported from Britain to Australia during the early 1800s. He noted that the convicts mostly had no use for the reading skills they were taught, but did respond to the religious nature of the instruction. Jonasdottir (1983) looks historically at the production of children's books and the provision of library services in Iceland. With only 235,000 people speaking Icelandic, book publishing for children is apparently difficult. Desroches (1983) traces the history of the library at Alexandria from the fourth century B.C. to its destruction in 646 A.D. Contributors to the library at its peak include Euclid, Euripides, Aristotle, and Archimedes. Bar-

bour (1983) examines the use of maps in books from Ptolemaeus in the second century A.D. to the present. He notes that topographical and special maps of various kinds have been used in books since at least the 17th century. Shore (1983) investigates the contents of high school social studies textbooks of the 1930s in relation to the topics of the Depression, Roosevelt, and Fascism. He concludes that students of that period would not have been made very aware of the issues through the use of such books.

Mention was made earlier of the books included in the *Summary*. Unfortunately these are not usually identified as quickly as research articles, partly because the university library may take time to obtain copies. However, books are included late rather than not at all in the hope that they may be of interest. For example in the latest edition there are abstracts of Meadows (1980), who chronicles the growth of various aspects of science publishing in Europe, and Scott (1980), who presents a historical and critical survey of oral and written Chinese literature for children.

## REFERENCES.

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- Meadows, A.J. (Ed.) (1980) *Development of science publishing in Europe*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers.
- Reeves, N. (1983) Teaching convicts to read in colonial Australia. *Australian Journal of Reading*, 6, 65-72.
- Scott, D.H. (1980) *Chinese popular literature and the child*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Shore, P.J. (1983) The view from the eye of the storm. *Social Education*, 47, 430-434.

Peter J.L. Fisher is completing his doctoral dissertation at SUNY-Buffalo. He is one of the five authors of the 1983/84 *Annual Summary*.

**Editor's note:** *The Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading: July 1, 1983 to June 30, 1984*, by Sam Weintraub, Helen K. Smith, Walter J. Moore, Kathleen S. Jongsma and Peter J.L. Fisher (IRA Book No. 966), is available at a pre-paid cost of \$15 to IRA members and \$23 to others. Order from: International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139.

## SOUTHERN BLACKS AND READING

A paper on some of the circumstances under which Southern Blacks learned to read before the Civil War has been published by the University of Illinois. Patricia A. Herman's *Southern Blacks: Accounts of Learning to Read Before 1861*. Reading Education Report No. 53, is available from the Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820.

## SIG ATTENDANCE RISES AT MEETING IN NEW ORLEANS

The History of Reading SIG drew its largest audience to date at its annual meeting at the IRA convention in New Orleans, on Wednesday, May 8, 1985. Organized and chaired by David W. Moore, University of Northern Iowa, the session opened with two speakers on the history of literacy development in New Mexico.

**Zelda Maggart** and **Bernardo Gallegos**, both of the University of New Mexico, surveyed three periods: (1) Literacy in New Mexico before 1680. Gallegos emphasized the efforts made by Spanish clerics after 1523 to teach the Indians to read and write in their primary language, Nahuatl. (2) Literacy in Spanish colonial New Mexico, 1692-1821. Gallegos concluded that by the end of this period the printed word was so woven into the social fabric that to participate in the culture, an individual either had to possess minimal literacy skills himself, or have access to a literate individual. (3) Literacy in New Mexico, 1821-1912. Maggart demonstrated how literacy was associated with geography, politics, economics, linguistic status, and religious activity. (For a copy of their paper, write Zelda Maggart, Dept. of CIMTE, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131).

**A. Garr Cranney**, Brigham Young University, then presented his "History of Reading: A Bible Corpus for Reading Professionals." Cranney used key words related to reading (such as "read," "study," and "book") to generate passages from a computerized text of the King James version of the Bible. After pruning, over 400 texts remained on such topics as the importance, the effects, and the difficulty of reading. Cranney discussed how books were used in largely illiterate societies. (Write to A. Garr Cranney, Box 42 MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.)

For his talk on "Research in the Teaching of Reading, 1933-1983," **Peter J.L. Fisher**, State University of New York at Buffalo, had sampled, at ten-year intervals, studies reported in the International Reading Association's *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading*. Fisher concluded that although the number of investigations related to reading had increased dramatically, especially over the past two decades, those concerned with the teaching of reading had not increased proportionately. (Peter J.L. Fisher, SUNY at Buffalo, Dept. of Learning and Instruction, 593 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260.)

The last speaker, **Barbara von Bracht Donsky**, Oyster Bay Cove, NY, spoke on trends in written composition instruction in elementary school textbooks, 1900-1959. A trend analysis of nine popular English textbook series published during these years showed a decline in categories relevant to writing (such as models for composition and letter writing) and an increase in oral language exercises that bore little relationship to writing. (Donsky may be reached at Woodland Drive, Oyster Bay Cove, NY 11771.)

After questions from the audience, Richard E. Hodges, University of Puget Sound and SIG president, chaired a business meeting. The treasurer's report showed a balance of \$132.84. Motions were passed to raise membership dues to

\$7.50 annually; to empower the SIG president to coordinate a speakers bureau on topics on the history of reading; and to encourage the SIG to take steps to foster the preservation of books, such as textbooks, that have significance for the history of reading. (A complete copy of the minutes has been mailed separately to SIG members.)

## NYSRA HOSTS THIRD INVITATIONAL STRAND

The New York State Reading Association, at its 19th annual conference scheduled for November 5-8, 1985, at Kiamesha Lake, NY, is once again presenting an invitational strand on historical topics relating to reading. Former SIG president, **Miriam Balmuth**, Hunter College of CUNY, will chair this session on Thursday, November 7, 1-3 p.m. **Barbara von Bracht Donsky**, Oyster Bay Cove, NY, will talk on trends in elementary writing instruction, 1900-1959; **Peter J.L. Fisher**, SUNY at Buffalo, will discuss research on the teaching of reading, 1933-1983; and **Margaret M. Waters**, Brooklyn College of CUNY, will present a paper titled, "Pedagogy for the Oppressed: The Hedge Schools of Ireland, 1697-1829."

## SIG OFFICERS REELECTED

The following slate of officers was elected for the 1985-1986 year:

President: Richard E. Hodges, University of Puget Sound  
1st Vice-President: David W. Moore, University of Northern Iowa

2nd Vice-President: Richard L. Venezky, University of Delaware

Treasurer: Janet Miller, Northern Kentucky University  
Secretary: Margaret M. Waters, Brooklyn College of CUNY

## History of Reading SIG Membership Information

The History of Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association was founded in 1976. The purpose of the group, as stated in its constitution, is "to encourage historical research in the field of reading and literacy; to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information about the history of reading and reading instruction; and to promote the development of a body of historical knowledge about reading and literacy."

Membership is restricted to members of the International Reading Association. Non-IRA members may receive the newsletter, but may not stand for office or vote. Dues are currently \$7.50 a year for both IRA members and non-IRA members, payable to the History of Reading-SIG. All dues should be sent to the SIG Treasurer, Janet Miller, UPO Box 99, NKU Campus Station, Highland Heights, KY 41076.

News items should be sent to E. Jennifer Monaghan, editor, *History of Reading News*, Department of Educational Services, Brooklyn College of CUNY, Brooklyn, NY 11210.