

History of Reading News

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TWO IRA JOURNALS SHOWCASE HISTORY

RRQ and *Journal of Reading*

In an unprecedented move, two journals published by the International Reading Association featured essays related to the history of reading as their lead articles in their most recent issues. The *Reading Research Quarterly* presented Lawrence C. Stedman and Carl F. Kaestle's "Literacy and Reading Performance in the United States, from 1880 to the Present," as the leading article in the first number of the 1987 volume. The February issue of the *Journal of Reading* led off with "History of Reading: Status and Sources of a Growing Field," by A. Garr Cranney and Janet Smith Miller.

Stedman and SIG member Kaestle review literacy and reading achievement trends over the past century and place current debates in a historical perspective. They evaluate then-and-now studies, achievement test score trends, and tests of functional literacy.

Co-authors Cranney, the SIG's current secretary, and Miller, SIG treasurer and a past president of the SIG, summarize a study they undertook (as reported in our last newsletter) to find out how much history of reading was being included in graduate reading programs. They received 195 usable responses (a 58% return) to a questionnaire sent to all the U.S. and Canadian programs listed in the IRA's *Graduate Programs and Faculty in Reading*. Only nine respondents (5%) reported that they devoted a specific course to the history of reading, and few of the respondents were able to name any sources other than Nila Banton Smith's *American Reading Instruction* (1986).

Cranney and Miller, after discussing the "value and allure of reading's history," present a wealth of information on sources. In addition to associations already familiar to our readers, they include the following, along with an address and the person to contact:

- **Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas:** Vivian Salmon, 5 Rotha Field Road, Oxford OX2 8JJ, England.
- **Australian Reading Association:** Noelene Reeves, 4 The Lane, Churchlands, Western Australia 6018, edits the group's newsletter.
- **Institut d'Etudes du Livre,** Ecole Nationale des Chartes, 19 rue de la Sorbonne, 75005 Paris, France.
- **Center for the Book in the Library of Congress:** John Y. Cole, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540.



Margaret F. Sax, *A Little Learning*, p. 14

Also included is a list of some of the "most noted of historical collections of reading material": the **Nila Banton Smith Historical Collection in Reading** at Hofstra University, the **Barnard Textbook Collection** at Trinity College, the **Plimpton Collection** at Columbia University, the **Nietz Collection** at the University of Pittsburgh, and collections at the McGuffey Museum in Oxford, Ohio, the New York Public Library and the American Antiquarian Society.

The article ends with an annotated bibliography of some 60 works on the history of reading, grouped into subject categories such as "ancient and medieval history of reading" and "American reading history."

SIG at World Congress in London

Once again our SIG sponsored a historical session at an IRA World Congress—this time in London, England, in July 1986. Co-organized by Miriam Balmuth and Earl Hanson, these sessions offer papers on the history of reading in different countries by authors who either were born or have lived in the countries they studied.

At this session, the papers included "History of Reading: Examination and Analysis of Elementary Primers in Czarist and Soviet Russia" by **Filia Holtzman**, Hunter College of CUNY; "Prolegomena to the History of Reading in Greece," by **Nancy Mavrogenes**, Chicago Board of Education, Department of Research and Evaluation; and "Historical Highlights of Adult Basic Literacy Instruction in the United States" by **Earl Hanson**, Northern Illinois University.

The international focus of the session was underscored by the fact that the countries represented by the speakers, together with members of the audience, were Australia, Britain, France, Greece, Morocco, Nigeria, Russia, Sweden, The Netherlands, and the United States.

Researchers' Guide to 19th-Century Textbook Collections

Richard L. Venezky's "Researchers' Guide to 19th-Century Textbook Collections" appeared in our Fall 1984 newsletter (vol. VIII, no. 1). Venezky had asked ten libraries to comment on their holdings of 19th-century American textbooks designed to teach reading, speaking, or writing. We are now able to supplement Venezky's article, thanks to two more of our members: A. Garr Cranney, Brigham Young University, and Cathy Davidson, Michigan State University, who alerted us to the following collections:

The Center for Research Libraries, 6050 Kenwood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637, has a very large collection of some 85,000 old textbooks. The holdings of the entire collection have recently been estimated as follows: 1800-1850: 4 per cent; 1851-1900: 19 per cent (heavily loaded toward spellers, readers, grammars and rhetorics); 1901-1950: 60 per cent. The collection includes all subjects from K-12, and foreign-language readers at the college level as well. It is uncatalogued, but arranged on the shelves by subject, and by author within that. "We keep all editions of a work, but not subsequent unchanged reprintings of the same edition," reports Esther Smith, Collection Development Librarian. The library also has 45,000 children's books, of which over 80 per cent are 1951 or later. For a specific text, consult the Circulation Dept. Tel: (312) 955-4545.

The **Russell B. Nye Culture Collection** at Michigan State University Libraries, East Lansing, MI 48824-1036, includes a 2,000-volume partly-catalogued collection of 19th- and early 20th-century textbooks, many of which are spellers and readers. Work has begun on a descriptive index to the collection, listing signatures of previous owners, places of origin, and other significant flyleaf inscriptions such as autograph verses and drawings. Contact: Jannette Fiore, Head, Special Collections, Tel: (517) 355-3770.

A LITTLE LEARNING: A CATALOG

The Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut houses the **Barnard Textbook Collection**—a remarkable collection of over 7,000 old schoolbooks. Its nucleus is the books that were once in the possession of the great American educator and editor of the *American Journal of Education*, Henry Barnard (1811-1900).

An illustrated catalog from a 1983 exhibition, featuring some of the books in this collection, is still in print. Margaret F. Sax, associate curator, who organized the exhibition, provides brief commentaries on the textbooks as well as bibliographical information. Her catalog is titled *A Little Learning: School Books in America from Colonial Times to the End of the Nineteenth Century*.

The catalog includes descriptions of a 1770 edition of the *New England Primer*, Joseph Emerson's *Evangelical Primer* (1812), *An Elementary Book for the use of the Deaf and Dumb in the Connecticut Asylum* (1817)—perhaps by Thomas A. Gallaudet, John Pierpont's *The Little Learner: or, Rudiments*

of Reading (1854), F. Brookfield's *First Book in Composition, for the Use of Schools, on an Entirely New Plan* (1855), a fourth edition of the *Confederate Primer* (1864), Lewis E. Monroe's *First Reader* (1873), and Jenny H. Stickney's *The Child's Book of Language* (1879).

For a free copy of *A Little Learning*, write to Margaret F. Sax, Associate Curator, The Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 06106. For information call (203) 527-3151, ext. 307. (But hurry. There aren't very many copies left.)

THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK: TWO SUMMER CONFERENCES

Two conferences relevant to the history of the book are being held this summer.

Columbia's Rare Book School

Columbia University Library is once again holding its summer Rare Book School, offering 24 five-day noncredit courses (either all- or half-day) on topics related to rare books and special collections. SIG member **Alice D. Schreyer**, University of Delaware Library, together with **Peter M. VanWingen**, Library of Congress, will teach a course titled "The History of the Book" on the production and impact of the printed book in the west from the 15th to the 20th centuries (all-day, July 13-17, 1987; tuition: \$400). **Michael Winship**, editor of *Bibliography of American Literature*, and **Edwin Wolf 2d.**, for many years Librarian at the Library Company of Philadelphia, will be the instructors for "History of the Book in America," which will examine the history and role of books in North America from colonial times through the 20th century (all day, July 20-24; \$400).

For information, write Terry Belanger, Director, Rare Book School, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, or call (212) 280-4734 or -2293.

American Antiquarian Society

The American Antiquarian Society (AAS) is sponsoring, together with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, a two-day conference on "Teaching the History of the Book: Methods and Concepts." The conference will take place on June 12 and 13, 1987, at the AAS, in Worcester, Mass. It will focus on how liberal arts institutions or professional schools (such as a school of library science) can incorporate the history of the book into their curricula.

Some ten to twelve speakers, including SIG members **Alice D. Schreyer** and **Richard L. Venezky**, both of the University of Delaware, will chair workshops and/or present papers. Other scholars include **Terry Belanger**, Columbia University, **Robert A. Gross**, Amherst College, and **Roger Stoddard**, Harvard University.

Applicants are urged to apply early for the **May 1, 1987** deadline, as they will be accepted in order of application, and the number of participants is limited. Fees are \$45.

For conference registration and housing information, write to John B. Hench, Associate Director for Research and Publication, AAS, 185 Salisbury St., Worcester, MA 01609-1634, or call (617) 755-5221 or 752-5813.

Learning to Write—Early 1900s

By ALVINA TREUT BURROWS

Recalling one person's composing experience in early childhood, as I have been asked to do, may illustrate a few of the problems of inherited methods. In my recollection, word cards related to the vocabulary of reading lessons eased some of the fatigue of a beginning writer. I liked those dog-eared, soiled old cards for that very reason. We also copied sentences from reading texts, and from the blackboard where the teacher wrote sentences from the day's lesson. In second and third grade, she wrote questions and we wrote answers on paper.

A beginning "reader" — a very small textbook with occasional colored pictures — still comes up on my memory screen. I also recall Longfellow's *SONG OF HIAWATHA*, but with only black and white pictures. I loved the "Shores of Gitchee-Gumee" and other sonorous rhythms, the imagery of the forest, and the Big Sea Water. In the *Progressive Road to Reading* we studied folk tales that left strong story patterns with us. Answering questions about these texts was as close to composition as we dared or were directed to go.

In later grades we also answered questions about assigned reading in history and geography texts. I never thought of this as composition. Indeed, we did not *compose* in the sense of projecting our own ideas about events, conditions, or leaders. We restated the information furnished by "the book," often borrowing the author's own words.

Occasionally our rural-school teacher allowed or encouraged us to write stories about anything we wanted. I recall that some wrote about animals, as indeed, children still do. Among some scraps of writing saved from my childhood are a few faded pages dated 1915. One from that time reflects a then frequent happening.

One day my master took me out on a ride to the mill. On our way in a quiet wood I was frightened by a loud rumbling buzzing of a huge black wagon of some sort. It had a crooked black body projecting from it. It had lots of people in it and a wheel on which a man had his hand. I pranced to the side of the road and wanted to run but the black wagon stopped. My master held me back. He got me by my head and patted me a few times and led me up to it and let me smell it and get a good look at it. "That's a very sensible horse," said the man who I found out later was running the machine called an automobile. "It comes from your good treatment." "Yes, sir. Thank you very much," replied my master and in a few minutes the automobile passed on and we started on our journey.

Reproduced exactly from my pencilled draft that was never corrected nor copied, this story can make no claim to excellence! It did attempt identification with the horse, trying to see his world through his eyes. Perhaps it also helped to promote fluency. I do not recollect any reaction to this tale.

A bit later in sixth grade, I wrote a story about a June wedding using birds as masks for humans. A few sentences of this longer account show its tempo and flavor.

DORIS SPARROW'S WEDDING

For weeks all the birds in Birdville were talking about the great wedding which was to take place in June. The June bride was Doris Sparrow and everyone was wondering what she would wear. She was to marry John Catbird (the richest fellow in Birdville) and everyone was talking about it.



The author, aged eight in 1913

The house was cleaned and papered and painted from the top to bottom. The lawn was cleaned by Johnny Sparrow and even the fence rails were laid straight. The bridge was nailed tight so it wouldn't rattle when the young married couple went over it.

I remember that I liked this story and that a supervisory visitor expressed his approval. Whether I read it aloud or whether he read it from my pencilled copy I do not remember. Apparently I did not value it as much as the verses I wrote, for these I copied carefully in ink in an old fashioned "Composition Book."

While searching for early childhood writings for this report, I came upon my high school yearbook for 1921. In it I was amazed to find a purported history of our class's freshman year. Under the pseudonym, *Jimmy and Jane Freshman*, is my name — Alvina Treut. The format is that of an occasional diary. The shortest of the 11 entries is for February 22, 1918.

Today is Washington's Birthday, and we had school all day. Isn't that awful? Jimmy threatened to hook, but didn't. We're all in the depths of despair and I can't write another speck.

How the fake-diary idea came about, I do not know. Another class member did a similar one for the sophomore year. Both were done shortly before publication time, not during the years so labeled. I hasten to add that there were some good stories, reports, and creditable verses in the yearbook.

From these and other scraps of memorabilia, from old textbooks, and from a very few research studies done early in this century, we may conclude that the psychology of composition was in its earliest infancy during my school years. From conversations with other octogenarians, I sense that for them composition was the step-child of literacy. A few confess that they liked writing compositions in elementary and high school; many more recall embarrassment and a sense of failure. It is to be hoped that this decade's attention to children's writing will help to bring many young people to the optimum flowering of ever enriching literacy.

Alvina Treut Burrows' early schooling was in a one-room rural school in Baltimore County, Maryland. She earned her doctorate at New York University, where she taught until her retirement. Her publications include *They All Want to Write* (1939; updated 4th ed., Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1984).

The Center for the Book

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress attempts to reach three different, but related audiences: the professional book community, scholars studying the history of books, and the general public. The center is a cooperative effort between the public and private sector: the Library of Congress provides administrative support, but about two-thirds of the center's budget comes from private contributions. John Y. Cole has been the center's executive director since it was created in 1977.

SIG member Alice D. Schreyer, now at the University of Delaware Library, became a consultant to the center in 1984 in order to prepare a guide to the Library's resources on the history of the book. Her *The History of Books: A Guide to Selected Resources in the Library of Congress* is currently in the press.

One of the center's 1983 publications was *Literacy in Historical Perspective*, edited by Daniel P. Resnick. To obtain it, send a check for \$8.00 (made out to the Superintendent of Documents) to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325; or telephone (202) 783-3238 with your Master or Visa credit card number. To put yourself on the center's mailing list, write to John Y. Cole, Executive Director, The Center for the Book, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540; tel. (202) 287-5221.

Call for Papers for New York Conference

The History of Education Society has issued a call for its 1987 annual meeting, to be held at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, October 9-11, 1987. Proposals may be for individual or panel presentations, and should provide the topic and an abstract (1-2 pages), and identify the presenter(s). Send proposals by **April 30, 1987** to: Professor Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, Box 129, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

AHA Revises Its *Studying History*

The American Historical Association (AHA) has several publications for teachers. One of these, titled *Studying History: An Introduction to Methods and Structure*, by Paul L. Ward, is now in a revised and expanded third edition (35 pp.). According to the AHA, the book examines the "hows" of studying history, and "incorporates recent scholarship in a discussion of the structure of historical knowledge." To purchase the book, send a check for \$3.50, with an additional \$1.00 per order for handling charges to:

Publication Sales Department, American Historical Association, 400 A Street SE, Washington, DC 20003.

EDITOR'S APPEAL

According to the article by Cranney and Miller (see page 1), there are nine institutions known to offer a specific course on the history of reading as part of their graduate programs in reading. We would like to know which they are, in order to publish a list of them for our readers. (Respondents to the Cranney-Miller questionnaire were all anonymous). Please could you drop a line to the editor of the *History of Reading News*, if your institution is among the nine, or if you know of such courses at other institutions.

SIG to Present Program at Anaheim

The History of Reading SIG will present its annual program at the 32nd annual convention of the International Reading Association in Anaheim, California. The program is scheduled for Wednesday, May 6, 1987, from 9:00 to 11:45 a.m., at Salons 4-5 in the Marriott Hotel. Richard L. Venezky, University of Delaware, is the program's organizer and chair.

Douglas A. New, Granite School District, Salt Lake City, will begin the program by discussing "Reading in Pioneer Utah: The Deseret Alphabet, 1850-1880." **Luther B. Clegg**, Texas Christian University, will follow with his paper on "Learning to Read in a West Texas One-Room School: 1900-1940." **Sheila Shapiro**, Buffalo State College, will talk on poetry in the 1857 edition of the McGuffey Readers. Finally, **E. Jennifer Monaghan**, Brooklyn College of CUNY, will present "The Meanings of Literacy to the Converted Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1640-1725."

A business meeting will follow, chaired by SIG president David W. Moore, University of Northern Iowa.

NYSRA Sponsors Fourth History Strand

At the New York State Reading Association conference in Kiamesha Lake (November 1986), the History of Reading invitational session — now in its fourth year — honored the 1986 special edition of Nila Banton Smith's classic *American Reading Instruction*. **Brother Leonard Courtney**, St. Mary's College, Winona, author of the special edition's prologue, discussed Smith's life and personality, providing insights into her life and methods of working. **H. Alan Robinson**, Hofstra University, discussed the history of American reading instruction since Smith's 1965 edition, highlighting a variety of key events and issues in the ensuing years.

Chaired by History of Reading SIG/NYSRA liaison, Miriam Balmuth, Hunter College of CUNY, the program was complemented by a display organized by **Vincent Faraone**, Long Island University. Wall charts illustrating American reading instruction according to Smith's historical periods were accompanied by examples of reading books from each period.

History of Reading SIG Membership Information

The History of Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association was founded in 1975. 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.