

History of Reading News

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LEADER IN THE FIELD OF READING IS DEAD

Helen M. Robinson

Helen M. Robinson, a leader in the field of reading, died on June 29th. Dr. Robinson's illustrious career spanned over five decades of scholarly effort in, and devotion to, the study of reading. The first of well over 100 articles and books by Dr. Robinson appeared in 1929; her last, in 1985. Her dissertation, published as *Why Pupils Fail in Reading*, represented a pioneering effort to understand reading disability and is recognized as an unqualified classic. From 1961 to 1968, she served as major author and editor of the *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading*. It was Dr. Robinson who established the category system still used in the summary.

The first William S. Gray Research Professor of Reading at the University of Chicago, Dr. Robinson served as president of the National Conference on Research in English and was the first president/secretary and one of the four original members of the Reading Hall of Fame. Additionally, she was president of the National Association of Remedial Teachers, one of the parent organizations of the IRA, and later a member of the Board of IRA. During her long teaching career at Chicago, Dr. Robinson continually stressed the importance of knowing the historical precedents in reading research. Her doctoral seminars always included a segment devoted to historical research and methods of inquiry as well as an analysis of pivotal early studies in reading.

In her will, Dr. Robinson requested that any contributions in her memory should be sent to IRA. Contributions can be made to the Helen M. Robinson Fund and mailed to IRA headquarters.

SUNY at Buffalo

Sam Weintraub



Source: Schools & Educators: A History of the People

Video Tapes on History of Schooling

A series of seven videotapes, titled *Schools & Educators: A History of the People*, is available from Northern Illinois University. SIG member Richard D. Robinson, University of Missouri-Columbia, is the "featured educator" for a tape on "The Evolution of the Textbook in American Schools." Other titles are "Hornbooks: Forerunners of Today's Textbooks," "A Day in the Life of the One Room School," and "Women and Teaching: Hardships and Heroics." The remaining tapes examine the life of Johann Pestalozzi, the role religion has played in education, and the impact of the industrial revolution on schools. "Featured educators" include the educational historians Richard Altenbaugh, Northern Illinois University, Gerald L. Gutek and F. Michael Perko of Loyola University of Chicago, as well as Charles Wolf, Lewis University.

Each tape is in color, runs from 15 to 20 minutes, and is priced at \$100 (or \$650 for the set). Write to Learning Center, Northern Illinois University, Gabel 8, DeKalb, IL 60115.

History of Education Society Meets

The annual meeting of the History of Education Society was held in Toronto, Canada, at the Park Plaza Hotel, November 4-6, 1988. **Florence Estes**, Indiana State University, was scheduled to speak on "Cora Wilson Stewart and the Crusade for Adult Literacy in Kentucky, 1911-1920." SIG member **Bernardo Gallegos**, California State University, Los Angeles, discussed "Education in the American Southwest During the Spanish Colonial and Mexican Periods: New Mexico, 1598-1846." **Susan Lee Pentlin**, Central Missouri State University, evaluated "The Third Reich in American German-Language Textbooks, 1933-1945." **Barbara Finkelstein**, University of Maryland, discussed "Images of Literacy Among Three Generations of Burakumin Women, 1900-1988".

CALL FOR PAPERS

The *History of Education Quarterly* is planning to publish a special issue on the history of literacy in 1990. The purpose of this issue will be to advance scholarship on the study of literacy in its historical context.

The *Quarterly* seeks manuscripts that address broad issues in the field of literacy studies and examine the history of literacy in various national, regional, and world settings. Please submit manuscripts by **September 1, 1989**, to the Editor, *History of Education Quarterly*, School of Education, Room 203, Indiana University at Bloomington, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Please note: manuscripts should be prepared according to Style A of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th ed.), double spaced, and submitted in duplicate. Notes should be double spaced and placed at the end of the article.

A Life in Reading

By RALPH C. STAIGER

"How did you ever get into the field of reading?" The question came (in the deep end of our neighborhood pool) from a lawyer acquaintance during last summer's heat wave. A retiree likes to reminisce, and so I did, for him. It seems to be a good way to start this essay.

An excellent fellow teacher who had taken some courses at the Temple University Reading Clinic, Ernestine Andrew, had touted its program, and the idea of learning more about reading appealed to me. As a teacher and supervising principal of a small twelve-grade rural school, I had encountered pupils with reading problems. They had puzzled me, for each was intelligent and should have been able to read more efficiently. And so I investigated, enrolled, and my wife found a job teaching at Chestnut Hill Academy.

Temple was not a disappointment. Emmett Betts was in his prime, and was a stimulating teacher. He was also a hard taskmaster. For example, the diagnostic course description suggested that it met three times a week; actually we spent all day, every day, working in the Reading Clinic. Other courses were held in the evening and on Saturday morning! It was a full schedule, and a rewarding one for those who lasted.

The habit of systematically evaluating readers and their reading, as well as the habit of working long hours, was instilled by our experiences. The students who completed the graduate course became competent reading specialists.

Since virtually all of us had been teachers, the transition from clinical practice to school use of the things we learned was not difficult, for we subconsciously drew upon our classroom experiences as we worked with Emmett Betts, Russell Stauffer (who headed the diagnostic service) and Elona Sochor in the Clinic. Later we taught small groups of severely retarded readers in the Laboratory School on the grounds of the Oak Lane Country Day School.

The students who had not previously taught, but came to graduate school directly from college, were at a disadvantage. While clinical observation and diagnosis in a one-to-one situation was valuable to them, many could not function well in a large class, which requires additional skills and organizational abilities.

Basic to our observation-training was the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). First we used the "official" IRI, and eventually we created our own, in itself a valuable exercise. The power of the IRI was that it stimulated our powers of observation in all reading situations: reading at sight, silent reading, skimming and scanning to reread materials read silently, and, of course, factual and inferential comprehension of what had been read. Marjorie Seddon Johnson, who was in our group, and Roy Kress later wrote a bestselling booklet, *Informal Reading Inventories*, for the International Reading Association's publication program. John Pikulski (also a Temple alumnus) joined them for the enlarged second edition. As with other clinical tools, there is no substitute for intensive supervision when a beginner works with the Informal Reading Inventory.

The IRI was not the only diagnostic tool we used, for we saw hundreds of poor readers and held hour-long summary

"case studies" in which case histories, standardized and psychological test results as well as observations were organized into a "syndrome" from which decisions and recommendations were made.

Although the emphasis was on remediation in the clinical program, the improvement of all reading programs was never far from us. Not all of our time at the University was taken up with classes and clinical work. The Temple University Reading Conference brought us into contact with teachers and leaders in reading from many other places in the United States and Canada, which provided us with a broad view of the reading field.

The first time I met Nancy Larrick, much later to become the second president of the IRA, was on Broad Street outside the Temple buildings during a Reading Conference. We engaged in a lively conversation, which we still talk of when we meet. She was then the editor of the *Young America Readers*, a student newspaper which competed with *The Weekly Reader*.

Emmett Betts encouraged us to become involved with reading specialists outside Temple, too. Toward that end he encouraged his students to join the National Conference on Research in English. The two dollar membership dues, he said, were affordable and would be more than repaid when we received the research bulletins issued by the NCRE.

NCRE breakfasts, often held in conjunction with the American Educational Research Association in Atlantic City, gave us the opportunity to become acquainted with many important people in the field. I first met William S. Gray, Arthur Gates, Arthur Traxler, Donald Durrell, Helen Murphy, Albert J. Harris, Constance McCullough, Nila Banton Smith, Guy Bond, Helen M. Robinson, Edgar Dale, Paul Witty, Gerald Yoakam, Gertrude Whipple, David Russell, Marian Anderson and Ruth Strang at those meetings. They were reporting their research, and were interested in what the others were doing.

Their intellectual concern with reading and its problems was, I believe, what attracted me to these people and reinforced my feelings that I had made the right choice. They examined, pondered, wondered, and theorized about reading, and were critical about their own creative endeavors. It was a joy to learn from them. In a small group at an AERA meeting, Arthur Gates described his beginnings in reading and reading research. His humility in approaching the many puzzles in reading was impressive, and left a lasting impression on me.

Once, after Bert Harris and Blanche Serwer had presented a study of the "worrisome influx" of Puerto Rican immigrants into the New York City schools, the aged B.R. Buckingham, returning to the NCRE breakfast for the first time in years, commented, "As I listened to this report, I could not help but think that when I was principal of the experimental Speyer School in 1910, people were saying the same thing about the new German immigrants." New arrivals have always presented language and cultural challenges as teachers of our Southeast Asian immigrants are finding.

Dora V. Smith once proudly introduced a shy young graduate student at the University of Minnesota at an NCRE breakfast. He was to become the seventh president of the IRA, Ted Clymer.

Later, I became closer to many of these people through the IRA, first as committee chairman, then as a member of the Board of Directors, and later as Executive Secretary. Their deep concern for the field was evident in their discussions, for they left personal differences and ambitions behind when they exercised their Board responsibilities. Without their intellectual and professional leadership in those early days, the IRA would not have gained the respect of the professional community as quickly as it did.

The founding of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction took place on the tenth floor of Temple's Mitten Hall, in the Reading Clinic which we graduate students inhabited almost constantly. Eventually, the ICIRI was merged with the National Association of Remedial Teachers, which had its beginnings at the University of Chicago.

The NART also included remedial arithmetic teachers, and the merger was opposed by Professor Leo Brueckner of the University of Minnesota, a leader in the teaching of mathematics who correctly predicted the demise of remedial arithmetic as a field if the two reading groups came together as one organization. Only recently, articles decrying the lack of remedial arithmetic programs have appeared in the press.

It would take much more space than I have been allotted to describe the days of my stewardship at IRA. These are scheduled for a future newsletter.

A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ralph C. Staiger, author of over 75 publications in reading, was born in 1917 in New York City and attended public schools there. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University. He earned an Ed.D. from Temple University in 1952, and was director of the University of Southern Mississippi Reading Clinic from 1952 to 1962. From then until 1984 he served the International Reading Association as Executive Director. He is currently chair of the International Book Committee.

The Origin of IRA SIGs

Russell Stauffer, Professor Emeritus, University of Delaware, and a supporter of our SIG since 1976, was the first to propose and organize a Special Interest Group—the Language-Experience group—under IRA auspices. The idea for such a group, according to Stauffer, came from his friend Dick Der-shiker, who was then secretary-treasurer for the American Educational Research Association.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

For twelve years now, from the fall of 1976 to the present, I have been editor or coeditor (with Bridget Cooke, who was also the group's secretary from 1975 to 1977) of the *History of Reading News*. Begun as two sheets typed on a battered Royal upright, with its headlines penned by artist Virginia Cantarella, the newsletter proceeded through various electric typewriters (including my coeditor's) until the winter of 1983-84.

With that issue, we turned to typesetting. The last seven issues, from the fall of 1985 to the present, have been typeset by Burnley Dame of Brooklyn, at prices so modest that she can have made almost no money from us. Now that we seem to need six-page newsletters (as we did in the two issues preceding this), prices—even Burnley's prices—have forced

us to make yet another change. The next issue, if all goes as planned, will be set by means of that latest electronic marvel, desktop publishing. We all owe Burnley a debt of gratitude for so many years of quality typesetting.

The spring issue of 1989 will see another change as well. For the first time, I shall not be involved in the newsletter. Richard D. Robinson, University of Missouri-Columbia, will take charge of that issue. News items should be sent to him at: University of Missouri-Columbia, College of Education, 317 Townsend Hall, Columbia, MO 65211; tel. (314) 882-8247.

The Launching of the SIG

It is fitting that the reminiscences of Ralph Staiger should appear in the present newsletter, for Ralph played a significant role in launching our Special Interest Group. A little history of the History of Reading SIG seems in order here. On March 7, 1975, I wrote to Ralph Staiger—then, of course, Executive Director of the International Reading Association—to request that the IRA form a committee on the history of reading. Richard L. Venezky, with whom I had been in touch but had yet to meet, and Ralph Staiger both suggested that a SIG would be a more appropriate format for such a group. Prodded by my husband, Charles Monaghan, I called up Ralph (I think in April) to ask for a room for an organizational meeting for the SIG at the upcoming 21st IRA convention at New York. Ralph was his usual marvel of courtesy and efficiency, and whistled up the Chambord Room for us at the Americana Hotel. Too late to appear on the printed program, we none the less left flyers everywhere we could, and drew a surprisingly good attendance of conferees—no doubt lured by the name of Dick Venezky as the speaker.

Our Faithful Members

Of the 16 persons who signed the sheet at that first organizational meeting in New York on the afternoon of Tuesday, May 13, 1975, those who are still members (besides me) are: **Doris Burns, Ann Marie Kelly, Janet Miller** (who would succeed me as president and who has served as the SIG's treasurer since 1977), **H. Alan Robinson**, and **Richard L. Venezky**. Current members of the SIG who joined in 1976 or 1977 include **Barbara S. Amann, Miriam Balmuth** (who would become a president), **Gorm Fridal, June R. Gilstad** (another future president), **Earl F. Hanson, Richard E. Hodges** (also to be president), **Jane M. Hornburger, James R. Layton, James E. Richmond, Russell Stauffer**, and **Sam Weintraub**.

Nila Banton Smith was a member of the SIG until her death in 1976, and would have given the welcoming speech at our first program at the 1976 IRA convention, held at Anaheim, had not illness forced her to cancel her appearance. Our speakers at that meeting were H. Alan Robinson, Sam Weintraub, and Richard E. Hodges.

SETS OF SIG NEWSLETTERS AVAILABLE

All this history and much more is available in past newsletters. Entire sets of these may be obtained free (at least for now) from our SIG archivist, Miriam Balmuth. Contact her at Box 57, Hunter College of CUNY, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.

SIG Program at Toronto

The History of Reading SIG presented a program at the Toronto Convention Centre on Thursday, May 5, 1988, at the annual convention of the International Reading Association. Richard L. Venezky, University of Delaware, organized and chaired the meeting.

Bill Vanderhoff, Texas Christian University, headed up the papers with his discussion of "The Classics and Cultural Literacy: An Examination of Selected 19th and 20th Century Readers." Using "classics" broadly as a term that encompassed authors from Homer to Aesop, Vanderhoff examined several readers (including the *McGuffey Readers*), for the frequency with which classical characters, titles and themes were mentioned. He used this information to reconstruct the "conceptual structure" of the textbooks for students.

Peter Fisher, National College of Education, Evanston, Illinois, compared and contrasted the lives and works of two best-selling 19th-century authors, G.A. Henty and Horatio Alger, the "most popular and enduring writers of boys' adventure stories in Britain and America." Fisher contrasted Alger's reliance on rags-to-riches stories with Henty's stress on the financial and social advantages of an adventurous youth. He suggested that Alger's stories reflected the American Dream, while Henty's implicitly advocated British imperialism.

Grace S. Vyduna, Unit School District 12, McHenry County, Illinois, then presented the "Language Experience Approach: An Historical View." She reviewed discussions on language experience approaches that surfaced in works by Francis Parker, John Dewey, George Farnham—in his book, *The Sentence Method of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling* (1881)—and Emma Watkins, in *How to Teach Silent Reading to Beginners* (1922).

The presentation closed with a paper titled "Origins of the Dolch 220 Vocabulary List," by **H. Donald Jacobs**, Arizona State University. Jacobs suggested that the Dolch 220 list was not the result of an original study, but a collation of several lists (dating from 1910) which exhibited certain biases: they preferred writing over reading usage and adult over child usage. He presented a "family tree" of the origins of the Dolch 220 list, and provided anecdotal comments based on his interviews with Mrs. Dolch. **Richard D. Robinson**, University of Missouri-Columbia, was the discussant.

A business meeting followed, chaired by SIG president David W. Moore, University of Northern Iowa. Expressions of appreciation for services rendered were made to David W. Moore and to Richard L. Venezky, whose terms of office as president and 1st vice-president (program chair) expired at the end of the meeting.

History of Education Review from Down Under

The Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society publishes the *History of Education Review* twice yearly. The annual subscription rate is \$A20 (about \$16 U.S., \$19 Canadian, 9.50 pounds sterling). For information, contact Marjorie R. Theobald and R.J.W. Selleck, Joint Editors, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria 3168, Australia.

SIG HAS A NEW SLATE OF OFFICERS

A new slate of officers is on board for the 1988-1989 academic year.

President: A. Garr Cranney, Department of Secondary Education, Box 42, McKay Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

1st Vice-President and Program Chair: Luther B. Clegg, School of Education, P.O. Box 32925, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX 76129.

2nd Vice-President and Membership Chair: Margaret M. Waters, Elementary Education, Brooklyn College of CUNY, Brooklyn, NY 11210.

Secretary: Peter Fisher, National College of Education, 2840 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201.

Treasurer: Janet Miller, UPO Box 99, Campus Station, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 41076.

Members-at-Large: Richard D. Robinson, College of Education, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MD 65211; Norman A. Stahl, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115-2885.

Books and Articles of Interest

Several books and one article may be of interest to SIG members: David H. Watters, "'I Spoke as a Child': Authority, Metaphor and *The New-England Primer*," *Early American Literature* 20 (1985-86): 193-213; R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Culture, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Allan Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology: Postwar Literacy Instruction and the Mythology of Dick and Jane* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1988).

LITERACY IN THE INDUSTRIAL WEST

Richard L. Venezky's "The Development of Literacy in the Industrialized Nations of the West" is available from the Dept. of Ed. Studies, Willard Hall Building, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, as Technical Report No. 14.

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.