

# Radio Programs for Land-Grant College and University Libraries<sup>1</sup>

THE PEOPLE of this country, as in other countries, are today groping within the terrifying shadow of the Atomic Age as they seek the answer to the riddle of our future and what they can do about it. In the process many of us are unduly influenced by the blandishments of organized self-interest. Unwittingly, we are beguiled by skilful appeals to the emotions and prejudice. We are desperately in need of facts which will aid us to think for ourselves and to form our own conclusions. One of the best ways of getting the information we need, of course, is through the use of library facilities.

Libraries, whose business it is to provide the publications and information for those who seek facts, must bestir themselves to greater activity in this service. Unfortunately, however, at least one-third of the people of this country have either inadequate or no library facilities. One of the means of reaching these people with information about books and libraries and stimulating their interest in reading is by means of book programs by radio.

Skeptics who doubt the educational value of radio, or who hold that radio is purely an entertainment device, will doubtless argue that radio book programs are largely a waste of time. They have not been found so at WOI, which for twenty years has broadcast programs sponsored by the Iowa State College Library. Then there are those who contend that people can be induced to

listen to book programs of a popular nature only. Again this has not been found so at WOI. The experts once believed that rural people, for example, would never listen to classical music over the air. Just how wrong they were has been demonstrated many times. The same situation is true respecting book programs of a serious nature. If such programs are skilfully prepared and interestingly presented, people will listen. Many persons in rural communities and small towns, as a matter of fact, are eager for information about books and good reading, especially on topics of current interest.

The land-grant college libraries have an obligation to render service to rural listeners by means of book programs over the air. Yet it is a sad commentary on their awareness of this opportunity when it is noted that over three-fourths of them do not now present or sponsor book programs of any sort by radio.<sup>2</sup> Those which do either offer but one program a week or an occasional one. Sometimes even these are largely comprised of general library publicity or are directed to the students and faculty rather than to off-campus listeners who do not have ready access to libraries.

Unfortunately, there is at present too little information<sup>3</sup> of a factual nature avail-

<sup>2</sup> According to the replies received in December 1946 from the libraries of forty-seven land-grant colleges and universities in response to an inquiry sent out from the Iowa State College Library.

<sup>3</sup> The results of one study are summarized in the first chapter of a pamphlet about WOI by Alberta Curtis entitled *Listeners Appraise a College Station*. It was published in 1940 by the Federal Radio Education Committee with the cooperation of the U.S. Office of Education.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a paper presented before the Agricultural Libraries Section of the Association of College and Reference Libraries at the midwinter meeting, 1946.

able to support any generalizations as to the effectiveness of radio book programs. Lacking this information, about all that can be done is to point out what has been accomplished in specific instances. Consideration is given here, first, to the book programs broadcast over WOI, a publicly-owned station operated by the Iowa State College on a noncommercial basis, and, second, to a few worth-while objectives and some of the factors involved in their attainment.

First of all, in any discussion of what land-grant college libraries should do with radio, the basic functions of the land-grant college should be considered. The land-grant college engages in three main types of activities: (1) teaching, (2) research, and (3) that of carrying on extension work, particularly in rural areas.

Where does radio fit into this program? Radio is exceptionally useful in extension work. The land-grant college fortunate enough to have a publicly-owned and operated radio station at its disposal has a manifest duty to present, along with music programs, market information, news, and other features, programs in the field of adult education. The educational responsibilities of the land-grant college should not end at the limits of the campus.

As a part of the college the library should support the institutional programs. The services of the land-grant college library should, therefore, extend beyond the confines of the campus. This has been accomplished in part by means of interlibrary loans and correspondence and by cooperation with agricultural extension workers. In some institutions liaison has been established by means of extension librarians. Radio has given the land-grant college library an opportunity to supplement its off-campus services. By using radio the library can contact more persons away from the campus during a single book program than

it formerly could in a year of effort by other means.

There are numerous factors which have an important bearing on the library's objectives in radio work. Some of the factors which should be taken into account are: (1) the adequacy of the combined library services in the area served by the radio station; (2) the interests of the potential listeners as partially determined by a study of their vocations as well as of their economic and educational levels; (3) the limitations as to time and talent of the library staff and others who may be available to assist; and (4) the arrangements which can be made with the radio station as regards how much time may be had and at what hours. Book programs should not, for example, be broadcast after 9 P.M. if the audience is primarily a rural one. Many rural listeners, according to a WOI survey,<sup>4</sup> apparently turn off their radios soon after nine o'clock.

#### *Objectives of Programs*

Some objectives of libraries in radio work might well be these: (1) inform listeners of worth-while and interesting new books and magazine articles which they probably would not otherwise hear about; (2) give listeners, by means of summaries, reviews, and excerpts, an idea of the contents, uses, and purposes of the publications featured on the programs; (3) interest listeners in buying or borrowing the publications in order to read them in full; (4) encourage listeners to undertake programs of reading and study to increase their knowledge of subjects in which they either were already interested or may become so as a result of hearing book programs; (5) encourage listeners to use available local public libraries and regional

<sup>4</sup> Reported in "A Statement by Radio Station WOI" which was prepared for presentation at the Clear Channel Hearing before the Federal Communications Commission, Docket No. 6741, Apr. 26, 1946.

libraries. A sixth objective at WOI has been the operation of an extension library in order to provide a lending service to those who might otherwise be unable to obtain books.

Perhaps it is worth while at this point to mention some of the broad subject fields stressed in the book programs broadcast over WOI. The field of American foreign policy and foreign affairs in general is one. It has already become trite to say that whatever happens in any corner of the globe is of direct concern to the people of the United States. Nevertheless, the idea needs continued emphasis. Listeners have indicated their interests in the civil war in China, in the Philippines, and in Greece. They want factual information on the crisis in Palestine, on Russo-American relations, and about many other matters of worldwide concern.

Domestic affairs of the United States also command a great deal of attention. Recently listeners were intensely interested in the reasons behind the stoppage of work in the coal mines. They want to know more about the housing crisis, agricultural policies, race relationships, and so on. All of these topics are suitable subjects for reviews and discussions, with books and magazine articles employed as a basis for the programs.

Public affairs is not the only subject suitable for book programs. The fields of science and industry contain a wealth of possibilities for programs featuring reviews of books and magazine articles. Listeners are curious about such matters as the implications of atomic power, jet propulsion, practical applications of electronics, the uses of penicillin, sulfa drugs, streptomycin, and the like.

#### *Vocational Information*

Vocational information is another field

which receives attention. In addition to instructions on how to raise a better calf or sew a finer seam, radio programs should feature publications on the historical aspects of various vocations and information about probable trends in different lines of work. Nor should the recreational aspects of book programs be overlooked. The effort is worth while if some listeners want nothing more than to listen to the reading of a good novel or short story.

What kinds of book programs will aid in the accomplishment of these objectives? These are some of the series of programs which are, or have been, sponsored over WOI by the Iowa State College Library or in cooperation with other departments.

"Backgrounding the News." A weekly fifteen-minute program featuring reviews of books and occasional magazine articles dealing with topics of current public interest. Usually subjects of front-page importance are selected. One of the essentials of this program is timeliness. For example, when the recent fighting in Manila broke out, an interview was conducted by two members of the library staff to discuss the "myth" of Philippine independence, using as a basis for the program the new book by Hernando Abaya entitled *Betrayal in the Philippines*.

"The Book Chat." A weekly fifteen-minute program of reviews of books of biography, adventure, history, geography, and miscellaneous subjects.

"The Magazine Rack." A weekly fifteen-minute program devoted to the reading of condensations in the *Readers' Digest* manner of interesting and significant articles in recent magazines. The articles chosen may be on any suitable subject.

"March of Science." A weekly fifteen-minute program of reviews of popularly-written books on recent scientific developments. When possible, members of the faculty have been asked to present these pro-

grams. For example, a book on radar would be assigned to an electrical engineer; one on the story of penicillin to a bacteriologist.

"Far Lands." A weekly fifteen-minute program featuring reviews of books of travel and books about the habits and customs of peoples of foreign countries and of the various regions of the United States.

"Famous Short Stories." A weekly fifteen-minute program devoted to the reading of either condensed or full-length short stories.

"Running and Reading." A weekly fifteen-minute program featuring excerpts from selected plays, poems, novels, short stories, or magazine articles.

#### *Novel Reading*

Without a doubt, however, the best-known book program and the one with the largest number of listeners is the daily novel-reading presentation, which has been broadcast regularly since 1928. This year it is presented from 10:05 to 10:30 A.M., Monday through Saturday. The director of the radio station selects the reader for the program in consultation with members of the library staff. The library staff assists in the selection of books for the program and provides whatever reference service is required in looking up pronunciations, locating biographical sketches of the authors, and other information needed by the reader. Relief readers, when needed, are usually supplied by the library.

In general, listeners to the novel-reading program prefer stories with happy endings. One of the most successful experiments of the present reader was the reading of Benet's long narrative poem, *John Brown's Body*. On the other hand, many listeners, to judge from their letters, objected to the reading of *Britannia Mews* because of a morals aspect in the book.

In her study<sup>5</sup> Alberta Curtis posed the question: "Should a novel-reading program be recommended to other educational stations?" Her conclusion was that, "From its rating by a regular audience for this station, and the favorable comparisons the listeners make between it and other radio story material, it does seem to offer an opportunity to educational stations to offset the advantage of continuity which the serials have, and to give something which fills a need."

#### *Radio Book Club*

Another cooperative venture of long standing presented by the radio station and the library is the Radio Book Club. In Iowa the inadequacy of library facilities available to people who do not live in or near the larger towns has long been a disgrace to the state. The book programs inaugurated by the library in 1925, and the novel readings which were begun in 1928, resulted in a demand from listeners for the opportunity to read the books featured on the programs. In an effort to help meet this need, permission was secured in 1930 from the college administration and the state library commission to set up a self-financing, nonprofit radio lending library. From February 1930 to December 1946, a period of nearly seventeen years, 55,730 books were circulated.

The library has cooperated in the venture by purchasing books from the Radio Book Club fund to form the club's library. The collection is housed in the library, and a member of the library staff supervises the assistants who answer inquiries, send out books, and keep the necessary circulation records. Members of the library staff have prepared and presented brief reviews over WOI of the books in the club and otherwise "plugged" the club over the air.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

Members of the library staff have edited the club's catalog and have written the annotations which accompany each title.

The library provides an additional service to members of the Radio Book Club. Occasionally members of the club write in for books which are not a part of the club's collection. If the books can be spared from the library's collections, they are made available on the same terms as books from the book club.

Each fall all new professional members of the library staff are given voice tests. The tests are conducted by the radio station staff. Two-minute recordings are made of each person reading a selection of his own choosing. These transcriptions are then played before a group of persons who act as judges. On an anonymous basis, the voices are rated on the various qualities which are needed in radio work. The judges usually are representatives of the radio station, the library, and the department of English and speech. The persons selected for radio work are, if necessary, given voice training by one of the staff members of the radio station. The wire recorder has been used to very good advantage in this training.

It should be pointed out, however, that not all persons who assist with the book programs sponsored by the library are members of the library staff. The library staff is expected to carry the brunt of the work. However, good radio talent should be utilized when available, irrespective of departmental affiliation. At present a member of the department of English and speech is presenting alternate programs on the "Backgrounding the News" series. A member of the radio station staff originated and has conducted the "Running and Reading" program.

In almost any discussion of reading books over the air, the question of copyright re-

strictions is mentioned. In her study<sup>6</sup> Alberta Curtis made an attempt to find out whether the reading of a book over the air was inimical to the interests of publisher and author. She concluded that the novel-reading program "does not damage book sales, but probably aids them." It was also discovered that persons who heard books read over the air often purchased gift copies of the books for friends.

### *Conclusions*

While this discussion of the book programs broadcast over WOI may serve as a concrete example of what one land-grant college library is doing, the same series of programs is not necessarily recommended for any other library. WOI's audience is largely a rural one. Many areas of the state have inadequate library facilities. No other radio station in the region is offering a comparable schedule of book programs. In other states conditions undoubtedly differ.

It is important, however, for all land-grant college libraries to study the possibilities of radio work and to supplement their other services to off-campus readers by means of radio book programs wherever there is an opportunity. On the basis of known results, as determined by questionnaires, correspondence, and interviews, the results achieved with book programs over WOI have been worth the effort. There is need for further study by land-grant college libraries on the objectives, methods, and types of radio book programs needed.

There should be no question, however, as to the need for books by those in areas with inadequate or no library facilities. These conditions frequently exist in rural areas and in small towns. It is to these people especially that land-grant college libraries should direct radio book programs in order to stimulate the reading of interesting and worth-while books.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 24.