

SELECTING AND 'SELLING' YOUR BOOKS

Jane Broeksmit, Librarian
Dwight, Illinois Public Library

Walk one block to work, past the house with the Doberman pinscher in the window, past the fire station, and up the sidewalk to the Dwight Public Library. Unlock the front door, unlock and unload the outside bookdrop, (morning papers, the mail, fifteen slippery plastic-covered books and one gum wrapper). Put books on the library counter, turn up the thermostat, and turn on the lights. Could the discussion of how to define the small library be ended by stating that a small library is one in which the librarian turns on the lights and controls the thermostat?

A good library, large or small, improves the life of a community; but a good library is essential to the cultural life of a small town. Generally a small town's cultural life revolves around the high school's calendar of school plays, band concerts, and art shows. There are no bookstores, only the paperback racks at the drug store, the bus depot, and the grocery store. BETTY CROCKER'S COOKBOOK is the only hardback book for sale in town.

One of the endless questionnaires that flood our desks asked: "What is your philosophy of librarianship?" Although I did not answer it, the question has haunted me ever since because I feared I did not have one. Does the concept of enriching the cultural life of the small town by running the library like a good bookstore qualify? Does the trick that you are trying to sell rather than lend books count?

A good bookstore is mainly books, attractively displayed, representing a wide range of interests and reading tastes. The atmosphere invites browsing and the sales staff is informed and pleasant. The book buyer knows his customers and tries to bring them together while preserving some semblance of his own standards and his own philosophy of bookmanship. This kind of bookstore has not entirely disappeared in today's mass-marketing world.

A small library can be the equivalent of a good bookstore. The strategem is to use a wide range of book selection sources while keeping in mind readers' interests, community issues, and national concerns.

Over a period of time one selects his own trusted sources. The following are my stable of advisors.

1. KIRKUS REVIEW, because their reviews are critical and witty and, though often devastating, fun to read. Sometimes the book which they dismiss with "a trite predictable plot; bilgewater but bouncy; saccharine prose; thin and tawdry, brainless, endless but harmless" becomes a fast-moving title at the library. Their non-fiction reviews are thoughtful and helpful. I do not sense that KIRKUS REVIEW is an arm of the publishing industry.

2. BOOKLIST, in contrast, is safe and sane and covers a wide range of subjects. I do not remember reading a review of a book about auto body painting in KIRKUS. A few years ago a graphic design firm vitalized their format making it attractive to read. Their magazine covers are a joy to behold.

3. THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW is essential: thoughtful reviews, Best Sellers with one sentence summaries after the title, "And Bear in Mind. . . other recent books, that in the opinion of the Book Review

staff, are of particular literary, topical or scholarly interest." Full page advertisements for what publishers hope will become blockbusters or master-pieces abound.

4. The book sections of Chicago newspapers, though surely of a second city caliber, are also required reading because library users read them and because they cover books of local interest. Mike Royko's SEZ WHO? SEZ ME makes no ripple in New York but is in the middle of the current Chicago Best Sellers list.

5. TIME and NEWSWEEK usually devote two or three pages to books. TIME'S EDITORS' CHOICE list helps sort out the wheat from the chaff. I am partial to the NEWSWEEK reviews for their straightforward analysis and compassionate tone. Their yearly Christmas round-up of children's books is always excellent and the Christmas review of the big and beautiful books is a good source of memorial books for the library.

6. CHANGING TIMES includes a BOOKSHELF column every other month, mainly paperbacks covering many topics. Here you can find out about books such as THE INFORMATION AGE SOURCEBOOK, "Information the authors have culled from more than 550 pamphlets and brochures prepared by the federal government agencies and Cooperative Extension Services of the Northeast."

7. PEOPLE'S Picks and Pans gives some space to books after the "Tube" and "Screen" reviews. Often these short reviews reinforce a decision already made or give one courage to take a plunge.

8. OTHER PERIODICALS: flip through as many as you can. New books on the outdoors, hunting and fishing are covered in OUTDOORE LIFE and SPORTS AFIELD. Do not forget the hunters and fishermen; maybe the reason they don't use the library more often is because there are few books of inter-

est to them. Many of the women's magazines have book columns. Almost all periodical can be used as book-ordering tools.

The amount of information available is almost endless. Select your favorite sources and browse through the others.

It is important to keep up with the job of book selection. Nothing is more deadly than reeling through four KIRKUS REVIEWS and two BOOKLISTS in an afternoon. The frenzy of that kind of reading is reflected in the book order. If you do your reading when you are tired nothing looks very interesting. It is best to do some book ordering each week even if you have to do it in your living room or on a Sunday morning at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee. Then as you read a review or an ad for a book you will say, "ahh, here's a blockbuster for Sparrow, an espionage for Duncan, a book about native grasses for Battle, an English mystery for Hare, and a straightforward detective story for Foote, who detests English mysteries, and here's one tame enough for Miss Snow, and here's one just because we want to be a good library."

Another great source of ideas is the bookstore itself. Here one can actually look at the book as well as discover titles not mentioned in any reviewing source. In some cases, bookstores are the only source of certain titles. That is where we found A TREASURY OF THE FAMILIAR edited by Ralph L. Woods with everything from Socrates to Edgar Guest and THE FAMILY BOOK OF BEST LOVED POEMS which circulates more often than THE OXFORD BOOK OF AMERICAN VERSE. When using bookstores as hunting grounds it's only fair to spend some of your library dollars there.

And last, but not least, perhaps more than any other, the small library appreciates the services of a good library system. With their help one can complete a Ph.D. dissertation, teach himself advanced wiring techniques or read

through the complete works of Rex Stout. The local library can offer three months of an experimental novel and provide controversial fare without fear of flying. When a system book is especially well received or helpful it can be ordered for your own collection. The joy of living in a small town is dramatically increased by library system services.

Several other guidelines are necessary for creating a bookstore-library. Keep an enticing assortment of books as visible as possible. Consider the job of straightening the shelves and arranging the magazines as important as tidying up your living room before a party. Magazine displays in airport and newsstand racks are as attractive and impeccable as the fruit and vegetable displays at good markets. Display and order matters; display and order sells.

Keep library rules and regulations to a minimum. After an especially busy day at the library I told a friend I thought we ought to start handing out numbers the way they do at a bakery.

"No," he wailed. "Don't ever do that! People don't mind milling around the check-out counter. I used to spend two or three evenings a week in a big city library. They had newspapers from everywhere, a whole roomful of periodicals, and every kind of book you can imagine. It was my home away from home until they started piling on a million rules. . . check the paper out here, the book there, a pink slip for this, a green one for that. I never go there anymore."

The moral of this story is: beware of running your library for the convenience and efficiency of the staff!.

Closing time at the library where I once lived was announced by the tip-toed approach of a uniformed guard who dimmed the lights ten minutes before the doors were locked. In our small library we announce "We're about to close

now." Then we straighten up the magazines, turn down the thermostat, turn out the lights and lock our own front door. . .and pray that the Doberman pinscher is locked up.