

Stephanie Bertin. A History of Youth Summer Reading Programs in Public Libraries. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. May, 2004. 71 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm.

Summer reading programs have become a permanent programming feature in the children's departments of public libraries. As children's services began and developed, so did the idea and practice of summer reading programs. Through an analysis of articles in *Library Journal*, *Junior Libraries*, and *School Library Journal* this paper traces the progress of summer reading programs from its beginnings in the 1890's until 2004. From story hours on the playground to websites with online forms, summer reading programs have endured many changes in society while remaining fairly constant in structure and administration. Keeping children reading and helping them to develop a love of reading continue to be important goals of summer reading programs. The future of youth summer reading programs will depend on their ability to be flexible and responsive to changing technology and children's interests.

Headings:

Children's library services – Summer Reading Programs

Children's library services – History

Children's library services – Activity Projects

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Young adults' library services – Activity Projects

A HISTORY OF YOUTH SUMMER READING PROGRAMS  
IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

by  
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Approved by

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Brian Sturm

For my family, for all of their support and love

But most especially for my parents,

I couldn't have done it without you

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Methods.....	6
1890's – 1919.....	8
1920 – 1949.....	14
1950 – 1979.....	29
1980 – 2004.....	42
Conclusions.....	57
References.....	63

## INTRODUCTION

One of the major, and most visible, functions of youth librarians in public libraries is providing programming. Varying types of programs are offered throughout the year, with differing goals and target audiences. Programs are seen as essential to the work of a children's librarian. They "are not frills; on the contrary, they constitute a basic ingredient in a carefully thought-out plan of service" (Broderick, 1977, p. 97). Providing activities to promote books, reading, learning, and library materials is one of the most recognized and important roles of children's librarians in public libraries (Locke, 1988). Other goals for programming include bringing into the library children and parents who were non-users, stimulating the imagination, and enriching the experiences of children.

One type of program that is offered almost universally is summer reading; in fact, a study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 95 percent of all public libraries offered some form of summer programs (Fiore, 1998). Summer programs are known under a variety of names: summer reading program, vacation reading program, summer or vacation reading club, and summer library program are a few of the common names. No matter what the name, the summer reading program for youth in public libraries has become standard practice. Usually these programs are designed for the elementary school age child to encourage independent reading during summer vacation. Some programs include pre-school age children up to high school students. The programs vary

based on the age groups included, types of activities, duration, subject or theme of the program, and goals.

Although summer reading programs are so widely practiced, empirical studies and critical evaluation of summer reading programs has been limited in library literature. Most of the articles and books found on summer reading programs are descriptive or anecdotal. Another area of publishing are how-to manuals with everything from one-off activities to entire summer long programs with themes, materials, and activities. Studies on the value of reading during the summer have been done in the education field (Fiore, 2003). Some studies have been done on “summer loss,” or students losing skills over the summer that were acquired during the previous school year, and the positive impact that summer reading can have on skill retention and even growth. McGill-Franzen and Allington (2003) summed up the results of their study by stating, “regardless of other activities, the best predictor of summer loss or summer gain is whether or not a child reads during the summer.”

In her book *Running Summer Library Reading Programs*, Carole Fiore (2003) summarizes some of the research relating to summer library programs for children. In the studies that she cited, a positive relationship exists between children who participated in summer reading programs and gains in reading ability. In these studies children increased in vocabulary and comprehension. They showed more improvement than children who did not participate in the summer reading program. One study found that among a variety of reading plans followed during the summer, children in the library program “made greater progress than those who took part in any of the other reading programs used” (Goldhor and McCrossan, quoted in Fiore, 2003, p. 1).

Very little has been done to compare among libraries what differentiates a successful summer reading program from a less successful program. In 1988, Jill Locke examined summer reading programs' effectiveness for her doctoral dissertation. Effective programs were defined as reaching a higher percentage of the child population. Using a survey mailed to 500 public libraries, Lock determined that only a third of the respondent libraries had effective programs. She found that variables relating to successful (i.e. effective) programs were restrictions in design, goals and objectives, marketing strategies, methods of evaluation, and professional staff. The restrictions that affected the success of the program were required activity attendance, age, how books were reported, and specified reading lists.

Beyond brief descriptions of the roots and early years of summer reading programs, there appears to be nothing in library literature that looks at the history and evolution of the summer reading program. Through an analysis of literature in professional library journals, this paper will track summer reading programs from their beginnings at the end of the nineteenth century to the present

## METHODS

This paper traces the history of summer reading programs in public libraries, looking at trends and changes in the format and goals in summer reading programs by using content analysis of articles in *Library Journal*, *Junior Libraries*, and *School Library Journal*. *Junior Libraries*, a section of *LJ* focused on youth services, was published from 1954-1960 within *LJ* and was indexed with *LJ*. In 1961 *Junior Libraries* became *School Library Journal*. *SLJ* was for children's librarians, school librarians and teachers. Until 1975 *SLJ* was published within *LJ*, allowing them to be searched simultaneously. These journals were searched using the annual index published with the journals. Index terms that were used to find pertinent articles were: Children, library service to; Children, library work with; Children's libraries; library league; vacation reading; reading clubs; and summer reading. Slight variations of these terms were used as the indexed terms changed from year to year. In 1974, *Library Journal* (and *SLJ*) ceased publishing an annual index of articles. The table of contents was used to scan for articles on summer reading programs until 1980. From 1980 on, the databases *Expanded Academic ASAP* and *Academic Search Elite* were used. They were searched using keyword and subject searches of "summer reading" and limited to *LJ* and *SLJ*.

*Library Journal* was used because it is a major national journal that has been in publication for the entire history of summer reading programs. It will give a broad picture of what was happening in library programming, which may not be observed



through a smaller publication. As *School Library Journal* developed, it attracted more and more of the articles that were related to children's services. Because it was an outgrowth of *LJ*, for the purposes of this paper both journals were used for analysis. It is important to note that the earliest summer reading activities may not have been submitted to *Library Journal*, but could possibly be found in local or state newsletters or annual reports.

### **1890's – 1919 Early Reading Programs and Clubs**

Library service for children in public libraries began to take hold in the late nineteenth century. As access and services increased, activities and programs appeared. The first of these begin to be described in *Library Journal* in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Three programs were developed that were widely imitated and are now recognized as the beginnings of summer reading programs. These were the Cleveland Library League, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's summer playground libraries, and the work of Caroline Hewins in Hartford, Connecticut.

The creator of the Cleveland program was Linda Eastman. In 1895, she created a list of "best books in the library suitable for children" and distributed it through the schools in June. She reported an increased number of children visiting the library (Eastman, 1896). At the ALA Philadelphia Conference in 1897, Eastman reported on her further work with children and the creation of the Cleveland Children's Library League ("Cleveland Children's", 1897). The library had just added over 1,000 new juvenile books and created the league at the beginning of the spring vacation "to impress the need of good care of the books on the children" (p.151). The purposes of the league were to teach and increase care of books, bring new users to the library, and direct children to good books. Publicity of the library and its resources was a major goal behind the campaign.

Eastman reported an increased, and she believed “better,” use of the library by league members (1897). The league quickly grew to over 12,000 members. As the league continued to develop, Eastman created reading clubs of members, which were under the direction of older youth or adults. Although reading had originally been secondary to the primary goal of book care, Eastman recognized that “it would be a fatal thing in this league work to merely stop at the taking care of books; that is just the beginning” (“Cleveland Children’s”, 1897, p.151). Bookmarks were distributed that promoted book care (the Maxson bookmark), and later bookmarks were made with booklists to encourage reading (Locke, 1988). The Cleveland Library League was not limited to the summer, but continued throughout the year. But the library promoted the league as especially good during the summer vacation for bringing children off the streets and encouraging them to read during a period when they may have little intellectual stimulation (“Library in Vacation Days”, 1898, p.279). Children were urged to make a list of their six favorite books to share with other children (“Cleveland Children’s”, 1897). This method of record keeping is the beginning of what became reading logs.

The library league idea quickly caught on. Within a year, six other libraries had library leagues, and a number of others were considering starting leagues. In Dayton, Ohio the format was implemented for the summer vacation only. The goals for these leagues continued to be advertising for the library, cleaner books and improving reading (“Libraries with Leagues”, 1898). But the impact on children’s reading and book selection was negligible in most libraries, and was not even a goal in some instances.

In Pittsburgh, the library began visiting five summer playgrounds for six weeks during the summer. The number of playgrounds expanded in later years as the program

was proven successful and popular (Woodward, 1901). Stories were told and read and books were distributed. When the playgrounds closed, a demand for library cards was created and many of the children became frequent library users (Olcott, 1900). The implied goals of the program were to introduce the library to non-users, teach library regulations, and develop “more judicious and intelligent book selection” (Woodward, 1901). Collections for the playgrounds were developed for Pittsburgh as well as in Boston and Seattle (“Pittsburgh”, 1910; Locke, 1988).

Caroline Hewins created the third major program that influenced future summer reading programs. Her program concentrated on reading guidance. She chose a theme for the program and readings. She changed the summer lending patterns so that children could check out more books. The program included weekly talks about a different subject each week all related to the theme. She also did booktalks, told stories, and read aloud. A puzzle club was created with children working on puzzles in the magazine *St. Nicholas*. Hewins advocated clubs for children who were the same age, lived in the same neighborhood, and had similar interests (Hewins, 1913; 1914; Lock, 1988). Many of Caroline Hewins’ ideas continued to be applied in later clubs.

In 1900, an article about children’s library clubs in Wisconsin described clubs that had adapted the library league idea. The league was broken into chapters, with each chapter having a reading list. Children received a certificate when they had read all the books on their chapter’s list (“Ideas in children’s work”, 1900). This appears to be the first instance of a reward or recognition connected with fulfilling the requirements of a reading club. Certificates became a major feature of summer reading clubs from here on. Reading ladders, lists, and folders, also played major roles in this reading program. The

major goals of this program were reading guidance, taking care of books, and orderly behavior in the library.

The Madison, N.J. Public Library reported its Vacation Reading Club in 1903. Aspects of Hewins' work and the clubs in Wisconsin could be seen in the format that Madison PL had developed. The club lasted six weeks. Children met once a week and were told stories. The first year the children were asked to read 5 books from a list of 100 created by the librarian. The second year, subject lists were created. Children were to fill in a reading ladder of six books, with the simplest book at the bottom. "I have read" was across the top of the page and the child was to mark his or her favorite book and sign the bottom when it was completed (Miller, 1903).

The 1910's saw more developments in summer reading programs. In 1910, the San Antonio Carnegie Library had published lists, sorting books by difficulty, for summer reading ("San Antonio", 1910). The public library in Spokane sent out postcards at the end of the school year to all children who had library cards, inviting them to come to the library and announcing new books and vacation borrowing privileges. Over 45% of the children responded ("A summer reading scheme", 1913). Unlike many others of the early summer programs, the Spokane library program did not include outreach to non-users of the library. A summer club in Long Island used Hewins' program of weekly talks on different subjects for their summer reading club (Roper, 1914).

The goal of reading guidance began to become more of a focus as the idea of vacation reading programs spread. The first stated goal of the library league in Lowell, MA was to "promote and foster the love of good reading among children" ("Lowell PL", 1916, p. 303). Other goals were to encourage the purchase of best books for children and

for league members to interest others in good books. The original purposes of the league were also apparent as children pledged to care for the books, be quiet and orderly, and recruit more members.

The format of outreach to neighborhood playgrounds also spread. In Binghamton, NY, the library visited several playgrounds. Stories were told and books shared. Interestingly, at some playgrounds the books could only be used while the library was visiting, but others allowed circulation of the books (Chamberlayne, 1917).

## **Summary**

Clubs and programs were initially for older children, approximately 10-18. This was influenced by age restrictions on borrowing. In 1913, Hewins' vacation reading club was for 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Although limits on participation aren't usually mentioned in these early descriptions, it is implied that they were for independent readers, upper grade school and on.

The format of vacation reading programs quickly developed the characteristics that can still be seen today. Reading records or logs, suggested (or in early clubs, required) reading lists, and rewards appeared within the first few years of summer reading clubs.

These reading clubs were developing as the new children's departments developed and were finding their place in the public library. By about 1900, children's rooms and services were being recognized as a "legitimate department of the public library"; the need for children's services didn't have to be convincingly argued, it was acknowledged to be a "good and permanent" fixture in the library ("Editorial", 1900). In

1900, at the Montreal Conference of the ALA, a section for Children's Librarians was formed, the forerunner of ALSC and YALSA (Long, 1969). The first leagues and clubs had as some of their primary goals, the instruction in the proper use and care of books and publicity, simply raising awareness in children and their caregivers of the children's department of the library and the juvenile book collection. As the children's library movement gained momentum and strength, the goals began to move beyond increasing public awareness.

Reading guidance became a more prominent goal in the summer reading programs. Olcott warned against what she saw as a "great weakness" in children's services: using programs and methods with "little or no direct bearing on books and reading" (1914, p. 12). She believed that the children's library should strictly limit itself to the "exercise of its literary function" and all that was done by librarians should "lead to wider interest in books... [and] increase good reading" (Olcott, 1914, p. 12). A major concern at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century of librarians, especially those working with children, was the quality of books being read. While the 1800's had seen a great increase in books for children (many of them good, like Twain and Alcott), large numbers of these books were not "good" literature. Books and dime novels like Horatio Alger, Oliver Optic, Deadwood Dick, and Stratemeyer were very popular. They were widely available and cheap (Long, 1969). Librarians were concerned with promoting quality books. This was expressed in the early summer reading programs by requiring children to read from specific lists of books, composed of classics and the best of juvenile literature.

## 1920 – 1949

The 1920's saw further refinement of the summer reading program ideas. As the programs were more widely implemented, discussion on the benefits of conducting them appeared in the professional literature. The motivations for providing summer reading programs grew from idealistic attempts at guiding young readers and practical publicity, to include keeping children off the streets and increasing circulation.

Providence Public Library described their summer reading program from 1920 as a “publicity scheme” (Root, 1920). Distributed to children was a “Summer Quiz” with an invitation to visit the library. The quiz was comprised of questions whose answers could be found in the books at the library. The children who answered all the questions correctly had their names posted on an honor roll.

Public recognition for reading achievement also played a major role in the 1921 vacation reading club in Pasadena. In the fall a certificate was presented in a school assembly to children who had successfully completed the program. The goal of the club was to encourage better reading. From a list of books chosen by librarians, children had to read 10 books and give an oral report about each book to a librarian (Drake, 1922). This is the first instance found of librarians listening to oral reports. This is a format that is still used in some public libraries and would later be a complaint about summer reading clubs from a number of librarians.



An article in July 1923 was critical of the “sudden vogue of children’s ‘reading clubs’” (Chicago PL, p. 618). It questioned the reasons behind the summer reading clubs, asking if they were “anything more than half-concealed, perhaps only half-realized, schemes to keep our circulation statistics up over the summer months” (p. 618). In the opinion of the article author, the reading clubs were using reading logs, diplomas, graduations to stimulate or manipulating children to read. It implied that the opportunity to share the love of reading was being sacrificed as children filled up notebooks of titles read, not for fun, but to get a reward. This was the first negative response encountered to summer reading programs. It raises the issue of incentives used for reading, one that is still debated. It is critical of creating an atmosphere similar to school during the vacation, when children should be on a break, and creating a negative connection with the library and reading by forcing children to read. In the article the first mention is made of a private company, Gaylord, publishing materials, available for purchase, to support summer reading programs in public libraries.

The Minneapolis Public Library reported on the second year of their “summer honor reading contest” in the fall of 1923 (“Reading for Credit, p. 722). It is interesting to note the use of the word ‘contest’ in the title of their program. It is also used several times throughout the article. Although it is described as a contest, the article states that the library does “not feel that [their] credit system savors of school or that routine takes the spontaneity from reading” (p. 722). Written reports were required from children after finishing a book. The librarians appreciated the program because they believed it gave them personal contact with the children, allowing them to learn what books a child liked and disliked and giving the librarians the opportunity to give some suggestions. The

participants were described as grades 5 through 8. The age limit is still much higher than is seen in summer reading programs today.

Other articles in 1923 described programs that were in the same mold as has already been described. One was a playground program that included a series of storytimes and circulating books (Hazeltine, 1923). Another program rewarded participants with a certificate for completing the required reading. Children had to report each book to a librarian. The library saw its circulation increase, which they attributed to the summer reading program (“Ohio – Youngstown”, 1923).

The October 1, 1923 issue of *Library Journal* included two editorials on children’s reading clubs: one pro and one con. Barrette’s editorial was in support of well-run vacation reading programs. She responded to the article in July 1923 (mentioned previously) that was critical of summer reading programs. She agreed that the emphasis must be on the value of good reading and encouraging a love of reading. But she believed that a program “handled with ...vision” could be a powerful aid to both of these goals (Barrette, 1923, p. 816). It was her belief that a child who has participated in a club and reads and reports on ten “good” books, has a much better chance of developing into a reader of “wider tastes and a deeper love of books than if no incentive were offered to try out the better books” (p. 816). Honor rolls, badges, and certificates were simply devices borrowed from child psychology to foster an interest, and if used well, they could be very helpful in attracting attention. It was only when the programs are abused that they become about circulation and statistics.

In the negative summer reading editorial, Latimer’s position was that reading clubs were artificial stimulation for children to read that compromised the library’s ability

to work with the average child to cultivate a “joyful approach ...to books” (1923, p. 816). She questioned whether the programs had actually persuaded reluctant readers to love books, “what does it profit them if they read many books and love none?” (p. 816). In her opinion, libraries were mixing up their goals with schools, which would only decrease the power of the library and do the child a disservice. Latimer feared that children would begin to see reading as “a task, or quantity output a noble accomplishment” (p. 816). She countered Barrette’s use of psychology to justify incentives with the argument that it is bad psychology to reward a child who is already a reader and that non-readers won’t develop a love for reading through rewards.

Because of these editorials and the most articles to date in a year on summer reading (6) in *Library Journal*, the practice of summer reading seems to have become fairly common in public libraries. It had its opponents, but it also had very strong advocates. Librarians appear to still be working out how it should be implemented, smoothing out the problems in the structure of programs and working on defining goals.

Other programs in the 1920’s continued to be in the same basic format as before, with a few exceptions. A summer reading “course” in Maine required children to read 10 books, which was a fairly standard number among summer reading programs, but children had to pass exams on the books they read (“In the library world –Maine”, 1927). In Georgia, the state library ran the vacation reading club. This is the first time that this had been reported (“A children’s reading club”, 1928). In the future more state libraries would develop summer reading programs, to take the strain off smaller libraries with limited resources and staff. The program in Georgia sent books through the mail to children. The children then had to write a brief report of each book in a notebook

provided by the library, which was sent back with the books. If the reports were approved (most were) the child would receive a certificate for reading 10 books. The state library had created lists of 25 books that were level and age appropriate. If children read all 25 books on the list, they received a gold certificate.

A number of vacation reading programs were described in *Library Journal* in 1929. A few of the characteristics of these programs stood out as unique or as steps in the development of summer reading programs. In San Francisco, one of the main goals of the program was maintaining circulation levels. The other purpose was better reading, and so children still had to select their books from a list created by librarians. The level of incentive increased considerably in the San Francisco program, as the child with the most creative and best notebook of reports received a book, a classic of course. Indianapolis ran a summer program with a treasure hunt theme. A list of 30 books was created and children were given clues about ‘treasures’ in each book. The children had to find the answer to each clue and keep track of the books and answers. The children who read 10 books and found the correct answers were given a diploma and put on the honor roll. Another program in Indianapolis allowed children to choose their own books. But in order to encourage good reading, the best list of ten books submitted by a child was published in the local newspaper. Librarians found this a good way to circulate books that remained on the shelves when reading was confined to a list. The vacation reading club in Wichita also used the local newspapers as an incentive. Children read a book a week and submitted a written review. The best reviews were published each Sunday in two papers. The emphasis in Wichita continued to be on quality and not quantity (“Vacation reading”, 1929).

Other libraries chose to emphasize quality books as well, without using a prescribed reading list. In Albany (using Gaylord materials), librarians did away with lists and with oral reports. The oral reports were described as “tedious” and were replaced with short written reports. A bulletin board with children’s names was posted and for each book read, a star was placed beside their name. Certificates were given for good reading, with gold stars on the certificates for children whose “reading had been most satisfactory” (“Vacation reading”, 1929, p. 1032). Children who read ten books were just as likely to receive certificates as those who read many more. The description of one of the programs in Albany gives another glimpse into ages participating in the clubs, explaining that it was for boys and girls in 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Using a theme of traveling was a popular trend at this time. Five different programs with a travel theme were described in 1929. One of the clubs gave credit to an article in *Public Libraries* for inspiring their program. Basically, the children used lists of books to travel around the world. The books they read were about the different places they ‘visited.’ The route taken was marked on some sort of map. Some libraries, like Bridgeport, Conn., developed a number of ‘itineraries’ with multiple book choices to read for each stop on the trip (“Vacation traveling”, 1929). Other libraries allowed children to map their own route (“Vacation reading, 1929). The final reward at the end of one program was a picnic for successful travelers, which appears to be the first instance of a party at the completion of the program (“Vacation reading”, 1929). The description of the Bridgeport program also tells us that the program is for grades 4-8.

*Library Journal* had vacation reading as the focus of the April 15, 1930 issue. Several articles were in-depth descriptions of what different libraries had tried. All of

them continued the traveling theme. Los Angeles Public Library had a very high quality program, with realistic looking passports and visas. The children were allowed complete freedom of choice in selecting books, as long as they had some connection to traveling or a place. The librarians stated that the strength of their program was its informality; it allowed the librarians to interact with children and stirred the children's imaginations (Leslie, 1930).

One of the "summer reading contests" was in Fairhaven, Mass. (Pillsbury, 1930, p. 343). This program was designed for first grade up to ninth grade, although no first graders participated and most children were in fourth to seventh grade. The librarians spent considerable effort on publicizing the program through local papers and schools. Children were given a fair amount of freedom in selecting their books, the goal being for them to "acquire the reading habit" (p. 344). The librarians were also concerned with eliminating competition, so the emphasis in giving rewards was placed on effort and quality of books reported. One interesting comment related to children reading too many books. This general feeling is implied in many of the program descriptions and can be seen in the number of books required to receive incentives, which was typically about 10 books. Fairhaven also used the prize of books for the first place winners, one for each age group.

The Cleveland Public Library also included readers as young as first grade in their program. The end of the summer included a celebration for children and their parents. Once again, ten books had to be reported to fulfill the requirements. The books children could read were listed according to reading level. As children completed books, stars were put beside their name on a display (Oliphant, 1930).

Other summer reading clubs featured in the issue included discussion groups, games from the different countries that were read about, and dramatization of the books (“Everyland Club”, 1930). A party at the end of the summer for children who completed the program was gaining in popularity (“Vacation reading in Charlotte”, 1930). Summer reading programs at this point seem to be split between those that allowed children to select their own books and those that had lists to choose from. This can possibly be ascribed to a difference in philosophy, whether the librarian wanted to encourage quality reading, or if she wanted to develop a love of reading, leading to a choice of quality books.

Despite this strong showing of literature about summer reading programs in *Library Journal* at the beginning of the 1930’s only two more articles were found before 1941, perhaps because of the Depression. An article in 1934 about a “summer plan” in Portland, Oregon, acknowledged the Depression was affecting their ability to provide programming. There was no money to print materials, so librarians created a bulletin board, recycling old paper. A castle was built of blocks. On each block, a child filled in his or her name and grade along with the title and author of a book. Librarians’ concern with quality books was expressed in the color of the blocks. Better titles were on colored paper. Children could read any book, but the librarians maintained a shelf of suggested, and it was implied better, books. The librarians did not require any reports from children, oral or written (“Portland, Oregon”, 1934).

Reported in 1935, the vacation reading club in Scranton, PA was concerned with quality. The goal of the club was promoting and directing worthwhile summer reading among grade school and junior high school students. The librarians required a high

educational and literary standard in the books that were read. Unlike many reading programs before, which had kept the child's reading record at the library, Scranton made the children responsible for keeping their own reading log ("Yearly Vacation Reading Club", 1935).

It was five years before any summer reading programs were a topic again in *Library Journal*. In 1940, Kathryn Reynolds described a summer reading program that she had been in charge of. The goals of her program were simply to get children reading and to help them discover reading for fun. She emphasized the importance of not having contests, which she felt discriminated against slow readers. With a limited budget, possibly because of the Depression, the program gave a child a sticker for each book. It required little time for staff to administer because there were no reports to listen to or read and no extravagant displays to create. This bare bones program included children from preschool to high school, the widest range encountered so far (Reynolds, 1940).

In the same issue of *Library Journal* was a debate on summer reading programs with an affirmative view and a negative view, presented by two librarians from Los Angeles (Nicholas & Ames, 1940). On the affirmative side, Lillian Nicholas argued that summer reading programs were worthwhile, that they repaid the effort put in by librarians. She believed that the programs goals should be to "stimulate and sustain reading interest in the summer" and "expand and enrich children's experience through reading" (p. 326). The sustaining of interest was seen in circulation numbers and in the retention of library patrons. Nicholas also brings up the "summer reading gap," or the loss of reading skills over the summer. This was the first time that this was seen as a rationale behind the summer reading programs in libraries. On the negative side of the



issue was Pauline Ames. She had a number of criticisms of summer reading programs. She believed that most programs were of a poor quality. Children read a lot of books, but they weren't absorbing anything from them and were non-discriminating in their choices (raising the quality issue again). She also stated that the programs were simple enough for library pages to administer and took librarians away from other responsibilities. The programs were time consuming, and took away from quality one-on-one interactions with patrons. She found fault with the psychology behind the programs, especially the competition and incentives. Most programs were rewarding the good readers, who would have read anyway, and punishing slow readers. Her final critique was that the programs falsely inflated the circulation numbers and created an unrealistic demand to increase circulation each year.

An article in 1941 was titled "Defending America in the Children's Room," illustrating what the primary concern was at the time, war (Reynolds, 1941). Although the program described was from the previous summer, before America was in the war, the international conflicts had influenced the theme of a children's summer reading program in North Dakota. The theme was no longer traveling, learning about the world and cultures, but was all about the United States. The program described shows one major development over earlier programs, it was much more thought out. In planning the program, the librarians considered who their patrons were and what they would like. They attempted to integrate the program with the work of the rest of the year and were conscious of how it fulfilled the policies and goals of the department. The library wanted to reduce the cost of the program and claims on librarians' time. Reading lists were developed to help guide children in reading on different topics, but they could read any

book as long as it connected in some way to the theme. No rewards or contest were included in the program in order to emphasize the inherent value and enjoyment of reading.

In 1944, a *Library Journal* article included a sampling of programs from across the country as well as some critiques of summer reading (“Taking the ‘oh-hum’ out”, 1944). The eleven programs in this article had several things in common. Publicity was an important part of the programs. The most common forms of publicity were school and classroom visits and local newspapers. The Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore used their library’s radio program to advertise the upcoming summer reading game, as they called it. Most of the programs created recommended lists, but only two programs had any sort of required reading. Both of these, one in Indiana and one in Minnesota, required reading in specific subject areas, but not specific books. The clubs also had children keeping their own records in booklets provided at the beginning of the summer. It was also common to post the names of children and track their progress. Most of the programs described used some form of oral reports to librarians. Some changed the name. In Sioux City, IA, they were called ‘talks’ and Cleveland librarians had ‘discussions’ with children. These reports tended to be fairly informal and were to provide librarians an opportunity to get to know the child and to guide them to other books that they might like. The Billings library required no reports and two of the libraries that had required some form of reporting complained about the time that it took. Almost every single library mentioned that they wanted to discourage competition as a part of the vacation reading programs. Rewards were not a major part of these programs. Most gave nothing more than a sticker per book or a certificate at the end. The Billings

library allowed children who had read more than 12 books to check out more books at a time than were regularly permitted. A major similarity in the programs in the article was in the theme. Patriotic themes prevailed. Several set up the program with children advancing through ranks of the military. The library in Duluth, MN interpreted the war and patriotic theme a little differently. Their goal was to prepare children for the post-war world and had children reading about different countries. It was very similar to the travel reading clubs of the 1930's.

The article in 1944 also showed that the war was having an impact in other ways. Shortages limited availability of materials. One of the reasons for providing summer programs was to keep children off the street. Both the Enoch Pratt Free Library and the Billings library mentioned the importance of the programs in contributing "to the forces which combat juvenile delinquency" by giving children whose parents were defense workers a place to come ("Taking the 'oh-hum' out", 1944, p. 344).

Two of the libraries in the article did question some of the reasons and the outcomes of summer reading programs. The Sioux City library mentioned the reservations they had had about summer reading, but they had continued to have the program. A library in Memphis was more critical of the practice. The librarian and staff there had decided not to continue to put on a summer reading program for a number of reasons. The prizes took away from the joy of reading for its own sake and turned reading into a quantitative activity, not a qualitative one. It limited the child's ability to explore and read with "spontaneous interest" (p. 348). The Memphis librarian also stated that their experience showed negligible increases in circulation numbers, which were only temporary and weren't worth the amount of effort required by the staff. They had

also seen no summer slump in library visits, attributed to having so many working mothers whose children would come more often and stay longer at the library.

In 1946, Ruth Gagliardo described a summer reading program in Kansas and how it had developed over several years. Started in 1942, the program included children from elementary school through junior high. For the first time, the article explicitly states that the program is to fight reading ability loss over the summer. The program was a partnership between the public library and the Parent and Teacher Association; this is the first instance of such a partnership. Previous programs had talked about how important it was to keep children reading, encouraging the habit of reading, and increasing reading skills. But the terminology of summer reading ability loss would become a buzzword and this is the first time in *Library Journal* that the modern term had been used. The goal of the program was to supplement the work of schools; the program was targeted at slow or reluctant readers. Before school ended for the summer, teachers announced the program in their classes, letters about the program were sent home with report cards, and letters to the parents of children in the target group, those needing reading practice, were sent by teachers. Children turned in a slip for each book read that included their name, address, age, grade, and school. They also checked boxes in scaled lists on the slip for how well they liked the book and how hard it was. Five books earned a child a certificate signed by the PTA president, principal, and librarian. For five more books there was a yellow seal on the certificate, a red seal for the next ten, and a blue seal for over 20. The certificates were awarded at an assembly in the fall. Gagliardo reported major increases in circulation. It was up 52% the first summer and had gone up 107% by the fourth summer. With 28% of the school population participating, and teachers reporting reading

gains and increased interest, the program was considered very successful (Gagliardo, 1946). This was a unique instance of using the summer reading program as an extension of school and having such a strong library and school partnership.

### **Summary**

The period between 1920 and 1949 saw libraries expand the idea and usage of summer reading programs. During this time, themes became a standard in summer reading programs with definite trends. In the Twenties a number of the programs used treasure hunt types of themes; the late Twenties and Thirties saw traveling themed programs become popular with children visiting destinations across the U.S and world through books. With the Forties came war, and patriotic themes for summer reading programs were very popular. It also became very common to use oral reports as part of the program. Some libraries, like Wichita, required written reports and published the best in the local paper. The younger age limit dropped during this period, in some instances including pre-schoolers.

This time period also saw some discussion about the usefulness of summer reading programs. There were some critics who took issue with the goals and format of many programs. They did not think that increased circulation was a realistic or beneficial goal for the library. It added too much to the pressure of the success of the program. They also did not like the format of programs that involved competition, overt or not, and prizes. They believed that these took away from what libraries should be encouraging – reading for pleasure. They believed that these aspects of the programs also did not actually do what they were purported to do which was encourage reluctant readers to

read. The prizes and competition only made children read more, but not better or harder books, and punished slower readers.

Advocates of the vacation and summer reading programs reported positive feedback from parents, children, and teachers. They also saw increased circulation numbers and new users coming to the library as a result of the program. Many of these issues would continue to be argued as summer reading programs continued.

### 1950 – 1979

The beginning of the 1950's saw a number of very short articles in *Library Journal* that gave little more than a glimpse of what was going on. One program was specifically for young adults (Graham, 1952). With very little money and an already overwhelmed staff this very simple program had teens read and judge books with the goal of developing a better teen collection. This is the first time that teens or young adults are recognized as a unique group that needed a different type of vacation reading program. From articles about programs in Boston and Los Angeles, the only thing learned was that reading was done from compiled lists ("L.A. summer reading", 1952; "Summer reading in Boston", 1952). The public library in San Bernardino suggested that prizes should not be used as incentives and that publicity through PTA meetings and class visits were best ("San Bernardino", 1952).

The summer reading program in Denver reported in 1953 was another instance of a school and public library partnership (Tracewell & Bennett). The goals for the program were to develop good library habits, good reading skills, and encourage reading for fun. Radio and newspapers were used to promote the program. The PTA sponsored a party in the fall to present certificates to children who read 8 or more books.

Another program from the 1953 *Library Journal* divided the children into two groups, older and younger. The younger children didn't keep records, but received a sticker for each book they finished. The very simple purpose of the program was to show

the fun of summer reading. A final party at the end of the program was for all the children who had participated, with no awards given for the number of books read. The staff wanted all children to feel included and by taking away the awards, the slower readers did not give up.

In an article about how to develop summer reading programs, Alice Cushman (1953) discussed some of the dilemmas faced by librarians who put on the programs. Was the program a race to read the most books or did it teach the fun and importance of books to children? Would a small staff be able to provide service with the increased demands? Did the staff have the time to provide good service to all users? Would the program be simple or complex? Librarians also faced tight budgets and had to consider how to provide the “best books for the greatest number of boys and girls” (p. 878). Cushman suggested that cooperation with other agencies such as playgrounds and scout groups could be the answer to some of these challenges. For activities in summer reading programs, Cushman presented a number of options including films, records, games and quiz questions in addition to the more traditional storytelling and reading aloud.

Seattle, Walla Walla, and a New York library all had summer reading programs that were co-sponsored by the schools (“Summer reading program”, 1954). Seattle and Walla Walla worked with the PTA and schools to promote the program. Announcements were made in classrooms, at PTA meetings, and in school libraries. In the fall, children, in grades 4-8, who had participated in the summer reading club in Seattle, received their certificates at school assemblies. Sometimes the children actually developed “a special book program for an assembly or [prepared] an entire special assembly” (p. 1145). For the Walla Walla Public Library summer reading, the PTA had a special recognition



program in the fall for children who had read 30 books. Each child was given a book chosen by a teacher and the child together. The Walla Walla PL also fostered more parent participation in reading by requiring a parent's signature when a child submitted reports for every four books. Librarians said that they saw more parents accompanying their children to the library to select books.

The Tarrytowns library in New York had an even closer relationship between the school and the public library for summer reading. The Board of Education hired a reading teacher each summer to supervise the program. Before school ended, teachers were informed about the program, letters were sent to parents, children were brought to the library for cards, and parents were reminded about the importance of summer reading during parent conferences. During the six week program, the reading teacher “[determined] the reading level of each participant and [gave] guidance in book selection” (“Summer reading program”, 1954, p. 1148). The reading teacher also supervised weekly meetings of reading clubs, organized by grade, where children discussed what they had read and the teacher gave booktalks. The program saw major increases in circulation; summer went from experiencing a noticeable drop, to being the highest period of circulation. Schoolteachers were also pleased with “marked improvement” (p. 1148) by children who participated in the program. At the end of the program, the reading teacher and the librarian selected winners from each grade by the number and choice of books. Each winner received a book.

The goals for all three of these programs were “maintaining of reading skills during the summer months . . . and the encouragement of recreational reading” (p. 1146). Few restrictions were placed on books children could read. In Seattle, children could

only read two books by the same author. Walla Walla only required children to read at least one book in their first ten books related to the summer's theme. Seattle had been providing summer reading in some form since 1919, with the exception of a few years during the Depression. They had found that as the program expanded to include more branches and more children, "the club had to be made simple and standardized" (p. 1145) for it to be administered.

In 1955, four articles about summer reading were in the May 15 issue of *Library Journal*. Three of the programs described had as their goal helping children discover reading books for fun (Gillies, 1955; Gross, 1955; Quinn, 1955). The program described by Gross, included a variety of programs all related to the theme. After reading 10 books in 8 weeks, children received a certificate. For Gross, the program didn't have to be about competition, but it depended on how the branches implemented it. In "The Jungle Club" described by Gillies (1955), rewards played a significant role in the program. Children who met the reading goal (the article didn't say what that goal was) were treated to a trip to the zoo at the end of the summer. The reading club described by Quinn required children to read 20 books to receive a certificate and be placed on the Honor Roll. The vacation reading club in Philadelphia had different goals than the other three programs in the issue. Its lofty goals were for children to develop good reading habits and "appreciation of good literature" (McMenamin, 1955, p. 1230). At three books children received a prize and a sticker in their reading record. Ten books earned them a certificate as well as allowed them to attend a final party.

In a 1960 article, Nason describes a cooperative summer reading program with schools. A summer reading list was developed and distributed through the schools. In

the same issue of *LJ* was a unique summer program from Muncie, IL (Hardendorff, 1960). The goals of the program were to make children aware of their community and to create an interest and demand for less popular books, especially science books. The librarian contacted local business people and scheduled weekly speakers for seven weeks from these individuals and some library patrons. The speakers included a potter, a chemist, and an engineer. The librarian would create a display of books on related topics. The programs were exceptionally popular and the books were always checked out. There were many requests that the program be repeated the following summer. This was not a traditional reading program with lists and certificates, but it got children and parents into the library and interested them in reading about less popular subjects.

Librarians were warned in 1962 to be aware of other youth organizations and commitments when planning summer reading clubs for children (Sive). The author believed that “children’s lives [were] over organized” (p. 1966) and librarians needed to keep programming simple and not time consuming. This is an interesting contrast to twenty years earlier when librarians saw summer reading as an aide to fighting juvenile delinquency and boredom.

A space themed summer reading program in Milwaukee made the astronauts honorary members (“Way out bookworms”, 1962). The librarians hoped the astronauts would be positive reading role models and be a good motivator for children to join the program. The library did get responses from the astronauts with encouraging comments about the importance of reading.

The East Orange Public Library used donations from local businesses and service organizations to help fund their summer reading program, the first instance of a public

library partnering with the private sector (“East Orange PL”, 1962). The rest of the program was fairly traditional with children between the ages of 6 and 12 reading and reporting at least twelve books. The demands of requiring oral reports were apparent in this article as “librarians sometimes listened to reports for 5 hours at a time” (p. 3836). One can see why many libraries had simplified or eliminated the oral report process.

Reported in 1964 was a significant change in the development and provision of summer reading programs. Three states, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, worked together to plan and develop a standardized summer reading program (“Short subjects”, 1964). This was the first time since Georgia’s summer program in the 1928 *LJ* (“A children’s reading club”) that a state run program had been in the journal. The Utah and Colorado state libraries and a public library from each state created the program that included bookmarks and certificates.

The 44<sup>th</sup> annual vacation reading program of the Denver Public Library was in the summer of 1965 (“Short subjects”, 1965). The program ran from June 1<sup>st</sup> until September 30<sup>th</sup>, longer than most programs, which were only 6 or 8 weeks. Children could read any 8 books of their choice and returned the reading record to any city library. Certificates of completion were awarded at the schools in the fall.

An article in 1968 contained a review of 9 different summer programs (“Roundup”, 1968). The general goal for these programs was to “attract children and young adults to the library and the world of books” (p. 2066). Competition, gimmicks, honor rolls, rewards, and reading logs were suggested as ways to increase the success of a program, although it was recognized that some librarians thought these all created too much pressure and made reading become a chore. Four of the nine programs required

children to read 8-12 books to complete the program. The public library in Long Island spent 10 months in planning, organizing, and publicizing the summer reading program. At the end of the summer, children who read enough books in their program were invited to attend a play. In Baltimore, the summer program included a variety of programs with reading clubs, story hours and films. In order to attract more patrons, programs for mothers were offered during the youth programming. No honor roll, certificate, or prizes were offered in the summer reading program in Beverly Hills. Children added segments to a worm bulletin board for each book they completed. Oral reports were part of the program in Beverly Hills and Long Island, where aides were hired to free librarians from this tedious task.

Two of the programs had a much stronger educational focus (“Roundup”, 1968). One of the libraries targeted poor readers and, with the assistance of the local board of education, hired a reading consultant. For a \$10 fee, which was used to help pay for the consultant, children and their parents were enrolled in the summer reading program. Parents and their children were required to attend 3-hour sessions, 5 days a week for six weeks. They met with the reading consultant individually and in groups. The parents were taught how to reading strategies to help their child and children practiced reading and learned reading skills. Another program offered reading tutoring. Junior high and high school students were hired to come in 4 days per week to read with children. This program was almost like a summer school or day camp. Art projects, games, and music complemented the books.

The Chicago Public Library developed a program in 1968 that was similar to the playground story hours of the Pittsburgh library at the turn of the century. The library

recruited college students as volunteers for the summer to go to the ghetto and read books with and tell stories to the children. The program included one film and one story hour per week.

No summer reading programs were in *LJ* again until 1974. Carolyn Jenks wrote an article that year about the changes that had been made in their summer reading program. When she began working as a librarian, a program was already in place. She found herself spending a lot of time and energy first with coming up with a catchy theme, and then on record keeping. She had to “suffer agony listening to endless lines of kids describing books” (p. 1458). She decided that there had to “be a better reward for excess energy spent by librarians and children” (p. 1458). So she developed a new summer program. The goals were: 1) to have something special for all children who came to the library; 2) have programs that included doing, not just listening and watching; 3) to show children that books could be used in many ways; 4) to show that reading was enjoyable. She divided the children by age and had weekly programs for each group. For 3-6 year-olds there were weekly storytimes. The 7-9 year olds met and participated in crafts, music, listening to stories and reading books. The oldest group, 10-13, created their own puppet play, from writing to making puppets, to performing it. All the groups used books in the programs in some way, often craft and how-to books.

Jenks’ article was one of the last articles about summer reading to appear in *Library Journal*. In 1975, *School Library Journal* began to be published separately from *LJ*. Because of *SLJ*’s focus on children’s and school librarianship, almost every article concerning summer reading programs was found in *SLJ*.

In Fort Worth, Texas summer reading was part of a “drive to get youngsters off the streets and into the library” (“Reading programs flourish”, 1975, p. 66). Another goal of the program was to teach young children the basics of reading and to help older children progress in their reading skills. Tutoring was used to accomplish this goal with junior high students helping 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

Three summer reading programs in 1977 were less focused on reading than had been seen in the past. The vacation reading club in Philadelphia had children care for a vegetable garden as part of the club. For eight weeks, 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders tended the garden using books in the library as reference material (“Program Potpourri”, 1977). In Trenton, NJ the summer program included softball games, skateboarding competitions, karate, Chinese cooking, relays, and races with staffers, wearing T-shirts reading “Your Info Team”, joining the kids. There were also crafts, dress-up, and games. It sounded like a lot of fun, but no mention was made of reading or books in connection with the program (“Summer in Trenton”, 1977). A vacation reading club in Georgia had children create and perform a skit based on a book. A series of craft programs for girls, ages 9-12, had them crochet and make samplers; they also researched the history of handicrafts.

Star Wars was the inspiration for the 1978 summer reading program in Evansville, IN (“Androids”, 1978). The theme was “Shoot for the Stars” and individual programs during the summer included puppet plays, space films and science fiction and space activities. After reading 20 books, kids earned a light saber, a bookmark, and a coupon for a fast food meal. The support of the library’s reading program by business is seen again in the coupon for fast food. These coupons as rewards became very popular, they were free for the library and were advertising for the restaurants.

Another program from 1978 showed a new development in the format of summer reading programs. In Elk Grove, Illinois, children set their own reading goals, in a reading contract (Wagner, 1978). The hope was that by eliminating the required number of books, non-competitive children and slower readers wouldn't be scared off. Previously the library had had a very traditional program, children read 10 books and received a certificate at a recognition program at the end of the summer. The number of children who completed the program had been about 50%. Staff decided that it was "more important that the children enjoy the books" (p. 35), than how many books they read. When children began the program, the librarian discussed with the child an appropriate goal based on the number of books they read during a week and if they liked reading. Very few rules were made in the program; any book from any source counted (in the many programs, only library books qualified). When children came to report their books, only the author and title had to be told to the librarian. The completion rate for the program jumped to 76%. The children were often very enthusiastic and wanted to set high goals. The librarians usually convinced them to set a lower goal and if it was met, the child could make a second contract. The majority of children who completed the program read more than the 10 books required under the old summer reading program. The librarians felt that "letting the children set their own goals for reading [was] a positive and worthwhile approach" (p. 35).

A less innovative summer reading program in the 1979 *SLJ* had a few similarities to the Elk Grove program (Roberts). With a theme of food, the program for 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> grade had children report only the authors and titles to librarians. The children could read any book, but unlike the Elk Grove program, they did have to be library books. To



earn the reward final reward of a chef's hat, the children had to read 20 or more books. A number of programs from movies, to crafts, to weekly story parties were offered, always including a snack.

Superheroes were a popular theme in summer reading programs in 1979 ("Library program roundup", 1979). The Columbus, Ohio superhero program was for anyone 18 and under, one of the most inclusive age groups reported. Children earned prizes after reading certain numbers of books. These prizes included a McDonald's coupon, an iron-on, an invitation to the final party, and a certificate. Sixteen books were needed to come to the party, anything beyond that earned the certificate. Magic shows, puppet shows and crafts were just a few of the activities at the library in conjunction with the summer reading. Quincy, Illinois also used a superhero theme. Children received a workbook to keep track of the reading with activities, recipes, movie lists, and a maze inside. The superhero summer reading program at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore had children solve clues about library activities and move around a game board to complete the program. There were prizes and a certificate signed by the mayor for finishing.

Other library summer programs reported in 1979 were in Nassau, East Orange, NJ, and California ("Library program roundup"). Nassau's program was for children up through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The movies, crafts, parties, and other activities were all related to the science fiction theme. Children's reading progress was tracked on a wall chart. The East Orange PL in New Jersey, in partnership with a museum, had an international theme that was reminiscent of some of the programs of the 1930's. Reading lists included books about or set in a variety of countries. The story hours included crafts, games and songs from other countries. Rotating exhibits loaned from the museum highlighted

different countries from the reading lists. The summer reading program from California recognized that earlier programs had excluded non-readers from participating. By allowing children to listen to books being read, by a person or on audio books, preschoolers and the visually impaired were included in the program. When 15 books had been read or listened to, kids received a T-shirt iron-on.

### **Summary**

Certificates being presented to children who completed their reading goal were a common feature of summer reading programs in the 1950's and would be an enduring element in programs. The number of books that were considered an appropriate goal varied significantly as has been described. Most programs hovered around requiring 10 books, some required 20, and one considered 30 to be deserving of the highest reward. The terminology of "summer reading program" seemed to be fairly standard at this point with a few exceptions. In the past, there had been "reading clubs" and "vacation reading programs." Some libraries had called them games and contests, but that had seemed to fade in favor of "summer reading program" by the Fifties. One of the major themes of summer reading programs in the 1950's was partnerships with schools. This trend would continue into the 60's.

The 1960's and 70's saw more libraries offer a variety of activities as a part of their summer reading programs. In the later 1970's reading actually seemed to take a back seat to activities and entertainment in many of the programs, a very decided contrast to the late 50's and into the early 70's when schools and libraries teamed up to help poor readers with tutors and reading consultants. The introduction of the contract method of setting goals at the end of the 1970's was an important development in

children's summer reading programs. This would become a popular format in later summer reading programs.

In the period between 1950 and 1979 the lower age limit included in summer reading programs dropped and the upper age limit seemed to drop as well, as separate summer reading programs were created for young adults. The first program just for the young adults was in the late 50's. Some of the older children and young adults began to be used as aids or volunteers to help with the summer reading program, rather than having a program for them. This division of children and young adults became a permanent feature, although not all libraries offered summer reading programs for young adults.

### 1980 – 2004

With the beginning of the 1980's, the contract summer reading program continued to be popular. The Texas State Library sponsored a pirate themed program for children 5 and older (Arrott, 1980). Children set personal reading goals and signed contracts. Each child who completed his or her contract could participate in a treasure hunt at the library at the end of the summer. The 'treasure' was coupons from local businesses. Certificates were also awarded to children at the final activity. Another summer reading program from 1980 also had changed to the contract format. Previously children in the Lynnfield, MA public library summer reading program had been required to read ten books, but with the new program children set their own goal and could re-contract if the reading goal was met (Hoffer, 1980). The hope of the new program was that it would encourage slow readers, that reading would be spread over the summer, children would read books on their level (not shorter, easier books to fill the quota), and that it would have a noncompetitive atmosphere. This program included teachers in the goal setting. Before the program began, librarians visited schools and distributed fliers. They asked teachers to submit a list of student names and appropriate reading goals. With positive feedback after the program, staffers felt it had been a success. During this summer reading program, the "quality of the books [read by children]...was good to excellent" (Hoffer, 1980, p. 41). Children who fulfilled their contract received a certificate and bookmark at a school assembly in the fall.

To increase the number of children who participated in the summer reading programs in Illinois, a letter was sent to the parents of children in grades 1-6 (“Library program roundup”, 1980). In what sounded almost like scare tactics, this letter from the state Superintendent of Education warned parents about summer loss in reading skills and encouraged the use of the “free reading programs” (p. 16) at the public library. Other forms of publicity used by the Illinois program included placemats at McDonalds, T-shirts, and radio and TV ads.

Two programs in 1981 described themselves as “alternatives” to traditional summer reading programs. The first program was in Bloomington, Indiana (Richey & Burton, 1981). Concerned that the competition in their prior summer reading programs had made some children feel like losers, the library instead had a variety of programs throughout the summer with book-related crafts, films, writers’ workshops, and children publishing a magazine. The librarians also created kits for the children. The first year the kits were for kids who had just finished first grade and are at a critical age in reading development. The kits included materials for parents on how to foster and practice reading skills and materials for children like a library card application, a coloring book about the library, a diary for favorite books and a book list. The kits were so popular that the library ran out within the first few weeks of the summer. The next year kits were made for children in grades 2-5. Different kits were created for different topics or genres (mystery, pets, science fiction, sports, etc.). The kits included activities, bookmarks and book lists. The library underestimated the demand for the kits and again quickly ran out. More kits were made up and new topics were added. With no sign-ups and no keeping

track of what children read, there were no prizes associated with the new summer reading program.

The other program, called Book Buddy, was similar by creating packets that were given to children with bookmarks, fingerplays, activities, and reading lists (Urdike, 1981). The author of this article believed that elaborate programs were basically apologizing to children for “only having books on [the] shelves” (p. 110), and that librarians were hiding behind costumes, records, and certificates in order to evade the real purpose of children’s librarians, which is to help children to discover the pleasure that comes from reading quality books. For her it was important that the goals for the summer reading program match the year round goals of the department. She was critical, like many others, of the use of prizes and coupons to reward reading. Creating bibliographies was one of the best ways to help readers and “encourage reading as a joyous pastime” (p. 110).

In 1983, the first use of computers in a summer reading program is described (Opocensky, 1983). In Lincoln City, Nebraska children read books to earn time on a computer. For every five books read, a child received a ticket allowing him to use the computer. Only about half of the children earned tickets, and of those only 65% redeemed their ticket. The computers (2 Apple II’s and 2 Atari’s) were loaned to the library by local computer groups. Volunteers, including many teenagers, were on hand to help with the use of the computers. Most of the children who participated in the program were older children. In addition to the reward of using a computer, children who completed their reading received a 10% discount at local bookstores and a treat at

McDonalds. The library saw a rise in circulation during the program and received a lot of positive feedback from the community.

The sponsorship of summer reading programs by private businesses increased from more than discounts and coupons with the support of B. Dalton Booksellers (“B. Dalton”, 1984). In 1983, B. Dalton donated \$4,400 for materials in Toledo’s summer reading program. This showed a new level of support by businesses, from local level support to corporate support. In 1985, it was reported that B. Dalton had again donated to a summer reading program, this time in New Jersey (“B. Dalton grants”, 1985). With the \$5,400 grant, the New Jersey State Library developed regional library cooperatives that would work together on summer reading programs.

Business sponsors also played a major role in the Houston Public Library’s 1985 summer reading program (“Houston”, 1985). The goals of the summer reading program were fairly typical: maintain reading skill levels; stimulate library use during the summer; and to “help fill [children’s] free time with healthy and useful activities” (p. 16). But the library had help from some private companies in reaching these goals. Denny’s, the Houston Astros, and a local burger chain provided coupons for food and free game tickets to participants in the summer reading program.

Computers made an appearance again in a summer reading program in California (“Summer reading is successful”, 1985). On 4 borrowed Apple computers, kids were able to register and keep track of their reading. Besides being popular with the children, librarians appreciated the computers because it meant less paperwork since the information was all stored on the computer.

For the first time since 1940, an editorial article in the April 1988 *School Library Journal* was written to critique the purpose and practice of summer reading programs (Manning). While some articles during these 40 years had critiques and reservations, they were not written as such. Manning describes summer reading as “a fixed star in the sky around which children’s library programming revolves each summer” (p. 52). One of her main criticisms is that programs divide children into winners and losers. It also rewards the winners who are already the good readers and makes the slow and reluctant readers feel worse about reading. This was the same opinion held in the negative editorial of 1940. Manning gives a number of suggestions for summer reading programs that will “provide an opportunity for each child to discover the simple joy of reading for pure pleasure” (p. 52). Everyone should have an equal chance to win, no matter how many or how few books were read. Parties should include all participants. An interesting suggestion she had was that no individual records should be kept, but only a group or library total. No prizes should be given for the most books. Instead, by reading a book each week, a child is entered into a weekly prize drawing. Her concern was that every child should have their self-esteem reinforced and not hurt by their participation in the summer reading program.

The shift to summer reading programs on the regional and state level increased with the 1990’s. The Illinois Library Association had a committee that developed a program guide that outlined how to publicize, promote, and conduct a summer reading program (“Dispel the summer doldrums”, 1990). Included in the guide were ideas on themes, games, and activities. In the Washington, D.C. area a group called Summer Quest had evolved including “over one hundred libraries in nine jurisdictions” that



worked together on issues of common interest including summer reading (Bauer & Salvadore, 1990, p. 34). All the libraries in the group used the same theme, but flexibility was encouraged at the local level. Artwork for promotional materials was also the same. Libraries could purchase these promotional materials or their own from independent sources. Committees developed booklists related to the annual themes. Programming also benefited from the cooperative. With so many libraries using the same theme, scheduling performers was easier and theater groups, storytellers, and magicians performed the same program at each library.

A young adult reading program in 1991 allowed teens to use an online community bulletin board (Carton, 1992). At the time, it cost money each time you posted a message in online message boards. The provider allowed teens participating in the program to post reviews of the books they read. The same year, the public library in Dayton, Ohio used a computer to track children who were part of the summer reading program (Gaffney & Crawford, 1992). Using database software, the library kept a record for children with information about their school, grade, address, and number of books read. The librarians found the program to be very efficient. It allowed them to sort and manipulate the data for reports, as well as for things like invitations to the final party. The record keeping was more accurate and more organized. A less tangible result was that staff had more time to get to know and talk with the children.

Geneva, NY developed a unique summer reading program (Ruth, 1994). The combination summer reading and basketball camp called 'Rebound and Read' was targeted at the cities at-risk youth. Funded through grants and supported by volunteers, the program lasted for two weeks. During those two weeks participants met each day.

During those days, coaches worked with the youth on their basketball and the kids spent time in classrooms practicing reading. Some time would be spent in the gym, then in the classroom, then back to the gym. The coaches also participated in the reading activities, which included reading sports stories, biographies of basketball players, and newspaper articles. Because it was held in a school gym and not at the library, the program included two visits to the library. At the library the youth learned how to use an online database and reference sources to find sports trivia and articles. Daily raffles gave away water bottles, T-shirts, and restaurant coupons to the kids who turned in journal entries. The program had high attendance and was praised by teachers and parents, who appreciated the combination of reading and sports.

In the 1990's Maine's state library began a summer reading program through the mail, reminiscent of Georgia's program back in 1928 (Olson & Meyer, 1995). With about 300,000 people in the state with little or no library access, the summer reading program allowed children the opportunity to participate in a summer reading program and continue reading during summer vacation. Children filled out postcards to request titles, with no limit to the number of books that would be sent. The number requested varied from only a few to 200. The library paid for all the shipping costs, both sending and returning. The goal of the program was just to keep children reading and give them the same access to books they would have if they could walk into a public library. All the children received a bookmark and pencil, and earned other prizes like stickers, a certificate, or a book.

The mid-90's saw some discussion about best practices for summer reading. In her article "Eyes on the *Real Prize*," Carolyn Caywood looked at rewards and if they

were good to use in summer reading programs (1997). She asked whether incentives encouraged children to read and helped them to develop a love of reading. Since incentives are usually given when a task is unpleasant, giving rewards for reading could teach children that it is something that must be done, but not enjoyed. If rewards were used, she suggested that the reward be similar to the task. For example, as a reward for reading, give a child a book. Other ways to better implement rewards include minimizing direct competition between children, incorporating as much choice as possible in the program and focusing on “intrinsic motivators like the pleasure of stories and satisfying curiosity” (p. 59). An article from 1995 reported on a study that had found that many reading programs sponsored by businesses were basically commercials for the sponsors (“Reading incentive programs”). Sponsoring these programs benefited them in several ways: it was good for their image, they had a captive audience for advertising, and children received coupons, bringing in business. The article recognized that with tight budgets it was hard for libraries to turn down these types of partners in programming and that increasing commercialism was a societal trend. One librarian article pointed out that it didn’t benefit libraries to be “purists or isolationists when it comes to [commercial] collaboration” but that librarians were in a position to ensure that programs weren’t “overpowered by a commercial message” (p. 22). The issues of how to incorporate incentives and how to walk the fine line with business partnerships continue to be dilemmas faced by librarians.

The Internet made a major debut in 1997 with libraries creating websites for their summer reading programs. One article reviewed a number of websites that would complement summer reading programs, from online stories to games (Junion-Metz,

1997). The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh used their website to link to thematically related websites (Barstow & Markey, 1997). It also provided a comment form. This was one of the “most successful components” (p. 31) of the website because its anonymity encouraged open and honest comments and suggestions from children and their parents.

Several of the programs from 1997 were fairly traditional with children participating in activities and reading around a theme, using teen volunteers, and statewide programs. But some programs and suggestions stood out. The Los Angeles Public Library had found through a study that most children participated in summer reading because their parents encouraged them to, not because they had chosen to (Barstow & Markey, 1997). So the library decided to focus their publicity on parents. Instead of flooding schools with flyers, hoping they would make it home to parents, postcards were sent to parents reminding them of the importance of reading and inviting their children to participate in the program. When parents returned the postcard to the library, they were entered into a drawing for a computer. The library also partnered with the Dodgers. At two baseball games in the summer, coupons were given to children that could be redeemed for a baseball bat and ball. Children who completed an hourly reading goal were entered into drawings for tickets to a game.

Another program that stood out in 1997 focused on outreach. Like many of the first summer library programs, the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library recognized that many children couldn't come to the library for a number of reasons, so they decided to go to where the children were (Barstow & Markey). The library worked with summer school programs and childcare facilities. Librarians visited these locations and gave

booktalks and storytimes. The library was able to include children who might otherwise never have known about or participated in a summer reading program.

Instead of giving prizes to children who participated in the summer reading program, a public library in Colorado committed to donate \$1,000 to buy books for homeless children if 45,000 hours were read by participants (Olson & Glick, 1998). By the end of the summer, nearly 70,000 hours were read, possibly showing that cheap rewards are not good motivators but that other goals could encourage even better.

A library in Wisconsin built on the Choose Your Own Adventure idea for their summer reading program (Langby, 1999). Children could read anything they wanted. For every five hours read, children entered their name in a drawing for one of 20 possible adventures. Some of the adventures that could be won were a trip out on a Coast Guard cutter, time at a horse farm, a fishing trip on Lake Michigan, or a roadie with a popular local band. The librarian found it was “easier asking folks to share their time and expertise with a young person than asking them to donate trinkets” (p. 35).

In 2000, several articles from the literature were on summer reading programs and their websites. In Oklahoma, the Department of Libraries partnered with the Daily Oklahoman newspaper to put the statewide summer reading program online (Minkel, 2000, July). The program had a link from the newspaper’s online edition. The program’s site linked to the Department of Libraries site to help user’s locate any public library in the state. The site included booklists and a historical look at the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were links to more booklists and book award sites, activities, and weekly trivia contests. The website also introduced kids to the newspapers by guiding them through the online Oklahoman. The site won a public relations award from the ALA in 1999.

A second article in 2000 gave several examples of good use of the Internet (Minkel, 2000, Fall). Several of the websites included games and interactive stories, and all of them included links and booklists. The Edmonton Public Library's summer reading site had an ongoing story written by the children. Children submitted paragraphs and the librarian selected one every couple of days to add to the story. Florida's state library had originally developed their site as an online version of the summer reading program manual for librarians, but it quickly turned into a resource for both librarians and children as it expanded to include activities and links. The Monroe County Public Library in Indiana used email to promote their summer reading program. The library took great care to make patrons aware of how the email addresses would be used when they signed up. Fewer than 20 people did sign up for the service, but it had not been heavily promoted.

A library in Ontario, Canada reported in 2000 on the effects that charging for the summer reading program had (Saczkowski). The library charged only \$2 for the entire summer reading program. The attendance at programs was 90%. The overall registration of children in the program actually increased by 30%. The librarian suggested that by charging a small fee, people seemed to feel that the program was worthy of their time. There were no complaints about the fees. A local service club had agreed to pay for anyone who was unable to cover the cost for themselves, but that need had not come up. This significant format change in a summer reading program gave the librarian more money to spend on the program, leaving more of the budget to buy books.

In a series of articles in 2001, Minkel explored the potential of having automated summer reading programs. In the first article he suggested that a completely automated

summer reading program software be developed that would be a part of or at least compatible to the circulation system (2001, July). Children could swipe or type in their library card number and register for the program. They could keep track of the reading they did (whether hours, minutes, or books) from at home or at the library. With traveling, visiting family, going to sports camps, etc., kids are often not around for the entire summer. By putting the entire reading program online, they could participate from almost anywhere. The electronic format would significantly decrease the amount of time spent by staff entering and manipulating data. Of course all of the materials would still be available in paper format, but the use of the electronic format would give librarians more time to spend working with children. Some librarians Minkel spoke with were concerned that children wouldn't come to the library if the program were entirely online. The second article came out later the same year and contained examples of some libraries that had attempted some form of online record keeping (2001, December). In Flushing, NY the library had allowed children who were going to be away during the summer to email the books they had read and reviews to the library. In Arizona, teens submitted slips online for every hour of reading they did. After five hours, they were eligible to win tickets donated by a local movie theater. In Minnesota, one library's summer reading program website allowed kids to sign-up to keep their reading record online. Because it was experimental almost no publicity had been done. Only eighty children used the online records. But the following summer, the librarian anticipated much higher usage of the online material with higher publicity.

In 2002, another article was written about the importance of outreach (Minkel, 2002). In the article the main reason for a drop in participation numbers was the number

of working mothers. For children to participate in summer reading, the program would have to go to them at the YMCA or childcare center. A variety of summer reading programs that went out to the children were described. Some of these sounded very similar to the playground programs of the early 1900's. In places like Rochester, NY and Terre Haute, IN, librarians regularly visited YMCA's and preschools telling stories, doing crafts, and signing up for summer reading. In Cheyenne, WY, librarians used their bookmobile to visit Hispanic children who lived far away from the library. One librarian brought the summer reading program to teens in a juvenile detention facility in Oregon. Local social service agencies like Head Start, the Boys and Girls Club and groups like the city recreation department were all suggested as important contacts in developing outreach as part of the summer reading program.

In 2003, Florida schools and public libraries partnered in the Library Summer Reading Pilot Program, part of the state's Read to Learn initiative (Ishizuka, 2003). The program was aimed at the nearly 25% of third graders who scored in the lowest level on state tests. The program offered tutoring, books, and workshops for parents to help increase scores. Another article that year was also about libraries and schools working together (Minkel, 2003, January). Most of the suggestions in the article had been used in the past, but the article emphasized that librarians needed to be proactive in approaching schools. Keeping records of grades and schools attended by summer reading participants was given as an important way to know where the users were coming from and as a way to build on common ground with teachers and administrators. Following up with schools and giving them results was another way to encourage working together.



An entirely online summer reading program for teens was used the summer of 2003 in Charlotte, NC (Minkel, 2003, June). Teens registered and tracked their reading online, with no paper at all. But to keep teens coming to the library, incentives like a \$10 fine waiver or free book sale items were offered. A similar program was not created for the children's summer reading program because staff were concerned that parents and young children would be less likely to sign up.

### **Summary**

The 1980's saw the continuation of the reading contracts. Alternative programs also made an appearance with the emphasis on fun and exploring and little or no record keeping or incentives. Business support of summer reading programs also increased during this time with corporate grants and more coupons from local businesses and restaurants. The first computers used in summer reading programs were seen in 1983. This was the beginning of a new phase in summer reading that is still developing.

In the 1990's there was a dramatic increase in the volume of articles on summer reading. The total number of articles between 1990 and 2000 was more than double that of any previous decade. The higher volume of articles and interest in summer reading programs continued after 2000. In the past, most articles were anecdotal with a few suggestions on what had worked for an individual library. A lot of the articles in the 1990's tried to be more prescriptive, how to have the best summer reading program or publicize it better, etc. But very few of the articles had anything new to add to how summer reading programs were structured or administered. Outreach was a concern in many places as participation numbers slipped.

But with the Internet, new ways of providing materials and access began to be a part of summer reading programs. In 2000 and 2001 libraries began to create websites to support the summer reading programs, including games, links, and booklists on their sites. In 2002 and 2003 the Internet began to be used to allow online registration and even online record keeping of summer reading. Although most libraries were slow in realizing the full potential of online registration, it was beginning to happen.

## CONCLUSION

Summer reading programs for youth have become a significant programming event in most public libraries. From a few programs at the end of the nineteenth century, summer reading programs quickly spread in the early decades of the twentieth century. The features of summer reading programs developed rapidly with incentives, reading goals, and special programs appearing very early on. These features have endured with few alterations over the years.

In early programs, librarians used summer reading programs to encourage reading, not just any reading, but quality reading. Over and over they stressed the importance that children read good books. Lists of acceptable, and sometimes required, books were created to direct children to the best literature. Librarians were concerned that more quality books be read, than with the quantity of books read. Goals were kept minimal in these early programs. Over time the quality issue has faded into the background. Librarians still create lists of good books, but children can usually read anything for the summer reading program.

Most goals of summer reading programs have remained fairly constant over the past 100 or so years. One goal that was seen in the first programs and is seen still today is fostering a love of reading in children. Love of books and reading can only develop if children are reading. Keeping children reading has always been a central goal in summer reading. A related goal has been to keep children coming to the library. In the earlier

years of summer reading, these two goals were entwined. The library achieved both by requiring children to read books from the library. The goal to keep children and parents coming to the library later was expressed in goals to maintain and/or increase circulation. Although maintaining library use and circulation numbers is still a goal in many programs, librarians have come to place more emphasis on the importance of children reading and allow children freedom in selecting their reading materials.

The increased freedom of choice in reading is a significant change during the history of summer reading programs. This freedom allowed more books to circulate. It gave children a greater sense of control and showed more respect for their reading choices. It illustrates how the high-minded concern for quality books had been superseded by a belief that any reading was better than no reading.

Competition has been an issue almost since the first summer reading programs. As the reading programs became more formalized and children had to read certain numbers of books, some librarians began to question how these programs were set up. They were concerned that the focus on numbers created too much of a contest out of reading, and therefore alienated some children from reading because they were unsuccessful in reaching the goal. Incentives were also disliked by many librarians. Although in the early days, most incentives were bookmarks, buttons, and certificates, some felt that incentives were rewarding good readers and punishing the slow and reluctant readers. Over and over during the twentieth century, competition and incentives were two of the major concerns that librarians had with summer reading programs. Librarians tried to minimize the competition by using group goals and setting low reading goals. Reading contracts, which appeared at the end of the 1970's, were a major

development in summer reading. By letting children set their own goals, it was hoped that competition could be eliminated. Using minutes read instead of books as a measure of reading accomplished was another change to equalize summer reading programs among children of different reading abilities. Libraries attempted to overcome the problems of incentives, while still offering rewards, by using prize drawings.

Summer reading programs have become more inclusive in who can participate. Early clubs and programs were for youth about 10 and up. The lower age limit dropped with time, until pre-readers were included. The upper age limit changed as well. As the lower age limit dropped, the upper age limit dropped too. In the middle of the twentieth century, a lot of programs were only for children up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade; even then the older children often were volunteers who helped the younger readers and did not participate in a reading program themselves. Then libraries began to provide summer reading programs for both children and young adults. The young adult programs were often less structured than the children's. Librarians included the young adults in the planning of the programs.

Over time, public libraries have begun to work together to plan and produce summer reading programs. State libraries and regional cooperatives have developed to take some of the pressure and demand off individual libraries to come up with new ideas and materials every year for the summer reading program. In the past decade or two, a variety of books with ideas and activities for summer reading have been published.

Summer reading programs have also seen increased support from the private sector. Local businesses often donate coupons or give discounts that can be used as

rewards. Large corporations like B. Dalton and Wells Fargo have given grants to libraries for their summer reading programs.

In the last few years computers and the Internet have begun to be a part of summer reading programs. Many libraries have used websites to complement the traditional summer reading program. They have links, games, and information that are related to the program. But some libraries have put the reading program partially or entirely online, with others planning to do so in the near future. These online summer reading programs raise a number of issues. The first is whether youth will still come into the library if they can simply sign up and report their books over the Internet. Not only could this affect circulation and program attendance, but librarians will no longer have the opportunity to talk to the children about what they have read. An important part of summer reading is the connection made by librarians with children as they recommend books and discuss what has been read. By putting everything online, the personal touch is lost and the program could distance librarians from their readers, rather than connecting them. It could also increase the false reporting of books or time read. Because there is no talking with the librarian, children could more easily record books simply in order to win the incentives.

Computers do offer some great benefits to librarians because they simplify the record keeping of summer reading programs. But they offer some other opportunities for summer reading that may not have yet been realized. Moderated blogs or online discussion groups could be part of the summer reading program. To cut back on potential for cheating, children could fill out a short form when reporting each book online that would let them write about their favorite part, an alternate ending, or just summarize the

book. Librarians could post the best entries. Email reminders of programs and encouragement could be sent to summer reading participants. It is important that the online registration and record keeping be kept fairly simple so that young children won't require very much help. Entirely online programs will probably be less practical for younger children. Some parents don't like their children being online, so paper summer reading programs won't totally disappear.

It may also be time to reevaluate summer reading programs as a whole. The reading programs of the past are nearly the same as those of today. In 2004 there may be online registration, but the most of the differences in the programs are more cosmetic than structural. The children of today have more demands on their time and attention than ever before. The Internet and television are major competitors with reading for children's free time. During the summer there are endless soccer games, swimming lessons, dance classes, etc. Other institutions like museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and community groups also have summer programs. Instead of competing with all of these things, summer reading programs could incorporate them. The programs could have the Internet and television be part of the program. Part of the program could be to encourage information literacy as children watch TV and use the Internet. More partnerships with other groups and institutions might also be a change that is seen in the future. Although these museums and zoos provide programs at libraries occasionally and have partnered in some instances, more could be done. The library could go to the museum and be part of a program there. A weekly story hour could be held at the botanical gardens. Summer reading participants could get discounts when they went to the zoo. Working with groups

like the YMCA and summer youth groups would increase the exposure of the library and bring in new users.

Summer reading programs have survived for over 100 years, but in order to continue to be effective and attract youth, librarians need to be creative in developing their summer reading programs. They will need to be willing to try new formats and not be restricted by what and how summer reading programs have been in the past.



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