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Libraries
and Wartime

Buffalo
Never
Fails

ALSO INSIDE:

Q&A with Stephen Lang

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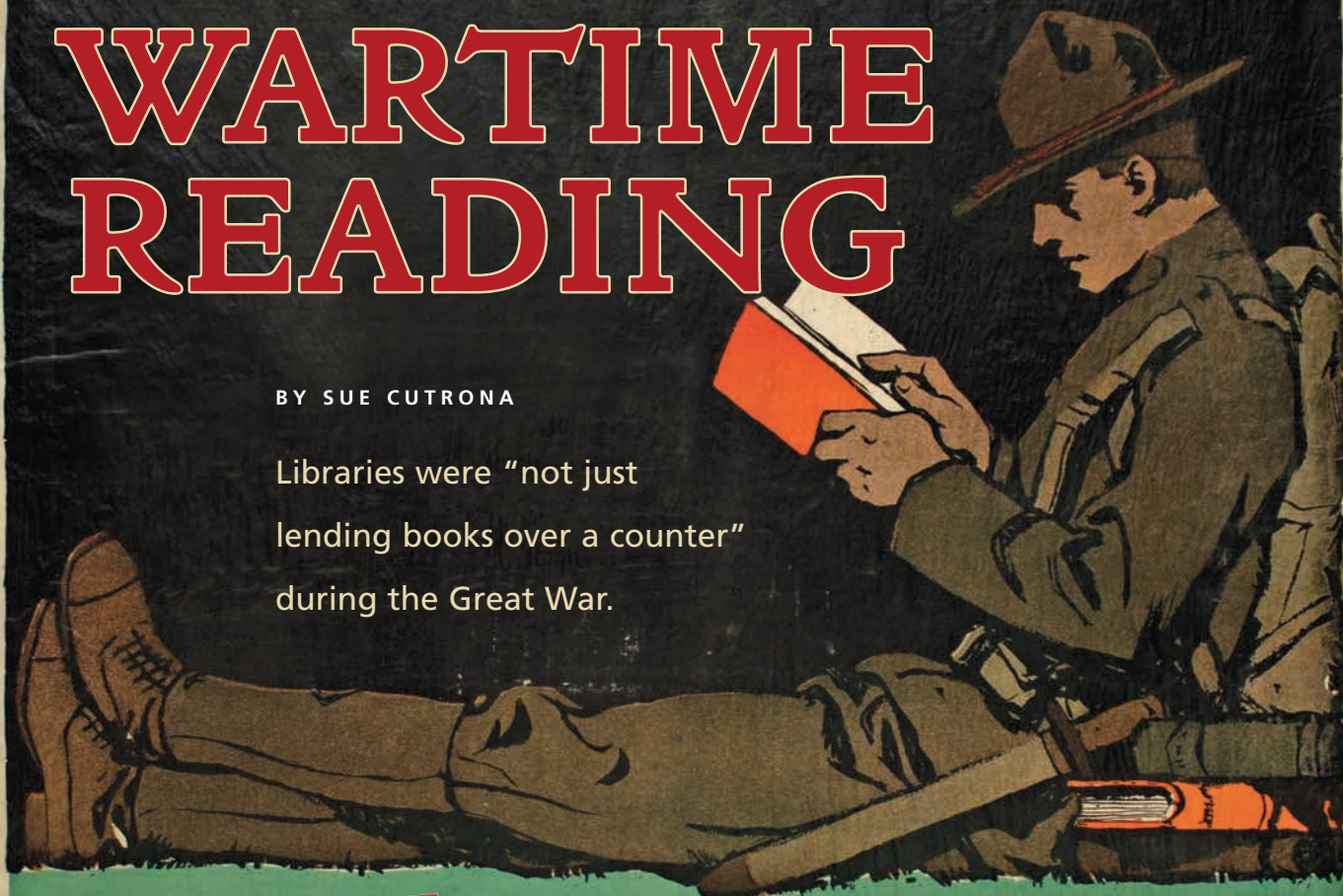
WWII POW Camps



WARTIME READING

BY SUE CUTRONA

Libraries were “not just
lending books over a counter”
during the Great War.



When the U.S. entered the Great War on April 6, 1917, there was a national shift in consciousness; opposition, neutrality, or lack of effort for the war could be seen as unpatriotic and anti-American. To remain in the public favor, libraries needed to join the war cause. Buffalo librarians were eager to continue to meet community needs and

demonstrate the usefulness of their institution.

Book displays began promoting “Food Patriotism” and “Helps to Thrift” at the Buffalo Public Library. Reader interest demanded a boost to “War Interest” collections on aviation, military training, the Red Cross, and war poetry. The BPL issued library cards to soldiers in Buffalo for training and sent traveling collections to local barracks. The Grosvenor Library

*The BPL issued library cards to soldiers in Buffalo for training and sent traveling collections to local barracks.
Inset: Buffalo librarians were eager to meet community needs in support of the war effort.*

also began to collect and promote war-interest material, including *Stars and Stripes*, the army newspaper written by servicemen.

Wartime agencies needed to publicize drives for Liberty Loans, food conservation measures, and donations of books for soldiers. Immigrants preparing for US citizenship required reading material in English and their native language. Public libraries, already established as educational and community centers, were poised to play a vital role in disseminating necessary information. At the time of the war, the BPL was striving to meet the demand for more branches while maintaining a bustling Main Library. Through a natural extension of library work, including collecting war-related material, public programming, and displays, the BPL provided much needed information to citizens and soldiers at a critical time in our nation's history.

Pre-War Years

Established in 1897 as Buffalo's free public circulating library, the BPL in 1914 consisted of a large downtown library and eight neighborhood branches and book depositories. Serving a population of over 454,000, the library also established collections in 98 schools and provided books for "traveling libraries" in over 100 clubs, factories, hospitals, charities, fire halls, and police stations. To improve service to patrons, the BPL collaborated with Buffalo's free reference library,



Established in 1897, the BPL's large downtown library was in Lafayette Square. Right: In 1914, Vice Librarian Theresa Elmendorf published an annotated bibliography of 100 books on the nations at war, reprinted in a local newspaper.

the Grosvenor Library, by creating joint book lists and coordinating purchases.

The pre-war years were a busy time for the growing library system; residents of several neighborhoods petitioned the BPL for a branch of their own, and circulation and registered users increased every year. Annual reports from 1914 through 1916 focused on plans for expansion, improving children's services, and providing books on trades for job seekers and foreign language material for immigrants.

In the years of US neutrality, 1914-1917, the BPL responded to interest in the "European war" in typical library fashion:

book lists and displays. In 1914, Vice Librarian Theresa Elmendorf published an annotated bibliography titled *Clash of the Great Powers*. Reprinted in a local newspaper, it listed 100 current books on Austria-Hungary, the Balkan States, the British Empire, France, and the German Empire. A second list featured titles on modern warfare, weapons, and airships on display at the Main Library and branches. In 1916, the Grosvenor Library published "Pros and Cons of Preparedness," a bibliography of books and magazine articles on international politics, neutrality, and defense. As the war in Europe waged on, the BPL pur-

CLASH OF THE GREAT POWERS

List of 100 Modern Books Dealing With the European War.

TO BE HAD AT PUBLIC LIBRARY

Telling About the Nations at War and the Interests at Stake.

The Buffalo Public Library has published a very interesting and timely list bearing upon the great war. One hundred modern books—there are probably not more than half a dozen printed before 1900—are grouped under the headings: Europe; Austria-Hungary; The Balkan States; The British Empire; France, Belgium and Luxembourg; The German Empire; The Russian Empire; World Politics and War. Many classes of books have been included—history to bring out the past of the great powers engaged; travel and up-to-date guide-books to define and make clear boundaries and physical circumstances of the countries; books upon governments and foreign relations to bring out the connections of the various nations engaged, and considerations of the economic conditions and development of the peoples. For instance, under Europe will be found President A. Lawrence Lowell's most scholarly *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe*; and the less profound but valuable discussion by Professor Ogg Maximilian Harden, the great German journalist, in his *Monarchs and Men* makes vivid some great actors in Europe's immediate past.

Walter Brown, head librarian of the BPL and president of the American Library Association, appointed a War Service Committee, which later oversaw all Library War Service programs.

Brown appealed to the citizens of Buffalo for book donations and they sent over 30,000 books and magazines to Fort Niagara and Fort Porter, as well as to other locations nationwide.



tasked ALA with the creation of libraries in thirty-two army camps and naval stations in the US and overseas. This massive Library War Service program required funds for library construction, as well as donations of appropriate reading material. ALA began the first drive for books in September 1917, and public libraries were urged to participate and publicize the campaign.

Soldiers' Books

The BPL responded immediately, and Brown appealed to the citizens of Buffalo for book donations. The Board of Directors readily authorized the use of library space and staff time to collect and prepare the books for shipment. Branch librarians placed slips asking for books for soldiers in each adult book circulated. Brown looked to the BPL collection and sent unneeded duplicates to the camps. Brown and BPL Board President Thomas T. Ramsdell were also members of Buffalo's Local War Council, which collected \$12,500 for the Camp Libraries Fund.

During the second book drive of March 1918, Brown encouraged citizens to spare books from their personal collections. Everyone could donate at least one book for the boys "over here and over there," particularly detective and adventure stories, and volumes of history, travel, and biography. The BPL worked with the YMCA, social clubs, local women's groups, and

chased maps of the countries involved and displayed them to foster study of geographical and political boundaries.

Right Books

Walter Brown, head librarian of the BPL, wrote in 1917 that the Library was "helping in many ways the workers at home, as well as the men in the service, through the distribution of the right books." Brown was president of the American Library Association (ALA) when the US declared war on Germany. At the ALA conference in June 1917, he appointed a War Service Committee, which later oversaw the Library War Service. The Federal government had



the Girl Scouts to collect and deliver books. BPL and Grosvenor Library staff volunteers continued to add labels and pockets to the books. Both libraries staffed an ALA publicity hut in downtown Buffalo. Continuing the drives through early 1919, Buffalo sent over 30,000 books and magazines locally to Fort Niagara and Fort Porter, as well as to camps, naval stations, and army hospitals across the nation.

The BPL also assisted with other national efforts; space in the Main Library was provided for booths selling Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps. The library was active during all four Liberty Loan campaigns, the Victory Loan campaign, and the War Savings stamps program, through which institutions and individuals purchased bonds from the US government to help cover the expense of war. The lower cost installment plan of War Saving Stamps was a more affordable option for many, including schoolchildren. Librarians not only loaned the federal government their money as citizens, but also from their institutional budgets. By 1918, BPL had expended \$5,000 in bonds, and the staff aid association invested \$1,000. The Grosvenor was on the local Liberty Loan "Honor Roll," with contributions of \$10,000 and \$15,000 during the last two campaigns.

Liberty Loan publicity committees had a willing partners in libraries. Thousands of inserts urging people to contribute



were placed in the books borrowed from the BPL. Neighborhood branches reported monthly on their efforts, totaling the inserts distributed and War Savings Stamps sold. Posters promoting loan campaigns decorated BPL branches and the Main Library. In time for the Third Liberty Loan, the Grosvenor created an exhibition of over 100 war posters from every Allied nation, some lent by prominent citizens. This proved very popular, and the posters were displayed again in 1919 after the war.

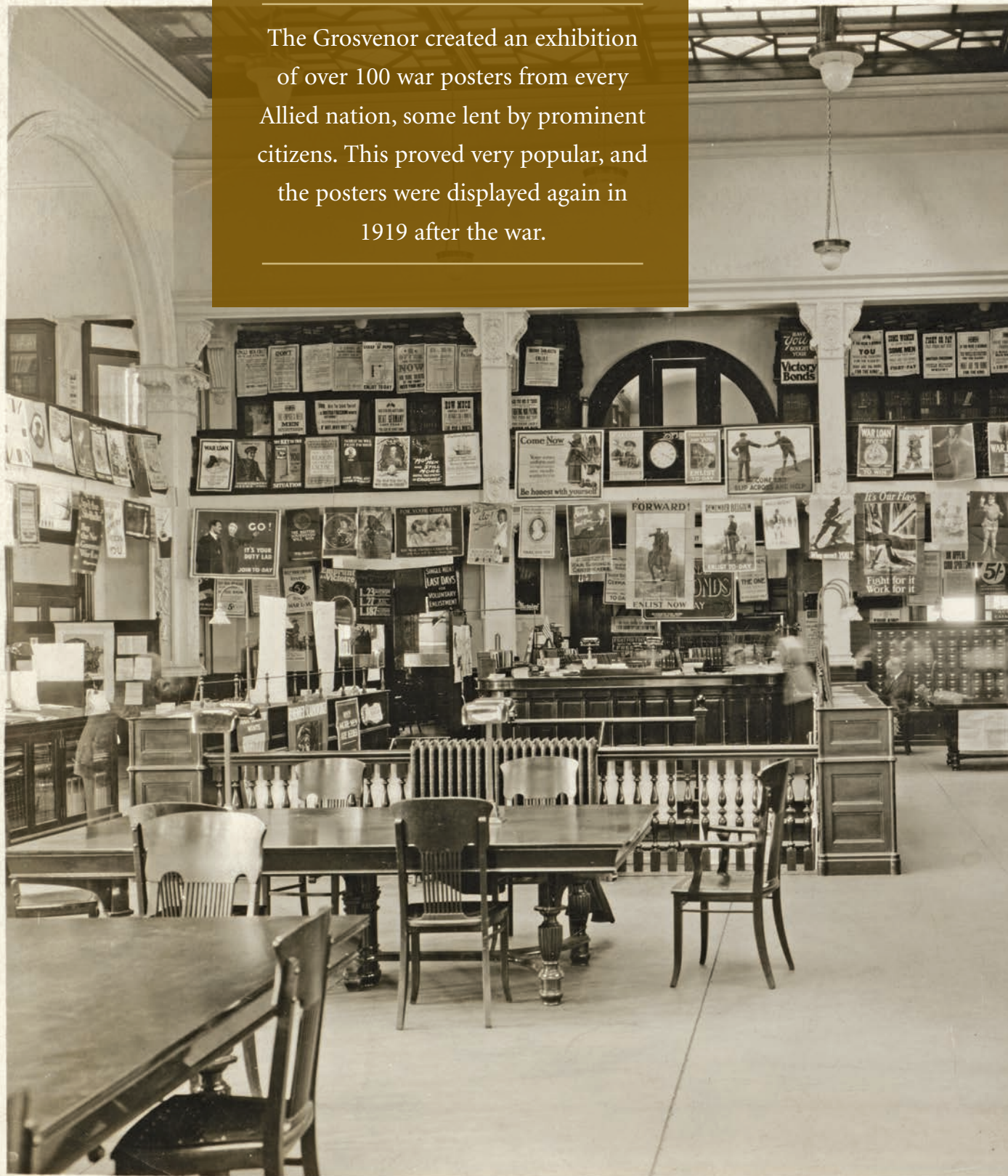
Red Cross

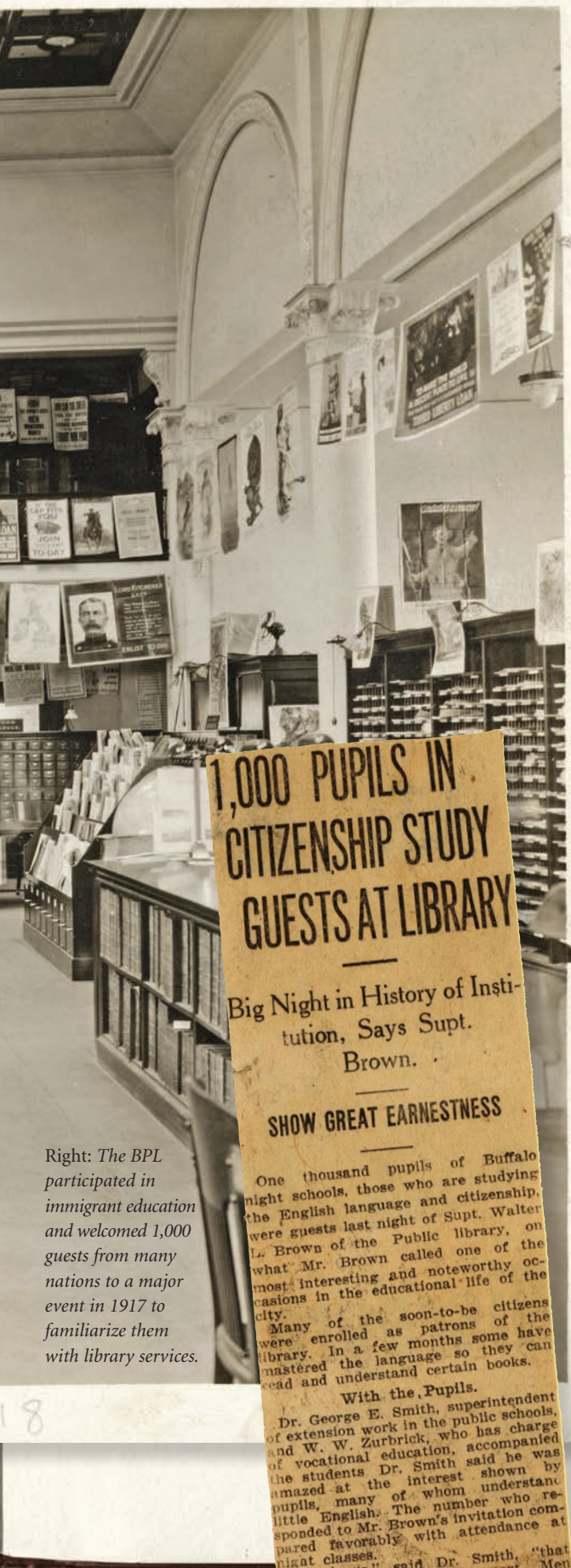
Buffalo libraries also promoted Red Cross war efforts. The Grosvenor Library displayed books on the organization, and the BPL collected monetary donations. Posters for Red Cross campaigns were featured in the BPL's Open

Buffalo libraries also promoted Red Cross war efforts. The Grosvenor Library displayed books on the organization, and the BPL collected monetary donations. Posters for Red Cross campaigns were featured in the BPL's Open Shelf department.

Shelf department. The Jubilee Branch of the BPL became a center of patriotic work and was used as the headquarters of neighborhood Red Cross activities. A draft board occupied one room of the branch. The Jubilee Branch librarian noted in 1917 that libraries are "not just lending books over a counter these days."

The Grosvenor created an exhibition of over 100 war posters from every Allied nation, some lent by prominent citizens. This proved very popular, and the posters were displayed again in 1919 after the war.





Right: The BPL participated in immigrant education and welcomed 1,000 guests from many nations to a major event in 1917 to familiarize them with library services.

Unusual Challenges

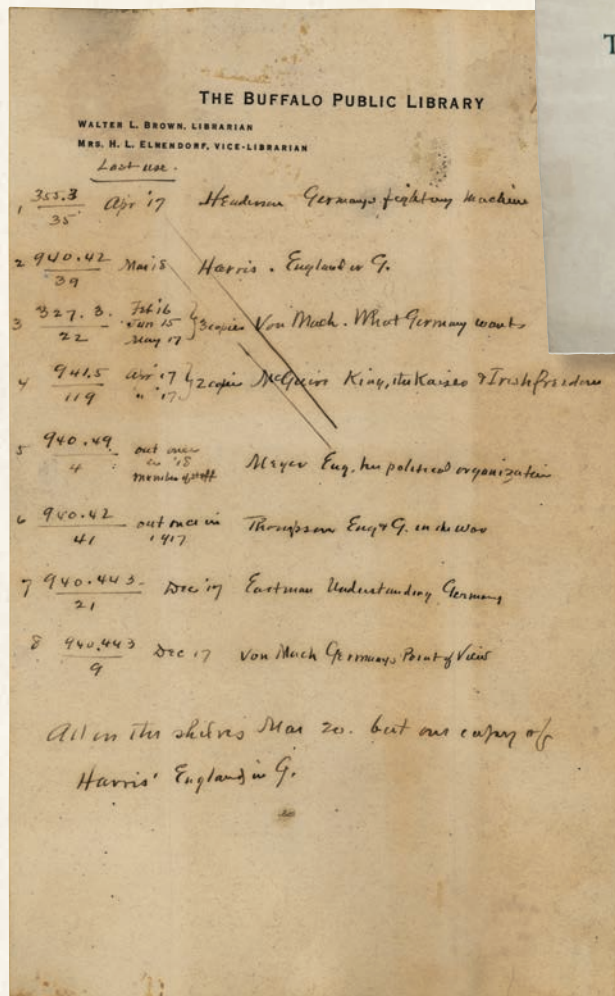
The war brought new and unusual challenges to Buffalo librarians. They reported mediating heated war debates between patrons and even helping untangle yarn for one of the Red Cross volunteers who was knitting items for soldiers. The staff of the Ives Branch of the BPL summed up their role in 1918 as a "community center and a bureau of general information." Librarians answered questions on the Red Cross and draft boards, and explained the process of sending letters to servicemen and obtaining army pay allowances for soldiers' families. Located in a predominately Polish-speaking neighborhood, the Ives' staff helped translate government notices. No matter was too small—the Grosvenor Library received so many inquiries on the pronunciation of "Bolshevik" that a librarian wrote to the Russian embassy and a Buffalo newspaper published the response.

When food thrift was required to ensure the US could support the Allies, the US Food Administration (USFA) tapped public libraries to help with this campaign. The BPL displayed USFA posters, and handed out government leaflets on food conservation and thrifty recipes. Librarians created book lists entitled "Just Vegetables: How to Grow Them" and "Low Cost Cooking." The Dudley Branch featured a window display of canned vegetables and fruits from war gardens in the

neighborhood, along with a sign stating "No Slackerland—Go or Grow."

Immigrant Education

Most of the BPL branch libraries were located in the neighborhoods of the newest Americans. Even before the war, BPL President Ramsdell suggested their potential as a resource for good citizenship. BPL libraries circulated foreign language books for the large populations of German, Polish, and Italian residents. For recent immigrants, there were pamphlets on books covering naturalization, occupations, and American civics. As a place where help was freely given, libraries had already created a welcoming space for newcomers. When "Americanization" became a national movement during the war, state and federal agencies encouraged public libraries to participate in immigrant education and assimilation. Buffalo's Mayor appointed Walter Brown to a "Committee of Fifty on Americanization" and the BPL became a source of government-supplied information on citizenship. One night in February 1917, Brown invited immigrants studying at night schools for a special tour of the main library. One thousand guests included Polish, Italian, Chinese, German, French, and Hungarian men and women. Librarians explained the services available and issued library cards. Brown described this as "one of the biggest nights in the history of the



The full extent of censorship by the Grosvenor and BPL is unknown. Eight German books targeted for censorship were still on the shelves in April 1918, but a handwritten note of each book's last circulation is pasted in a library scrapbook.

library," and a way in which the BPL "may reach a portion of the city's population that needs reaching."

With "Americanization" came anti-German hysteria. At a time when many public libraries removed "pro-German" material from circulation, the full extent of censorship by the Grosvenor and BPL is unknown. In 1917, Brown and the BPL Board of Directors did approve removing "pro-German" newspapers from the collection. However,

BACK TO THE JOB!

What Job?

There are books on all jobs
at the

CAMP LIBRARY

Pick yours out and
GET BUSY

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

As soldiers returned home, the BPL distributed pamphlets on occupations featuring books for soldiers seeking work in advertising, engineering, and carpentry.

eight books targeted by a vigilante group were still on the BPL shelves in April 1918. Although a handwritten note of each book's last circulation is pasted in a library scrapbook, no evidence of banning was found.

As soldiers returned home, BPL and Grosvenor librarians created a timely educational booklet entitled "Disabled Soldiers and Sailors." It listed books, government reports, and articles on the vocational re-education of veterans, including Red Cross programs. The BPL also distributed pamphlets on occupations featuring books for soldiers seeking work in advertising, engineering, and carpentry.

At the end of the war, BPL President Ramsdell declared that the library's efforts had been a "direct means of keeping up the morale of the Nation." Educating citizens through library and government-issued reading material became a patriotic duty

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

The archives of the Buffalo Public Library (BPL) and the Grosvenor Library are housed in the Grosvenor Room special collections of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL). Quotes and figures in this article are from the detailed annual reports of both libraries, BPL monthly department reports, and Grosvenor account books. Photographs, scrapbooks, and bibliographies published by the Grosvenor and the BPL were also referenced. The Rare Book Room of the B&ECPL maintains a collection of nearly 3,000 war posters that were donated to the Grosvenor Library in 1919. Many of the posters are featured in the B&ECPL's exhibit *Buffalo Never Fails: The Queen City and World War I*, on display through 2019.

and Buffalo librarians proved that they could provide necessary services in times of war and peace.

The BPL and the Grosvenor library are predecessor institutions to the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL). The Grosvenor Room special collections of the B&ECPL continues to maintain WWI materials in the local history, Library Archives, and Rare Book Room collections. ■