
Greetings: Concerns on Access to Information

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President Park, officers, and members of the North Carolina Library Association. I am delighted to have this opportunity to participate in your Biennial Conference and bring greetings on behalf of the American Library Association. As the Immediate Past President of ALA, I am especially pleased to be in the great State of North Carolina, for several reasons: 1) my mother is a native of North Carolina; 2) my father grew up in North Carolina; 3) my daughter currently lives here in North Carolina; 4) I have had a long-time association with the School of Library and Information Science at North Carolina Central University, as a member of its Advisory Council and last, but not least, I have so many wonderful friends and colleagues in this state that I have worked with in ALA over the years, and I have such high regard and hold them in high esteem for their outstanding contributions to our chosen field of librarianship.

As I reviewed your program, I became intrigued with the title of the North Carolina Attorney General's address, "Legal Issues Facing Librarians Today," for we librarians in America in general and in ALA in particular, have become concerned about the importance of information in an information society.

From my perspective as the Immediate Past President of the American Library Association, I see several barriers to access to information that should be of special concern to all of us as we pass from the Industrial Age to this new age of information and technology. The first barrier I see is literacy—or rather the lack of it. There are 27 million Americans who cannot read and these non-readers directly affect and are affected by crime, unemployment, poverty, and human suffering. They are the "Information Poor," as are their children, who will have very little opportunity to advance in life because of this handicap. The second barrier to information is technology. There was a time that a person could reasonably

expect to find answers to questions in books; it is no longer that simple. Today's vast store of information cannot be made available in print form and is now found in computer systems. Thus, the gap has widened between "the information poor and the information rich." The third barrier to information is censorship. Of course, all of us are familiar with the attacks on our school libraries and the reasons for censorship. Whatever the reason, the public is in danger of being deprived of free access to information. The ALA, as all of you know, has been in the forefront of the battle against censorship, since the adoption of the Library Bill of Rights in 1948. Of course, one of the big sources of censorship today is our Federal government. Those of you who were at the Mid-winter Meeting in Washington remember the ALA Washington Office publication, *Less Access to Less Information*. The government is trying to control information by increasing user charges and limiting access by treating information as a commodity and publishing greater amounts of information in computer format only. One of the legal issues that the Executive Board of ALA will have to face at its fall meeting is a new information issue case.

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The case at issue involves the decision of the Congress to defund the Library of Congress by \$103,000 in order to prohibit the publication in braille of *Playboy Magazine*. It was Congressman Chalmers Wiley, R-Ohio, who added the amendment to decrease the Library of Congress appropriation for 1985-86 by \$103,000 to defund the braille of *Playboy*. It was the same Congressman, Mr. Wiley, who attempted to defund the

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brailling of *Playboy* in 1981. This effort was turned back by a coalition of groups, including the American Council of the Blind, the American Library Association, and several veterans' groups joined together in opposition to his efforts. In 1981, many of you may remember that ALA passed the resolution on the reaffirmation of access for the physically handicapped. For more than 15 years, since 1970, the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has produced a Braille edition of *Playboy Magazine*, not necessarily because the Library of Congress is promoting *Playboy*, but because the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Advisory Committee recommended it. ALA will have to decide whether or not it will be the plaintiff in a suit or *amicus*. I can assure you that some action will have to be taken.

Only the preservation of public libraries, publicly supported, can assure that each individual has equal and ready access to information.

The fourth barrier, of course, is money. Our finances have always been at the mercy of government allocations, state and local funding and private contributions. The last 10 years clearly demonstrate that we cannot take our support for granted. You may recall that in June 1984, in Dallas, in my Inaugural Address I said "that only the preservation of public libraries, publicly supported, can assure that each individual has equal and ready access to information." If, ladies and gentlemen, we are to ensure the continuation of our country as a democratic republic with free institutions in an open society, it is imperative that not only librarians and boards of trustees of our public libraries insist on free access to information, but it is also important for all of the American people to work to eliminate all barriers to libraries, books, and information.

In 1985, we would be wise to remember the words of Thomas Jefferson who once said,

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be ... If we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed."

Library Research Funded

The chairman of the Research Grants Committee of the North Carolina Association of School Librarians, Beth M. Rountree of Charlotte, announced this week that a proposal by two graduate students in the East Carolina University Department of Library and Information Studies has been funded by the organization. The study will deal with the leisure reading patterns of rural ninth grade students in two regions of the state. Submitting the proposal were Carroll M. Harrell of Hertford and B. Annette Privette of Zebulon. Ms. Harrell works in Perquimans County High School and Ms. Privette is at Bunn High School in Franklin County. Both are candidates for the Master of Library Science degree at East Carolina.

The research will examine not only whether and what teenagers read, but will determine how they obtain reading materials and in what setting they choose to read. This study will make recommendations concerning the buying and lending practices of school and public libraries in the rural areas of the state. It also will help classroom teachers to design assignments which encourage rather than discourage leisure reading.

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