

Blog # 23 Libraries Gather Books for Troops

As a librarian, I was interested in reading about the role libraries played early on in the war. In September, the American Library Association called for all the local federated clubs to take up the patriotic work of procuring books and magazines for the soldiers. In response, Kinsley librarian, Margaret W. Hills, asked for book donations in the September 20 *Graphic*. *“One of the very great needs of the present hour for our soldier boys is plenty of good reading material. Throughout the nation all the public libraries are collecting used books for this purpose. There is not a home in town that cannot spare one or more books. The week of September 24 to 29 is set for gathering 1,000,000 volumes. The Kinsley public library will receive at Edwards, Noble & Company’s store all books and forward them without delay for immediate service. Let us send at least 100 books from Kinsley. One book is not much to give, but it may do a great deal of good to some soldier boy. Get the book now and send it or bring it to Edwards, Noble & Company’s store.”*

The October 4, *Graphic* reported: *“Many books to go To Sammies -- More than 135 Already Contributed Here, and Many More Expected. Last week was library week, when a movement was made nationwide to gather library books for the camps. We were asked to contribute not less than a hundred here and when Saturday night arrived Miss Margaret Hills, who was acting for the Wednesday Night Club, reported 135 volumes ready to go. She also stated that she expected to have enough books for another shipment by the close of another week. Good work. The boys in the camps get awfully lonesome. The books contributed are a miscellaneous collection, mostly new, and every soldier should be able to find something to suit his taste.”*

The term “Sammies” in the headline above was new to me as a name for American soldiers. The Europeans used it, and it presumably derived from “Uncle Sam”. “Sammies” did not catch on, but “doughboys” did, the origin of which is unclear. At this time, the Kinsley Library was not a publicly funded library, but a club library run by the Wednesday Night Club. It would not be a publicly funded library until 1926.

Back to the book drive news. In the November 8, *Graphic*, W. H. Kerr, the librarian serving Camp Funston 3-5 days and week and coming from the Kansas State Normal School (now Emporia State University) wrote to Miss Hills: *“I wish you and your people to know how much we appreciate the shipment of books for our Camp Funston libraries. It is an unusually good lot of books, and came in very nicely this week in making up a library for one of our new recreation buildings just being opened.”*

At the end of the month, Miss Hills announced that more books were needed at Camp Funston, and she would be collecting them to ship out that Saturday. It was reported in the January 31 issue of the Kinsley *Mercury* that Librarian Kerr in an address to Kansas librarians stated the following: *“Even though there are about 20,000 books on the shelves and between 4 and 5 tons of magazines are received every week, all of these put together will not meet the steadily increasing demands made upon the library at Funston.”* He went on to emphasize that donated books should be recent, sound and clean *“in every sense of the word....* Most of the 4 or 5 tons of magazines and periodicals which the library received weekly are the so-called ‘Burlson 1 cent magazines’, and a remarkable feature is that they are received within a few days after publication. About 450 copies of the *Saturday Evening Post*, 300 copies of *Literary Digest* and over 400 copies of *Colliers* are received weekly.” Mr. Kerr said the following magazines, many of which are still familiar to us today, were most needed” *Life, Judge, National Geographic, Popular Mechanics, Popular Science, Illustrated World, Harper’s Monthly, Scribner’s, New Century, Scientific American, Current History* from the *New York Times, Ladies Home Journal, Vanity Fair*, and even copies of the *Police Gazette*.”



To be continued....