

Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008!

BY CHRISTINE MCNEW

A Pioneer Program

In January 1958, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission Demonstration Bookmobile began its daily routes in Burnet, Llano, and Blanco Counties as a part of the Texas Rural Library Service, funded with the first Library Services Act (LSA) grant.¹ Texas State Librarian Witt B. Harwell initiated the Texas Summer Reading Club as a pioneer program conducted under the LSA. Although summer reading clubs had existed for decades, the Texas Summer Reading Club is believed to be the first large scale children's reading club in the country.²

In 1958, teen girls in poodle skirts danced to "At the Hop" by Danny and the Juniors and "Sweet Little Sixteen" by Chuck Berry. Young girls played with Barbie dolls, roller skates, and pogo sticks. Little boys wore coonskin hats and carried toy rifles or cap guns and played with Legos® and marbles. Children watched *Howdy Doody*, *The Mickey Mouse Club*, and *Leave it to Beaver* on black and white televisions. They listened to "The Chipmunk Song" by The Chipmunks/Dave Seville and "The Purple People Eater" by Sheb Wooley. A new home cost \$30,000, the average income was \$4,650, and gas was \$.24 a gallon. Texas libraries were adding air-conditioning, photocopiers, and record players, and many were beginning to host weekly storytimes for young children.

Literature for young children encouraged idealism and imagination. The Caldecott Medal winner was *Time of Wonder* by Robert McCloskey. Beginning readers relished *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* by Dr. Seuss. In that year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Little Rock schools must integrate. Literature for adolescents explored ethical, political, and religious issues. The Newbery Award winner was *Rifles for Watie* by Harold Keith. An American classic, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare, was published in 1958, and it won the Newbery Award the following year.

Literature for adults explored the complexities of the times. Notable books published in 1958 included John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, Boris L. Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Carl G. Jung's *Undiscovered Self* and *The Dharma Bums* by Beat Generation author Jack Kerouac explored inner realities and emerging consciousness.

A few thousand Texas children participated in the Texas Summer Reading Club at bookmobiles in Central and East Texas and the Rio Grande Valley and at small community

libraries in Llano, Burnet, Marble Falls, and Navasota in the early years. According to the April 1958 issue of *Texas Libraries*, there were 281 public libraries in Texas, and public library service was unavailable for 35% of Texans in 52 counties.³ The United States had entered the space race and the first Texas Reading Club theme was *Space Flight*. The September-October 1958 issue of *Texas Libraries* reported that children "swarmed" the bookmobile.⁴

...As the young people boarded the bookmobiles to join the Reading Club, they found the interior decorated with pictures of space men, planets, satellites, and stars, all backed up solidly by their own planet, Earth. When they joined they were dubbed Space Cadets, and each was given a 'Flight Log' to keep... Each Space Cadet who read enough books to return to the Earth Station was awarded a State Library Reading Certificate and dubbed "Astronaut."

An article in the *Alice Daily Echo* published January 19, 1960, quoted State Librarian Harwell:

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One woman in west Texas regularly drives 90 miles to the nearest bookmobile stop, and in South Texas two brothers walk five miles to check out books from the "library on wheels."

One teacher in a south Texas community gave the bookmobile credit for raising the vocabulary level of her Spanish-speaking students, and another said some of her lowest readers had picked up remarkably after using the bookmobile collection regularly.

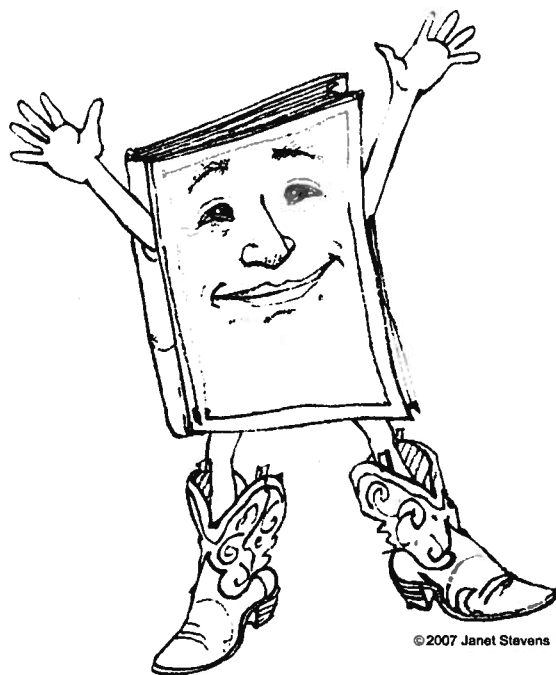
50 Years of Texas Reading Club Themes

It's been a long and exciting journey from *Space Flight* to the *Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008!* And oh, the places children have been! The annual Texas Reading Club themes mirror a half-century of cultural and historical events.

In the 1960's, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Mary Poppins*, and *The Sound of Music* ignited imaginations at theaters. Children sang "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" and "Chim Chim Cher-ee" and played with Frisbees, Hot Wheels, and skateboards. In 1968, children watched wondrously as Apollo 11 landed on the moon. In that decade, Reading Club themes – including *Open Your Future-Read*, *Vacation Readers Go Everywhere*, and *Read and Watch Your World Grow* – invited children to expand their horizons and prepare for the exciting future that lay before them. In the turbulence of the 1960's, children witnessed the Civil Rights movement. In 1963, the year Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, the Texas Reading Club (TRC) posters proclaimed *Read! The Fifth Freedom...Enjoy It!*

In 1970's, *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Muppet Movie*, and *Star Wars* were box office hits. Children watched *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* on PBS and played with *Star Wars* action figures and Atari video games. At the library, they explored the world and their imaginations. The 1970's TRC poster announced *There is No Frigate Like a Book to Take Us Lands Away*. Annual themes invited children to *Be a Readasaurus*, *Climb a Little This Summer*, and *Take a Giant Step*. Young people traveled *Cross-Country With a Hero*, took a *Jungle Journey*, and went *In Search of Texas Treasures*. In 1976, they celebrated the Texas Bicentennial by *Movin' On... Then and Now*.

The 1980's were filled with fun, action, and adventure. At theaters, the decade began with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*



and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and ended with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *The Little Mermaid*. Children played with Nintendo, Transformers, Cabbage Patch Kids, and Walkmans, and they watched *Nickelodeon* and *The Muppet Show*. At the library, they competed in *Sports Splash* and glided through *Monster Madness*, *Magical Mysteries*, *Awesome Adventures*, *Animal Antics*, and *Creature Features*. Children explored their roots with *Celebrate Texas* and a *Reading Rodeo*, journeyed through distant galaxies in *Space Capers*, and broke new ground with *Trailblazer*, *Stargazer*.

As the 20th century came to a close in the 1990's, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Lion King*, and *Toy Story* entertained children at local theaters. They played with roller blades, Pokemon, Microsoft X-Box, Sony PlayStation, and they discovered *Harry Potter*. Libraries added computers and the Internet. During the summer, children cracked *The Secret Code is...R.E.A.D!* and frolicked through a fun-filled summer at *Camp Wanna Read*. On the 500th Anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America in 1992, they voyaged to the library to *Discover the New World of Reading*. Children followed the yellow brick road to reading in *Lions and Tigers and Books... Oh My!*, explored geography and culture in *Familiar Faces*, *Far Away Places*, and learned that kids can help save the earth in *Once Upon a Planet*. They played their favorite sports in *Ready...Set...Read!*, let their imaginations soar with the *Incredible Dream Machine*, explored wild kingdoms in *Furry Tales! Funny Tales!*, and expressed their creativity in *Open a Book - On With the Show!*

At theaters, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Shrek*, *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* welcomed children into this brave new century in which they play Guitar Hero, Dance Dance Revolution, and Wii sports. The Texas Reading Club (TRC) set a course for the new millennium with *Invent the Future! Read!* in 2000. Then children expanded their horizons *To the Library and Beyond!*, learned about Texas culture and history in *Read Across Texas!*, and solved mysteries in *Mission Possible: Spy a Book!* They explored rainbows and prisms in *Color Your World...Read!*, returned to nature in *Go Wild...Read!*, won medals for *Reading: The Sport of Champions!* and breezed through *Sail Away with Books!* And now they will celebrate the golden anniversary with *Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008!* What a long, wonderful journey this past half-century has been!

50 Years of Artwork and Programming Manuals

The TRC artwork has kept pace with professional and technological changes and innovations. The small 2-color posters provided in the 1950's and early 60's advanced to full-sized color posters for *Come to Chimera* in 1978. Clip art was provided in the early 1970's. In 1980, a Spanish theme was added to the artwork along with the English theme. In 1990, nationally acclaimed children's book illustrators began creating the artwork, beginning with James Marshall. Stephen Kellogg, Felicia Bond, David Wisniewski, Denise Fleming, Kevin Henkes, Alexandra Day, and so many others followed, leading up to Janet Stevens in 2008. The clipart became available online and on CD-Rom in 2002. The color artwork followed in 2004, enabling local Texas libraries to easily download it to their own websites. Beginning in 2007, color clipart was provided electronically in addition to the black-and-white line drawings.

In 1968, Shirley Lukenbill and Anita Lesser created the first TRC programming manual with high quality programming ideas based on the theme, *Come to the Chimera*. Through the years, numerous creative and talented librarians wrote outstanding manuals featuring ideas for summer programs for children of all ages. In 1982, Peggy Jemelka Rudd from the Central Texas Library System wrote the programming manual for *Space Capers*. Rudd, now director and librarian of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, continues to be a strong advocate for youth services. In 2001, individual librarians began to write chapters for the manual in their areas of expertise. A bilingual chapter, puppet plays and reader's theater scripts, and stories for oral telling were also added in 2001. In 2002, the manual was distributed electronically on the Texas State Library website and on CD-ROM for the first time. Digital photos of crafts were added to the manual in 2007. In 2008, links are provided to videos on *YouTube*.

The Texas State Library began contracting with Texas singer-songwriters to write and record original theme songs in 2002. Songs by Willy Welch, Joe McDermott, Purly Gates, Sara Hickman, and Lucas Miller are available online for Texas libraries to use in promoting the TRC, reading, and libraries.

In 2008, the Texas State library will provide artwork and a manual for the first young adult reading club, *Texas Teens Read!*

Texas Library Association Advisory Committees

The Texas Library Association (TLA) Children's Round Table formed the Texas Reading Club Advisory Committee in the late 1980's to advise the Texas State

Library on improving the TRC. The committee began hosting programs at the annual TLA conferences to share ideas for summer children's programs. This laid the groundwork for annual programs to introduce the contents of TRC manuals at TLA conferences. In 1991, the committee selected James Marshall as the first nationally-acclaimed children's book illustrator to create artwork for the TRC. The committee began sponsoring annual programs by the artist at annual TLA conferences. Today the committee nominates themes and artists for each annual TRC and continues to host annual programs at TLA conferences.

TLA's Young Adult Round Table established the Texas Teens Read! Advisory Committee in 2006 to suggest themes, nominate artists, and host programs at annual TLA conferences for *Texas Teens Read!* The committee selected the theme, *Game On! TTR.08* and nominated graphic artist, Rod Espinosa, to create the artwork. Committee members developed eight innovative programs for the first *Texas Teens Read!* programming manual.

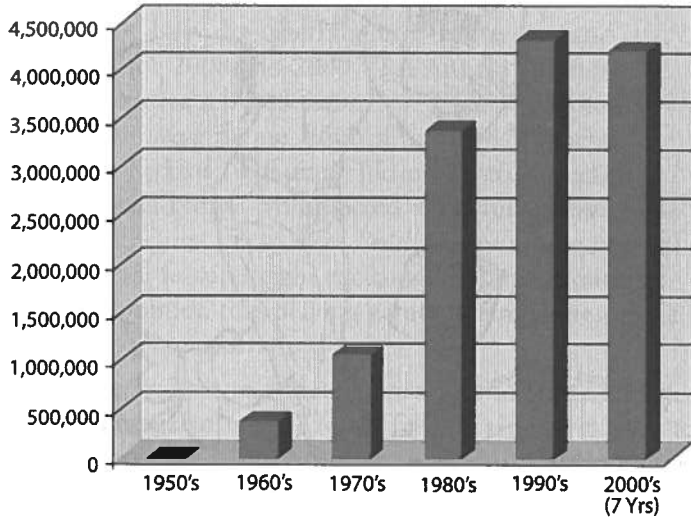
Participation by Texas Children

In total, more than 13 million Texas children have participated in the Texas Reading Club in the past 50 years. Participation has grown rapidly throughout the years. In 1959, approximately 5,000 children participated at libraries in 29 counties. By 1969, participation nearly grew to approximately 59,000 children at 287 libraries and one bookmobile, and a total of approximately 357,000 children participated in the 1960's. This number tripled to approximately 1,056,000 in the 1970's and tripled again to approximately 3,372,000 in the 1980's, and grew to 4,309,000 in the 1990's. Now, approximately 500,000 children participate annually at more than 800 public and school libraries.

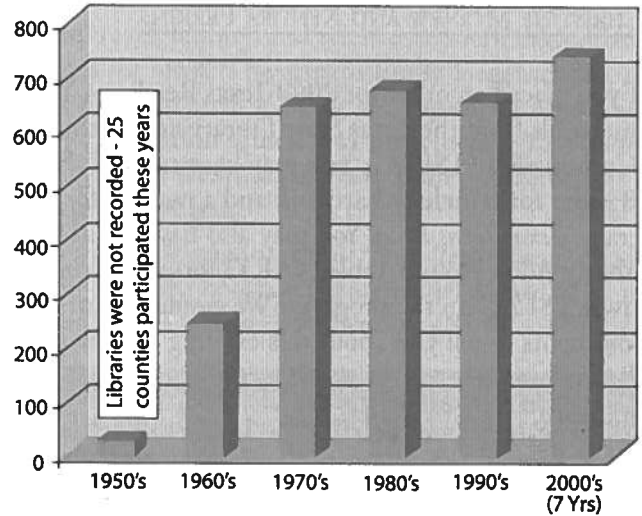
Acknowledging Contributions of Texas Librarians

Librarians far too numerous to mention have contributed to the success of the Texas Reading Club over the past 50 years, encouraging children to visit the library and read during the summer months. Research shows that their efforts have contributed to greater reading skills for children who have participated, which is associated with higher academic achievement and more successful lives. These include state librarians who have continuously supported the Texas Reading Club, from Witt B. Harwell in 1958 to Peggy J. Rudd today; Bess Ann Motley, the director of Texas Rural Library Service who implemented the program; Texas State Library staff who have served as managers of the TRC throughout the years, including Vicki Crosson, Jeanette Larson, and Christine McNew; librarians who have served on the

Children Participating in the Texas Reading Club from 1958 – 2008



Libraries Participating in the Texas Reading Club from 1958 – 2008



Texas Reading Club Advisory Committee; librarians who have written manuals; and most importantly, librarians at local libraries throughout Texas who implement the program annually.

Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008!

Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008! celebrates literature and stories, songs and music, games and toys, everything children have enjoyed through the past five decades. Children's book illustrator, Janet Stevens, created the amazingly beautiful artwork. Singer/songwriter Joe McDermott composed the joyful theme song, "Celebrate." Texas youth librarians wrote chapters filled with fun programs for children of all ages for the 2008 manual. You'll find them all on the Texas Reading Club website at www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/projects/trc/2008/. They combine to make *Texas Reading Club Jubilee: 1958-2008!* one of the most exciting Texas Reading Clubs ever.

Christine McNew is the youth services consultant for the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and the manager of the Texas Reading Club.

NOTES

- 1 Peace, William Kittrell, III, B.A. A History of the Texas State Library with Emphasis on the Period from 1930 to 1958. University of Texas, 1959. (P. 132)
- 2 Motley, Bess Ann. "The Texas Plan and Its Progress." Texas Library Journal (Vol. 35, No. 1, March 1959, P. 20)
- 3 Texas Libraries. (Vol 20, No. 4, April 1958, P. 64)
- 4 Texas Libraries. (Vol 20, No. 6, September-October 1958, P. 117) ☼

Raising "La Belle": A School Presentation



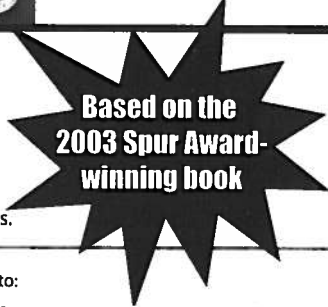
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