

1970s

Space Shuffle

The decade of the 1970s began auspiciously.

The South Branch was remodeled, and the Children's Department moved to the basement. Thus, additional space was gained not only for children's materials but for adult collections as well.

A similar remodeling took place a year or two later in the North Branch. Now there was basement space not only for children's programs and story times but also a hospitality room for senior citizens.

"We would get as many as 60 people coming on Friday afternoons for movies," Carol Shotola, a retired library administrative assistant, later recalled of those days. "We got movies from Suburban Audio Visual Service, a department of the Suburban Library Service. Travelogues, biographies and musicals were senior favorites. Board President.

Anton Novak and his wife frequently were among the attendees."

The arrangement did not last long, Mrs. Shotola recalled. Growing interest in children's books and activities created the need to station a children's librarian in the basement rather than at the first-floor circulation desk. Additional space was diverted to use as a periodical room.

City-Library in 2nd Dispute

Another in the series of disputes between the Library Board and the city of Berwyn began April 9, 1973, when the Board by a 5-3 vote fired the library director. Lining up with the majority were Board President Kotaska, Vice President Oplatka, Financial Secretary Ted Palter and Members Frank Juranek and Joseph Tranauskas. Voting against were Members Bernadette Gorman, Georgia Nevaril (later Lhotka)* and Novak. Member Florence Zukowski apparently was absent from the meeting.

In a 2005 interview, Mrs. Oplatka recalled that Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka "marched to City Hall with Mrs. Polivka" and lobbied to get her job back. Apparently the two women, friends since high school, mounted a successful argument. Mayor Emil Vacin reinstated Director Polivka and instructed her to return to work the following day.

The confrontation widened.

The Library Board explained its action in a statement printed in the *Berwyn LIFE* on April 15, 1973. The statement noted that the Board had adopted a plan calling for compliance with the minimum standards for Illinois libraries and specifically targeting a 5 percent increase in book circulation. Instead, circulation declined from 208,000 in 1963 to 150,000 in 1972.

The Board also had called for installation of book depositories at all three branches; an increase in children's programs and adult movies; promotion of a library book amnesty and open house; and the encouragement of congenial relations between the library staff and patrons.

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Georgia Nevaril later married Ed Lhotka and hereafter will be referred to as Nevaril-Lhotka.*

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Instead, the Board maintained, "Mrs. Polivka appeared to be of the opinion that the services of the library were adequate. This, coupled with unaccountability of funds received, some monies spent and library-budgeted funds unspent, contributed to the [Board's dismissal] action."

In a rebuttal printed in the same issue, Director Polivka said that, in her view, "Standards must be based on population served, taxable property, size of area served and other criteria. It is desirable to have a lot of money appropriated for the library, but it must be realistic."

As to circulation, Mrs. Polivka noted that 11 out of 20 libraries in the western suburbs had experienced a decrease in circulation, which she attributed to "competition with exterior media." She disputed statistics supplied by the Library Board and noted that March circulation was up 8.5 percent over the previous year.

As to installing three book depositories, Mrs. Polivka said they would cost \$1,200 and the Berwyn Fire Department had advised against them.

The desired library open house had just been held, the Director noted. As to programming, she listed an average attendance of 52 at preschool movies, 45 at

children's movies and 55 at those for adults. She said the library lacked space to seat more.

Regarding financial matters, Mrs. Polivka said library expenditures and revenues "are open to inspection and periodically audited."

Looking back on the controversy decades later, Mrs. Oplatka recalled, "There were certain men on the Board who were officials in their companies, and they made rulings as to what Mrs. Polivka was to carry out. She did not do it."

Oplatka said she cautioned Polivka, "'When these men make rulings they expect them to be carried out.' But Mrs. Polivka said she 'knew what was good for the library.'"

In the following issue of the *Berwyn LIFE*, Board President Kotaska took issue with Mayor Vacin's decision to reinstate Director Polivka, as well as with Mrs. Polivka herself. In a letter to the editor, Mr. Kotaska wrote:

The mayor, without hearing all the facts, returned the librarian to her job. Under Illinois statutes, the Board has the authority to appoint and remove the librarian.... The decision made by the Board was legal and cannot be changed by any city official.... To adopt the premise the people of Berwyn are not interested in their libraries and that they are getting good services is not true. The cliché "we always did it this way for the past 19 years" is not valid.

Therefore, with all due respect, we ask that the mayor reconsider his action and acknowledge that the Board did act within the law.
[Otherwise] the Board feels it must take legal action.

As to Director Polivka's statements to the press, Mr. Kotaska insisted Berwyn's circulation figures did not compare favorably with those of other suburbs. He noted that, according to Suburban Library System figures, the Berwyn Library circulated an average of three books per resident, whereas Downers Grove circulated 11 per person and LaGrange, 16.5.

Recalling that, in May of the previous year, the Board had asked Mrs. Polivka to send questionnaires to people not using the library to determine their reasons for nonuse, Mr. Kotaska noted, "It was never done."

He cited a Suburban Library System study that concluded the Berwyn Library contained "too many old and worn titles; the collection of nonfiction books for children

lacks depth; one branch of the library should be designated as the main branch; and the library's system of cataloging needs modernization.”

As to finances, Mr. Kotaska noted that a year earlier the Board had instructed Mrs. Polivka to inform Board members of the procedures used for handling revenues from fines. “The librarian has not replied.”

Similarly, the Board president said, Mrs. Polivka failed to comply with the Board's January 8 request for the director to supply weekly employee time sheets for Board approval.

Board Seeks Closure

President Kotaska listed two main issues the Board felt must be corrected:

- 1) “The concept of one library must prevail. The maintaining of three separate libraries — as was the policy — must come to an end.”
- 2) “The employees must be given the opportunity to participate and contribute to the best of their abilities. ... Compensation should reflect their efforts.”

Years later Alderman Donald Pechous, who at that time chaired the City Council's Library Oversight Committee, recalled Board members' desire to close the Central Branch of the library as the crux of the conflict between Board and director.

Mrs. Oplatka later identified employee benefits as the major issue. “The men on the Board wanted to provide more coverage for employees,” she noted.

Apparently, Director Polivka had not even informed employees of benefits to which they already were entitled. One former library staff member recalled she had worked for the library for more than six months before she found out through a conversation with employees in other city departments that she automatically had been afforded medical insurance coverage 30 days after she had begun working for the library. Not only had she never received a medical insurance card, but she had never even received the application forms to get one, even though they had been sent to her from City Hall in care of the director. Further, she never had been given a list of paid holidays and was totally unaware she was entitled to five days of annual sick leave.

“We did not know anything we were entitled to,” the former employee said, “and we complained to the Board.”

The same February 8 letter in which the employees complained to Library Board members about the director's handling of employee benefits also took issue with the Board itself. The letter signed by 12 staff members expressed concerns about "the interference in internal management by a Board member and the questioning and harassing of staff members during their working day.... According to the American Library Association, it is a violation of standards for a Board member to meddle in internal management or harass employees. We zealously agree."

Nevertheless, the benefit issue was reinforced at an April 18, 1973, public meeting called to explore the issues by Alderman Pechous, chairman of the City Council's Library Oversight Committee.

At that meeting, Miss Gail Gjondia (later Lofgren,)* a full-time Library employee for seven months, said it was only within the previous week that she had

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Gail Gjondia later married Thomas Lofgren, and in 1993 she was named Director of the Berwyn Public Library. In upcoming sections, she will be referred to as Lofgren.*

received forms to apply for hospitalization insurance that she apparently had been eligible to receive after 30 days of employment. As quoted in a *Berwyn LIFE* report on the meeting, Miss Gjondia said she "was told to back date [the form] to October 1972."

Also according to the *Berwyn LIFE*, Miss Gjondia said Mrs. Polivka "told the staff almost daily that the Library Board was planning to phase out the head librarian and other members of the staff, and if they wanted to save their jobs they should support Mrs. Polivka."

Board members also spoke out at that meeting about employee intimidation.

Mr. Juranek said employees had been asked to sign a petition saying they "backed Mrs. Polivka 100 percent."

"We have a gifted and creative staff," Vice President Oplatka told the audience. "They are underpaid. They were threatened with the loss of their jobs and told the Board was dissatisfied with them by the librarian. Some fear they will be terminated after tonight's meeting."

Mrs. Oplatka said Mrs. Polivka had “failed to implement progressive programs endorsed by the board and turned back to the city \$7,000 budgeted to the library for staff salaries while the library remains understaffed.”

The *Berwyn LIFE* report went on to note that a spokesman for the Friends of the Library weighed in on the director’s side, stating that, although the Berwyn Library was below the new minimum national standards, “so are most of the libraries in the country.”

Board members who had voted against Polivka’s firing spoke out as well.

Mrs. Gorman objected to the firing as “a real railroad job.”

Mrs. Nevaril-Lhotka said she had “begged the board to allow Mrs. Polivka to defend herself the night she was fired but was unsuccessful.”

Mr. Novak suggested the Library Board’s action was “in violation of acceptable parliamentary procedures” since the dismissal had taken place in closed rather than open session.

President Kotaska insisted no violation had occurred. Nevertheless, to allay any doubts, Mr. Juranek told those assembled that the Board would meet to re-fire Director Polivka at a special meeting the following Monday.

“We’ll have another meeting,” Mr. Juranek said. “An open vote will be taken... We’ll obey every parliamentary rule.”

Immediately following the meeting, Mr. Juranek wrote to Mayor Vacin and the City Council, insisting the Library Board had “acted in good faith and within the requirements of the law.”

Mr. Juranek cited a legal opinion rendered in 1971 by then City Attorney Walter Wellman: “Quoting Section 4-7 of the Illinois Revised Statutes, the Board has the power ‘to appoint a competent librarian and necessary assistants, to fix their compensation, to retain professional consultants as needed.’ If one does not agree with this statute, his recourse is through the courts and not by the action of any city official or library committee appointed at a city council meeting.”

Accordingly, Mr. Juranek wrote:

We are asking the city attorney [Thomas Hett] to initiate a quo warranto suit on behalf of the citizens of Berwyn to:

1. Determine what right the mayor or any other city official has [sic] to usurp the decisions of the autonomous Library Board.
2. Determine the basis a city employee, the city comptroller, has in paying an employee who has been terminated by the Library Board.
3. Recover the salary plus interest of the employee who was paid but legally terminated.

We wish the Library Board's actions to be respected without political or any other interference as long as they are acting within the Revised Library Statutes. The decision of your Library Board was not based upon emotion but facts generated over an extended period of a year and a half. Our government is a Democracy not a Dictatorship. People may not agree with majority rule, but this is the basis upon which our country was founded.

Other reactions to the April 18 meeting also were reported in the *Berwyn LIFE*.

Alderman Raymond Cox said he did not feel Mrs. Polivka should have been fired, but the decision had been made by the Library Board and was outside the authority of the City Council. However, Alderman Pechous said he would ask the city attorney for an opinion on the authority of the Library Board.

Speaking out in her own defense in a statement published in the newspaper, Director Polivka outlined progress on a five-year plan she said had been submitted to the Library Board in January.

The long-range plan included recommendations for expansion of services in almost every department of the library, to be made possible by additions to the building. A second-floor addition was proposed for the South Branch "covering the east half of the building" and a second addition with space for two offices. The North Branch would expand young adult and children's services by shifting materials into the mezzanine and basement. Central Branch alterations would involve replacing and repositioning shelving to create more space and stem the seepage, and then redecorating the children's room.

However, the controversy already had moved beyond legal opinions and long-range planning.

"Mayor 'Fires' Board President"

That was the newspaper headline over the story announcing that, two days before the scheduled special meeting of the Library Board, Mayor Vacin had fired President Kotaska.

In a letter delivered to Mr. Kotaska on Saturday, April 20, the mayor said he was dismissing Kotaska as president and member of the Library Board effective the following day.

Mayor Vacin described his action as being “in the best interests of the citizens of the City of Berwyn and for the more harmonious operation of the library system”:

I have on several occasions discussed with you what I consider very obvious deficiencies in your administration of the Library Board. But after Wednesday’s City Council Library Committee meeting where you adamantly refused to alter your path, I realized my current action was necessary and appropriate.

In your handling of the abortive firing of the head librarian, you have in one stroke brought embarrassment and ridicule to the city and library system and have failed to accomplish your intended purpose. Furthermore, you attempted to fire a long-time, faithful public servant without the courtesy of formal charges, a hearing, or any opportunity to defend against the accusations. And in doing your deed you violated the rules governing the conduct of public meetings.

The act dealing with open meetings requires that all actions of public bodies be conducted in the open and not in secret. From the information I have received, you attempted to fire Emily Polivka in an executive session and never did return to an open, public meeting to move for her dismissal, receive a second and have an open public vote.

I have asked for your resignation so that I could spare you public embarrassment, but you have refused my offer. I am therefore forced to make your removal and the reasons a matter of public record. Please turn over all property of the city and any official records of the Library Board to the [City] Comptroller as soon as possible.

In defiance of the letter, Mr. Kotaska showed up the following night to preside over the special meeting of the Library Board.

At the request of Board Member Nevaril-Lhotka, City Attorney Thomas Hett showed up as well. The *Berwyn LIFE* reported this exchange:

The attorney said that in his opinion Mr. Kotaska's participation in the meeting was illegal and cautioned, "Anything you do here may be a complete nullity."

Mr. Kotaska said he was in possession of a legal opinion which said a Board member could only be removed "for cause," which meant malfeasance in office.

Attorney Hett said it was up to the mayor to determine cause.

Mr. Kotaska said it would be up to the courts to decide whether the mayor had legally removed him.

Two votes were taken at the meeting — one to again terminate Director Polivka and the other to reimburse Vice President Oplatka for any legal costs encountered in defending the decisions reached by the Board.

The Board split 4-4 on each vote with Members Juranek, Oplatka, Palter and Tranauskas supporting the motions and Members Nevaril-Lhotka, Gorman, Novak and Zukowski, who had been absent from the fateful April 9 meeting, voting in opposition. Mr. Kotaska cast the deciding vote to achieve a 5-4 margin to terminate Mrs. Polivka.

On the advice of City Attorney Hett, Mrs. Polivka's supporters then walked out of the meeting.

"As far as I'm concerned, no legal meeting took place here tonight," the city attorney told the *Berwyn LIFE* reporter.

The following day, the mayor advised the City Council by letter that he had removed Mr. Kotaska from the Board and promised to present his reasons at the next Council meeting.

In a parallel communication, also dated April 23, City Attorney Hett presented the legal opinion Alderman Pechous had requested:

Illinois statutes give the mayor the power to remove an appointee providing the City Council is duly informed of the action and does not overrule the mayor with a two-thirds vote.

Within the area of their statutory responsibility, the Library Board is autonomous. However, the corporate authorities of the city determine

the amount to be appropriated for library purposes and in this way can effectively "usurp" decisions of the Board... Moreover, any public official can call attention to deficiencies in the operation of the Library Board and can initiate actions to protect the city from suit when the Board acts illegally.

Section 407 of the State Statutes (Chapter 81, Ill. Revised Statutes) clearly gives the Board the power to hire and fire. Just as clearly, Section 41 of Chapter 102, commonly known as the Open Meetings Act ...demands that all formal actions of the Library Board be open and public.

I have been informed that Mrs. Polivka was ... dismissed after a secret vote had been taken in ...closed session. No action was thereafter taken, in an open, public meeting whereby Mrs. Polivka's dismissal was moved, seconded and publicly voted upon. Hence, the decision reached at the closed session did not achieve finality and Mrs. Polivka's dismissal did not take effect.... The mayor properly advised Mrs. Polivka and the city comptroller that Mrs. Polivka was still a city employee entitled to her pay. That the Library Board's action on April 9 was ineffective is most clearly acknowledged by Mr. Juranek, who stated in a recent newspaper article that the Board would have to reconvene to properly vote to dismiss Mrs. Polivka.

As to Mr. Juranek's request to file quo warranto proceedings, City Attorney Hett wrote, "Mr. Juranek cannot speak for the Board unless he has put the question to them, and I know of no meeting of the Library Board since April 9 where he could get authority from the Board to make the requests."

Noting the City Council's Library Committee "has come under attack in the press for seeking to learn the facts surrounding the abortive firing of Mrs. Polivka," Attorney Hett said, "This committee has the responsibility of reporting to the Council as to the method of spending appropriated funds.... [It] had a legitimate purpose to hold a public meeting to discuss the firing in order to determine if funding, spending or lack thereof was in any way involved."

In response, the Library Board faction favoring Mrs. Polivka's firing attempted to mediate the conflict through the City Council. They proposed an outside panel of experts

evaluate the library and the relationship of the Library Board to the City Council. But the Council's Library Oversight Committee by a 2-1 vote referred the matter back to the Library Board, noting the committee had "not been called in at the beginning ... and it's too late now [to intervene]."

The City Council concurred in the committee's recommendation and also in the mayor's appointment of Mrs. Blanche Kekish to replace Mr. Palter on the Library Board, thus creating a majority in favor of Director Polivka.

Mr. John Juergensmeyer, attorney for Mrs. Polivka's opponents, urged city officials to avoid "expensive" litigation.

Alderman Pechous maintained Mr. Kotaska and his supporters had "rejected every attempt at reconciliation."

Mayor Vacin said he would "not allow the board to be used as a pawn in an individual vendetta."

In response, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of the four dissidents by Juergensmeyer and Zimmerman Law Offices of Elgin and Chicago. It contended the City Council had violated state statutes in its handling of library funds, in replacing Mr. Palter before his term ended and in removing Mr. Kotaska without a "formal charge."

The suit further contended the city had not given proper accounting of library funds to the Library Board; okayed library bills without Board approval; paid Mrs. Polivka's salary after the Board had voted to fire her; and had reduced the tax levy requested by the Board.

Dispute Resolved Out of Court

According to *Berwyn LIFE* newspaper accounts, the matter was settled out of court. It was agreed the city comptroller and library director would make a full accounting of all library funds to the Board and that the Board must approve all bills for payment.

It further was stipulated that Mrs. Polivka must be retained as director "for a reasonable time" and that "the Library Board has control over the hiring and firing of library personnel."

Per the agreement, Mr. Kotaska was returned to the Board as a member, but not as president, and his “reappointment” was only for the duration of his term, which would expire April 1 of the following year. Mr. Palter was not returned and Mrs. Kekish’s appointment stood, thus shifting the balance of power to Director Polivka’s supporters.

To avoid what Attorney Hett called “the confusion of the past,” the terms of all future board members were to end on June 30, not scattered throughout the year.

Both sides saw pluses in the compromise.

Mr. Hett said the accord “upholds the mayor’s power to remove a Board member” since it called for Mr. Kotaska’s “reappointment” (not reinstatement).

Mr. Kotaska insisted the key element in the compromise over the mayor’s power to dismiss a Board member was the stipulation that the action must be a “removal for cause.” He also counted it as a plus that “it is now a matter of court record that the Library Board has the power to hire and fire and has complete control over finances.”

At the first meeting of the reconstituted Board, Acting President Oplatka was able to muster unanimous support for a request that Director Polivka supply the Board with personnel records so that a Board policy on personnel could be formulated. And Mrs. Oplatka earned compliments from Board Member Gorman, one of the director’s supporters, for “doing a good job in keeping the [first] meeting away from quarreling and running it fairly.”

New Board officers were elected in September 1973, and with Mr. Novak as president; Mrs. Kekish as vice president; and new appointee Mrs. Anna Hassler as secretary, the *Berwyn LIFE* noted, “The last fragments of power wielded by the old majority were erased.”

Mr. Kotaska did not go quietly. He continued to take issue with the Board, questioning items ranging from bid procedures to the accuracy of circulation figures. He held up payment of May and June bills, charging that Director Polivka had not supplied sufficient documentation.

In July, Mrs. Polivka and her supporters again appealed to the City Council’s aldermanic oversight committee for help. In disgust, Alderman Pechous resigned the committee chairmanship.

“The City Council was sued, an accord was reached, but it has not been honored,” the alderman told the Council. “In my opinion the Library Board is violating its own bylaws. I have decided to resign as chairman.”

“The City Council should keep hands off library policy,” insisted Mr. Kotaska. “We went to court to prove the library budget is independent of the city’s.”

Countered Hett, “Nothing in the court-ordered settlement indicated the city can’t make changes in the library budget.”

Board Gets Back to Business

Library Board members were tiring of the fray. They wanted to focus on what the *Berwyn LIFE* described as “a backlog of problems caused by five months of litigation and Board recess” — faltering air conditioning at the Central Branch; moisture collecting on the east wall and inadequate shelving in the juvenile room at the South Branch; and the need for blacktopping the parking lots at both locations.

The Board decided to handle the situation by barring Member Kotaska from any committee assignments. When Mr. Kotaska’s term was up in April 1974, the mayor replaced him with Mr. Anton Jurcik. By 1975, only Members Novak, Kekish, Gorman and Nevaril-Lhotka remained from the original Board involved in the controversy.

Years later, looking back on that super-heated era, Mrs. Oplatka took satisfaction in her part in history, saying, “I did fight for the things I thought the people should have.”

Retired Alderman Pechous said he thought one of the key issues was that “Director Polivka was not buying books. She was turning back to the city the money she did not spend.”

The former alderman also recalled that a Board faction led by Mr. Kotaska was concerned about the decline in circulation and thought one way to address it would be to close the Central Branch in City Hall.

“By that time, most of the public schools had their own libraries,” Mr. Pechous recalled, “and Board members were saying, ‘Why do we need three branches?’” The closing was staved off, Mr. Pechous recalled, by an impassioned speech by a sister from Street Odilo who successfully pleaded, “We need the Central Library.”

A perspective on the embattled library director herself was offered by Gail Lofgren, who recalled that at age 17 she had been hired by Mrs. Polivka to work as a page at the library, an experience that inspired her career goals and eventually led to her own employment as Berwyn library director in 1993. Interviewed following Mrs. Polivka's death in 2000, former Director Lofgren offered a different view of the controversial predecessor who climbed up on library rooftops with a tar bucket to repair leaks and was willing to give a teen-ager a chance at employment. She recalled Mrs. Polivka as "an extremely dedicated person ... very organized. Everything in the library had to be in order, and I've never seen such straight shelves in my life."

Apparently lost sight of in those combative early 1970s was an important evaluation of the Berwyn Library undertaken by Beverly Yacko, book collection consultant for the Suburban Library System.

In his letter to the editor defending the Board's dismissal of Director Polivka, Mr. Kotaska had referred to the library weaknesses uncovered in the Yacko study. In her report dated April 2, 1973, the consultant had noted:

"The Berwyn Library is unique in the Suburban Library System because it has three branches." But although she found the North and South Branches provided a welcoming setting for patron study and relaxation, Consultant Yacko described the Central Branch as "not very inviting."

"Housed in the basement of City Hall, it has books on all walls and narrow aisles, giving the room a very crowded appearance. Unless there is very heavy circulation and use of the materials in this branch, it should be disbanded," the consultant concluded.

Branches "Below Standard"

The South Branch, which was open 62½ hours per week, was six hours below national library standards, Yacko noted. The North and Central Branches fell even further below, at 41½ and 34 hours per week, respectively.

"A first priority for the Library Board should be to raise the tax rate for library services," Yacko urged. "A library in a community of 50,000 people should have a budget of \$257,250, or \$4.90 per capita. The book budget should be 17 percent of the total budget, or \$43,700. The annual report for Berwyn indicates an operating budget of

\$145,900 and a book budget of \$30,865. The total book collection is 71,972, far below the 3.5 per capita, or 175,000, suggested by standards.

“Because the diffusion of book funds is a detriment to a strong collection, one branch should be designated the main library and the materials housed there should be greatly strengthened and broadened,” she concluded. “Only the most popular titles need to be held in duplicate either at the branches or in the main library.”

Yacko suggested increasing the main library hours to a minimum of 68 per week. She urged a thorough weeding of the collection and suggested a commercial cataloging service be employed. “The present cataloging takes much of the librarian’s time,” she said, “time which should be expended on administration and public service.”

But the Library Board appeared most desirous of a return to normalcy, and the staff was focused on changes taking place in patron tastes and interests and in new technologies that promised to alter the format of library services throughout the country.

Not even on the radar screen at that time, an event was taking place at Harlem Avenue and Riverside Drive that would prove vitally important to the future of the Berwyn Public Library. On November 30, 1974, a ribbon-cutting was held at 2701 S. Harlem Avenue for the new corporate office of the Czechoslovak Society of America. Some 20 years later, city and library officials would be negotiating to buy that building as a new home for a centralized Berwyn Public Library.

By the mid-1970s, patron interest in reading was on the rise, but tastes in literature were changing.

Director Polivka reported in a *Berwyn LIFE* interview that, between 1974 and 1975, readership had increased “substantially.” The Berwyn Library now had 86,964 books and 34,408 periodicals. Adult fiction circulation rose to 62,626 and adult nonfiction to 45,171. Children read 20,096 nonfiction and 39,787 fiction books, and the recording collection also proved quite popular with a circulation of 5,618.

Children’s programming for 1975 added movies to the traditional story times.

The approaching Bicentennial celebration sparked increased requests for children’s history materials. Help also was sought for science projects, with chemistry experiments the apparent favorite. Fairy tales enjoyed renewed circulation. Books by Beatrix Potter and Dr. Seuss were most popular.

However, by the end of the 1970s, libraries were noting big changes in the types of service they were being asked to provide in what was being described as “a new era — the Information Age.”

In November 1979, President Jimmy Carter convened a White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Conferees explored whether libraries should continue their relatively passive role of storing and providing materials or take a more aggressive approach by serving as community information centers and teaching people to read. Library representatives got a taste of things to come — computers set up to tap into 100 data banks that would enable patrons to shop the country for best buys, research median incomes across the nation or call up information on bills being considered by the U.S. Congress. Delegates endorsed a National Library Act to set up priorities for libraries throughout the country.