



WAKE UP AND READ!

That's the slogan of America's first National Library Week, and it's sound advice; here's why.

by Jerry Klein

"**R**EADE ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?" is a standard conversational gambit. For most of us, the literal and truthful reply would be a confession that no, we hadn't.

Surprisingly, America has the lowest proportion of book-readers of any major English-speaking country, and during the course of a year, 60 percent of us read no book except the Bible. Even if we can't afford to buy all the books that seem interesting, half of us live within a mile of a public library—yet only a fifth of us ever visit it.

This is especially sad in view of the changes which are sweeping over the nation's public libraries. Maybe you haven't noticed, but no longer is the library a dark storehouse in which dusty, old librarians stand over equally dusty, old shelves of forbidding-looking volumes.

Today a fresh, crisp breeze is

whipping through our public libraries. They're coming alive as never before, and playing a variety of dramatically new and helpful roles in community life.

These days you visit the public library not just to borrow a book, but to make friends and share ideas, to hear music, discuss important issues, borrow works of art, learn social etiquette, and get advice on your life's work. At the library, you learn to read better, dress more smartly, and earn a greater return on your life's savings.

For the last 10 years or so, states like California and Indiana have been holding "library weeks" to bring citizens up to date on how their libraries have been changing, but today begins the first National Library Week. Its chief sponsors are the American Library Association and the National Book Committee, and its slogan is "Wake Up and Read." However, there's so much

going on at libraries these days that the slogan might better be "Wake Up and Live!"

Let's say, for example, that you never took much interest in books because you're a slow reader. Libraries in places like Providence, R.I., sponsor Reading Improvement Programs. One young man, who took such a course and increased his reading ability from 240 to 600 words a minute, reported: "For the first time in my life, I enjoy reading!"

WITH MONEY from the Fund for Adult Education, libraries in Detroit began an Opportunity Clinic for persons 16 to 21 who were not in school. These youths were helped to find themselves not only vocationally, but socially, too, with sessions on subjects like dance-floor behavior and good grooming.

Detroit libraries also became the stage for television shows. Teenagers discussed their problems with

the head of the library youth service, and authors confronted their critics across the video round table.

Many libraries these days have collections of records for lending. Cleveland went further and organized evening entertainments consisting of a talk on some musical subject followed either by recordings or live music performed by local talent.

More and more bookmobile trucks are bringing the library virtually to the doorstep of families who live in rural areas or in new residential sections where library systems have not been able to match the booming population growth.

To give parents of young children a chance to peruse the book stacks in peace, the Rosenberg Library of Galveston, Tex., inaugurated a weekly Family Night. An attendant watches over the small fry, and there are films to keep older children occupied while their parents browse, listen to new recordings, or inspect



Richland, Wash., library holds fencing exhibitions—just the idea to bring "The Three Musketeers" alive!



Music lovers as well as book lovers find modern libraries fulfilling their needs.



During Summer months, Brooklyn librarians bring together the wonders of the printed page and nature.