

Miss Beatrice Evans, Chief Librarian in charge of Travelling Libraries with a few of the books in stock and boxes ready to send out in response to requests.



## Ontario's Travelling Libraries

“WE FIND OURSELVES facing the bleak winter months with no available reading material. We have no library and the supply of magazines leaves us with little or no choice. Could you send us a travelling library?”

This appeal came to the Travelling Libraries Branch of the Ontario Department of Education, from a woman in an outpost settlement of Northern Ontario. The answer was that of course a library would be provided. All the woman would have to do would be to get her neighbors together to form a group who would be responsible for the books while they are in the community and for their return to the library. The group began with eight prospective adult readers which they expect will increase to twenty, as well as whatever children are in the homes where the books go. About a dozen of the men are single, railway employees living in a staff house and ready to make use of books. This is only one of many local situations where the travelling library meets a special need.

Where else do travelling libraries go? They were originated to provide small collections of books for those areas of the province where there was little or no library service; and one of the greatest needs seemed to be found in the small rural school. Even today, of the 75,000 books in stock, three-fourths are books for children, leaving about 20,000 books for adults. Small libraries with limited funds to buy new or expensive books may have their stock supplemented with one or two or more boxes of travelling library books. Several hundred books are sometimes loaned to assist in launching a community library. French language books also are sent on loan to libraries not yet in a position to establish their own French collection. And both English and French as well as some Italian and Polish language books are supplied on request to Frontier College workers. (Frontier College is the adult education project where the leader works by day with men in construction, mining, lumbering, et cetera, and in the evening directs them in study, which may be something as simple as reading and writing or basic English or as advanced as high school

matriculation work.) And of course the service best known to most of us is the providing of boxes of books for local groups such as Women's Institutes, Farm Forums, Home and School Clubs, church groups, company developments in outlying places or groups of residents of any community who may organize themselves solely for the purpose of borrowing a library. There is no charge for the service. The local group is required only to pay express charges on the books when they arrive; the Libraries Branch pays the charge for their return. (It must be added that travelling libraries are not loaned to counties having a County Library service.)

A travelling library is not made up of books merely for entertainment. Fiction constitutes only a limited part of any collection. The rest is made up of juveniles and general reading — biography, world affairs, books about Canada, science, Nature, philosophy, sociology, economics, essays and poetry with a few technical and handicraft guides. But one of the special advantages about borrowing books from the Travelling Libraries is that the Chief Librarian, Miss Beatrice Evans, will consult with the borrowers about the books they would like to have. Sometimes a woman from a local library group will time a visit to Toronto so that she can drop in at the Travelling Libraries headquarters — the new address is 278 Davenport Road, Toronto — and Miss Evans will sit down with her to make up a book list suited to the interests of her group; but most libraries will be requested by mail and Miss Evans encourages her correspondents to feel free to say just what sort of books they want, even to ask for some special titles. If a book requested is not in stock but is considered up to good library standards, copies will be purchased. In the choice of children's books, Miss Barbara Smith, Supervisor of Children's Library Service is just as eager to help.

Speaking of reading for children, Miss Smith says, “Most parents agree that reading is a ‘good thing’ for children. But what, if anything, are the majority doing about it?”

“In the first place, child guidance experts tell us that the first five years in a child's life are the