

Bartlesville, Oklahoma

August 21, 1950

Dear Friends,

A number of persons have followed closely the events related and leading up to the dismissal of City Librarian Ruth Brown, and are consequently acquainted with the sequence in which action has evolved. Many more, however, volunteering their assistance in bringing about a just decision from the public, have asked for knowledge. The Commissioners have offered no common statement, and there has been limited and inadequate newspaper publicity. We feel that you would want the facts submitted below; let us know if you have use for additional copies.

On February 16, 1950, a group of citizens appeared before the City Council to request an examination of the contents of the Public Library, with specific reference to Nation, New Republic, and Soviet Russia Today, believed by them to be subversive and/or Communistic. To illustrate the extent of subversion believed to exist in Library affairs, Mr. Hull was introduced by the citizens' spokesman, Mrs. Warren. Mr. Hull described an occasion upon which Miss Brown, Librarian, appeared for service at his drug store's lunch counter with two Negro women. Mayor Hudson declared the incident a matter of Miss Brown's private concern, but delegated Library Board President, Russell Davis, to study with his committee the library periodicals cited. The citizens requested and were granted an opportunity to make their own study of the material.

At the Council meeting of March 6, reports of both the Library Board and the citizens were read and discussed. Inasmuch as the latter group presented a number of suggestions for library conduct, Mayor Hudson ordered a full investigation by the Library Board and a report in April.

On May 25, the Library Board's statement, prepared for an April hearing, was read to the Commissioners and new Mayor, E. S. Dunaway. The Board had removed Russia Today from the shelves, Nation and New Republic were declared non-subversive and numerous instances of their circulation to public libraries across the country were cited. The assistance of the American Library Association and the Oklahoma Library Association was sought and cordially extended. Librarian Ruth Brown was publicly acclaimed proper custodian of the public's reading materials. No move was made by the Commissioners, either to accept or in any other way to recognize the report. Copies of it were placed, by the Library Board, at public disposal in the Library. A simultaneous report from the citizens' group now cited the advertizing in New Republic as objectionable, and criticized the character of writers whose books were reviewed therein.

RUTH W. BROWN ARCHIVES: 15



On June 14, 1950, the City Council passed and approved an ordinance vetoing Section VI of the Revised Ordinances of the City of Bartlesville (1924), on supervision of the Public Library. With the approval of the Council, the Library Board may, under the new ordinance, appoint library personnel, such appointees subject to removal at any time, by the Council. No statement of cause for removal is provided.

At a July 10 meeting, the City Council announced the removal of the entire Library Board, and their successors were named.

On July 25, 1950, Miss Ruth Brown was called by Mayor Dunaway to a closed conference. Present were: Mayor Dunaway, Councilmen Henton, Forrest, Margenau, City Attorney Alton Rowland, City Manager E. A. Jones. At this meeting Miss Brown presented the Mayor with the request that personal questions, regarding her life outside the library, be offered to her in writing, and she would answer thus. Questions pertaining to her work at the Library she would and did answer promptly at the conference.

Nevertheless, the first and many ensuing questions asked her were of a personal nature, referring often to the race question and to Miss Brown's activities on behalf of the Negro. These, Miss Brown reiterated, she wished to answer in writing. When asked whether she had signed a Loyalty Oath, she said that she had never seen one, would sign it if presented with one. None could be found in the City Manager's files. A Commissioner asked: "Miss Brown, I understand you to say that you are not a Communist?" Miss Brown's reply was an emphatic: "I certainly am not."

Further questions pertained to (a) Miss Brown's agreement with the former library board on the subject of the periodicals cited, (b) a writer with whom Miss Brown had discussed the library situation, (the Council expressed concern over a national publicizing of affairs here) and (c) the alleged Communism of Paul Robeson, whose picture a Commissioner understood had once hung in the Library. At the close of the interview, Miss Brown left the Mayor's office as Mrs. Sanderson City Clerk, was called in. No notes nor minutes were taken on the questioning. An hour later, Manager Jones telephoned Miss Brown at her home and read to her the Council's statement of the termination of her employment, "forthwith". To date she has received no written confirmation of her dismissal.

On August 7, 1950, the Mayor, asked during a Commissioners' meeting whether the color question or communism were responsible for Miss Brown's dismissal, stated twice that it was neither. Rather, it was "insubordination". Pressed for specific instances of insubordination, Mayor Dunaway could not recall one. Neither could any Councilman, although the interview with Miss Brown on July 25th had lasted an hour and a half.

The Friends of Miss Brown