

About Carolyn W. Field

A Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania, Carolyn Wicker Field (1916 to 2010) retired in 1983 from the Free Library of Philadelphia where she served as Coordinator of Work with Children for 30 years.

The Carolyn W. Field Award:

A brief overview of the life of the person behind the name

By Karen Wanamaker, 2018 Carolyn W. Field Award Committee Chair

Each year our Pennsylvania Library Association's Youth Services Division awards the Carolyn W. Field Award to recognize the best book for young people by a Pennsylvania author or illustrator published in the previous copyright year. But who was Carolyn W. Field and what did she do? In 2016, I was selected to serve on the 2017 Carolyn W. Field Award Committee. While I looked forward to serving on this notable children's award committee, I admit that I didn't know much about the woman for whom it is named. I knew Carolyn W. Field was a prominent player in children's literature and children's services. That was about it. Let me be simple and clear: she was amazing! Now serving as the 2018 Chair of the Award Committee, I decided to share a bit more information with all of you. I compiled this information from several websites and a tribute article that are found at the end of this post.

Carolyn W. Field's favorite quotation was from English children's writer Walter de la Mare: "Only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young." In fact, she had this quote inscribed in the fireplace mantle at Philadelphia's Northwest Regional Library so that everyone would see it. I doubt that she realized when she started in librarianship that she would in fact BE one of those rarest and best things or that she would have such a profound impact on the world of children's literature and services.

The following is a brief outline of some of her accomplishments.

Carolyn Wicker Field was born in 1916 and grew up in Massachusetts. In 1938 she earned a master's degree in library science at Simmons College in Boston. After several library jobs, she got a job at the Free Library of Philadelphia. She remained there for 30 years. On July 24, 2010 at the age of 93, she died, leaving a legacy that is as strong as she was.

Work:

- **1938:** Began her librarian career as a children's librarian at the New York Public Library
- Other jobs prior to her work at the Free Library of Philadelphia:
 - Children's services at Cuyahogo County Public Library in Cleveland, Ohio
 - Head of children's work in Wilmington Institute Free Library, Delaware
 - County Librarian for New Castle County Public Library, Wilmington
 - Children's Coordinator for the Wilmington Public Library in Delaware
- **1953 - 1983:** Coordinator of the Office of Work with Children at the Free Library of Philadelphia. Her work at the Free Library cannot be summed up in bullet points, but some of the major accomplishments include:
 - Established the Children's Literature Research Collection
 - Established the Spring Book Review
 - Established the Storytelling Festival
 - Created the Philadelphia Children's Reading Round Table
 - Created the Drexel University/Free Library of Philadelphia Children's Literature Citation. She later won this award in **1984** after her retirement.

Service:

- She served with the American Red Cross in England during WWII.
- **1958 - 1988:** She served on the Library of Congress' Advisory Committee on the Selection of Children's Books for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.
- **1958 - 1959:** She served as a chair of the Newbery/Caldecott committee. Related to this, she also implemented the innovative "Profiles in Literature," series which consists of taped interviews with Newbery and Caldecott authors and illustrators.
- **1959 - 1960:** She served as President of the Children's Division of the American Library Association--now known as the Association for Library Service to Children.
- **1962:** At the Seattle World's Fair, she organized a storytelling event held at the United Nations Plaza.

- **1965:** She founded the Philadelphia Children's Reading Roundtable.
- **1970 - 1972:** She served as President of the Pennsylvania Library Association.
- **1970 - 1972:** She led NCTE's Committee on Reading.
- She taught children's literature as an adjunct professor at Drexel University.
- Girl Scouts - She held almost every volunteer position in the organization during her life, plus:
 - Was an active Girl Scout starting in **1928**
 - Served on the Board of the Girl Scouts of Philadelphia for almost 30 years
 - Co-chaired the Girl Scout Bicentennial celebration in **1976**
- She volunteered in the library and archives of Cathedral Village after retirement.
- She served in various roles with Stagecrafters Theater in Chestnut Hill over many years:
 - Director
 - Actress
 - Member of the Board of Directors
 - Vice President for Production
 - President for Production

Awards:

- **1963:** She received the Grolier Foundation Award (now called the Scholastic Library Publishing Award).
- **1972:** She received the William Penn Award from the Girl Scouts of Philadelphia.
- **1974:** She was awarded the Pennsylvania Library Association Certificate of Merit.
- **1974:** She was named a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania.
- **1975:** She received the Alumni Achievement Award from Simmons College's Graduate School of Library Science.
- **1979:** She won the B.A. Bergman Literary Award.

- **1980:** She received an Honorary membership in Drexel's Chapter of Beta Phi Mu.
- **1983:** The Pennsylvania Library Association's created the Carolyn W. Field Award named in her honor.
- **1984:** She received the Drexel University/Free Library of Philadelphia Children's Literature Citation.
- **1994:** She received the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Distinguished Service Award.
- **1996:** She received the first Mary A. Grant Award for outstanding volunteer service from the Catholic Library Association's.
- **2011:** The American Library Association announced an Honor Resolution Commending Carolyn Wicker Field at their Midwinter Meeting.

Publications: Author or editorial role for several books:

- In **1967** she published *Subject Collections in Children's Literature*.
- In **1987** she co-authored *Values in Selected Children's Books of Fiction and Fantasy* with Jacqueline Shachter Weiss.
- In **1993**, she was an editorial advisor for *That's Me! That's You! That's Us! A Bibliography of Multicultural Books for Children*.

As you can see, Carolyn W. Field was an outstanding librarian. Her passion for children's literature and children's services was evident in all of her work. She also showed a strong sense of service and creativity over her lifetime. I hope that my service on the Carolyn W. Field Award Committee will live up to the standard she set in her own work and that our award in her honor can perpetuate her name and accomplishments into the far-reaching future.

Stay tuned next month for the announcement of this year's award winner and honor book titles! We hope to see many of you at the Carolyn W. Field Luncheon this October during the annual PaLA Conference.

Web Sources:

Association for Library Service to

Children: <http://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/governance/bdacts/Resolutions/cwfresolution>

Free Library of Philadelphia:

<https://libwww.freelibrary.org/blog/post/1072>

Pennsylvania Center for the Book: [https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/literary-cultural-heritage-map-pa/bios/Field Carolyn Wicker](https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/literary-cultural-heritage-map-pa/bios/Field_Carolyn_Wicker)

The Philadelphia Inquirer:

- [http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20100807 Carolyn W Field headed library s youth program.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20100807_Carolyn_W_Field_headed_library_s_youth_program.html)
- [http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20100803 Carolyn W Field dedicated children s librarian.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/obituaries/20100803_Carolyn_W_Field_dedicated_children_s_librarian.html)

Article Source:

Doms, K. (1982). Carolyn Wicker Field: a tribute. *School Library Journal*, 2819-21.